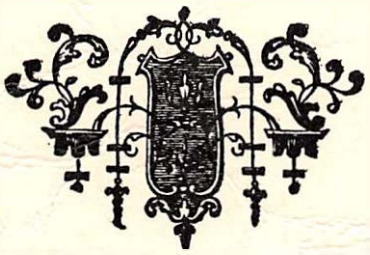
THE LIFE

OF

JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE

FOUNDER OF THE BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS



by

CANON JOHN BAPTIST BLAIN

Translated by

Brother Richard Arnandez, FSC

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Volume 1, Book 2

at Rouen

Published by John Baptist Machuel

Rue Damiette

1733

With the approbation and the authorization of the King



LE PORTRAIT DE M.RE JEAN BAPTISTE DE LA SALLE

Prêtre, Docteur en Theologie, et Instituteur, des Freres des Ecoles Chrétiennes.

FOREWORD

We are pleased to present in English Canon Blain's life of our Founder, St. John Baptist De La Salle, Volume 1, Book 2. The translation is by Brother Richard Arnandez, FSC, of our New Orleans-Santa Fe district, translator of Volume 1, Book 1. We are most grateful to him.

However, we regret very much that we were unable to publish in English all of Blain prior to the death (December 15, 1982) of Brother Charles Henry, FSC, former superior general and first editor of the Lasallian publications. It was Brother Charles who kept insisting that Blain's work be translated into English, that no serious student of St. La Salle's life and work can afford to be without Blain.

For over 150 years Blain was the sole source of biographies of our Founder. In the very popular study (English translation, 1981) of St. La Salle's spiritual experiences and spiritual teaching, Announcing the Gospel to the Poor, by Brothers Michel Sauvage, FSC, and Miguel Campos, FSC, there are approximately 200 references to Canon Blain's biography of John Baptist De La Salle! A student of our Founder must necessarily be a student of Blain.

Blain's work on De La Salle takes up two large volumes. We have now completed Volume 1. Volume 2 is already translated and will appear ere long, we hope, in published form. It is concerned with the Founder's spirit and virtues. It also contains a short life of Brother Bartholomew, our first superior general after De La Salle. There are also some brief accounts of a few of the first Brothers and a listing of events not covered in Volume 1.

We are delighted to present to our readers Canon Blain, a contemporary of our Founder, a friend of many of the first Brothers, a priest who was most familiar with the beginnings of our religious family. Blain is rich in detail. True, he does ramble at times and his style may often be wearisome. But, as we mentioned in the foreword to Volume 1, Book 1: "His work is a veritable gold mine for students of De La Salle, his times, and his work."

In addition to our thanks already expressed to the translator, a word of appreciation is due also to: Brother Richard Rush, FSC, Romeoville, IL, for his careful reading of the English translation; to Bill Brown and Jack Laak of St. Mary's Press, Winona, MN, for their professional advice; to Mrs. Carol Hamm and Gregory Bozych of the Christian Brothers National Office for typing the manuscript and setting it up on the computer word-processing system.

Brother Hilary C. Gilmartin, FSC
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Christian Brothers National Office
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September 2, 1983---Feast of Blessed Brother Solomon, FSC, martyr of the French Revolution

LA VIE
DE MONSIEUR
JEAN-BAPTISTE DE LA SALLE,
INSTITUTEUR
DES FRERES DES ECOLES CHRE'TIENNES.

LIVRE SECOND,

Où Monſieur DE LA SALLE *eſt repreſenté comme l'Inſtituteur d'une Societé nouvelle, très-utile & très-néceſſaire à l'Egliſe.*

NOUS n'avons juſqu'à preſent regardé Monſieur De La Salle que comme un Particulier ſur lequel le Ciel avoit de grands deſſeins, & qu'il préparoit par des graces choiſies, & par la pratique des vertus les plus éminentes, à devenir l'inſtrument d'une œuvre qu'il deſtinoit par ſa miſéricorde à l'inſtruction, à l'éducation, & à la ſanctification de la jeuneſſe la plus pauvre & la plus abandonnée. Maintenant nous l'allons enviſager, en continuant l'hiſtoire de ſa Vie, comme Patriarche à la tête d'un Inſtitut qu'il éleve par l'inſpiration du Saint-Eſprit, qu'il cultive avec ſoin, & qu'il ſoûtient par ſon courage & de continuels exemples de ſainteté. On peut juger de ce qu'il va faire, par ce qu'il a déja fait. D'un homme qui a fait de ſi grands ſacrifices, que peut-on attendre que des prodiges de grace & de vertu ?

CHAPITRE PREMIER.

Dieu envoye à M. De La Salle de nouveaux ſujets d'un vrai mérite : Les étranges violences qu'il ſe fait pour s'accoutumer à la nourriture de ſes Diſciples : Juſqu'où il porte en tout le reſte l'eſprit de Retraite, d'Oraiſon, & de Pénitence.

MOnſieur De La Salle dégradé, pour ainſi dire, & tombé de ſon rang, pauvre, ſans crédit, ſans amis, n'ayant à preſenter à ceux qui vouloient le ſuivre, que la Croix de Jeſus-Chriſt, n'avoit auſſi à leur demander à eux-

BOOK TWO

In Which De La Salle Is Portrayed As the Founder of a New Society, Very Useful and Necessary for the Church

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Up to now we have considered De La Salle as a private individual, one on whom Heaven had great designs, whom it prepared by choice graces and the practice of the most eminent virtues to establish a work which God in His mercy destined for the instruction, education and sanctification of the poorest and most abandoned youth. As we continue with the story of his life we come now to consider him as a Patriarch at the head of an Institute which he created through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which he built up carefully and sustained by his courage and his continual example of holiness. By considering what he had already accomplished one can form some idea of what he would proceed to do. From a man who had already made such heroic sacrifices, what could be expected if not prodigies of grace and virtue?

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Chapter I

God Sends De La Salle New Recruits of High Quality. How He Had to Force Himself to Get Used to the Food His Disciples Ate. To What Heights He Carried the Spirit of Retirement, Mental Prayer and Penance.

Having given up his rank as canon, De La Salle had indeed come down in the world. He was now poor, without influence, with few friends. He had nothing to offer those who wished to follow him, except the cross of Jesus Christ. He asked nothing of them as a condition for entering his house other than a willingness to embrace entire and perpetual abnegation. Reduced to a state as lowly and poor as this, he should, it would seem, have remained alone to face his unenviable destiny, with no expectation that others would imitate his choice and come to swell the ranks of his little flock. So it might have turned out, in fact, if he had been led by merely human considerations in all that he had done. He would have remained buried in obscurity along with so many other men whose names have disappeared, and who, even during their lives, were scarcely known in the cities where they lived, or among those whose condition in life they had chosen out of vanity, eccentricity or secret hypocrisy.

But it is not thus with those worthy men whom the Spirit of God guides and in whom His love rules. God hides them in the secret of His face only to sanctify them at His leisure, after which He brings them forth again before the world, to procure His glory and the salvation of souls. Then, having become capable of doing great things for God and for their neighbor, they do not remain forever in the obscurity they love and prefer. People come looking for them, and Heaven inspires many others to join them in the path Christ trod.

This is what happened to De La Salle also. In a short time his little flock was increased by several young men who were inspired to leave everything after his example. Some of them were university students who gave up their studies and came to join him in spite of their parents' objections and of the frantic appeals from worldly people, who did all they could to turn them away from him. Convinced that they would be accomplished enough when they had learned the lessons taught by Jesus Crucified, they believed that the only thing they needed was to know Christian doctrine and to practice it to the letter, so as to be able to teach it effectively. They felt that even though they were neither priests nor clerics they could fulfill this mission of teaching, which is most necessary and most useful for the poor and most sanctifying for those who undertake it with zeal and humility. They generously gave up the idea of receiving sacred Orders and the worldly hopes they might have entertained in a more prestigious calling than that of schoolmaster. As John Baptist's flock grew, the house they occupied became too small, and he therefore had to lease a larger one in Rue Neuve. Later on, as we have already mentioned, De La Salle bought this house, thanks to donations he received in view of this purchase. This residence has remained the property of the Brothers, and by them is rightly considered to be the cradle of their Institute.

Some ecclesiastics noted for their piety lived there at first with De La Salle and the Brothers. One of these was Faubert, who was very close to his benefactor, and who at this time seemed to wish to follow in his footsteps. In a spirit of holy emulation, just as De La Salle was training Brothers, Faubert undertook to train some poor clerical students for the priesthood, and to create a sort of minor seminary in this same house. However, this mingling of people with different vocations could not last. De La Salle soon realized the drawbacks inherent in the situation and decided that the two communities should separate; but how did he go about it? By a new example of humility and meekness, two virtues which he displayed in all he did. He parted from the man who was so deeply indebted to him as Abraham departed from Lot: by yielding the place to him. Taking his own followers away from those of the new canon, he left the house to the latter and his group and moved to another much smaller building not very far away. There he lived with his Brothers in poverty, mortification and regularity which resembled the holy lifestyle practiced by other religious at the inception of their Orders. However, the holy Founder could not remain very long in such a small residence, which was moreover too cramped and unhealthful and entirely unsuited for his plans. So he asked Faubert to give him back his house; and he and his little community once more took up their residence there at the beginning of 1685.

How did De La Salle live at this time? Will anyone believe us if we describe his manner of living? Are today's Christians prepared to admit that a man of their time actually revived the fervor of the early centuries and gave in his person examples of penance, mortification, humility, obedience, retirement and prayer like those we admire in the desert Fathers, in the Bernards, the Dominics, the Francises, and in the other great Saints?

I shall only be telling the truth if I say that the great sacrifices and heroic acts of virtue related in the previous Book are only an anticipation of those which will follow. For the joyful hours when the Holy Spirit makes His presence felt, and when He communicates Himself interiorly to souls, are hours of spiritual exaltation and expansiveness. These souls, inebriated with divine love and with the sweetness of grace, feel that they have been delivered from their limitations, raised above human frailty, made capable of achieving anything, and fired with the desire of doing all and suffering all for God. They enjoy deep understanding of the precious insights into the sublimest perfection; they conceive ardent longings and feel themselves impelled to undertake the most heroic projects. Still, it sometimes happens that returning to their mortal condition, and held down by the same Hand which had lifted them so high, they no longer have wings to fly; and so they remain earthbound, plodding along with the rest of men. In this situation, deprived of heavenly consolation, they no longer feel enough strength and courage to pursue what they had undertaken; and so they leave unfulfilled their plans of perfection, which are easy enough to devise in imagination, but which cost nature so much to execute.

As for De La Salle, he was not one of those men whom God favors in vain, and whom self-love sooner or later brings back to the ordinary ways. He had indeed done much for God, and received much from Him; and his way of using these new graces was to engage nature in still bloodier combats, and to achieve over his flesh even more complete victories than those which he had won over the world.

Tenderly loved as a child, very dear to his parents, brought up with all the care that their special affection and attention could provide; nourished in the midst of abundance, behold him now in the depths of indigence, struggling with poverty which can well be called the basic misery of life. Accustomed to choice food, habituated to the amenities of life, will he be able to get used to a manner of living which barely furnished enough of what is needed so as not to die, and which allows nature to live only to make it suffer? He had condemned himself to a type of living which forbade him the use of fire, and very nearly that of wine, of fresh linen, of all the better foodstuffs. Will he be able to accustom his nature to what inspires it with horror, and the mere sight of which provokes nausea? Will he be able to harden his body to accept cruel and bloody disciplines, to nights spent in prayer, to take the repose he needed only on a board laid on the bare ground? Will he be able to spend days at a time in a place which offered little more space than a tomb, and gave him only enough room to practice mortifications? Will he be able to habitually wear chains of iron bearing prickly points, or hair shirts, and to appear before his fellow citizens only in a garb apt to make everyone laugh at his expense, and to draw down on him the hoots of the street urchins and the whole populace? Yes, he will do all this. We shall

see him undertake new and more strenuous combats and win new victories over his delicate nature by the terrible violence he practiced towards himself, first by enduring the sight of what was set before him, next by forcing himself to eat it, and then (it makes one shudder to say it), by swallowing again despite all his repugnance, what his too delicate stomach had rejected.

Those who know the Brothers can testify that even today their food is of the most frugal type, coarse and unappetizing. It was far more so at the beginning of their Institute in Rheims, in Paris and in Rouen. Some forty years ago I heard people in Paris who were familiar with their manner of living say that they lived as austerely as the religious of La Trappe, and that their food was even more mortifying than that served in that celebrated abode of penance. People called their house "the little Trappe," and those who knew what went on claimed that with regard to the various forms of humiliation and mortification the Brothers rivaled those illustrious penitents who in our day have made a monastery of lower Normandy into a new Thebaid.

When De La Salle invited the schoolmasters into his home in 1681, he continued to live with his own brothers as he had done previously. When these left him, he did not modify his usual manner of living and did not change the type of food served at his table. Then, when he began to live with his disciples, although he banished from his table whatever might have satisfied sensuality, the food served was in no way unappetizing. But when he divested himself of all and became as poor as the paupers he took care of, he resolved to live like the poor and to eat as they did.

This decision was the outcome of others he had already put into effect, but it was not the least painful one to nature; I dare say that it cost him more than all the earlier ones. To conform to it completely he forbade his disciples to serve him any food different from theirs. They were very much put out by this; he could not have commanded them anything which would have put their obedience to a sterner test. What they knew about his delicate constitution and fastidious eating habits made them despair of ever seeing him grow accustomed to their coarse type of food; so they tried everything to make him rescind this order, the execution of which was as much a sacrifice for them as it was for him. But they found him inflexible on this subject, and were therefore obliged to give in and serve him what the others ate, thus submitting to his will and affording satisfaction to his spirit of penance.

It was then that De La Salle, in the spirit of St. Bernard, would go to the refectory as to a place of torment. He was never in greater distress than when it was time to eat. Nature, alarmed at the mere thought of what it would have to endure, caused him to shudder when they brought on the soup. There ensued for him a grievous struggle, an agonizing conflict; for on such occasions nature and grace lock in strenuous battle, and the latter does not emerge victorious over the former save at the cost of a galling ordeal. The former canon was indeed a pitiable sight at these times. His stomach turned and his hand trembled; when he put the spoon into the bowl he could not withdraw it. What will he do? Will he obstinately insist on overcoming a repugnance which seems to bring on an agony and threatens to burst a blood

vessel in his chest because of the superhuman efforts he makes to force himself to eat? But on the other hand, can he yield to nature? And was it not time for him to make his body do penance for having been brought up in so fastidious a manner?

He did violence to his feelings and ate. But he could not keep the food down. His vomitings began when he saw and smelled the soup; when he tried to eat it, they became so violent that he brought up blood. Prudence would have suggested that he stop trying, for on such occasions exaggerated efforts often lead to serious consequences. But if he yields, he is vanquished. This was what the Holy Spirit whispered to this generous soul, secretly reproaching him with cowardice, and with listening too readily to the siren voice of his sensual flesh and the perfidious counsels of what Holy Writ calls animal prudence. With new courage he returns to the struggle; and to win a total victory over himself he forces himself to swallow again what he had thrown up, and this repeatedly. Before him I do not know of anyone who had ever given such an example of mortification. This torture, which lasted all through this first meal, continued for several days more. Everything they brought him: salted meat, coarse vegetables and other dishes of the plainest kind of food made him vomit.

Distressed that he did not seem able to overcome his repugnance, and at having to start over again each day the same struggle against such long-standing delicacy as regards food, he had recourse to hunger to insure a certain victory. This remedy seemed worse than the disease, and was in itself a major penance; but it must have proved effective, because devouring hunger teaches one to eat anything, and provides an appetizing sauce for the most insipid and revolting food. A hungry body refuses nothing; everything seems good to it; and it consumes with pleasure what it would have turned from in horror when it was well and copiously fed. A strict fast lasting for several days wrought this sort of miracle on an overly delicate body, the miracle that De La Salle expected, and which he had not been able to merit by the unusual acts of violence he had practiced. This long fast gave him appetite enough, and taught his rebellious body to eat with pleasure what he had not even been able to look at before. Food which had provoked nausea appeared appetizing to a body which lost its delicacy of taste only when it found itself deprived of all nourishment. If the struggle was a hard one, the victory was complete, for the triumph he won over his flesh lasted all his life. His body was so well tamed, so perfectly mortified that it seemed to be dead indeed in this regard, with no feeling, no inclination and no repugnance for the most loathsome-tasting dishes. Some years later, in 1693, when he was in Paris with some of the Brothers, living in extreme poverty, he and they were obliged to eat some bread and other foods which the most mortified persons could hardly have endured to look at. He ate it with no apparent repugnance.

He failed to distinguish between the vilest-tasting and the most savory dishes; at least he ate both without seeming to pay any attention; and he arose from table to say grace without knowing what he had eaten. This became quite obvious one day when the good Brother Cook inadvertently served De La Salle and the Brothers nothing but a portion of stewed absinthe leaves. All the rest were aware of the mistake and thought they were going to be poisoned---everybody, that is, except De La Salle. All left the dish

untouched after tasting it, convinced that it was some kind of noxious herb. They preferred to leave the table as hungry as when they had sat down, to eat nothing rather than, as they thought, risk certain death. But De La Salle, who ate his entire portion, was very much surprised when his disciples told him what the children of the prophets said to Eliseus: "O man of God, there is death in the pot!" They were all concerned, and eager to find out what they had been served; but after investigating they discovered that it was not poison, but absinthe. If this new food did not provide them much nourishment, at least it served to divert them for a while. In the end, the story and the false notion that they had at first conceived, after serving as a topic of conversation during recreation, became a matter for edification, as they praised the mortification shown by their father. I was about to forget to mention that the Brothers did not miss the opportunity of practicing mortification, too, in connection with this meal, because their Superior had the dish served up to them the next day. Some were still unwilling to taste it the second time around; but eventually they were obliged to do so, because it kept coming back until they ate it.

Indeed, the examples that De La Salle gave them on this score, as on all others, were of daily occurrence; each day brought on a new kind. When at table, whether he was distracted or attentive, he ate what was set before him without ever asking for what might be missing, without even showing by the least sign that anything was, in fact, missing. So it sometimes happened that he ate without having anything to drink, or ate his portion without any bread, or his bread without anything else; and even that he ate things which were not meant to be eaten.

This exceptional degree of mortification of the taste enables one to judge of his mortification in everything else. No sense of his body remained without its special suffering---I was about to say its martyrdom. He himself became his own executioner, exercising on himself all the different sorts of austerities which Holy Scripture canonizes, and which the Saints practiced. Enveloped in a hair shirt, or wearing a copper belt provided with sharp points, or wearing both of them, he doffed his penitential instruments only to use others even more cruel and harsh. I am speaking of his practice of scourging himself to blood. With whips made of iron, bearing pointed rosettes on the tips of the lashes, he tore his flesh pitilessly. The spots that appeared on the floor where his blood ran down, or on the walls of the cell where he scourged himself, betrayed silently, without his knowing it, to all the Brothers the saintly cruelty he exercised towards his body. "He treated his body too rigorously," said a member of his family to a Brother who is still living, "and like St. Francis he will be obliged to ask its pardon when he dies for all the suffering he inflicted on it during his life. He made himself his body's tyrant, yet he had been brought up with extreme tenderness; no child was ever so delicately reared. Those who know this are the more surprised to see him revive in his person the penances practiced by the Macariuses, the Hilarions, the Jeromes and the other famous penitents among the Anchorites."

His children pitied their father and took pains to hunt out his instruments of penance and to remove them from his reach, thus sparing him, at least for a few days, the torments he suffered, and giving his body a little

respite. In this way they managed to get away from him, without his noticing it, six of his disciplines, all of which bore marks of his fervor, being stained with his blood. Did his body, so ill treated during the day, so exhausted by labor and worn out by austerities, get any chance to rebuild its strength somewhat by resting during the night? No doubt his body would have longed for such repose, but De La Salle did not give it any; for he spent a good part of the night in prayer; and when necessity obliged him to pay to sleep the tribute which nature owes it, he lay down on the floor, or slept in a chair. He used no other bed. If he could not rest comfortably there, he could not sleep for very long either, because the bell which called the Brothers to rise at 4 a.m. found him fully dressed; and so it became his rule to start his mental prayer at once, thus anticipating his disciples in this holy exercise. Nay, a mental prayer which really never came to an end could hardly be said to begin. Almost all the day, in addition to the night, was consecrated to prayer and contemplation. He went from one to the other by a series of exercises which, under different names, seemed to be nothing but a continual mental prayer.

Leaving aside at such times everything which could have brought him into society, and living as solitary a life in his native city as an anchorite in the desert or in his cave, he made himself invisible, as it were. He delighted in retirement because this promoted his union with God. Indeed, his main concern was to cultivate this union and to avoid as far as possible all visits, paid or received, so as not to let his dealings with men interrupt his communing with God. However, in spite of his efforts, some of his old friends came by to distract him from his application to God. While gently chiding him for having become so unsociable, they told him that he seemed to have forgotten that man is born to live in society, or that there existed in Rheims other people besides himself. However distastful it may have been for him to lay aside his preoccupation with God in order to converse with men, he did not show it by an external sign. No cloud flitted over his countenance, revealing the deep boredom he felt at not being left alone with his Sovereign Good. His cheerful, serene and gracious attitude made his presence agreeable, and his dignified manners, gentle, polite and affable, were a proof that solitude had not made an ill-tempered recluse of him, or deprived his company of the charm and interest it had possessed when he was a canon.

As his Institute was still in its infancy, his greatest concern, indeed his sole preoccupation was to water it with his tears, to cement its foundations with blood drawn from his veins by his rigorous disciplines, to buttress it by the penances he performed, and through his fervent prayers to draw down on it God's choicest and most abundant graces.

To make his supplications even more effective the saintly Founder used to offer them at the tomb of St. Remigius. At the feet of this illustrious archbishop of Rheims, rightly called the Apostle of France, he often spent not only a good part of the day but entire nights, begging Heaven through the intercession of the Saint who baptized the first king of the Franks, to show Itself favorable to his undertaking and to bestow on himself and his followers that abundance of grace which fortifies the virtues and merits of those thus bedewed. To be able to pour out his heart all the more easily in the presence of God, and to lay before the throne of God's majesty his prayers and

entreaties at the very tomb of St. Remigius, he had won over the assistant sacristan of the church, and persuaded him to lock him up in the sanctuary at night. Thus he had full liberty to pray and to satisfy his devotion in a spot which favored it. He ended one day and started the next one by mental prayer. The holy Founder, so happy at the feet of the holy patron of Rheims and beneath the eyes of Jesus Christ, spent entire nights in the continual exercise of contemplation and prayer. So long as he remained in the city he made it a rule for himself to devote to this pious practice the Friday and Saturday nights of each week, after spending most of the day there also. On these days he went back home only for a short time, so as to keep in touch with what was going on there, and to take some little food. Then he hastened to return to the feet of the Apostle, so as to get his intercession before God, and to prostrate himself once more before Jesus Christ.

In the silence of night, he made up for the shortness of his days, which did not suffice for his prayer. Alone, with no witnesses, what did he do? What did he say? Did he join penance to his prayer and vigils? Did he take the discipline with a fervor which the very holiness of the place would augment? Judgment day, which will make manifest the merits of the man whose story we are relating, will reveal it all to us. St. Remigius' tomb was the refuge to which De La Salle never failed to return whenever some new storm arose to menace his foundation. In addition to the days and times mentioned, he often repaired thither on other occasions, earnestly seeking by his prayers and tears to dissipate the tempests and to turn aside the lightning bolts, and conjuring the Saint to offer his prayers before God's throne.

This great attraction for complete solitude and unceasing contemplation brought him sometime later to the "retreat house" of the Discalced Carmelite Fathers at Louviers, a few miles from Rouen. Everyone knows that these great promoters of the retired and contemplative life have certain houses remote from the world which they call "deserts," because they live there like the solitaries of old in their hermitages, in perpetual silence and in contemplation which is interrupted only by the absolutely necessary demands of human frailty. This spot, so suitable for communing with God, seemed like a paradise to a man who wanted to cultivate society and union with God alone; but he could not stay there long. Unforeseen events recalled him to Rheims and as we shall see later on, forced him to leave, albeit with great regret, a delightful solitude.

It can be said unhesitatingly that his great longing for mental prayer and the vehement desire he entertained to be alone with God made him almost indifferent to other concerns. The greatest displeasure he could experience was to observe and to be observed. Because of this, in spite of the remarks of his friends who reproached him with becoming unsociable, he tried as much as he could to remain alone, in solitude, hoping to avoid being known by anyone other than his Beloved. However, he had not been called to live the life of Magdalen exclusively, but Martha's as well---a life which held so much labor in store for him. To prepare him to undergo the asperities of this active life, Heaven allowed him to enjoy the suavities of contemplation. It was with much regret that he found himself obliged to cut short his prolonged prayer in order to devote more time to the affairs of his community, which became more numerous after Nyel abandoned the schools he had taken charge of.

At first De La Salle had planned to limit himself to supervising only one in Rheims. That was enough for him; he did not care to extend his obligations any further. Humility inspired him in this; but charity which knows no limits obliged him to let his zeal reach out to the other schools outside the city, to leave God for God's work, and to deprive himself of the solace of the interior life in order to procure his Lord's greater glory.

Divine Providence, Which was leading him as though by the hand, and Whose directions he followed blindly, had made it impossible for him to refuse to take over the direction of the schools in Rethel, Guise and Laon. Thus these schools, which Nyel had established, also came under his control. In this way Divine Wisdom showed that It had sent Nyel to Rheims only to bring De La Salle into the orbit of God's designs. It wished to entrust the execution of these designs to no one but him, since the earlier worker was not fitted for the task. Indeed, the direction of these three schools was too much for a man already advanced in years. Moreover, when Nyel had left Rouen he had not planned on staying away forever and hoped to be buried there.

To be able to follow his inclination with a good conscience he had vainly besought De La Salle on more than one occasion to take over the schools in question. Although the latter had repeatedly refused, Nyel kept insisting and presented new and more pressing arguments to win his friend's consent. His age and the fact that it was impossible for him to provide these three establishments with the manpower needed were the reasons he advanced, or rather the pretexts under which he dissimulated his longing to go back to Rouen. He did not, however, succeed in convincing De La Salle. The latter continued to say no, as we have mentioned before. So Nyel, seeing that he was getting nowhere by his pleas, made up his mind to abandon the schools to Providence, and to go home to Rouen, where he died two years later as we shall mention in the proper place.

No doubt Nyel foresaw what was bound to happen: that necessity would force De La Salle's hand, and that his charity would not permit him to turn a deaf ear to the needs of the poor, nor to allow the schools to close. That was indeed what happened. Nyel's departure proved more effective than his presence and his importunities had been, and by abandoning the three schools he obliged De La Salle to assume charge of them. The latter could not turn down the new solicitations addressed to him by his dear friend, the parish priest of St. Peter's in Laon, imploring him not to let these establishments close, and not to shut his ears to the voice of Divine Providence, Which seemed to be telling him plainly that God was sending him this new opportunity for doing good, and that these schools had merely been prepared for him by Nyel's hands.

Chapter II

De La Salle Calls Together His Principal Disciples; They Make an 18-day Retreat during Which He Discusses with Them All the Matters Which Needed to Be Regulated. He Listens to Their Opinions and Follows Them, Not Wishing to Decide Anything of His Own Volition.

Seeing himself now in charge of a number of schoolmasters in various towns, De La Salle thought the time had come to gather them into a small body, and to adopt a uniform lifestyle. Although he had succeeded in introducing a certain number of regulations among his followers, as yet they did not make up a true society. All of them dressed differently, some better than others. Each one taught as he thought best; all were free to leave the group, and remained only so long as they pleased. They had no vows, no binding commitments; they depended on nobody and owed no subordination to anyone. They were easy to call together, but as yet they did not constitute what could be called a body or a community. For a community is an association composed of several members, having a superior at its head. As its leader, he should animate it and give inspiration to the inferiors who should live in dependence on him and not have any outlook different from that which he communicates to them. This subordination is the bond which preserves all the members in union; and obedience is the attractive force which keeps them all in order. The spirit of God is the soul which should give life to this body, and the rule is the guiding force which should govern all its members' actions. As yet, the saintly priest's followers showed none of these characteristics.

To change the group of schoolmasters into a regular community, what was required was to give them a special garb, rules and constitutions, and to establish among them perfect uniformity in all things, in conformity with their vocation. It was necessary to inspire all of them with the same spirit, attitudes, dispositions and views, so as to make of them a society having but one heart and one soul, like the early Christians who, in forming the primitive Church, gave to the centuries which followed a model of what a perfect community should be. Now, to succeed in doing all this De La Salle thought that he should not impose any of his personal preferences. In his humility he did not think that what needed to be done should come from him. Although destined to be the father of a new family made up of men who looked on everything only with his eyes; although inspired by God in his designs and enlightened by the graces which he received in his protracted communing with God, he grew more and more humbly distrustful of self. He would have considered questionable anything that might have been decided by his own choice. Dead to all natural considerations and to self-will, he wished to be nothing but the instrument of God, to act only through His impulse, and to follow His inspirations exclusively.

In this disposition of self-effacement, the humble Founder called together his principal disciples, twelve in number, and met with them to confer on the means of giving some form to their new brotherhood, of insuring some stability among the members and of attaching them to their state. This was certainly a

matter of supreme importance, which called for serious reflection, or rather for enlightenment from on high. To secure these advantages the fervent Superior proposed that they all make a retreat, a suggestion which was warmly welcomed. It began on Ascension Eve in 1684 and was to continue until Pentecost; but, in fact, it was prolonged till the feast of the Most Holy Trinity.

De La Salle began by a very touching talk in which he informed his followers of the reasons why he had called them together and why he had suggested that they make this retreat. He gave them to understand that the order existing in the house at the time should make them consider the means of maintaining it. Regularity, he declared, is the soul of a community; and this presupposes wise regulations, which ought to be tried out before being definitely prescribed, so that being accustomed to the yoke the members might find it bearable when it was made obligatory. He insisted that the way to insure that the rules would be observed later on was to practice them first on a trial basis; then these laws, which experience would have shown to be practicable, would not appear onerous. By adopting such prudent procedure, he said, when the time comes you will not find anything in the new rules which you are not accustomed to. Your heart will recognize your own work in the legislation which will be laid down, and the details it prescribes will seem agreeable to you because you yourselves will have been the lawgivers. Now that you have reached the point where I wished to lead you, and now that I can testify to your fervor and pious dispositions, I wish to concert measures with you to stabilize your state of life, to strengthen you in your vocation, to consolidate your union with one another, and to begin building the edifice of which you are the foundation stones.

He then reminded them of the ideas and suggestions which they themselves had often put forward, namely, of binding themselves to their vocation by vows. It was up to them, he said, to consider whether the time had come to impose on themselves such blessed chains which, while restraining their liberty, would bind them to God. He asked them whether, after remaining up to the present unattached to their vocation and free to come or go, they now felt that they should join themselves to it by some type of vow. He concluded by saying that on this point, as on all the rest, he wanted them to feel entirely free to declare how they felt, and even freer to do whatever they wished. All he planned to do was to listen to them and to follow whatever the majority might decide. What he did recommend to them was to pray much, and by a fervent retreat to place themselves in a position to know God's will.

During this lengthy session of prayer and meditation they had ample time to call upon the Holy Spirit and to prepare their hearts for His inspirations. In silence and recollection each one had leisure to make himself attentive to the voice of God and to heed His intimations; each one was also free to speak out and to express his thoughts and sentiments. De La Salle did not try to lead in one direction or another; nor to suggest to them his own views or insinuate his own ideas. He let them free to think and to say whatever they liked. No doubt, the best thing for them, and the simplest, would have been to ask him to speak first, and then to accept like docile children the heavenly illuminations granted to their father. A man filled with grace, such as he, was a mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit; his words were oracles for them.

Perhaps they did this; perhaps they objected that they were his children and begged him to govern them like a father and to lay down laws for them without consulting their opinions or inquiring after their preferences. But how could they overcome his humility on this point, which allowed him only the right of listening, of asking for their opinions, and of going along with the majority?

Not that he failed to assist them with his lights, or to redress their opinions when these were neither correct nor judicious; but he did this in such a way that his own self-love found no satisfaction in so doing, and that their liberty of offering their advice and defending their opinions was not at all interfered with. The only right he claimed for himself was to speak much to God, begging Him to address Himself to this group of his twelve disciples, to make known through them what He wanted done, and to do so with such clarity that he himself would have no other choice than to subscribe to these ideas inspired by the Spirit of God. We cannot mention here all the topics discussed during this assembly, nor can we list all the decisions made. We do know, however, that agreement was reached on certain regulations, and that the adoption of a distinctive garb, the choice of a name for the association of schoolmasters, the food they were to eat, and the project of making vows were all taken under consideration.

The first question, concerning rules and constitutions, would have been premature if it had been decided at this point; because only time lets such projects mature and makes it possible to find the right solutions. The finest regulations, in theory, are not always the best in practice. It is easy to lay down obligations for oneself, but less easy to fulfill them with perfect fidelity. Prudence suggests that it is wise to try out the yoke we wish to impose on ourselves, and to take time to determine whether this yoke is supportable and whether we can undertake to bear it definitively with the help of grace. Outside of Revelation, nothing but experience can teach men all they need to know about the responsibilities they may wish to assume. Experience alone enables them to assess the bonds they wish to lay upon themselves, and reveals to them the work of the laws to which they want to subject their liberty. Without such experience either they will presume too much on God's help, or rely too much on their own strength. It is in order to try out what God wishes to do in us, and what we can do with His help, that the Church prescribes a novitiate lasting at least one year for all those who desire to enter religious life, before she allows them to bind themselves by vows. This wise Mother wants people to try out everything, and to attempt first to lift the weight they propose to shoulder, to see whether they have strength enough to carry it. In the same spirit she orders that nothing shall be kept hidden or disguised from the postulants concerning what is done in the religious house; that they be given the book of rules and constitutions to read, and that to the normal austerities other humiliations and mortifications be added during the novitiate, so that the novices may know from their own experience what they will be binding themselves to for the rest of their lives.

In this same way De La Salle was in no hurry to give regulations to the Brothers, regulations which are more easily prescribed than carried out. Wisdom told him that it is best not to establish statutes too soon, lest experience, the great mistress of good government, might force him to revoke

them. He preferred to have the rules practiced for a long time before promulgating them definitively, rather than to publish them without a prior time of testing. He was persuaded that rules which remain a dead letter are soon abrogated by nonuse or by obvious violation. In a word, by having the Brothers live it first, he established little by little the sort of life he hoped to see observed by them, thanks to wise rules. So that later on when the time did come to draw up definitive rules, all he did was to set down in writing the usages which were being observed. In this way the old traditions became the new laws. By submitting to them the Brothers were only obliging themselves to what they had always practiced. So, in this first assembly, the only question, as regards regulations, was to agree on those already in use and on some other points which needed to be introduced, and which have been hallowed by practice. The rest of this matter was left to Divine Providence.

The second topic on which the assembly deliberated was the question of food. Custom had already regulated this in a way that safeguarded the principle and practice of mortification; but fearing lest relaxation might in time bring in the use of more fancy food, this was carefully forbidden. All fowl and the other more costly kinds of meat were proscribed. Only the cheapest cuts of coarse and ordinary meat were sanctioned. On abstinence days only vegetables and cooked greens were allowed, without much seasoning. Fish was not permitted either, except for the kind whose cheapness and low quality made them common in the diet of the poorest people. In a word, everything served at table was to conform with the spirit of poverty and penance which the community professed. In addition, it was stipulated that this food, which afforded so little satisfaction to the appetite, should be doled out in small quantities.

The third topic seemed the most urgent, but on it, too, the assembly failed to reach a decision. Up to this time the schoolmasters had worn in the house the clothes they had brought with them. No modifications had been introduced except that they all wore a small collar. Exteriorly, therefore, they had remained looking like ordinary laymen; no special sign distinguished the members of the new community from other lay people. De La Salle had recognized this lacuna for some time and had been looking for a way of remedying it; but he did not wish to make any decision on his own initiative. He put the matter to the group of twelve Brothers; but when they considered it they could not agree on what form the habit should take. De La Salle himself was not entirely sure either. The more he thought of the question, the more convinced he became that a change had to be made, but the less certain he felt about how to go about it. As the group also remained quite undecided on this point, nothing was concluded, and they left it to the prudence of their father to resolve the issue whenever he though it proper.

If the subject of vows did not seem to call for any immediate action, it was still, basically, of the highest importance. For it is really not all that difficult to select a habit of a color and shape which fit a given profession, nor to abide by the choice once made. But vows have consequences which cannot be too carefully examined. The ideal of perfection inspires them; but often enough thoughtlessness has more to do with the decision to pronounce them than deep and well-regulated devotion. If it were as easy to fulfill them exactly as it is to assume the obligations they impose, it would

be impossible to recommend the taking of vows too warmly; but experience shows only too clearly that vows made without serious reflection and through indiscreet zeal are often poorly observed; and that Satan warps these means of perfection into elements of disorder and chains by which he drags souls to their perdition.

So the wise Superior called for a discussion on the following points: (1) Should they make vows? (2) Which ones? (3) How long should they last---a year? several years? for life? He invited the Brothers to consider these questions, without hinting at his own opinion. He had strong reasons for not wanting them to make the vow of chastity just yet, but he preferred not to explain his position until they had had their say.

The fervor of these first Brothers was great; their ardor for perfection would have incited them to make perpetual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience; but De La Salle, more enlightened and experienced than they, would not move so fast. He feared lest his children, by trying to run too quickly on the path to Heaven, might meet with some stumbling block and fall. He apprehended that indiscreet fervor might carry them too far, might induce them to embrace the counsels of perfection too hastily, or that secret presumption might lie at the root of their eagerness. For in theory, and for devout people who merely speculate, nothing is more beautiful than the evangelical counsels. Those who aspire to perfection without wishing to pay the price, find them admirable. But only those who fulfill them to the letter know what this practice costs our feeble nature which, even when sustained by grace, has to put forth such desperate efforts to rise above itself. So De La Salle, foreseeing what might happen, advised his Brothers not to let themselves be carried away by imprudent enthusiasm, and suggested that they delay a decision in order to let the proposal concerning perpetual vows come to maturity.

True, his disciples based their desires on plausible reasons. Since they wished to follow Jesus, naked and despoiled of all things, and to enter into society with the true sons of Calvary, was it not proper, since they had no goods to divest themselves of, that they should root out of their hearts the last fibers of cupidity by renouncing all desire of possessing, and all proprietorship? Why not oblige themselves to be, through grace and for the love of God, what they already were by nature, poor and penniless? Why not add the merit of the vow of poverty to the practice of the virtue? What danger could the vow run among men who loved poverty and cherished it even as Jesus Christ did? Furthermore, since they were in fact living the deepest poverty, had this not familiarized them with all its unpleasant aspects? What, other than additional merit, could the vow of poverty add to the rigors of the life they led every day with so much joy? As for the vow of chastity, they had been inclined to make it even before they entered the community, since most of them had planned on it by envisioning the ecclesiastical state or some other condition incompatible with marriage. Their hearts desired to belong entirely to God, longed to be faithful to Him and swore Him inviolable attachment with the help of His grace. The vow of chastity, far from increasing the difficulty of observing celibacy which they had chosen through virtue, would make it easier on the contrary, thanks to the graces which it would win for them.

As for the vow of obedience, the most perfect of the three, only self-willed people find it difficult. Whoever has renounced self-will possesses a docile and tractable heart which desires nothing but submission. It was to obey, they said, and not to do our own will (which we have followed only too often to our own detriment and confusion before the world) that we entered this house. The vow will only strengthen the resolution we have taken of doing in all things the will of God while renouncing all attachment to our own.

They also observed that the past had taught them about the future, and that the experience of the first schoolmasters had instructed them, since these men had gone back to the world where their salvation was in peril. They had also learned from their own experience, when they were tempted to leave the society under the pretext that they did not find there any assurance for their future. They remarked that the natural inconstancy of human minds and the mutability of the human heart need to be firmly anchored and, as it were, nailed to what is good, through the binding force of vows.

All these arguments were sound; they could not but please De La Salle, who rejoiced to see these neophytes of his Institute display so much good will and enthusiasm for perfection. But the time had not yet arrived for allowing them to reach out quite so far. Before they could pretend to this, grace needed the time and opportunity to strengthen their wills in the search for good, to draw the line between superficial and solid virtue, to distinguish between the subjects who under similar outward appearances hid very different interior dispositions, and finally to prepare them to assume obligations whose merit depends entirely on the manner in which they are carried out. The man of God upheld this opinion with such solid arguments that all the Brothers acknowledged that he was right; and while waiting for the day when in God's plans they could make perpetual vows, they agreed for the moment to limit them to three years. At the same time they decided that all of them would gather again in Rheims a year later, at Pentecost in 1685, and that each one would then be free to make perpetual vows. This proposal, however, was again deferred and was not finally carried out until several years later. For the time being it was settled that they would make vows for three years; so after mental prayer, De La Salle drew up the formula which has been in use ever since. All copied it in their own hand, so as to pronounce their vows after him; and what they then did was repeated each year until 1694, at which time the vows of the Brothers assumed a slightly different form, as we shall relate below.

De La Salle began the ceremony on the feast of the Most Holy Trinity, which is the great feast of the community. What a joy it was for him to consecrate, through his vow, the choice he had made of obedience! True, he was still in possession of his freedom; and being a priest and the Superior of the group it did not seem fitting for him to step down from his position to obey Brothers who were laymen, to obey his own inferiors, to obey men who lacked both learning and interior lights, and who needed his advice and direction so sorely. But where does perfect virtue stop? Where others see an impossibility, virtue finds everything easy. The perfectly obedient man shall sing of victory. Besides, it was only right that De La Salle should crown all the heroic sacrifices he had already made by sacrificing his will, and that he

should join to all the merit already acquired that of a vow of obedience. But how could he practice it? That was a mystery which his humility would soon find a way of piercing: by stepping down from his position as superior and placing one of his disciples above him, at whose feet he would throw himself in total submission. So, in view of this secret design, still hidden in his heart, he added to the vow of poverty and to that of chastity (both included in the obligations of sacred Orders), that of obedience. In this way he found the secret of losing his life entirely, according to Our Lord's words, and of fulfilling to the fullest extent the ideal of Gospel abnegation.

After De La Salle, the twelve Brothers likewise pronounced the same vows for three years; the following year, 1685, eight of them renewed their vows. The four others were invited but did not choose to appear at the ceremony. They had changed their minds and they also changed their state by leaving the Community. If this scandalous departure of four of the twelve principal members, who were the hope and the foundation stones of the new Institute, was a cause of tears and affliction for the servant of God, it afforded him and the others who remained a salutary lesson. This desertion made them conscious of their own weakness and taught them how little they should rely on their own virtue. It showed them how wise their father's conduct had been in not permitting them to pronounce perpetual vows and in insisting that they take a whole year to prepare themselves for so doing. Finally, they realized how much confidence and openness they should show towards a man who was obviously inspired by Heaven, and who seemed to have received from God special lights as to how they should be guided.

The other members of the Community also needed to be made more stable and firm in their vocation. The discussion centered around the links by which they should be attached to it. Each of the twelve set forth his own opinion. Some thought it would be best to allow them to make the vow of chastity, whether perpetual or temporary. Others wished to add to this the vow of obedience, either perpetual or temporary. De La Salle listened to what they had to say, and after weighing the arguments, pro and con, decided that it was best not to be in too great a hurry about proposing a vow of chastity to subjects who had not been in the Community long enough, or who had not yet given proof of true constancy in virtue. He felt that to settle them in their vocation it would suffice to let them bind themselves by a simple annual vow of obedience; this vow, renewed every year, would attach them to the Institute as long as their good will perdured. If this grew weaker or disappeared altogether, and tepidity and negligence undermined their vocation, instead of trying to keep them it was better to let them go, after trying by every possible means to bring them back to their early fervor, so as to rid the Community of their presence. Everybody agreed to this; the sovereign respect they felt for their worthy Superior won over their assent and submitted their reason to him, as soon as he had expressed his opinion. They were free to think and to speak up only when he did not reveal his own position first, and when his humility obliged him to keep it hidden.

So, in accordance with this decision, all the recent arrivals in the house, and all those on whom it was felt that complete reliance could not yet be had, made the vow of obedience for one year. This they continued to renew every year on the feast of the Holy Trinity.

Chapter III

De La Salle Gives to His Disciples a Distinctive Habit. Why and How This Came About. He Has Them Assume the Name of Brothers of the Christian Schools. Humiliations That This New Garb Procured for Him and His Followers. He Teaches School Himself; Persecutions He Had to Endure on This Account.

The matter of dress remained undecided and was left to the prudence of the virtuous Founder. It was settled during the ensuing winter in the following circumstances. The weather got extremely cold, and the poor schoolmasters, thinly clad, suffered a great deal from the rigor of the season. The Mayor of the city felt sorry for them; and one day when he met De La Salle on the street, he expressed his pity for them and advised him to give them some capotes* which would keep them warm and protect them from the inclemency of the weather. This article of clothing, called capote at Rheims, was very commonly used at this time in that part of the country. The advice struck the pious Founder as judicious, and considering it to have come from on high, through the mouth of one of the chief magistrates of the city, he adopted this garment for his disciples. The only change he made in the capotes commonly used in Champagne at this time, which were made of all kinds of cloth and in all sorts of colors, was that he had them sewn out of coarse woolen material, dyed black, and lengthened till they reached down to about eight inches from the ground. Thus the capote could be worn over the habit, like a sort of overcoat, and protected the wearers from the cold and the bad weather. This idea suggested another: to change the dress which the schoolmasters wore. Up to that time they had kept the secular clothes which they had worn in the world, clothing of all types and colors. Nothing was less fitting for people belonging to one and the same Community. The virtuous Founder succeeded in introducing a uniform style of garb by giving the Brothers a sort of plain black soutane, something like the capote, cut in the same fashion as the cassock clerics used to wear, and like that which several religious groups still use. It was closed in front by metallic hooks and eyes. This modest uniform which, by its shape and its lack of adornment distinguishes the Brothers from lay people, from ecclesiastics and from all other religious, has become their special habit and is still worn by them today. This new type of dress, which at first impressed people by its unusual appearance, and which shocked so many, is in fact the most fitting one could imagine for their

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*These were a kind of heavy overcoat, sometimes with a sort of bonnet attached to the collar, which usually were worn shorter than knee length. The ones used by the Brothers were longer, but without the bonnet. Eventually they evolved into the "mantle" worn with the sleeves hanging unused, like a sort of cape.

state. If one considers the matter attentively, he will agree that it is appropriate to their persons, their employment and their character. Made of black material of the commonest kind, it bespeaks simplicity, modesty and poverty. Its length, similar to that of ecclesiastical dress, distinguished the Brothers from lay people, and reminded them to behave with circumspection and gravity, reserve and recollection; and to eschew the manners of the world.

Moreover, this habit, deserving of veneration because of its form, inspires respect in the youngsters whom the Brothers teach, and makes these children, indocile, obstinate and troublesome as they are, show consideration, attention and even fear which otherwise they would not be inclined to feel. A short cloak, of whatever color, would not make the same impression on them, and before long they would prove unmanageable and unbearable to the Brothers if they did not find in the external appearance of the latter's clothes, in their gravity and silence, a barrier against that undue familiarity which breeds contempt. This habit is also a constant reminder for the Brothers themselves; its black color tells them that they should be dead to the world; by its coarse quality and lack of style it stresses that they have embraced a state of abjection, poverty and mortification; its very shape proclaims that they are consecrated to God and must live for Him alone. This habit is a helpful and restraining influence when passions seek to show themselves. It is a severe monitor which reproves them for those faults inconsistent with their state of life; it is a sign which reveals to the public in the places they frequent and in the actions they perform there, whether they are behaving properly, or visiting inappropriate spots, or using unbecoming language, or allowing themselves to indulge in frivolous conduct likely to dishonor their profession. In a word, De La Salle was indeed rightly inspired in giving to his disciples this sort of habit; for no other would have suited them so well. Any other would afford them less protection from the seductions and dangers met with in the world.

It is true that this new dress was not, at the start, to everybody's liking; and that later on it met with a great many critics. It is also true that its unusual and extraordinary shape brought down on the Brothers in all the localities where they eventually wore it, a great deal of mockery, scorn, insults and affronts. But a man as eager for humiliations as the pious Founder did not allow himself to be moved by all this. He knew that the habits of most religious Orders had occasioned the same sort of treatment of these religious at the beginning. Church history had taught him how the garb worn by the hermits and monks had been found shocking by the wise and by the lovers of this world, and by heretical emperors as well, especially the Iconoclasts and their followers. He was well aware of the inhospitable treatment meted out to the first Franciscans when they appeared dressed in sackcloth and girt with a cord. He had read about the cruel treatment that this habit had provoked in Germany when the first twenty of the Saint's disciples entered that country. Children threw stones at them; the dregs of the populace chased them wherever they went; they were beaten and treated shamefully; people took malicious pleasure in dragging them around by their cinctures, pulling off their hoods, and tearing their sacks to pieces. Nor had he forgotten how the appearance and the dress of the Capuchin Fathers had appeared ridiculous to the worldly when they first beheld these new religious. The world would have been even more surprised had it known the motive which

led these holy men to choose the habit they wore, namely, to arouse its mockery. Indeed, the first authors of this holy reform movement, filled with the spirit of their seraphic Father, St. Francis, and like him eager for ignominy, had purposely chosen the brown-colored sackcloth, worn in Italy by convicts, in order to show their contempt for the world and to draw down its scorn on themselves. De La Salle had all these striking examples before him, and he invoked them to make his disciples esteem and love their new habit, as the true livery of Jesus Christ, the Man of Sorrows. He wanted them to consider ill-treatment as the best way of sharing in the lot of the Crucified, and to respect the habit that procured such ignominy for them. By the same token the new habit became precious in his own eyes and worthy of envy; and as we shall soon see, he donned it himself, so as to share along with his children in the various kinds of humiliations with which the world honored this habit, while thinking it was discrediting it.

Indeed, the world was shocked as soon as this habit appeared before its eyes. The worldly-wise, and even some sincerely good people, could not find it to their liking. What did not both groups say to the pious Founder to get him to change it? If he had heeded all the advice given him on this subject, at this time and later, he would not have had time for anything but listening to childish remarks, proper to women's chatter.

He was, however, obliged to pay attention to the remonstrances made to him on this topic some years later by a person of distinguished merit, who invoked all sorts of arguments to induce him to modify the new habit. And no doubt the Servant of God's humility would have caused him to yield to the authority and enlightment of this person, whom he respected highly, and to modify the habit according to the latter's wishes, if the critic's proposals regarding the habit's shape and makeup had not tended to make it more elegant and more to the taste of the public, thus causing those who wore it to be in greater danger of losing their spirit of simplicity and of contempt for the world. Fearing then, and with much reason, that the change in the exterior would affect the interior, and that the "old man" would find satisfaction at the expense of the "new man" in a habit that appealed to worldly people, he remained inflexible in his view, all the more so since the only reasons brought forward in favor of the change were based on mere convenience. Such arguments could not stand up against those arising from the nature of the thing itself, and from the undesirable consequences a change would have had. In fact, the habit that the person in question wanted the Brothers to wear would have at once violated the simplicity, poverty and humility which these "new men" made profession of. Along with concern for cleanliness it would have opened the door to vanity; and self-love as well as love of the world would have been favored thereby. For the less their habit gratified the world, the more proper it was to keep them apart from the world. God's servants should not try to flatter His enemy. Once this desire insinuates itself into a heart, it soon extinguishes the desire to please the Creator.

For men whose whole ambition was to conform themselves to Jesus Christ, it was a blessing to wear such a garb of ignominy which resembled that which the soldiers laid upon Christ in derision. Of course, since De La Salle remained firm on this occasion and replied that he could not bring himself to yield to reasons of mere propriety and to set aside the serious motives which had led

him to give to his Institute's habit the form which was so sharply criticized, he was treated as a stubborn dolt, a man who followed nothing but his own ideas. As he expected this, he let people talk, and changed nothing; but fearing lest the authority or the considerable number of those who did not like the habit as it was might impress the Brothers who wore it, he wrote a memorandum to explain and justify their style of dress. In it he set forth his reasons and the motives for his refusal so cogently and in such a Christian manner, that he won those who seemed to be the most strongly opposed to it back to his point of view.

The adoption of the new garb brought about a modification in the Community's name. That of "Brothers" was the one that fitted them best, so they chose it, giving up the name of "Schoolmasters" to those who practice this profession for gain. Humility and charity suggested giving up that name; it had not even been fitting for men who professed to run schools only so that Jesus Christ might reign in them, and so that they might teach Christian doctrine gratuitously. If the name of "Schoolmasters" had been acceptable up to this time in a house where uniformity of lifestyle and equality in all things had not yet bound the subjects together, and where some of them were still vacillating in their vocation, it was no longer proper now that they had joined together to form a single body. Consequently, the name "Brothers" truly belonged to them---a name which nature gives to children who share the same blood and the same father on earth, and which in religion describes those who have the same spirit and the same Father in Heaven.

In this way the denomination of "Brothers of the Christian and Gratuitous Schools" became thenceforth the official name of the children of De La Salle; and from now on we shall call them by no other.

This appellation is the correct one, because it includes the definition of their state and indicates the mission proper to their vocation. This name reminds them that the charity which gave birth to their Institute must be its soul and life; that it should govern all their deliberations and animate all their projects; that it should inspire all their decisions, rule all their undertakings, govern all their words and deeds. This name teaches them how excellent is the duty they have assumed, the dignity of their state, and the holiness proper to their profession. It tells them that as Brothers they owe each other mutual proofs of tender but spiritual friendship; and that considering themselves as the elder brothers of the children who come to be taught by them, they should exercise this ministry of charity with truly loving hearts.

The capote and the soutane made of cheap, coarse material called for shoes and hats of the same style, thus making up an accoutrement characterized by perfect poverty, and appropriate for men who had given up all attempts to please the world. In those days people wore large, broad-brimmed hats; but those which the pious Founder had made for the Brothers showed even wider brims than those in general use. His idea was to make the Brothers look different from worldly people in every respect, to allow them nothing resembling what the world admired, and arouse between them and it so deep an antagonism that they would not even think of becoming reconciled with it. To

provide them with footgear in keeping with their headgear, he had shoes made with a thick double sole, like those worn by farmers or those engaged in heavy labor.

Such an outfit produced the effect that De La Salle expected it would. He aimed at setting up such a contrast between his children and the children of the world that neither group would ever want to have anything to do with the other. He hoped to accustom the Brothers to the outcries and insults of the populace which, as a rule, rewards them for their labor only by affronts. He wanted to see them established in that tranquillity of soul which is normally found only in the depths of true humility and in perfect death to self. This goal could quickly be reached by the practice of mildness, patience, bearing wrongs meekly, and the other virtues which every step they took through the streets clad in their new garb gave them occasions to practice. Hardly had they set foot outside their house when critical and ill-intentioned eyes fastened upon them with derision. Evil tongues launched poisoned darts to wound them, and everybody on their way, inside and outside the houses, came forth to meet them or waited till they passed in order to cover them with contempt and derision.

People pointed the finger of scorn at them; they were escorted with raucous cries and amidst scenes of near riot. They were mimicked in public, and whoever invented some new outrage addressed to them thought he had done something very clever indeed. Jeers and hoots accompanied them wherever they went. Passersby stopped in the streets to take part in the taunts hurled at them. Artisans left their tasks unfinished in their shops to join in the merriment. Street urchins made up a new game: following the Brothers and yelling after them. The mob found pleasure in covering them with abuse; everybody enjoyed playing tricks on them and laughing at their expense. The same farce began again day after day; for since the Brothers were obliged to go to and from their schools they were accompanied thither and back with vilification. And lucky were they when they got off so easily; for often they were spattered with mud and pursued by those who threw stones at them till they reached the door of their house. Those among the Brothers who, in addition to their ridiculously looking clothes (so considered by the rabble), adopted a simple and naive manner, got more than their share of derision. They could all rejoice at being true men of sorrows and at having found their treasure in the company of Him Who was overwhelmed with opprobrium.

Their lot was that of the Apostles, and they underwent the same kind of treatment. They could say with St. Paul: "We are looked upon as the offscouring of the world;" we are rejected like filthy scum on stagnant water or on the frothy sea, like the refuse of earth. The world rose up in wrath against these new-type men, and even more so against their manner of living, showing only harshness, rigor and animosity towards them. Or rather, let us say that the Devil feared this new company of Gospel workers that the Father was sending out to cultivate the most neglected corner of His vineyard; and so he poured out all his fury and rage against these men. It was he who set poisoned tongues to wagging, vomiting all sorts of injuries against them. He it was who put into wicked hands the stones that bruised them, and which would have pleased the throwers all the more if they had caused painful wounds.

The poor Brothers whose long-suffering was put to the test every day really needed heroic patience in order not to succumb to the protracted persecution they endured; for the mini-war which the world had declared on them did not last for a few days only. It went on for years. All this time these heroes of Christian patience had to permit from their fellow citizens the same kind of torments that the first Christians suffered from the pagans, with the exception of prison and torture. Insults, ignominy, injury, ill-treatment...nothing was spared them. Even those who favored the establishment of the Christian and gratuitous schools, and who lauded this work as it deserved, declared themselves against the Brothers and treated them like enemies. Everything about them shocked these people: their lifestyle, their garb, their simplicity and modesty, the silence they observed in the streets. "Who are these new-type men?" they asked in mockery. "Where do they come from? What race gave them birth? Who ever saw anything like this? They seem to have emerged from the tomb; they are dressed like scarecrows. No one can tell whether they have eyes or tongues. They never speak. They never open their eyes. Do they have tongues? They will end up forgetting how to speak! Why have eyes and not use them? Why did God give us sight if not to see where we are going? These Brothers are like the idols spoken of by the Royal Prophet: 'They have mouths, but speak not; they have ears, but these are deaf; they have eyes, but they keep them shut all the time; they have hands, but they remain motionless'. Only their feet keep moving, bearing from place to place these strange statues who seem lifeless, if they did not show at least this sign of life." This was how the worldly-wise made fun of those who had become fools for Christ's sake.

De La Salle did not need to envy his disciples this sort of treatment, because he received the lion's share of such outrages and abuse. The father was being persecuted in his children: the master, humiliated in his disciples. He was the main actor whom the public brought out on the stage to make sport of and to laugh at his expense. It was he whom the worldly-wise thought they saw humiliated when they beheld his Brothers surrounded by an insolent mob of ruffians, jeered at and derided. All the blows aimed at them were felt by him, and the insults heaped on them rebounded onto him.

Nor was this all. Outraged every day in the year and almost at every hour of the day in the person of his children, he was personally insulted more often and more outrageously than any of his followers. When he left the house, as soon as he had taken a few steps, he ran into carpers, people who lay in wait to affront him. They always had their taunts ready and they seemed to have an inexhaustible supply of these on hand to hurl at him. They railed at him over the state he had given up, over that which he had embraced, over his eccentric manner of living, over the supposed extravagance of his behavior and his dress. The imaginary dishonor he was bringing down on the Chapter of which he had been a member, and on his family, one of the most highly respected in the city, the pretended wrong he had done to his brother by not leaving him a benefice which his birth seemed to give him a right to, were all crimes which people had not forgotten. They were still fresh in men's minds, and the wounds they had left in certain people's hearts were still bleeding. All thought they had a right to blame what he was doing because of what he had done; to find fault with the new examples of virtue he was giving even as they had criticized the previous ones, characterizing them

as imprudence, weak-mindedness, singularity, hypocrisy, stubbornness, ambition, exaggeration. The remarkable thing is that these ungrateful people, who during the recent cruel famine had eaten his bread and had profited by his distribution of his fortune, these same hungry people whom he had fed with so much charity, had already forgotten their benefactor and his kindness, and could not seem to find any other way of thanking him than vilifying him. Some addressed cutting reproaches to him; others overwhelmed him with invective. Sometimes in the streets he was exposed to physical violence from people who had no veneration for his virtue, no respect for his priestly character, no consideration for his rank. More than once stones were thrown at him. We say nothing of what he had to suffer from his relatives and former friends, who were among the most notable people in the city. It is easy to imagine how they treated one whom they considered as an enemy of the family, an unreliable relative, a man who had embarrassed them and degraded himself by his extraordinary and bizarre behavior.

What rubbed raw the wounds in their hearts, and incited them to criticize him even more bitterly, was the new token of humility which he began giving, and which he continued with the same generosity. We can even say that his family and his worldly friends were more humiliated by this than he was himself, and that they felt extreme confusion over a step which the whole city found utterly ridiculous and out of place. Here is what happened.

Some of De La Salle's disciples were most eager to walk in his footsteps and to keep pace with him in his progress towards perfection. But not having received as much grace as he, they soon exhausted their strength; and excessive austerities and exaggerated fervor led to their death. These unexpected losses caused problems in the schools because the positions of these dead Brothers were not filled. De La Salle tried to replace them as soon as possible; but since he did not have enough candidates ready to take the place of the missing ones, he resolved to do so in person, and began to teach school in St. James' parish. To do this properly he felt he should wear the Brothers' habit. So he exchanged his long clerical mantle for one of their capotes. He also put on the wide-brimmed hat and the thick-soled shoes which were part of the Brothers' uniform; and thus outfitted he went to teach school. When the world saw him thus disguised, so to speak, wearing a capote with long sleeves, made of the coarsest and cheapest material, and a soutane of the same cloth underneath, one can easily imagine the guffaws his appearance provoked in the city, the ribald cries of the street urchins, the hoots that issued from the assembled rabble, delighted at this opportunity of satisfying its innate meanness.

On this occasion nothing was spared to cover him with confusion and to satisfy his taste for abjection. He drank deep at the chalice of ignominy and tasted every sort of humiliation. Not once, not twice nor thrice did the virtuous Superior choose to expose himself to such outrageous treatment. He had plenty of time to grow used to it throughout the several months during which he left his house twice a day to go to give an example of humility by teaching school. In addition, he would have felt that he was failing in his duty had he omitted any of the teacher's least responsibilities. So, to fulfill them to the letter without leaving out anything, he proceeded, just like an ordinary Brother, to lead his pupils to Holy Mass every day; on

Sundays and feasts he accompanied them to High Mass and Vespers in the parish church. He remained standing at their head with a modest, recollected and devout air which filled all right-thinking people with admiration. They were indeed surprised to see a doctor, ex-canon, distinguished gentleman, and person of such high merit playing the role of schoolmaster, accepting the unpleasantness it involved, and carrying out the lowliest duties connected with it. They could not sufficiently praise the Almighty Who, when it so pleases Him, can effect such marvelous changes in hearts, and such great prodigies of grace.

Most humiliating for the pious Founder was the fact that to go to discharge his task as a teacher, he had to pass beneath the eyes of some who had once been his friends and had now become his enemies, censors and critics. But far from trying to avoid this by timid evasion or shrinking from these encounters which nature recoiled from, he showed himself with humble magnanimity in the habit of a Brother of the Christian Schools, thus braving the gaze of his family and of the illustrious Chapter of the Metropolitan church, when he went to exercise his functions as teacher. He continued acting thus with the same constancy even as he had begun; and he discontinued this humiliating practice only when another Brother could take his place at St. James'.

All during this time, torrents of humiliations from many directions swept over the humble priest; it seems that God took pleasure in fulfilling his desires and in contenting His servant's noble thirst for derision. For although he himself went forth to meet these trials and did everything to draw them down upon himself, a good many others befell him from unexpected sources, trials which proved very hard to bear.

We must not disguise the truth. The fact is that his disciples, although fervent, were not at this time very adept at their task; among them there existed no uniform method of acting in class, no definite rules about the manner of conducting a school. Their good will was considered a sufficient title to put them in charge of a class; and without having been properly trained for this very difficult function they were sent to perform it without methods, skills, or sufficient aptitudes. In those early years De La Salle had not yet been able to set up a novitiate to try out his candidates' vocation, to correct their defects, to reform their tendencies and character, to shape their manners and attitudes, in a word, to impart to them the spirit of their state and prepare them for the missions they aspired to. The fervor which reigned in the house made up for this, in a way; for upon entering they received a first infusion of this spirit. All those who presented themselves were admitted; they came because they had been struck by the examples of piety and patience given by De La Salle and the Brothers. They sought admission to a house which offered them only a hard, poor, laborious life and a penitential existence. The public rewarded them for the gratuitous instruction given to the young only by mockery and insults. It was hardly probable that anything but the Spirit of God could bring to such a Community young men who had nothing to hope for but rigorous penance within it and, outside of it, the ill-treatment of the world. All that was asked of them was to show good will and common sense.

Once they had been accepted and had followed the regulations of the house for a few days, they were sent to teach; they were assigned to a class to exercise a mission which they knew little or nothing about. Each one struggled along as best he could, which ordinarily meant rather poorly. It was scarcely possible for them to succeed in such a demanding task in which, not having had any apprenticeship, they themselves were still tyros. Since they had no rules to guide them in teaching, nor any principles to show them how to act, they taught haphazardly; this of course meant much trouble and fatigue for these Brothers themselves, and little progress in learning for the students. As a result, the two main elements of Christian education, namely, instruction and an effective method for imparting it, were not being achieved.

For to teach reading, writing, ciphering and Christian Doctrine effectively, one needs to have learned all this perfectly; to know it perfectly, one should have learned it from good teachers within the Community; and this was what was lacking at this point. The art of sound classroom procedure is more difficult than one might think. It calls for natural ability, a method, silence, mildness combined with gravity, calm, great patience, and, above all, much prudence. This art has its own rules and is acquired mainly by experience. So, men who were ignorant of these rules and who had not had time to procure the experience needed could hardly teach successfully.

Moreover, discipline is very necessary, especially in schools attended mostly by the children of the lower classes. It holds the rebellious in check, incites the slothful, masters the defiant, overawes the disorderly, curbs the playful and inattentive. In a word it is required to bridle the insubordination of youngsters who lack a proper upbringing. Such discipline is a duty for schoolmasters; but it is very difficult to exercise towards lads who are vicious, gross, badly brought up, and who display all the defects of the low social level from which they spring. Correction and punishment must be meted out with due measure, at the proper time, and in the right way. Too much discipline, or not enough, administered at the wrong time, too soon or too late, inflicted with passion and without regard for the proprieties, are all mistakes which must be avoided. In a word, any lack of circumspection, or the slightest imprudence, changes the remedy into a poison. So much self-control is called for, and such consideration for the students! One must possess complete dominion over his own passions to be able to correct at the right time and in the right way, to be neither too soft nor too harsh towards the young who have strayed from duty's path, and who can be so exasperating at times. One must never show caprice in this matter, still less uncontrolled temper. To govern a classroom properly, one must constantly renounce one's natural feelings and not follow one's inclinations in any way. It would almost take a <u>superman</u> to manage these youngsters who are not yet men themselves. It would take a pure spirit to subdue these boys who show nothing but bad spirit. At least, faith and reason alone should rule in a Christian school; they should lead to the constant practice of humility, patience, mildness and prudence. If there is any failure on this point in a school, the result will immediately appear in the form of unrest among students.

It is not difficult to understand, therefore, that these young Brothers, brash and hotheaded, even though fervent and sincerely pious, who were not

trained or prepared to keep a class in order and silence, and who perhaps were not themselves too well versed in reading and writing, soon made mistakes which led to more disorder and trouble. When some of the teachers lost their prestige by such faults, the troublemakers among the students defied them and paid no more attention to their punishments than to their lessons. Then the really resentful pupils who enjoy nothing more than to catch their teachers in some fault, to disconcert or to disturb them in order to make fun of them and laugh at their expense, never failed to profit by every chance they got to stir up disorder, confusion and upheaval as soon as these teachers provided them with the least occasion for doing so. Moreover, these troublemakers, angered rather than corrected by the just punishments deserved by their bad conduct, only sought to avenge themselves on the teachers by spreading false and exaggerated accounts by insinuations and complete fabrications which they concocted and related at home, either to excuse themselves in the eyes of their parents or to arouse the latter's indignation against the Brothers.

Some of these lads remained defiant, incorrigible and uncontrollable; the Brothers were at a loss as to what to do with them or how to bring them to do their duty and make them behave. At times they perhaps went beyond the limits of just chastisement; for as we have said, it is difficult in such occasions to keep to the happy medium. At all events, De La Salle had to bear the blame for the faults of both boys and Brothers. Some parents, showing even less sense than their children whom they had so badly raised, instead of restraining them by wise correction, encouraged their evil dispositions. They came to complain bitterly to De La Salle about the punishments inflicted by the Brothers; they made him the scapegoat on whom they cast their reproaches, invectives and insults.

Thus the only innocent person in the whole business was condemned as though he alone had been guilty, and had to suffer for the indiscreet zeal of his disciples as well as for the students' disorderly conduct. He had to endure the anger of the parents, who came to him uttering bitter recriminations, as though to take revenge on him for the supposed ill-treatment inflicted on their children in the schools. On these occasions the most reasonable ones limited themselves to complaints and reproaches, while the most violent did not stop short at outrages and threats of violence. These irritated parents were joined by the rabble which is always ready to stir up trouble and to proffer insults. These scenes took place at the door of the house and were of frequent occurrence. When he emerged, De La Salle was seldom able to avoid being the object of these complaints and their victim as well. The hoots of the populace began when he appeared on the doorstep and followed him as he went along. During the eight years he remained in Rheims, this ignominious escort frequently gathered around him when he left the house and when he returned.

Patience put to such a long and trying test was indeed calculated to make a saint of him. So many persecutions and humiliations, so courageously endured, prepared for and deserved the graces which the Institute needed. The pious Founder was sowing in tears; today he reaps in joy. He needed invincible fortitude in order not to yield to such furious and incessant attacks; and this God granted to him. With a less heroic degree of virtue he would have succumbed and abandoned the whole enterprise; but what is a soul

capable of when God's arm upholds it and His spirit fills it? If it must struggle at every step, it wins victories at each moment. The temple of charity is built upon the ruins of self-love. Love for contempt and abjection, and a salutary detestation of self keep pride in chains, along with all the other vices and passions, and erect in man's heart a trophy to the pure love of God.

Even prudent and well-intentioned persons thought that De La Salle carried his zeal too far and that he was risking his own safety too much. Who would ever have thought, they asked, that a man of his rank would have brought himself so low, would have come down to such a wretched state? On his part, he let them talk and thought only of how he might do more good. He listened calmly to the advice and remonstrances offered him, but forgot both promptly; and he silenced within his heart what his own feelings might have suggested, in order to hand himself over to the spirit of the Cross. After replacing a Brother at St. James' school, he returned to his retired mode of living and once again took up his exercises of prayer in the little cubicle which he had selected and which was scarcely big enough to contain him. There he spent the days and part of the nights in contemplation. He left it only to be present at the community exercises, and he enjoyed being there so much that he could hardly tear himself away to go to take some nourishment.

Chapter IV

Fervor of the First Brothers of the Institute

Although De La Salle strove to keep his austerities and penances hidden from others, he could not conceal them from those who lived in the same house with him. His children observed their father in order to imitate him, and they felt a holy ardor to follow in his footsteps in the most arduous path of perfection. Their eyes, attentive to all his actions, studied him everywhere and were fastened on him as on their model so as to copy him; thus, although he was clever enough to veil some of his penances from these household sleuths, they on their part were skillful enough to discover many of them. The daily examples of virtue which they beheld in him made it clear to them that there were many others which he tried to keep hidden. The pious Founder's heart, so filled with divine love, was strongly inclined to the practice of penance and mortification. He could not conceal this tendency from his disciples; indeed he made it obvious to them that he did not spare his flesh and sought to crucify it in all things. From what they saw him do they could conjecture what he might be practicing in secret. The acts of mortification which good example obliged him to perform in public hinted, at least in part, at those which his humility made him shroud in secrecy. The result was a pious curiosity on the Brothers' part to discover these penances, and a noble emulation led them to imitate them.

They could follow De La Salle by the traces of his blood which he left behind, and thus managed to find the cruel instruments of penance he used to torment his body. These examples completed what his instructions had begun,

and persuaded them to become like him in the practice of penance and prayer. In this new Community there was talk only of Heaven and of the way to attain it; only of perfection and of the means of reaching it; only of the virtues and of how to make them pure and heroic; only of divine love and of what must be done to acquire it. The language spoken there was entirely different from the conversation heard in the world. Among the Brothers there reigned the pursuit of humiliation, of self-abnegation, of flight from the world, of silence, recollection, interior spirit, the life of retirement and solitude, the love of crosses and of suffering. To know Jesus Christ and Him crucified, to model themselves after Him and express His life in their own persons, to bear about always the dying of Jesus in their bodies, and thus to become His living and perfect portraits was enough for them; they cared to know nothing else. Such was the ambition of these early Brothers. In this they made all their search for knowledge consist. In their company a worldly person, a child of the old Adam, would have felt as though in a strange land; he would have been entirely different from them, and his aspirations would have been altogether alien from theirs. He would not have understood their talk, would not have been able to make himself understood by them. Judging by their ways, their language, their manner of living, he would have taken them for men from another planet, or for men come down from Heaven.

John Baptist had enkindled such an ardent fire among his children that they could not be satisfied by limiting themselves to the practice of ordinary fervor, any more than he could. They aspired only after God, longed only to suffer for God, to crucify their bodies and to make themselves like unto the Man of Sorrows. Enthusiastic over the practice of penance, they begged for permission to engage in it even to the point of importunity; they were satisfied only when all their requests were granted. They never had enough; to content them, their Superior had to permit them to use disciplines, hair shirts and iron chains as much as they wished. The only jealousy among them was directed to whoever happened to have more of these instruments to use. De La Salle, who was not backward in this matter himself, easily gave in to their desires; if he tried to put limits on their fervor, he put none on his and thus became for them the object of a noble emulation, or of a holy despair.

However, to tell the truth, they had no reason to complain too much about him on this score, for his own attraction for austerity made him liberal in granting them permissions in this matter. He even gave in to them too much, as we shall see; and what he might be reproached with is to have allowed them to exercise on their bodies some of the holy cruelties that he practiced on his. These travelers with De La Salle in the desert of this world, filled with heavenly ardor he had imparted to them, ran with all their might in the footsteps of their father, following the odor of his virtues on the path to perfection. Unwearied in practicing penance, they requested permission for even more. Once they had done one thing, they begged to be allowed to try another. Each in turn came asking for these favors; and they found that their turn took too long to come. Before and after meals, in the morning after prayer, in the evening after the examen, at one time or another the Brothers surrounded their teacher and importuned him with pressing earnestness to allow them to perform some new humiliation or some fresh act of austerity. It was for them a great cause of disappointment that they could not give free rein to the impetuosity of their desires, and had to restrain themselves within the

limits set by strict obedience. But since these fervent religious wanted nothing but God, their intention was pure; neither self-love nor self-will had anything to do with the mortifications which they longed to practice, and the spirit of obedience ruled even the spirit of penance. These truly obedient men would have thought that they were doing penance for the devil and not for God had they indulged in any austerities not sanctioned by obedience. Thus, the vehemence of their desire to crucify their flesh was measured by their eagerness in asking their Superior to give them the merit of obedience. As we said, they had little trouble in convincing him, or in securing permission for the frequent use of disciplines, hair shirts, iron chains and other instruments for making the body suffer. The various kinds of humiliation were also highly prized by them; there are none that the Spirit of God did not inspire them to try. Wherever they happened to meet De La Salle, if they had committed some fault, they threw themselves at his feet and asked for a penance. They revealed all their defects to him and requested permission to manifest them to others. Whatever could cause them the most embarrassment was the first thing they revealed. Whatever could lead others to think less highly of them was what they most eagerly wished to publicize. They seemed to take pleasure in declaring openly to all what could dishonor them in others' eyes, and the public was not slow in showering them with opprobrium and infamy.

The people who were so assiduous in insulting them when they appeared in public, sorely disappointed them when they failed to do so. They felt that contempt was due them, and that they were treated justly when they were reviled as the offscouring of the world, when people threw stones at them, when they were spattered with mud. In the house each one rivaled with the other to take on the lowliest and most unpleasant tasks, which nature found least attractive. The only time they ever quarreled was when it was a question of vying in humility and of seizing opportunities to do things that self-love finds most mortifying, and pride hard to bear. They argued only when occasions arose to contend with each other in humility and to profit by chances to perform actions which most sensibly mortify self-love and pride. In a word, the new Community was a school of virtue and of perfection, where each one strove with the others in noble emulation. No one gave or received anything but striking examples of fervor, charity, humility, mortification, silence, recollection, obedience, patience, zeal for the salvation of their neighbor, love for their vocation, and concern for the instruction and sanctification of poor children; but it is true that, by wanting to follow their father too closely, a number of these fervent disciples of De La Salle succeeded in shortening their lives.

The Brothers, carried away by the power of his example, overcame him by their insistence; and all of them together let themselves be swept away by the tidal wave of their fervor, which led them to certain excesses in the matter of penance. He should have restrained them, and used the bridle of obedience to hold back these men on fire with enthusiasm, who let the vivacity of their desires spur them on. But how could he have done this? He was the first to surrender to this attraction. In this matter he himself was the most culpable of all; and he did not feel himself justified or even willing to reproach them for a fault which he loved. If both father and children, setting no limits to their macerations, committed a fault, it was a fault which they did not wish

to correct. They could not have brought themselves to make up for it save by practicing even greater penances than those which they were reproached for. However, we must admit that they went too far in this matter; it is a fault which can indeed be imputed to them. But which of the Saints does not deserve the same reproach? All of them have sinned in this manner, and none of them has been willing to acknowledge and confess this crime. If some of them, like St. Francis, recognized as much on their deathbeds, and begged pardon of their bodies for having treated them too severely, they never did so until it was too late to admit their culpability, too late to correct themselves. After all, God may have wished to raise up in these later centuries the spirit of penance which characterized the first days of the Church, to help us remember that this spirit is the spirit of primitive Christianity and the spirit of the Gospel, and to show that any spirituality which waters it down, disguises or modifies it, is a false and deceptive type of spirituality.

The fact is that at La Trappe, at Septfonds, and elsewhere in France we have seen in our day the ancient practices of austerity revived by men who because of their physical constitution would not have been thought capable of enduring the vigils, fasting and other macerations of the flesh so commonly practiced of old in the deserts and at the beginning of religious Orders. Yet these men carried these mortifications almost to the same lengths as did those heroes of former times. In the seven or eight years from 1681 to 1688 when De La Salle left Rheims to go to establish schools in Paris, he lost over six of the fifteen Brothers who composed the Institute at its beginning, in the schools of Rheims, Laon, Guise and Rethel. All these men died a premature death before reaching the age of thirty. There were others whose health was ruined and who had to seek help outside the Community. From 1688 up to De La Salle's own death in 1719, he had to deplore the demise of at least forty-five more Brothers and experienced the joy of sending them on ahead of him into Paradise. Of these, only eight or nine were over thirty years old.

A house as poor, austere and mortified as that of the Brothers was indeed apt to become a cemetery for the bodies and to people Heaven with the souls of those who dwelt in it. Human reason was not listened to there, still less the voice of mitigation or relaxation. The young men allowed themselves to be carried away by the pious excesses of their devotion, and condemned as cowardice or sensuality any respite that nature cried out for. All of them, nerved by the words of their guide and inspired by his example, made superhuman efforts to follow in his footsteps and to yield to the attractions of grace. Thus, in a short while, they undermined and ruined their health either by following their ardent desires, by the intensity of their application to the interior life, or by the practice of unrelenting mortification, or finally by the immoderate use they made of disciplines and other instruments of penance, combined with their daily round of exhausting work in the schools. In seeking to follow their Founder the Brothers did not pay attention to the fact that he did not walk, did not even run, but flew in the narrow and thorny path leading to Heaven. He was a man especially favored by grace, a true Benjamin, to whom the new Joseph, our Savior, gave a tenfold portion when distributing the gifts of grace. His measure of it was full, abundant, overflowing. The great sacrifices he had made for God, the astonishing violence he had offered his nature, the heroic deeds of humility,

of renunciation and of charity towards the poor had opened for him the floodgates of God's benedictions. We can say that his lot was to receive a victorious grace, and that thanks to it and with its help everything became not only possible for him, but feasible and easy. The amazing thing is that the penance he practiced, which exceeded what any of the Brothers did, far from ruining his health seemed to fortify it and to make his constitution more robust. In seeking to imitate him they should have consulted their capability but this they failed to do. Vying with a spiritual giant, they found their limits in a short time; but at least they had the consolation of having done all they could to resemble him; and they died like Saints after living like great penitents.

Brother Jean François was the one who led the way to Heaven. A good job in the city had provided amply for his needs, and one can say that when he left it behind he was leaving much in the eyes of Him who gauges the merit of our actions only according to the share that our hearts take in them. When he resigned his position, he abandoned more than the Apostles did when they followed Jesus Christ; for the latter were only poor fishermen who had nothing to forsake but their nets; but since they renounced them with all their hearts, their sacrifice had great value in the eyes of Jesus Christ, Who addressed to them the highest praise and promised them the richest rewards. In addition, as St. Jerome and St. Gregory observe, Our Lord's disciples left much in leaving behind the little they possessed, because they also gave up the desire of owning anything. It was this attitude, so agreeable to Him Who takes into consideration the sentiments of the heart, which merited so many graces for Brother Jean François. What won him over to God and led him to enter the new Community was the example of the Brothers' lives. Impressed by their piety, fervor and patience, he realized that the one who directed them was indeed a great servant of God; and he conceived a holy desire of putting himself under his guidance and of belonging to his Community. He lived only a short time after this; but the manner in which he lived has left his memory in benediction. His days were indeed full, and his great concern was to give them all their entire measure of merit. A deep interior spirit characterized his piety. Always recollected, attentive to God's holy presence, vigilant over all the movements of his soul, careful to suppress all useless thoughts and irrelevant affections, watchful to eliminate the slightest movements of his passions and vices, on the alert to mortify his natural inclinations and his self-will, he let nothing enter his heart but that which was from God and for God. In a word, exclusively occupied in cultivating the interior life, he so badly weakened the exterior man that after eighteen months of community living he reached the end of his days. But as Holy Scripture says, he had lived a long time since he had lived with great fervor. His days, so full of merit, counted for years before the Lord. Explevit tempora multa. He did not need to live any longer, since he had reached the goal to which a long life should lead, namely, perfect charity. The power that this virtue exercised over his soul showed itself during the severe illness which brought him to the grave within a few days, in 1684. The delirium resulting from the high fever which consumed him and which preceded his death for some days, was not marked by any extravagance, any irregular movements, any ill-considered words. I can even affirm that this delirium was edifying, mirroring as it did his beautiful soul. It revealed the deep impressions that divine love had made in it. Dare I say it? His delirium was like a sort of ecstasy, during which his heart was

filled only with a longing for Heaven, and with transports of love for God. He exclaimed: "O beautiful eternity! How lovely is thy dwelling place, O Lord! O love, love, love! We shall go to see love...love...love!" These words were constantly on his lips. He repeated them often, in a pleasant voice, with all the strength he had left, and expired as he finished pronouncing them. His death was as saintly as his life had been.

Brother Bourlette was the second of these martyrs of penance. Excessive fervor soon brought him to the tomb. He was a native of Rheims, the son of respectable parents, adequately provided with all the goods of fortune. Dear to his family, he lacked nothing in a home where affection reigned. The future smiled on him; everything seemed to offer him pleasing prospects as the world judges. His family inheritance promised him the means of establishing himself and the hope of being very happy in the world. But touched by God's grace he lifted his eyes to a higher goal in Heaven. Whatever was mortal seemed to him unworthy of an immortal soul. His family home held no charms for him because he felt too much at ease there. The Brothers' house, where everything was lacking and on entering which he might have said that he was shutting his body up in a prison, consigning his senses to torture and his will to entombment, appeared to him as truly the house of God and the gate of Heaven. He joined the Brothers; but how, on what occasion, for what reason and purpose? He entered without his parents' knowing it; he remained deaf to their pleas and entreaties; he persevered in spite of their tears and constant efforts to make him leave. The eminent virtue of De La Salle and of his disciples had given rise to his vocation. The desire of walking in the straight path which leads to Paradise was the motive which drew him to a house which he considered as the narrow door giving entrance into Heaven. He lived there like an angel and died there like a saint.

What surprised him at first, touched him, and won him over to God was De La Salle's unconquerable patience and that of his children. As a citizen of Rheims he could not be ignorant of who this man was whom he saw so poor, reduced to such circumstances, so heartily despised by all. Comparing the original status of the servant of God, a situation of wealth and honor, with the second that he had willingly embraced, a state of poverty, mortification and ignominy, he could not sufficiently admire the action of grace in human hearts. He was constantly amazed at seeing a man who had given up so much, who had become so vile in the world's eyes, yet happy and full of joy over the fortunate exchange he had made by giving up his wealth for poverty and his comfortable life for one that crucified the flesh.

What struck him most was to see this man of God made a sight for the vile rabble that mocked him, some of whom seemed to be saying to the others: "Behold the Man! Behold him, this Canon, this Doctor, this scion of a great family, who has become a schoolmaster! That is the role he has taken up; let him subsist on it, for he now owns nothing; he is as poor as those whom he teaches. Isn't he a sight! Clad in that outfit, dressed in a <u>capote</u>, with those heavy shoes and that hat with the wide brim hanging over his shoulders! Doesn't he bring credit to his city, his family, his former colleagues in the Chapter? What a brilliant part he plays in the world now! Can he have lost his reason? He must have, for he only shows himself as one dead, who cares nothing about what anybody does to him!" The young man who had one day seen

De La Salle reduced to being the plaything of the people, saw some of his disciples treated in the same way the next. The insolent riffraff that gathered around them sought to amuse themselves at their expense. He saw that they were insulted with impunity, that they allowed their tormentors full liberty to mock them, to tug on their clothes, to shove them rudely, to splash them with mud, to strike them, chase them and throw stones at them. And amidst all this they did not seem to be upset, nor did they let a single word of indignation, not a sign of impatience escape their lips. This edified him extremely. These quiet, modest, mild and peaceable men surrounded by a pack of unruly children who (as Scripture says) ran after them like wild dogs, barking and seeking an opportunity to harass them. These truly patient men in the midst of this fanatical mob, which drew near to them only to strike them, seemed to him men formed in the school of Calvary and modeled after Jesus Christ their exemplar. When all was said and done, he thought, they deserved envy rather than pity.

The admiration he conceived for them inspired him with the desire of becoming like them, so that after drinking of this same chalice on earth with them he might be found worthy of a place in their company in Heaven. Once he had made this generous resolution, he carried it out without letting his parents know. The latter, desolate and afflicted, were filled with consternation when they found out the truth, and hastened to come to deliver him from a house which (as the world judges) devoured its inhabitants, and which was the object of so much public hatred and persecution.

The more they loved this child of theirs, the more they wept to see him in a place so horrible in the eyes of the world. If death had taken him from them, they would probably not have shed as many tears at his grave as they now did. They felt disgraced because their son was among the Brothers. To wipe away this stain from their family honor there was nothing they did not try in order to make him leave. But they might have been speaking to a deaf and blind person; he seemed not to see their tears nor to hear their sighs. Their lamentations and complaints found him, and left him, as immovable as a cliff battered by the waves, which can see the ocean's tide breaking over its foot without being moved. When this generous youth entered the house he could have said with St. Paul: "I no longer listened to flesh and blood." His eagerness to belong entirely to Jesus Christ made him forget that he had any parents; and when they came to tempt him to leave his vocation he seemed not to recognize them any more. His heart secretly told them what his lips, out of respect, dared not utter: "I know you not. I no longer recognize you as my father and mother when you try to tear me away from the bosom of my heavenly Father." Thus, armed with the sword of the Gospel, he accomplished this separation, painful as it was to nature, and gave up parents who loved him tenderly.

Perfect charity, that Gospel pearl which must be bought at the price of renouncing all else; that refined gold, which makes its possessor so rich and which demands the greatest sacrifices, was the reward given to this virtuous young man for what he had just done. Indeed, it seems that the love of God which costs even generous hearts so much, was bestowed on him on the threshold of the house when he came to beg entry there. For from that moment onward his heart was so fully inflamed with it that it no longer beat save for God. It

can be said that this sacred love pursued him everywhere and overwhelmed him. Its assaults were impetuous and continual, so that he seemed at all times to be in ecstasy, and out of touch with his surroundings, especially during mental prayer and thanksgiving after Holy Communion. At such times he seemed to experience convulsive movements, or to be seized by a violent fever which caused his limbs to tremble. When he was warned and reproved because of this singular behavior he seemed quite surprised, because he alone was ignorant of what all the others could see. Furthermore, to judge correctly of his charity's ardor we should measure it by his attraction for humiliations.

In his case a sincere desire for self-abasement gave his love for God the genuine authentication it needed to certify its reality. For after all, the latter can always be suspected as regards its genuineness or its purity when the former is not present to vouch for it. For nothing so evidently proves that self-love has been eradicated from a heart than a strong yearning for humiliations. Any other sign might be questioned. No other can guarantee the presence of the pure love of God in a soul. Only he should be numbered among the perfect who displays love for the cross as the effective proof of his love for God. By this standard Brother Bourlette deserves a place among the perfect, since no other inclination appeared so strongly in him than his desire for self-abasement. His entire ambition was to lower himself in the estimation of men and to forfeit their consideration. If his spirit of obedience had not been stronger than his thirst for humiliation, he might have been seen pretending to be insane so as to excite the rabble and the street urchins to throw stones at him and splatter him with mud. On more than one occasion De La Salle had to call on all his firmness and authority to restrain him within the limits of prudence. This lover of contempt insistently begged permission to run about in the streets of his native city and under the eyes of his parents, friends and fellow citizens, clad in a red pourpoint* and wearing a woolen cap on his head, hoping to force people to treat him as the demented were treated, and to look upon him as such.

His parents, still heartbroken at having lost him, and at seeing him in a house with such a reputation, kept coming back and urging him to leave it. They did not desist, importuning and wearying him with their tears, reproaches, caresses and other signs of tenderness, weapons so often victorious even over the most inflexible hearts. So De La Salle sent him to Rethel to get him away from them, hoping by thus separating him from them to put him out of reach of the importunities. But what does natural love inspire? His father and mother, whether from nearby or from far off, did not slacken their efforts. Like bears robbed of their cub, they hastened to the place to which their son had been exiled in the hope of protecting him from their pursuits. At Rethel as at Rheims, they besieged him with cries, lamentations and reproaches, without succeeding in causing their own emotion to gain his heart. In vain they wept and appeared inconsolable before him. In vain did they mingle tears with their pleas, and reproaches with their caresses; they found him ever the same: unmoved by their tears, their cries

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*A pourpoint was a man's outer garment, like a sweater or blouse, with puffed out sleeves, which covered the body from the neck to the waist.

and the heartbreak of those who had given him life. Entirely wrapt in God, he let grace in his heart overcome nature. On that interior altar he offered to the heavenly Father as a victim his own natural love, the sorrow he was causing his parents, and that which they caused him. Relating this new temptation to De La Salle in a letter he said, "My parents came to see me and asked if I was not at last ready to be converted. I told them that I was converted already." I do not know whether it was for the purpose of keeping Brother Bourlette's residence a secret from his parents, but at all events he was changed again, from Rethel to Laon; however, nothing was gained by this.

When his father found out where his son had gone, he lost no time in proceeding thither, and in trying to induce him to leave a state where he could not bear to see him. Once again the son, dry-eyed, saw the tears flow unchecked from his father's eyes. How many sobs and wails beat against his ears, without being able to reach his heart! What new testimonials of affection did he not receive? What bitter reproaches was he not obliged to listen to on the part of the grieving old man, sunk in consternation and almost in despair? These importunities which assailed him with such fury did not, however, succeed in breaking down his resolution. They merely served to steel him in his vocation and to sanctify him by giving him repeated opportunities to renew the greatest natural sacrifice he could make.

The reward of all this constancy was not long in coming; for whether God wished to grant him his crown without further delay after he had withstood so many combats, or whether his great fervor shortened his life, the fact is that after about two years of a truly saintly life he met with a happy death. If charity was not its sole cause, it certainly seems to have been the occasion that brought it about. Here is what happened. When Brother Bourlette's companion fell ill, the generous young Brother undertook to care for him while keeping the two classes in session. He was doing the work of three men; but fervor never thinks anything is too much; when doing too much it still accuses itself of slackness. The parish priest, still living today as a canon of the Cathedral, came to visit the Brothers. He loved Brother Bourlette on account of his extraordinary piety, and found him overburdened and in danger of succumbing under the load of all the work he was doing. So he suggested giving the students a week or two of vacation, but the humble Brother said that in conscience he could not do this without a written order from De La Salle. The charitable pastor, foreseeing the results of this misplaced fervor and this ill-founded scruple about obedience, was rather displeased by the Brother's resolve; and to make him realize that the situation was more than he could handle he asked him how, all by himself, he could teach two separate classes containing such a large number of students, while still taking care of the sick Brother. "Sir," replied Brother Bourlette, "I keep my right foot in one class, my left foot in the other, my mind is with the sick Brother, and my heart is in Heaven." This reply amazed the pious parish priest, but left him with nothing more to say. He departed, edified and full of admiration.

A few days later the sick Brother was well enough to handle his class once more; but Brother Bourlette was obliged to leave his and go to bed. A continual and raging fever carried him off in the year 1686, in spite of the doctors and the medicines which failed either to give him any relief or to prolong his life. The entire parish, indeed the entire city, showed great

grief. His death was a great loss, and people honored him as a saint. During several years, pilgrims frequently visited his grave to honor him and pray to him. Many persons came to offer their prayers there and to invoke the pious young Brother. His tranquillity of soul and his modesty, which were so obvious in all his external behavior, had won for him the nickname of "the Modest Brother". People called him by no other, and by thus designating him they thought they had characterized his virtue and given him deserved praise.

Brother Maurice, another native of Rheims, was the third of De La Salle's children to go to enjoy his reward in Heaven. His happy death occurred in Rheims on May 1, 1687. He was born of a very honorable family, and paid it even more honor by his great piety than he had received from it by his birth. No sooner had he joined the Brothers than they all looked upon him as their model. Everything in him spoke of God and turned people to God, inspiring devotion in their hearts. This good Brother seemed to be a reincarnation of Jesus Christ; in his person he provided others with a striking image of Our Lord when He lived on this earth. When he kept silence, his example spoke; and he instructed others by giving to each of his actions its fullest perfection. Thus, all through his life and especially at its conclusion we might apply to him, in due proportion, this magnificent commendation that the people gave to Jesus Christ Himself: "He has done all things well."

This was true especially of his mental prayer. The recollected posture he maintained, the religious spirit which seemed to envelop him, the great devotion which his face manifested, made him resemble a seraph. All during this holy exercise he remained so interiorly occupied, so taken up with God, that he seemed to be in Heaven. He was so oblivious of all sense-impressions that he was not tempted to satisfy them even in the least. In him, nature no longer dared to manifest its preferences; for however timidly they appeared, he immediately contradicted them, mortified them and pursued them till he had entirely destroyed them.

Natural inclination and self-will enjoyed even less liberty in his life. The mere mention of such things inspired him with horror; and it can be said that he had succeeded in exterminating them in himself. Perfect obedience, which St. John Climacus calls the tomb of self-will, was the virtue which seemed to predominate in this Brother. It led his Superior to show him a sort of special predilection. De La Salle had a particular love for this perfectly obedient Brother, and preferred him as his Mass-server. Brother Maurice served Mass with so much modesty and piety that those present might have thought they beheld an angel serving a seraph at the altar.

His delicate constitution could not long survive the austere and mortified life which the Brothers led. Regretfully, they could see that he was growing weaker and becoming tubercular; and once the malady declared itself, it made rapid progress. The fire of Divine Love, which consumed him interiorly, contributed even more than the hard and penitential life he led to weakening and ulcerating his lungs. Nor should anyone be surprised at this. When this little Community began, grace was poured out so obviously and in such abundance on its members as well as on its leader, that although none of them

had gone through the exercises of the novitiate (which was not established until 1691), the Brothers in a short time became what they needed to be: spiritual men.

Brother Maurice was one of those most in need of a bridle rather than a spur as he advanced on the way to God. His fervor carried him away; and he took neither his health nor his strength into consideration. Not surprisingly, he soon found himself exhausted; and the end was not slow in coming. This good Brother, like the others, forgot that he had a body; and while trying to live as though he were a pure spirit, he failed to realize that our infirm and mortal flesh has its exigencies. He hastened towards the end common to us all, and found a tomb in the house which he had recently entered.

De La Salle, disconsolate over the prospect of losing such a valuable recruit, tried everything to re-establish his health and that of another Brother suffering from the same malady. The doctor who examined them felt that the only measure that could prolong their lives was for them to leave a house which gave everything to the spirit and nothing to the body. He judged that the company and example of De La Salle and of the Brothers were eminently calculated to make saints, but not to cure the sick. Indeed, the fervor of the father and that of his children increased day by day; and the more it grew, the less attention was paid among them to the body and its needs. The spirit of grace strove with the spirit of the flesh above all and sought only to curb it.

The ordinary doctor of the Community, Dr. Dubois, believed that a house where nature found only martyrdom would soon become the grave of these two Brothers if they remained there; so he gave them no other advice than to leave it if they wished to recover from their illness and shorten their agony. This advice was not to the liking of Brother Maurice. Fearing lest by leaving the Community he might lose the spirit of grace he had received when he entered it, he resolved to stay there and die. The sacrifice of a premature death seemed to him less bitter than that of a Community where the spirit of God reigned, and where the happiness his soul enjoyed surpassed the torments that his body endured.

De La Salle, charmed by this generous resolve, consented to it with joy; and it was for him a source of great happiness to keep with him for six more months such a perfect example of patience, humility, obedience, resignation and fervor. Although a prey to great sufferings, the young man sought to assuage them only by continual recourse to God and aspirations towards Heaven, which held the object of all his desires. His edifying death took place on the last day of April, 1687, when he was twenty-two years old. The other Brother who also suffered from tuberculosis did not show a similar determination. He immediately accepted the offer to return home; but soon repented of having done so. His family home, which deprived him of such great examples of virtue, did not restore his health. He died there three months after leaving the Brothers, filled with bitter remorse over having abandoned the land of the saints. On his deathbed when he saw his poor mother weeping over him, his regret at not being any longer under the guidance of De La Salle and in the company of the Brothers became even more cruel and hard to bear.

"Ah," he replied to his disconsolate mother, "you break my heart. If I had remained among the Brothers, instead of hearing wails I would listen to nothing but prayers."

The other Brothers who went to make up the new colony that the Brothers' Community established in Heaven were all like those we have just spoken of. They also died in Rheims at an early age, with great resignation to God's will and giving evident signs of the joy they felt at offering the sacrifice of their lives to God, and at leaving this earth to go to Heaven. The parish priest who gave them the last Sacraments was in constant admiration, seeing these young Brothers so indifferent regarding life, and so ready for the journey to eternity. That was the testimony he gave one day to the father and to his children, in the presence of several ecclesiastics who seemed to be finding fault with De La Salle for sending such young Brothers into the classroom. "I do not know," he told them, "whom I should admire most, De La Salle or his Brothers. I have already assisted a number of them on their deathbeds and given them the last Sacraments. They amazed me; I have never seen anybody, even octogenarians, die with as much courage and resignation as these young Brothers." His words carried conviction because he was an elderly man who had been engaged in the pastoral ministry for some thirty years.

De La Salle spared no pains to afford relief to his sick Brothers and to help them recover their health; but when it pleased God to call one of them, his calm and joyful attitude showed that he felt sure of their happiness. He knew them through and through; nothing within them was hidden from him; thus he was persuaded, even without any special revelation, but merely on the basis of faith, that such pure souls and hearts so devoted to God had certainly been taken up into union with the Sovereign Good, and had already entered into the possession of their last end, or at least were not to be separated therefrom for very long.

This good father was happy at having such children. At their death he shed no tears and refrained from sighs and lamentations, whether he was present or whether news of their deaths was brought to him. Thanksgiving was the only tribute he owed to them, and this he paid without delay. "Let us give thanks to God," he would say, "since one more of our Brothers has gone to Heaven."

Chapter V

New Progress in Fervor Made by De La Salle. He Decides to Give Up His Position as Superior and to Have a Brother Replace Him. Through a Pious Artifice He Succeeds in Bringing All the Brothers around to This Idea, and Wins Their Consent. Admirable Examples of Humility and Obedience He Gives after His Resignation from Office. Having Been Reinstated in His Rightful Position by the Authority of the Vicars General, He Gives Himself Up Again to His Attraction for Penance.

Before De La Salle had to take charge of the schools outside Rheims, he was able to enjoy at will the delights of solitude and of repose in God. Freed from distracting cares or multiple concerns, he could concentrate on recollection without being disturbed or obliged to leave his solitude in order to occupy himself with business affairs which, no matter how holy, are always a burden to interior souls because they withdraw them from union with God. The community house in Rheims was for him a true desert where he successfully hid himself and remained unavailable to everyone except the Brothers. He left the house and appeared in public only to seek the world's scorn. The fervor that reigned in the house kept all the Brothers faithful to their duties. The deep silence, inner recollection and perfect obedience that they displayed afforded him much leisure time to devote to mental prayer, and liberty to think only of God. In fact, his fervent disciples had a secret Superior in their hearts, Who directed them in all they did; and on the outside they had a rule which governed all their actions and every step they took. Consequently, De La Salle found that the management of the house was not a source of distractions for him. All he needed to do was to preside over the Brothers' exercises of piety, once they came home from school. When they left for class again, their absence once more gave him the opportunity of occupying himself with God in the depths of his heart, in silence and solitude. Thus, in one way or another, he kept up his conversation with God. His manner of praying varied, but it was continual. Hidden in his tiny cell, he emerged from it only to be present at the community exercises; and he left these only to plunge once again into contemplation.

But when the number of schools and of Brothers increased, problems and administrative details requiring his attention likewise multiplied and demanded a part of the time he had hitherto devoted to God alone. How he regretted having to mingle Martha's cares with Mary's repose! What annoyance he experienced at having to interrupt his intimate union with the Sovereign Good! But God's will is the only law that pure souls recognize. They seek His will, not their own satisfaction. Given this attitude, De La Salle willingly gave up God for God's sake, and gladly deprived himself of those delights with which the Divine Spouse favors holy souls when they walk alone with Him, in order to devote himself to his duties and to go where the divine

will called him. Still, he was careful to accord to the duties of his state only the time that was strictly necessary; he spent all the rest in mental prayer, and never wasted any of it in dealing with creatures.

Miserly with his time, he used it wisely so as to occupy as much of it as possible in prayer. For this reason he kept himself even more secluded than before, and made it a duty for himself to live on this earth as though alone there with God, forgetting that men other than he existed. In vain did those who had not completely dropped their former relationships with him reproach him with having become too unsociable or indifferent in their regard. In vain did some souls truly beloved by God, who alone amidst all the scorn heaped on him had kept on paying him his just due and esteeming him at his proper worth, seek to approach him and to profit by his lights. He remained inflexible in his resolve to see nobody and to admit no visitors to see him, following this rule given by the author of the Imitation of Christ: "The greatest Saints avoided as much as they could the company of men, and chose to live to God in secret." Still, as we mentioned before, when he was taken by surprise or when in spite of himself he was obliged to come forth to show that he was still among the living, he was found to be what he had always been by character and education: polite and gracious, exemplifying the joy of the Saints on his countenance.

It was thus that the Abbot of St. Thierry encountered him one day. This Abbey, belonging to the Order of St. Benedict, lies about two leagues from Rheims. The accounts he had heard all over Champagne about De La Salle and his new Institute stirred the Abbot's curiosity and brought him to Rheims to see whether everything he had heard about the man of God was true, and whether his own experience would not gainsay at least some of it. When he reached the Brothers' house with all his retinue, the noise of his arrival made De La Salle aware of his visitor and he came down at once to receive him. On seeing him, the Abbot recognized him for what he had always been: gay and courteous as usual, but wearing a very different dress. After looking him over from head to foot, he took him by the arm and asked him laughingly, "Is this how a man of your character should be dressed?" De La Salle's reply was a smile and a courtly bow. That was the only answer he ever gave to such "compliments." After a long conversation with him, the Abbot left, filled with admiration and esteem for a man whose worth the city of Rheims refused to recognize, just as it failed to realize how lucky it was to have him as a native son and to number him among its inhabitants.

However, no matter how carefully our hermit strove to avoid people, he could not entirely escape their unforeseen visits. The canons of the Cathedral, whether in order to be edified or to satisfy their curiosity and to see with their own eyes what their former companion looked like now among his disciples, frequently came to call on him, much to his displeasure, but much to their own edification and profit. They beheld with their own eyes a member of their company reviving those great examples of humility, poverty, mortification, detachment, recollection and other virtues which the Christians of these later centuries admire in those of the first. At any rate, they could not complain that his piety had made him less polished or more indifferent to them, because they found in him the same good heart, the same courtesy, and the same display of friendship. He did not even show the ennui

they occasioned him by thus coming to distract him. Yet his displeasure was considerable; and it was perhaps to avoid it that he thought of going to make a retreat in one of the retreat houses belonging to the Carmelite Fathers. He did this in 1686, in such great secrecy that not even his children knew where he was. The only precaution he took to make sure he could be called back, if something out of the ordinary happened during his absence, was to inform the Brother whom he left in charge of the house in Rheims where to write to him. He left him an address; but even this did not reveal his secret, because it was an indirect one, and did not indicate how a letter, posted to an abbess in Rouen, would eventually reach him.

This precaution De La Salle took was wise, because in fact it became necessary to call him back soon on account of the illness of the two Brothers in Laon, which happened about this time. As soon as the Brother who was taking De La Salle's place in Rheims heard of this, he set out to visit the two stricken men who needed his help and presence. However, in spite of his diligence, he did not get there soon enough, and had barely time to see one of them die after having received Extreme Unction. This made him resolve to inform De La Salle at once, and to let him know that his presence was absolutely necessary for his little flock. For the improvised hermit this was bad news indeed, because it made him give up his retreat in a delightful spot where nothing interrupted his communing with God, and because it informed him of the death of one of his best subjects, and of another's serious illness. However, he did not let this news upset him; the most annoying and unforeseen incidents found him and left him perfectly calm. He was thus obliged to leave right away for Laon, and everyone was much surprised to see him arrive there only three days after getting the news; and even more surprised to see him obey so promptly and at the cost of so much fatigue, the call of a young Brother of twenty-four.

With the Brothers he discussed what should be done, and then gave the students vacation for two months. After this, without giving any rest to his body, worn out and exhausted from the fatigue of such a painful journey, he set out for Rheims accompanied by the Brother who had sent for him. As they walked on through the night, as he ordinarily did, he ate nothing but a crust of bread and drank a glass of wine before midnight in a village four leagues from Rheims. When they reached the city early in the morning, he immediately sent to bed the Brother who had accompanied him, while he himself went to pray. The fact is that mental prayer had more attraction for him than sleep; and since it was time for the Community to engage in it, he could not deny himself this gratification. To his soul which sought this repose he granted it, without paying attention to his body, so weary from such a long trip made at night, on foot, and almost fasting; his body was only asking for justice when it pleaded for a few hours' sleep.

If the repose he found in mental prayer was so delightful for De La Salle, the satisfaction he found in true obedience was no less. He had made a vow of obedience, as we mentioned previously, and had done so with a firm determination to carry it out for the sake of good example to be given to the Brothers as well as for his personal spiritual advantage. But how could he put this vow into practice? His position as the Superior gave him the right to command, thus placing obedience beyond his reach. Hence, to put his vow

into practice and to satisfy his humility, he needed to give up his position and lay aside his authority as superior. But who could take his place? Whom could he choose as the new superior? Whom could he obey without demeaning his priestly character? The Community included no other priest. Most of the Brothers were men of little learning or education. Was it fitting that a priest, a doctor, an ex-canon, a director and superior should step aside and place over himself a simple Brother, lacking any qualifications or special attainments? Christian humility leads people to seek the depths of abasement. But could he without abasing his sacerdotal character, without discrediting his ministry, without dishonoring his person place himself at the feet of a layman clad in a black robe, and ask him for permissions? Something in this manner of acting seemed somehow improper. Would it not have been carrying humility too far, and listening to his own inclinations at the expense of wisdom and prudence? De La Salle could have hardly been ignorant of this. This difficulty had arrested him and, for a long time, he had been trying to resolve it.

After all, perfect virtue does not lay much store by such reasoning. Faith alone guides it and leads it blindly on the path trodden by Christ. A higher illumination teaches it that it cannot do better than to heed the lessons given us by eternal Wisdom and to follow His example. Thus, in the Man-God kneeling before St. Peter, the Apostles, and even Judas, washing their feet and wiping them with His own hands and kissing them with His adorable lips, the humble Superior found the solution for his dilemma. The more he contemplated the life and death of Jesus, the more he felt he should reproach himself with having listened to human reasoning. All he read in the Gospel, in the life of the Lord of the universe, were examples of submission and dependence. There is not one of His mysteries that does not afford us some instance of a particular kind of obedience. Subject to the laws of nature, He remained for nine months in His mother's womb, without trying to hasten the moment of His birth. Submission to the orders of Emperor Augustus brought Him to Bethlehem where He was born. Although His condition as the Son of God, His title as Savior, the purity of His conception and the privileges of His birth exempted Him from the shameful and painful rite of circumcision, He made it a duty for Himself to endure its rigor and abasement. The same spirit of obedience to the Law brought Him to the temple to be offered to God. All we know of the first thirty years of His life is that He was subject to Mary and Joseph. And He ended His life as He had begun it, by obedience of which He gave us a perfect example on the cross.

In all these instances of obedience practiced by God, the humble Superior found the solution to his difficulties, and he reproached himself for having deluded himself by listening to arguments of mere human propriety which the Gospel does not approve of, and which the example of Christ refutes. His longing for retirement and pure uninterrupted prayer was added to his desire of humbling himself and of obeying, and led him to divest himself of his title as superior. As the number of Brothers increased, along with that of the schools, his cares and occupations were multiplied, thus robbing him of part of the time that his heart wished to devote fully to communing with God. If he became a mere private individual again, he would find it easy to give himself up unreservedly to a life of humiliation, of abnegation of his own

will, and of thinking only of God, and thus beginning on earth the life proper to Heaven where our one activity will be to contemplate and to love the sovereign Beauty.

Still, to bring the Brothers to accept his resignation he needed reasons; but what reasons could he invoke? Here again he found himself in difficulties. If he gave his true motives, he would have betrayed his humility; if he tried to invent specious ones, he would have betrayed the truth. What could he do? Not wishing to offend against either virtue, he focused on all the appearances which might be taken for sound arguments by men not especially gifted with discernment. He tried to show them that the best interests of the Community required that someone else take over its direction. His efforts were not in vain, for he succeeded in winning them over to his proposal. So plausibly did he put forth his unconvincing reasons that these good Brothers were either really persuaded, or did not dare to contradict him, or did not want to disappoint him; and so they finally agreed to what he proposed.

In addition, the humble Superior, in view of getting his disciples to go along with what he wanted, had taken all the necessary dispositions to make his withdrawal seem to be God's will. Such behavior should not surprise us. If self-love is very clever at deceiving others, humility is no less ingenious in advancing its own ends. The most effective means John Baptist could use to make all the Brothers accept his abdication was to gather them together and to explain to them the reasons for his resignation. Then he had them meditate on this before God; next he asked them to express their opinion, and artfully insinuated his own by making it appear necessary to follow it. He did not ask for a vote until he saw that they were won over. In addition, he felt that to give their decision even greater weight it should be arrived at during a retreat, because at such times reason guided by faith is more clearly enlightened. God's will is perceived more plainly and grace more abundantly given. Hence, after calling his disciples together and beginning a retreat with them, he explained what he had in mind and addressed them in touching exhortation, bordering on the pathetic, to sway them all the more. He left out nothing that could add to the weight of his arguments, which really were no more convincing than the humility that inspired them.

He reminded them that the additional number of schools had also increased his administrative concerns and required men capable of directing these schools properly. All alone, he could no longer face up to so much business; hearing the Brothers' confessions and directing their consciences were important matters, and quite sufficient to take up all his time. Among their number there were several outstanding Brothers, wise, prudent, virtuous and capable of assuming the responsibility of governing the Community. It was, therefore, incumbent on them to choose someone to take his place, since the good of the Institute required that it be conducted by one of them.

He added that it was necessary to try out this scheme at least, and that the time for doing so had come and should not be passed up. Sooner or later it would become necessary to take this step, since he himself would not live forever; and it was preferable to do while he still lived what would become absolutely necessary after his death. The new superior could acquire

experience under the Founder's eyes and be advised by him. He offered to act as the coadjutor or vicar of the newly-elected man, and to initiate him into his new functions so as to make it easier for him to exercise them. Nature itself, he insisted, made it plain that every society should be ruled by one who was like the other members, and that Brothers should obey a Brother. Having him, a priest, at their head constituted an anomaly; it was in every way preferable that they should have a Superior like unto themselves. Finally, he observed that he could not conciliate his duty of attending to so much business with application to mental prayer and the cultivation of the interior life; he felt himself called to a life of retirement and detachment from creatures. He wished to get them used to doing without him, and to accustom them to obey another Brother.

All these seemed like excellent arguments inspired by humility, but exclusively aimed at favoring De La Salle's virtue and at giving him more liberty to put himself in the lowest place. However, under careful scrutiny they appeared more fictitious than real. Once stripped of their ostensible plausibility, their hollowness became obvious. Indeed, if the Brothers had taken up each of the contentions that their humble Superior so artfully advanced, they could have used them to convince him that the best interests of the Institute demanded that he remain in the position he occupied; and that if they listened to the pleading of his humility, they would inflict on the Community a wound that his charity should seek to spare it. They could have told him that he was their father and they his children; that such reciprocal relationships cannot be nullified. Hence, nature itself required that he should be their Superior and they his inferiors. The head should rule over the body, as we can see by the place that nature itself assigns to it; order would be subverted if the feet were set where the head ought to be, and vice versa. He could conclude from this example that his humility was going to introduce disorder into the Community, if he was ever seen at the feet of a Brother, taking orders from him and obeying him. They could have observed that since he was their shepherd, it was his duty to lead his sheep; it would be ridiculous for a sheep to conduct the shepherd, and consequently they could not accept his humble request without exposing their little Community to certain ruin. Since it was his work, only his hand which had begun it could, according to the normal order of Providence, bring it to its full development. De La Salle was their Founder, guide, father and patriarch; as such he had the charisms needed to govern them; these were gifts granted to him personally, which could not be shared with another.

These reflections were powerful and impressive arguments and they demolished the specious ones that De La Salle tried to put forward. He himself would have been the first to recognize their cogency, if his humility had not prevented him from doing so. Comparing the one set of motives with the other, he could not have even considered resigning; and it should have been easy for him to conclude that charity should prevail over his attraction for mental prayer and a life of dependence. Be that as it may, either the Brothers did not entertain the reflections, or if any of them did, they did not venture to bring them forward. All of them were much surprised when their father revealed his project to them; they fell silent and, apparently, gave up the use of their reason. Perhaps on this occasion they did not possess sufficient understanding or else they failed to show enough resoluteness. At

all events, they took under consideration a proposal which they should have turned down with respectful but humble insistence. Since De La Salle was so eager to practice obedience, they should all have acted together and commanded him to stay in his place while leaving them in theirs. This was the only pledge they should have exacted from him in the name of the obedience he wanted to exercise; but this they did not do. All these good Brothers, extremely edified by this new proof of virtue that De La Salle was giving them, consented to his abdication and resolved to choose another superior, thus giving to one of the children the authority belonging to the father, and making the father depend on the child. They agreed to put the head in the place of the feet and to choose a member to govern the head; to put a simple Brother above a priest, and a priest at the feet of a Brother; to make the confessor and director subordinate to his penitent, and to establish the penitent as the guide of his director and the censor of his confessor. They allowed themselves to be convinced by reasons that nothing but their Founder's humility made plausible. It is true that he went about it in such a way as to make them believe what he said and go along with what he wanted; for he told them, in the end, that they should no longer think of him. By showing them how necessary it was for them to choose another superior, he really made it an obligation for them to do so.

He obtained satisfaction. An election was held, and the choice fell on Brother Henri l'Heureux. This designation was much to the liking of De La Salle and met with his full approval and commendation. Brother Henri l'Heureux possessed notable qualities; it was he whom De La Salle had hoped to see in his place, and whom he would have picked for his successor. He was wise, moderate, humble and solidly virtuous. He seemed indeed capable of governing the little Community at any time other than at its beginning, and when the father who had founded it was still living. If De La Salle had no longer been in this world, Brother Henri was the one best qualified to replace him; but the Institute at this time was like an edifice barely rising out of the ground. Its builder was necessary to construct it properly and establish it firmly. Any other hand was not the one that God had chosen to erect it and bring it to its completion.

The many qualities of the new Superior won for him as much esteem and confidence as the Brothers could have displayed towards anyone other than their beloved father. De La Salle was the first to show him marks of respect, submission and dependence. He immediately forgot who he was and acted only according to the orders of the new Superior. He showed himself scrupulously exact in paying him the reverence due from an inferior, so much so that he became a real source of confusion for Brother Henri, while winning for himself the admiration of the Community. Entirely happy, De La Salle finally saw himself fully free to yield to his humility everything it asked for. Each day was marked by fresh examples of submission and dependence. In the lives of the Saints, which contain so many instances of this sort of conduct, one can hardly find anything that he failed to practice. He proceeded from an act of humility to one of obedience; and if anyone had followed him throughout the day, he would have seen him making an uninterrupted series of them. In fact I do not know whether, in observing him attentively, one could have surprised him not actually exercising either mental prayer, or penance, or humility or

obedience. Morning and evening, on entering or on leaving the refectory, he accused himself of his faults, in the posture and with the devotion of a humble penitent; and the faults he reproached himself with were, if I may so call them, "sins of edification."

Whatever was most lowly, most demeaning, most distasteful in the household chores was what he preferred; and he managed to choose these tasks or to have them assigned to him. Sweeping, washing dishes, carrying out the garbage, cleaning the rest rooms were the occupations he sought out. In his eyes none seemed beneath his dignity. He did not merely have one superior; all the Brothers became such for him once he himself had given up that role. His will would not have had enough masters to suit it if he had had to obey only one. To make sure that it was held captive under the yoke of unremitting obedience, he deferred to as many individual superiors as there were Brothers in charge of this or that service. Looking on all of them in the same way, he went to the kitchen or elsewhere, not to offer his services to whoever was in charge, but to seek orders and formally ask whether anyone had any commands to give him. The most docile child never showed more perfect obedience. The most attentive servant never displayed more marks of dependence. The most fervent novice never seemed more on guard against his own will, or more prompt to sacrifice it than did the Servant of God.

He had become through grace what children are because of their age. Simple, candid, unquestioning, unreasoning, he made use of his mind only to subject it to the opinions of others. Timid and hesitant, he did not dare to take a step except under the direction of Brother Henri l'Heureux. Like a child who examines his mother's countenance to discern what pleases or displeases her, he fastened his gaze on his Superior's face to fathom his intentions, and did not wait till the latter had indicated them to him by a positive command. Having become a humble servant through virtue, he sought nothing except to learn and to accomplish the will of the master to whom he had subjected himself. The latter's orders were the rule of his actions; his words became laws. To do this or that, to act or to remain at repose, to begin something and not finish it, was all the same to him. Indifferent to everything, he was always ready to do what he was told.

Having become a novice through choice, he hastened along the path of perfection as though he was just beginning to walk therein; and to make sure that he did not perform any actions that would not lead him to God, he based them all on the solid rock of obedience. For him, it was not enough to be the most punctual at the first sound of the bell, the most assiduous at all the regular observances, the most faithful in carrying out the common regulations. He wanted to be given special commands covering all he was to say or do. What a source of edification it was for the Brothers to see this holy priest, this doctor, this ex-canon, their father and Founder and Superior, their confessor and spiritual director throwing himself at every moment, and for the slightest motive, at the feet of Brother Henri to confess his faults, accuse his least failings and ask for a penance! What a surprise for those who witnessed all this to see a man of such surpassing merit constantly asking permissions for the least things, and doing so on his knees, in the attitude of a criminal and with the submission of a child!

Brother Henri l'Heureux, who witnessed actions of this sort all day long, could not get used to them. Embarrassed at seeing at his feet the man whom he honored as his father in God and revered as a saint, he felt like St. John the Baptist when he was obliged to baptize Jesus Christ. Ashamed at having to give permissions to the one from whom he should have asked them, he remained abashed and did not know what he should say or do, so disconcerted was he. On the one hand he feared to chagrin his good father by not letting him humble himself as he wished; on the other, he simply could not bring himself to give orders to the one who really had the right to command. More than once he begged De La Salle to spare him the embarrassment he felt in seeing him so often at his feet asking for permissions from one who, on entering the house, had become his disciple and his dependent. In his turn, De La Salle begged him not to deprive him of the merit of obedience which was due to him, and which he was so happy to practice. The two of them became a real example of humility and edification for the entire Community. The Brothers were deeply touched by seeing De La Salle so often prostrate before Brother Henri, accusing himself of his faults, asking for penances and permissions for the least things, and behaving in all respects as though he had never enjoyed any authority in the house, as though he had never left the state of dependence and inferiority; but they were also much edified when they saw Brother Henri humiliated over the humiliation of De La Salle, distraught at being his Superior, saddened over having to command him, and never forgetting who the humble suppliant really was, or who he himself was.

The virtuous Brother made use of his authority only on one occasion, when De La Salle carried his love for abjection too far. He felt obliged to invoke his rights over him, and to stop him from carrying out an extravagance to which his zeal for self-abasement was leading him.

Here is what happened, as told by one of the pious Founder's earliest disciples. "Among the many edifying things," he says, "that De La Salle performed when he was out of office, I was the eyewitness of one which impressed me deeply, although I was only fifteen years of age at the time. As we were beginning recreation one day, someone told the Superior that one of the toilets was very untidy, and that he needed someone to help him clean it up. At once De La Salle offered to go, and throwing himself on his knees he asked permission to do so, with the simplicity of a child. Carried away by his eagerness, and without having heard correctly the respectful refusal of the Superior, he hastened to gather some straw in order to carry out a task which he longed to accomplish, and in which he feared someone else might forestall him and thus rob him of the merit of abasing himself."

In all this the humble and obedient man had allowed himself to be deceived, had mistaken one word for another. Brother Henri had told him that would not be right; but in his eagerness he thought he heard him say that would be all right; and so he had hurried off, in all good faith, to perform an act of humility which he thought had been authorized by obedience. He had actually begun when Brother Henri, hastening after him, remembered that he was the Superior and that as such he should make use of his authority to set some limits to the pious Founder's eagerness to humble himself. He caught hold of the latter's soutane and pulled him away, and thus gave him a chance to prefer obedience to humiliations, even external ones. Nor was this all. The young

Superior, hoping to bridle to some extent this impetuous inclination which led De La Salle to undertake all forms of self-abasement, made bold to tell him that he had not permitted him to do anything of the sort, and that he was acting against obedience. At those words the humble priest fell on his knees in front of everybody, accused himself of temerity and willfulness, and besought Brother Henri to give him a penance for it.

No matter how much the wise young Superior begged his venerated father to act towards him as a father towards his son, or at least as his equal, he never did succeed in convincing him. He never managed to persuade him to give up in the slightest degree his yearning for complete dependence. He exhibited this inclination not only inside the house and before the Brothers, but outside too, and in the presence of visitors he made it a point of obligation. He did not blush to appear as an inferior and to ask for permissions as faithfully as any novice. He spoke to no one and received no visits without permission. Hence before going to the parlor he always asked if Brother Superior's leave had been obtained; and if visitors happened to meet him when he had not been able to obtain this, he would not converse with them until an express permission, which he himself often went to ask for, unsealed his lips.

It was this scrupulous and exact fidelity to the rule and to obedience that betrayed him and made his humility known. His abdication had been kept a secret within the Community; nobody on the outside knew about it. The rare contacts between the public and the Brothers made it easy to keep the fact confidential. The mystery might have been preserved much longer if De La Salle had not given it away himself thanks to his simplicity and eagerness to obey. What happened was that several distinguished persons, friends of his, came to visit him one day and met him unexpectedly. They attempted to strike up a conversation, but in vain; he remained silent except to say that he could not talk to them without permission from his Superior. These persons, greatly surprised at this, were dumbfounded in their turn and looked at each other in amazement. Meanwhile De La Salle went to ask for the needed authorization. When he came back, his friends began by expressing their astonishment and then their reproaches; they roundly condemned such behavior, and blamed a humility which in their opinion gravely infringed against prudence, contradicted his priestly character and all his other qualifications. A simple Brother placed over a priest, doctor, ex-canon? The Founder, father, director and confessor of the little Community at the feet of one of his children, one of his penitents, seemed to them a disorder that called for a remedy, a monstrosity in the area of government.

These persons could not keep for themselves what had happened, and broadcast the news throughout the city. The unusual nature of the fact made tongues wag, and everybody had some comment to make. The news spread from mouth to mouth and finally came to the ears of the ecclesiastical authorities, who approved of it no more than did anyone else. They had the right and duty to reestablish order in the bosom of the little Community by putting the Founder back in his rightful position, and the members in their due rank of subordination. So they came to the house and obliged De La Salle, to his great regret, to take up again his role as superior; and to his great relief, they made Brother Henri l'Heureux give it up. This good Brother considered this the most fortunate day of his life; but it was a sad one for the humble

Founder. The one was as happy as the other was displeased over what had transpired. De La Salle lived as in his element in an atmosphere of lowliness and obedience. His heart was at peace and enjoyed the repose promised to the humble and to those who practice perfect obedience. Never had he been happier; never had time gone by so swiftly. Brother Henri, on the contrary, on leaving the superiorship left behind him an unnatural condition, where his father's humility had kept him in constant embarrassment. He felt abashed and confused on seeing him prostrate at his feet, and longed for nothing more than to return to his rightful state of dependence.

The humble Superior was thus obliged to reassume the leadership of his Community, a position that in his heart of hearts he had never wanted, and had given up with so much joy. But although he reassumed his rightful position, he did not for all that renounce the right to obey and to humble himself. He merely found another way to do it. At any rate, this example of the noble longing to abase himself and to renounce his own will was an extremely valuable lesson for the young Community, and proved very helpful to the Brothers. They all felt filled with a like ardor, and ran in the path blazed for them by their mentor towards the goal of true humility and perfect obedience.

How great was the joy of the children on seeing their father, despite his humility, once again occupying the first place! How they longed to obey him blindly, since by his example even more eloquently than by his words he had taught them the value of obedience! With what zeal they cast themselves at his feet to beg of him in suppliant posture not to spare them, and to inflict on them severe penances to expiate faults which they had learned from his own lips how to exaggerate, to confess and to chastise unrelentingly! Brother Henri l'Heureux, in particular, could not sufficiently thank God for having dealt appropriately with De La Salle and with himself: with himself by relieving him from office and putting him back in the ranks; with De La Salle by lifting him out of the lowly condition he had wanted to assume and by obliging him to take the headship again. Everybody rejoiced in the Lord and blessed Him for what He had done. They were so impressed by the examples of virtue that they had seen in their father that they could speak of nothing else. They brought these edifying topics of conversation with them everywhere they went during recreation. This was what they usually talked about; it formed the common topic of their reflections.

De La Salle suspected what was going on; he was on the lookout to get proof of it. His suspicions made him ingenious, and he found means, without being perceived, of hearing what the Brothers were saying. He had not been eavesdropping very long when he heard them talking about him. If they had been relating the unfavorable things that he thought of himself, he would have been delighted that his disciples were treating him as he thought he deserved; but they were recounting only edifying details; they praised him, and each one added something to top what the other said. The instances of humility, obedience and mortification they had witnessed kept coming to the fore, and each speaker drew from them conclusions from which all could profit. De La Salle suffered keenly from this sort of talk which embarrassed him very much; for he saw that his efforts to induce the Brothers to entertain a low opinion of him had been in vain. He was most disappointed at having failed so

signally; and it is hard to say how much these flattering conversations alarmed and dismayed his humility. Upset over this, as a saint would be, he found it difficult to control his humility-inspired displeasure, and reproached those who thus praised him; and after exaggerating the seriousness of this so-called fault, he promised to forgive them only on condition that from then on they would forget entirely about this episode.

Nor was this all; he wished, so to speak, to push vengeance to the extreme, and sought for some means of causing his disciples to entertain scruples if they were ever tempted to speak well of him again. He felt he could not rely on them in this matter. He knew that, although he tried to make their fault appear very serious, they were not too remorseful over it and would most likely fall into it again. So, to make sure they overcame this defect (edifying as it was: a fault which only his humility could perceive), he resolved to make it a rule for them "never to speak during recreation of any living person in particular." We can easily imagine how disappointed his children were when they heard this prohibition. This rule seemed to be a very severe penance; in their eyes, if they had sinned, the punishment was far more grievous than the fault deserved. They had to accept it, however, and submit to it. In the long run, however, irked by having to shroud everything concerning him in silence which, in reality, made it more difficult for them to progress in virtue (since nothing stimulates fervor more than eyewitness-accounts of examples of heroic virtue), they begged their Superior to lighten this burden which they found intolerable. In the end he was obliged to modify this rule, so pleasing to his humility but so galling for his disciples; and so he added to the rule these words, "except to speak well of them."

This instance of humility, I dare say, is one that will not be paralleled in the life of any other saintly person. It takes a very humble soul, indeed, not to be touched by praise; it takes an even humbler one not to be able to abide praise and to reject it with distaste; but does it not take a supremely humble person to grow angry at one's panegyrists, to treat their encomiums as crimes, to punish them for this, and to reduce them to silence as though they were enemies?

Some time after the humble Superior had once again taken up his duties, he ordered a Brother, as a penance, to eat his supper kneeling in the middle of the refectory. As the delinquent seemed reluctant to obey, De La Salle became indignant with the indignation of the saints. To repair the scandal given, he determined that he would act as though he were the guilty party and perform the penance he had assigned. So he rose from his place, went and knelt next to the Brother, took his spoon and began to eat the soup as he had prescribed that the other should do.

The Brother, confused and contrite, wanted to take back the spoon from De La Salle's hand. The latter refused to let him have it. Hoping to inspire him with disrelish and to get his Superior to leave him alone to finish his penance, the Brother put his hand into the bowl and began to scoop up the soup in that manner. He thought that De La Salle would not eat any more after this; but he was mistaken. His Superior, who in the past had forced himself to perform such unusual actions to overcome his natural fastidiousness, had so perfectly succeeded in this that it no longer seemed to bother him at all.

So, quite simply and without showing any sign of repugnance, he kept on eating the soup, although the Brother's gross action should have made it disgusting for him. The clumsy Brother joined imprudence to his lack of manners. Ashamed at seeing his Superior gaining merit, thanks to the new occasion he had furnished him of mortifying himself, he decided to prevent him from continuing by taking the bowl away; but the awkward movement he made only spilled the soup all over the floor. The opportunity was too precious to be wasted, thought De La Salle; he resolved to carry mortification as far as possible, so he sopped up as much of it as he could and ate it with apparent pleasure. The Brother wanted to imitate him, and so the two of them managed to clean up what had been spilled and ate it with relish. It was thus that the fervent Superior undertook to make up for his disciples' faults. The slightest delay in obeying was considered a transgression which could not remain unpunished. To expiate such offenses, he condemned himself to bear the penalty and thus taught all those under him that true obedience is prompt and does not admit of any delay.

De La Salle's fervor constantly increased. Reestablished in his position of authority, the only satisfaction he derived from it was that he now could freely do as much penance as he liked, and be accountable to no one on this score. The Brother who slept in the same room with him saw that he spent part of the night in mental prayer, and then stretched himself out on a door that lay in an alcove, and served as his resting place. There he took his scanty measure of repose, with no mattress, pillow, sheets or blankets.

This same Brother, who later became the director of the house, affirms that his Superior spent all of Holy Week fasting. From Palm Sunday to Easter he abstained from all nourishment except for a piece of bread and a little water on Holy Thursday after the ceremonies. He was not in the habit of drinking wine, and it was rarely served in the house at Rheims, the city in all of France where wine is most abundant and of the best quality.

He spent this entire Holy Week in prayer and contemplation, in his room which he left only to celebrate Mass. This cell was so bare and scantily furnished that he did not even have a chair to sit on. When he could no longer remain on his knees, he was obliged to sit on the side of an unmade bedstead, the only piece of furniture in the room. The Brother observing his Superior's excessive abstinence from food did all he could to induce him to mitigate it, but without success. Perhaps De La Salle himself regretted this on Easter Sunday, for when he arrived with the others for dinner in the refectory, his stomach could not tolerate any food and rejected whatever he tried to swallow. Thus the obstinate faster had to do penance for having fasted so rigorously. The Brother did not miss the opportunity of observing that this new indisposition was the consequence of his long fast, and of respectfully reproaching him with having carried it too far.

De La Salle was not convinced; he claimed that his upset stomach was caused by the fact that the cook had made the soup in a pot not properly tinned. If such had been the case, all of the Brothers who ate the same food would have been similarly affected, but none of them experienced any difficulty. This is what the Brother took the liberty of telling his

Superior; but the latter replied only with his usual smile. Whenever anyone alluded to his mortifications or his other virtues, he would smile and change the subject.

Chapter VI

De La Salle Does Not Give Up the Project He Had Tried to Put into Effect, i.e., of Relinquishing the Superiorship and Assuming a Position Where He Would Have to Obey. His Virtue Finally Becomes Manifest and Wins a Great Reputation for Him. Several Persons Beg Him to Act As Their Spiritual Director; He Accepts Very Few of Them and Soon Manages to Get Rid of Them. He Undergoes New Persecutions; Divine Providence Furnishes Him with the Opportunity of Establishing a Second Community for Country Schoolmasters and a Third for Boys Wishing to Become Brothers.

Although De La Salle had been obliged by the Vicars-General to resume his position at the head of the Brothers' Community, he occupied it with regret and continued to feel for the last place an irresistible attraction which constantly drew him to return to it; but this had been definitely vetoed by the ecclesiastical authorities. They were almost scandalized on seeing him subject to a Brother lacking in clerical status; and while they privately admired his humility they reproached him with having carried its practice too far; and in public appeared to condemn the lengths to which this rarest of virtues had led him.

But, he reflected, the main objection they had made was not insurmountable. With a little ingenuity he thought he could find a way to once more resigning his position as superior, without meriting the just reproach they had made him of subjecting his person and his priestly character to a layman. Humility can be resourceful; and it is difficult to block up for it all the byways that lead to abjection and scorn. Fertile in expedients to open for itself the door to dependence and obedience, when one avenue is shut it finds another.

What then did De La Salle do to find a refuge where he might disappear from the sight of men after abandoning his role as superior, and where he might live in a state of eternal dependence? He could neither degrade himself nor efface the sacerdotal character he bore; but he could raise one of the Brothers to this sublime dignity, place him at his right hand, and finally place him over himself; and nobody would have any objection.

It was certainly an ingenious expedient. It answered all the objections previously made. When a priest was ready to replace another priest in the government of the Brothers, he could take over all of De La Salle's duties and prerogatives, thanks to his priestly character. John Baptist's sacerdotal

character would not suffer if he prostrated himself at the feet of a fellow priest. Ordination, by conferring on this man the same powers that he himself possessed, would make the former capable of exercising all the latter's functions. De La Salle could find no more appropriate means, therefore, of making way for someone else, and of doing so with full regard for the proprieties, while avoiding all the reproaches previously levelled at him, than by preparing the Brother who had been chosen as his successor for ordination. Such was the determination he reached; but this solution, so carefully thought out, involved certain difficulties.

Brother Henri l'Heureux possessed solid virtue, eminent piety and great prudence. He was altogether a very deserving person; but he had not gone very far in his studies and knew Latin only imperfectly. Since he had to learn it, De La Salle undertook to teach it to him and succeeded admirably. This Brother had a quick mind and much capacity for learning, so that less than two years later he was ready to undertake the study of theology. He did in fact study it with such success that he surprised the other members of his class. Up to this point the scheme of the humble Superior was proceeding just as he wished; but God had other plans and brought John Baptist's project to nothing just when he thought he was about to succeed in it. God called Brother Henri l'Heureux from this world when De La Salle was on the point of presenting him for ordination, as we shall relate in a moment.

This unexpected death occasioned serious disruption in the servant of God's plans and led him to re-think the whole matter very seriously. In his original concept for the organization of his Institute he had thought of having a priest in each of the principal houses to act as the Brothers' confessor and to say Mass for them. Brother Henri l'Heureux would have been the first of these "priest-Brothers" entrusted with the sacred ministry within the Congregation; and the holy Superior, who in his heart of hearts had already chosen him as his own successor, was only waiting for the proper time to put him in office. Everything seemed to favor this hope. Brother Henri had all the qualities of body and mind he needed. Young, hardworking, gifted with a robust constitution, one might have thought that he would live forever if man were not a mortal being. Prudent, wise, endowed with good judgment and sufficient learning, filled with zeal, the spirit of his state, he was entirely capable of causing the holy Founder who loved him so much to live again in his person. De La Salle loved him and honored him and entertained the fondest hopes for him.

Naturally, John Baptist could not be insensible at the loss of such an excellent subject, especially as he had not had time to prepare himself for this blow. Hence he felt it all the more keenly. Never had the Brothers known him to be so deeply moved, so distraught, so shocked as he was on this occasion. Up to then they had never seen him lose his equanimity. Ever master of himself, he ruled his soul in patience. The saddest events seemed unable to penetrate the depths of his soul, and were never reflected on his countenance in the slightest trace of disquiet or chagrin. But on this occasion his emotions and his grief clearly appeared. Only for a quarter of an hour at most, however; after this brief space of time he recovered his usual attitude of peace and serenity, thanks to his entire submission to God's will and to a total abandonment of his desires to those of Providence.

Nay more; considering that the action of Providence on this occasion constituted a sign warning him not to think any longer of raising some of the Brothers to the priesthood, he gave up the idea entirely. This decision which was inspired from on high became such a solidly anchored conviction in his mind that he made it a law for his followers, an express rule, that the path to the sanctuary would remain forever barred to them, and definitively forbade them to aspire to sacred Orders.

As careful as De La Salle was to concentrate on his own work, and not to deal with outsiders any more than he had to, he had not been able to refuse his ministrations to a number of persons who had recourse to him. Thus he added to the direction of the community of orphan girls the spiritual guidance of a number of women distinguished by their piety. They came to visit him from time to time at the Brothers' house and gave him an account of their consciences. They were very glad to receive his wise advice, but they went back home disappointed at not having been able to obtain his blessing, even though they had humbly begged for it, throwing themselves on their knees on the threshold of his door and entreating him to grant them this favor so much in keeping with his priestly character. They never succeeded in convincing him to do so. All his life long his disciples themselves found him stubbornly unwilling to grant them this favor which he considered as a sign of superiority. One of them whom he was sending to Rome threw himself at his feet as he was leaving and asked for his blessing. He begged him insistently to afford him this final consolation. But De La Salle merely made the sign of the cross on his forehead. As long as he lived, he never wanted to do more than this. As for the ladies, he told them that he gave his blessing only at the end of Mass.

As time went on, the fierce persecutions that Hell aroused against the servant of God did not lead to a notable increase among his penitents and other devout clients. Few people were eager to put themselves under the direction of a man so ill-spoken of in the world. As we know, the cycle of fashion applies to spiritual directors as to everything else. So long as a director is in vogue, he enjoys a following; but when his reputation suffers an eclipse, his followers melt away and he loses his credit. However, in the long run real holiness is made manifest; like light that dissipates the fog that shrouded it, it shines out with new brilliance. This is what happened to the servant of God.

His virtue which had met with so many critics finally found admirers and panegyrists. Awareness of his extraordinary acts of humility finally spread, obliging his enemies and those who had accused him of ambition to admit that the only thing he sought was a state of dependence and contempt. From then on people began to realize what an exalted level of holiness he had reached. Men of the highest distinction, among others the Duke of Mazarin, sedulously cultivated his friendship. Every time he came to Rheims this noble lord never failed to come and visit him. A large number of people wanted him as their spiritual director. Pious persons once again began to call on him, in the hope of being admitted among his penitents. This, however, he tried to avoid as much as possible; and only after much urging did he finally accept a small number of persons to direct.

He admitted them only after subjecting them to various trials which put their self-love to the test. Among those who had seemed most eager to become one of his spiritual daughters was a certain religious, who must have been inspired by God in this, since she was sadly in need of reforming her life. She had a certain amount of good will, but she was attached to many trifles which keep the heart of a spouse of Christ closed to His divine love, and cause the loss of many graces. Involved in a multitude of vain amusements and attached to little nothings which prevented her from progressing in the path of perfection that she had undertaken to pursue, she realized that she was too weak to break the chains that bound her, and did not have the courage to divest herself of these superfluities. The hand of De La Salle was what she needed to deliver her from herself and from all the silly baubles which held her heart captive. In his charity he undertook to help her; and the first thing he did was to ask her what Jesus had asked the leper: "Do you wish to be cured? Do you really want me to be your director? Do you choose me for your guide and your visible guardian angel? Will you, through the eyes of faith, look upon me as Jesus Christ Himself? Are you ready to obey me as you would Him?"

The nun naturally protested that she would indeed do so. Then he told her that the first act of obedience he required of her, and the condition on which he agreed to guide her, was for her to bring him all the useless little objects she had accumulated in her room. It was a painful demand. This religious had quantities of knicknacks and various curious and dainty things which she loved, and the sacrifice must have been a bitter one. However, she obeyed; and after removing from her cell all that was superfluous, she set fire to the lot by the orders and under the eyes of her new director. It was under such conditions that the servant of God agreed to become a director of souls. He made them purchase this favor by stern sacrifices that were keenly felt. He did not try to amuse people by lengthy discourses, but made them get down right away to practical consequences. He made them learn by experience that true devotion needs direction only to find its way to Jesus Christ more surely and promptly, by means of obedience and sacrifice.

Although he undertook the direction of only a small number of choice souls, among whom was his own sister, he still thought he had too many of them. He, therefore, sought to rid himself of this burden and soon succeeded in doing so. As we know, the spiritual direction of pious women takes a great deal of time; and no matter what precautions a priest may employ to avoid wasting time, they still manage to consume a lot of it in spite of him. Women are marvelously adept at saying little in many words; and when one is willing to listen to them, they always find a great deal to say. As a rule, they are not happy with a director unless he lets them talk their fill, and unless he does the same. Few of them are looking for good advice in few words. Thus it rarely happens that a man who is sparing of his time and very busy is much appreciated by pious women who, having much free time, are very clever at keeping their confessor occupied for long periods, and are more curious to learn new things about virtue than eager to practice what they already know.

De La Salle's days were too short as it was; and he had to economize his time so as to devote all his spare moments to mental prayer and to the duties of his position. Consequently, he was not too pleased by visits which, under

the pretext of spiritual direction, robbed him of part of his precious leisure. Convinced that as a rule there was little to be gained and much time to be lost in directing pious women, and having learned from experience that he spent more time counseling one of them than several Brothers, he concluded that he should leave this ministry to people who feel some inclination to it, who have more time to devote to it, and who have nothing better to do.

Another drawback to being a spiritual guide for women, and one that turned him away from it, was that they came to the Brothers' house. And while they did not go any farther than the parlor, they still appeared in a place where he preferred not to see them. He wished to teach his disciples to keep their distance from women and felt that this could not be carried too far. He was afraid to familiarize them with women by letting the latter come to the house. It is true that the ones who came were most edifying, and showed by their solid virtue how effective the servant of God's direction was. But he knew that the fair sex is dangerous both by its vices and its virtues; that even modesty and piety can be a snare for devout eyes; and that for sincerely virtuous men a saintly woman is almost as much to be avoided as an immoral one, since she inspires more esteem and thus gives rise to a sense of security which exposes one to be taken by surprise and tempted.

The best means that the wise Superior found to preserve his disciples from this danger was to make the sight of, and meeting with, these persons impossible. By declining the charitable ministry which led them to seek his house, he did not cause them any major inconvenience. If those who lost him as their director could not have found a better one among a thousand, at least they did have the consolation of finding many others always eager to receive them and to take up where De La Salle had left off. However, he did not brusquely dismiss these followers. If all the sheep had begun to complain of their shepherd all at once, they would have created too great an outcry and might have moved him to compassion. But he let them go one at a time, at appropriate moments and on different occasions; and thus their complaints were muted and impressed him less. Moreover, new persecutions which, it seems, should be dated back to this period, hastened the dropping of some and the desertion of others.

Such is the world. It never leaves the Saints in peace for long. Irreconcilable enemy of virtue that it is, it always finds some new quarrel to pick with those who practice perfection; and if sometimes it appears to have signed a peace treaty with them, it soon violates the pact and recommences hostilities.

What lay behind the new campaign against the holy Founder and his disciples seems to have been the disciplining of some of the students. There is perhaps no place on earth where youngsters were meaner, more stubborn and more good-for-nothing than Rheims at this particular time. They were born with no redeeming traits and were sheltered by the ill-temper of their parents. Raised in the paternal home, they saw nothing but bad example, heard only language capable of instilling poison into their hearts, were abandoned to ignorance and the vicious inclinations of their nature. They had recourse to the protection of their parents' anger against the deserved corrections inflicted on them by the Brothers, and they were clever enough to profit by

this. These little idols, adored by their fathers and mothers, were sure that at their first cry they would find a refuge in the latter's hearts. They thought that they should be honored at school as at home, and that people should be pleased with watching them talk, laugh, fool around, make monkeyshines, play tricks; and that in church, before the altar, and even during the celebration of the holy Sacrifice they had the right to flaunt their lack of piety. All the decent citizens of Rheims bewailed this situation, but did not dare to complain in front of the parents for fear of arousing this uncouth rabble, which returns a torrent of abuse for the least word of reproach.

The evil was serious and was getting worse. It even seemed impossible to remedy it, since those who should have corrected it were the very ones who permitted it through a blind love for their children. Since they did nothing, it was up to the Brothers to try. Responsible for educating these hardheaded young rascals, they had to attempt, by punishment, to curb their evil conduct and their lack of piety. This was what was expected of their zeal; and right-thinking people made them understand that it was their duty. But when they tried to fulfill it, how the little scamps howled! How they aroused the anger of their parents! The devil got into the act, since it was he who had the most to lose through the success of the gratuitous schools. Above all else this enemy of all that is good hated the new establishments, for he could already foresee all the good they would produce and feared their progress. The Christian education that the children received in the new schools struck at the roots of the evil and corrected the lads' defects at their very origin. It made them realize that their souls were immortal, that life is short, that death is most uncertain; thus the fear of God entered these young hearts by slow degrees and bridled their passions which, even though hardly awakened, were already straining at the leash. By learning how to serve God, to render to Him morning and evening the duties that religion inspires, to attend services in church respectfully, to hear Mass with piety, to prepare for the Sacraments, they seemed to be full-fledged Christians when they were barely beyond their childhood years, and gave their parents and teachers reason to hope that the seeds sown in their hearts, through the instructions they had received, would spring up in due time and produce much fruit. These excellent results were already appearing; and that was why the devil was so eager to sow cockle amidst the wheat and to choke the good grain under an invasion of weeds.

He believed that the incorrigible students would be of help to him in his scheme. These lads, refractory to any sort of discipline, revolted against flogging and other forms of chastisement. It was impossible to apply any type of punishment to them without causing a huge uproar. At first the Brothers made use of all the means of correction which usually prove effective on characters that are not totally depraved. Charitable warnings, kindness mingled with severity had been resorted to in vain. Then came threats; but the boys only laughed at these. Mild measures having had no great effect, in order to prevent an outbreak of disorder in the schools and chaos among the students it became necessary to turn to more vigorous means, to appeal to authority and to menaces, and finally to make use of corporal punishment, following the advice of the Wise Man who warns those in charge of educating children that they must not hesitate to correct them, because if they are

beaten with rods they will not die from it, and on the contrary their souls can be delivered from hell by this means. Physical correction, which followed the threats that had been so often made in vain, proved effective with those whose character was not completely untamable. But the boys who had always done just as they pleased, who from the cradle onward had been their own masters, and lived as their desires suggested under the eyes of their parents, (too uncaring and indifferent to try to restrain them), instead of profiting by this correction became embittered; and all of them together stirred up in their families a movement of revolt which eventually turned into a public and general condemnation of the Brothers.

To bring this about, these young rebels exaggerated the punishments inflicted on them at school. But this was enough for parents who were beyond appeals to either faith or reason. Their fury knew no bounds. Instead of approving and backing up by their own authority the wise corrections given in the schools, instead of obliging these graceless scamps to beg pardon of their teachers and to make amends for the scandal they had given, they encouraged the mutiny; they decried the Brothers as sadists and hurled all sorts of vile imprecations at them; they took up stones to throw at them and pursued them through the streets; they themselves incited the children to run behind them and spatter them with mud, to gather together and hoot at them, and thus take vengeance by all sorts of outrages for the wise correction given them.

The Brothers were already used to such scenes of public abuse and merely gave new proofs of their humility, mildness and patience, following the example of their Divine Master. They did not open their lips, save to bless those who screamed out insults against them and assailed them with curses. No threatening or impatient words escaped them addressed to those who maltreated them; and they willingly did penance for these wicked children who needed it so badly.

De La Salle, of course, enjoyed the lion's share of this ill-treatment. As the originator of these gratuitous schools, he was blamed for everything that had happened in them. He should have kept better watch over them and thus forestalled the imprudent acts which gave rise to these complaints; it was up to him to mitigate the penances imposed, to teach the Brothers the secret of keeping to the golden mean which makes correction effective. In a word, De La Salle was the one really to blame, and he alone should bear the consequences of the disorder that was taking place.

What did he think of all this himself? He thought what the others thought. Condemned by the public, he condemned himself to drink the chalice of confusion presented to him wherever he appeared, and even in his house in the person of his disciples. God allowed this harassment because it merited the great blessings which the Christian schools were going to bring about in Rheims. As long as De La Salle remained there (until 1688, at which time he went to Paris to try to open a school there), he had to contend with opposition and was exposed to ill-treatment day after day.

Once he left for Paris, things changed completely in Rheims. The city calmed down and modified its attitude towards the Brothers. It would seem that at that point all the devils who had fomented the difficulties and

troubles left Rheims with him and followed him to Paris, to carry on there what they had begun in the capital of Champagne. De La Salle, if I may use the Apostle's language, had received the privilege not only of believing in Jesus Christ and of making Him known, but also that of suffering for Him everywhere. It was his role to prepare the way for the success of the Christian schools by practicing limitless patience and perfect humility. The schools in Rheims, the first objects of his charity and the first theater of his crosses and humiliations, were also the first to be abundantly blessed by Heaven; for after his departure, the seed he had sown with so many tears sprang up into a rich harvest; and the Brothers whom he left behind him were able to reap a hundredfold. The youth of the city, brought up by such good masters, seemed transformed; they came to school regularly, were attentive to the Brothers' instructions and docile to their reprimands. They showed themselves open to piety and inclined to virtue. This transformation was slow in coming, of course; but it was profound and lasting; it still endures, and there is every reason to hope it will be permanent.

During this period of continual opposition which at almost every moment provided the servant of God with opportunities for practicing patience, humility and mortification, Divine Providence afforded him an occasion for displaying these virtues through a remarkable act of charity. In 1687, the first of the Brothers who taught in the school at Guise fell desperately ill. After he received the last Sacraments, the physicians despaired of his life and gave him up for lost. He was only waiting for the moment to give his soul back to its Maker in peace; but before embarking on this journey to eternity he expressed a vehement desire to see his good father. This longing experienced by the sick Brother was a pious and legitimate one, but it was not easy to satisfy, as Guise lies eighteen leagues from Rheims, and such a trip required time.

To try to satisfy the patient's wishes it was decided to send someone to Laon, which is about halfway between Guise and Rheims, with a letter addressed to the Brothers telling them about the situation and asking them to send someone to the Superior to let him know of the sick Brother's desire. The first messenger reached Laon about four in the afternoon. Brother N..... who is still living, and who composed one of the memoranda used in writing this history, immediately left Laon for Rheims, reaching there the next day around noon. With equal concern De La Salle set out in company of the same Brother at one o'clock.

In spite of the extreme heat (this happened in midsummer) he wore his heavy capote, which he used all the time he remained in Rheims and only gave up in Paris on the orders of his ecclesiastical superiors. He also had on a soutane made of the same heavy, coarse material, which he never took off, and which he merely lifted up halfway to his knees with his shabby woolen cincture when he went on foot. He also wore a hair shirt, as he usually did, and which pained him so much that he could hardly bend over, as someone observed, when he dropped his handkerchief and had to stoop to pick it up. In spite of all this penitential accoutrement, he covered seven leagues under a broiling sun. He might have rid himself of the heavy burden of his capote, at least, by letting his young companion carry it; but he was not the kind of man who sought to make things easier for himself, still less to do so at someone

else's expense. During this painful journey, his blood pressure rose so much that he bled profusely from the nose; but the only relief he sought was in prayer. During the whole trip, he did nothing but sigh and raise his eyes to Heaven. That was where his heart's desires lay, and where he promised his overburdened body to let it rest from its sufferings and fatigue. When oncoming night made it necessary for them to halt at a village, he said the Rosary aloud with the young Brother who accompanied him. After taking some rest in a very rustic inn, he left at three the next morning.

Not that he reached Laon any sooner, although it was only three leagues farther down the road. He took a long time to recite his breviary and to practice other devotions as they walked. From time to time he would stop and kneel before a tree, to pour out his soul before God and enter into a deeper union with Him. Perhaps, too, the fatigue and exhaustion he felt after the efforts of the previous day made it impossible for him to go on. So the Brothers at Laon, unknown to him, got a horse ready for him while he was saying Mass, for the first thing he had done on arriving was to hasten to celebrate Mass. On horseback he did not take too long to reach Guise. The sick Brother was dying; but on seeing his good father who embraced him tenderly he seemed to revive. He even exclaimed that he was cured; and, in fact, a few days later he was out of danger, completely recovered, and ready to go back to his class. At this time De La Salle was about thirty-six years old. He seemed to think that his youth and vigor gave him the right to load his body with all the austerities it could possibly bear; so his fervor knew no limits. The amazing thing is that he did not succumb or shorten his life by the practice of penance beyond all measure.

It was about this time also that Divine Providence opened up for De La Salle a vast field for the exercise of his zeal, without leading him away from the end of his Institute. The Founder's reputation for holiness and that of his disciples extended far and wide. The good accomplished in the Christian schools became known in towns and villages throughout the territory of Rheims, and aroused the zeal of the parish priests. Many of them eagerly sought to have some Brothers to take charge of the Christian education and instruction of the young, so often left to themselves, a prey to ignorance. These zealous pastors were looking for a remedy to an evil which the servant of God, too, had been concerned about for a long time. He desired even more than they did to cure a malady which was becoming fatal for the majority of poor country folk. But the more he thought over the problem the less could he discern a means of solving it. No doubt his disciples could do as much good in the villages as they did in the towns and cities; they might even have found it easier since they would have met with more docility among the children and less opposition from their parents. But where could one find in a small village the resources needed to defray the living expenses of two Brothers? The most sincerely disposed parish priest, even with the help of his parishioners, would not as a rule have been able to provide such funds. Moreover, if a second Brother might have been necessary in the larger parishes, he would have been superfluous in the smaller ones. Consequently, if De La Salle had agreed to furnish teachers for the villages, he would have had to consent to send only one Brother: a thing that the pious Founder could not bring himself to do. He saw too many drawbacks in such a measure. It seemed clear to him that the danger of perversion or at least of relaxation

would inevitably threaten these isolated Brothers, left to themselves with no companions, no good example, and practically no moral support in these little villages.

This was why De La Salle made it a rule never to send a Brother alone to any school. Never did he consent to break this resolution. So, in spite of his great desire to cooperate with these country parish priests, he could not accede to their requests; to all he replied that he had made it an inviolable rule never to assign a Brother alone to any such mission.

But zeal is ingenious and always tries to find a way. Difficulties only make it more resourceful; and by trying various expedients it finally hits on one that succeeds. When these virtuous parish priests realized that they could not obtain any of De La Salle's disciples, they did not give up hope of getting some of his students, at least, or teachers trained by him. To succeed in this, all they needed to do was to choose among the young men in their villages those who seemed the most well-behaved, the most pious, the most gifted for studies, and to send them to the new academy of the Brothers, where they would be taught and trained. This they did. Each one selected among the young men in his flock the one whom grace seemed to have pointed out by endowing him with the qualities needed to become a leader for the rest. They sent these young men to the holy Founder to be brought up under his guidance. Soon the house was filled with them, for the zealous Superior, delighted at the thought that these candidates could do the work of the Brothers in their respective villages, and bring with them not only instruction but the seeds of virtue and piety as well, received them all with open arms and established for them a sort of seminary, separate from the Brothers' Community.

In this group there were about thirty youths. They had their own special regulation and their own particular exercises. They were taught reading, writing, Gregorian chant, and everything else pertinent to the profession they wished to exercise. To mental prayer, vocal prayer, spiritual reading and all the other practices of Christian piety definite times were assigned. A carefully selected Brother had charge of this new section and directed it under the eyes and following the advice of De La Salle. This extra work also entailed extra expense, which had to be met by the servant of God. For when the parish priests sent him these young aspirant teachers to train, they did not undertake to pay him anything for his efforts; they expected John Baptist to do everything out of pure charity and to provide for the material wants of those who were sent to him for spiritual formation. Their expectations were not disappointed. He who feeds the birds of the air and nourishes with so much goodness the ravens and their brood which cry out to Him extended His providential care over a man who had abandoned himself entirely to Him, and did not permit those whom He had directed to him to lack anything. De La Salle did not labor in vain in cultivating this new field that God had given him. When sowing the seeds of piety in these hearts, he did not sow in infertile ground. His pains and his charity were rewarded when he beheld the Lord's blessings follow these young teachers on their return to their villages. There they did an immense amount of good and spread the good odor of Jesus Christ by their example, piety, zeal and determination to fulfill in most exemplary fashion the duties of their profession. At the same time they

spread the reputation of the new Institute, and by witness of their upright lives they indicated what sort of house it was where a group of young peasants had so quickly learned new ways and taken on a new spirit, emerging therefrom as fervent Christians, all on fire to go home and teach Christian doctrine to children.

Differing from the Brothers exteriorly, and especially in their dress (for all of them wore secular clothes and were not distinguished from other laymen except by their special collar and their shorter hair), they resembled them interiorly by their modesty and recollection. Several of them indeed did not wish to leave a house where they had found the Spirit of God and enjoyed the happiness of serving Him. They begged the pious Founder to admit them into the Brothers' Community; and this he granted them. Thus De La Salle gathered the first fruits of the seeds he had sown. The others, too, who went back to those who had sent them, never forgot either the house where they had for the first time received the spirit of grace, or him who had welcomed them with so much kindness. They considered him a father and always preserved filial sentiments towards him.

This creation, as necessary as it was desirable, did not continue as prosperously as its beginning might have augured. Once he who was its support was no longer present, it soon fell into ruin. De La Salle had hardly left Rheims for Paris when this seminary folded up. The servant of God, who understood its usefulness better than anyone else, several times attempted to reestablish it. Towards 1700 it seemed that he was going to succeed in founding a similar one in the parish of St. Hippolyte at Paris; but after an auspicious beginning it, too, was ruined, thanks to the ambition and cupidity of the Brother placed in charge of it.

However, this initiative which the servant of God was so anxious to launch may yet see fulfillment. Full of their father's spirit, De La Salle's children inherited his zeal with regard to this good work, and they hope to revive it some day at their important establishment at St. Yon, near Rouen.

A third community, different from the other two, was also created about this time in De La Salle's house. It was made up of a number of boys, fourteen or fifteen years old, whom the Spirit of God had inspired with the desire of joining the new Institute. The only obstacle preventing their acceptance was their youth. The wise Superior had his doubts about them on this score, and feared lest such youthful recruits might bring a childish, "schoolboy" spirit into his Community. On the other hand, these youngsters showed much good will and a firmness of resolution beyond their years. They were absolutely determined to be the children of the one whom they had chosen as their father. Without allowing his refusal to dampen their enthusiasm, they kept knocking at the door until it was finally opened to them. Their constancy impressed John Baptist favorably, and led him to hope that they would remain steadfast in a state of life which they had so perseveringly sought to embrace.

However, his wisdom suggested that he put them to a test. So he made of them a special group and assigned to them exercises, proper to their age, which might nourish their vocation, prepare them for fulfilling the Brothers'

mission, and help them grow in piety and in virtue. Since their age did not allow them to bear the full burden of the common rule, he gave them an easier one, better adapted to their capacity, which aided them to cultivate true devotion and the spirit of prayer, without inducing distaste and boredom through a too lengthy, too serious and too absorbing program of spiritual exercises. These tender plants needed to be treated with care, discretion and caution, so as to mature in mind, cultivate their judgment, and thus get ready to advance to the Brothers' Community.

It was under these conditions and with these precautions that the prudent Superior admitted them; he assigned them to a wing of the building separate from the quarters of the country schoolmasters and from those of the Brothers. The kitchen communicated with the three separate dining halls. This young community depended for its subsistence on the same source as the other two. Divine Providence and De La Salle's charity were their only resource. He had to find the means of supporting them in the treasure house of his heavenly Father. Not that this caused him the least concern. The One for Whose love he had sacrificed everything was more than able to provide for all these needs and to furnish what was necessary for all those He sent to him.

De La Salle did not change anything in the dress of these young men. Each one wore what he had brought with him. The only thing common to all of them, which distinguished them from outsiders, was the collar they wore and their short hair. Their lifestyle was quite different from that of the country schoolmasters, and constituted a sort of introduction to and imitation of that of the Brothers. At the appointed times they learned reading, writing and arithmetic. The rest of the time they spent in exercises of piety appropriate for their age. Every day they recited the Little Office of the Most Blessed Virgin and said the Rosary; they made an examen twice a day, and also devoted themselves to spiritual reading and mental prayer under the guidance of one of the most pious and capable Brothers. As a rule they went to Communion every week. In a word, their lives were organized more or less like those of the novices today. The wise Superior chose those who, at the age of sixteen or seventeen, seemed to have the best dispositions and brought them over to the Brothers' department, gave them the habit, and sent them to teach. This sort of junior seminary for these lads, which took the place of a training stage and of the novitiate for the Institute, was a place which the servant of God delighted in visiting. When time permitted, he enjoyed assisting at their exercises of piety and addressing exhortations to them. On Christmas Day he joined them in consecrating himself to the Child Jesus and showed them how to do the same. The first time he did this, especially, his devotion appeared so manifest and lively that all of them were deeply impressed. To insure that this pious ceremony would speak to their hearts and arouse their devotion he caused a figure of the Divine Infant to be placed in their oratory; before it each one knelt in turn to make his act of consecration. The pious Founder began, and prostrate at the feet of the sacred image he read his consecration aloud, with as much faith, reverence and devotion as he would have shown if he had seen the Divine Infant with his own eyes.

Imitating him, everyone came in turn to recite the consecration, with a fervor which was the counterpart of that of De La Salle. Nothing was more edifying than to see these boys, at an age when they are at their liveliest

and most exuberant, betray their youth only by their fresh countenances, without allowing it to appear at all in their behavior. So recollected and modest did they appear in their house that one might have mistaken them for religious, already mature in virtue, moving about within their cloister. Outside of the house anyone who happened to meet them might have thought that they were hermits of old, who when they left their caves seemed to make no use of their senses. In fact, they had eyes without seeing and ears without hearing; and they behaved in the midst of the world like strangers who pass through a place without caring to look at anyone. I myself saw this in Paris, when they used to serve Mass at St. Sulpice.

This little community survived for about two years in Rheims after De La Salle departed for Paris. Once established in the capital he thought it best to bring them there so as to have them under his supervision, and he gave the Brothers' habit to a few of those who belonged to the group at that time. At the request of Father Baudran, parish priest of St. Sulpice, several others were assigned to serve Mass at the parish church. They spent the entire morning in this holiest of functions. They arrived in the sacristy in the morning and left only at noon to go back to the Brothers' house, where they slept and had their meals. In this situation where they were so much exposed to distractions one could see them kneeling, in profound silence, and seemingly absorbed in prayer. One after the other they went, clad in violet cassocks, to serve the priests at the altar; and when they returned with them to the sacristy they once more took their places kneeling, and continued their prayer which seemed to last all morning.

Nothing was more edifying, and the people who beheld them were filled with admiration. But it was in this occupation that they found their downfall; these children were withdrawn from their normal environment when they were taken out of the house; and while the service required of them was indeed a very noble one, it was not part of their vocation. Thus it came about that in an environment which involved certain dangers, and where not all of those whom they served at the altar were always models of piety, they gradually fell away from virtue. De La Salle understood full well the perils which threatened these young men, and the temptations to which they were exposed; but he was not in a position to decide; those on whom he depended or on whom he chose to depend, and whom he needed absolutely at this time, made it an obligation for him to let the program go on. This frustrating situation finally came to an end; John Baptist withdrew the boys from the role of acolytes in the parish; he sent home those whose fervor had faded away, or who were not considered apt for his Institute, and admitted others who had preserved the spirit and grace of their calling.

Thus, before leaving for Paris (whither we shall soon follow him), De La Salle found himself during the last years he remained in Rheims, at the head of three different groups, all of which tended to the same end by different means.

Chapter VII

De La Salle Learns of the Death of Nyel and Has Prayers Offered for Him. He Leaves Rheims for Paris. The Cross Follows Him There and Becomes the Foundation Stone of His New Establishment.

Nyel, who had played a part in the founding of the new Institute in Rheims, whither Madame Maillefer had sent him, had gone back to Rouen, as we mentioned, after abandoning all the establishments he had created. By this desertion he had obliged De La Salle to take charge of them all. He rejoiced at having been the first worker that Divine Providence had used to lay the foundations of the edifice of the Christian Schools, which De La Salle had proceeded to build up so courageously; and he could say with the saintly old man Simeon, "Lord, let Your servant depart in peace. There is no more for me to do in this land of exile, since my eyes have seen the one whom You have chosen to accomplish Your designs for the foundation of gratuitous schools, where were always the objects of my zeal. Now I seek nothing other than to close my eyes in death."

He did in fact pass away in Rouen, where he had wanted to retire, on May 31, 1687.

De La Salle seemed deeply touched on learning the news, and on various occasions he expressed his sense of loss over this demise. Without delay he asked for prayers, both public and private, for the eternal repose of the deceased. In addition, to honor his memory, he had the chapel of the Sisters of the Child Jesus hung in black and he himself sang a solemn Requiem Mass, attended by all his disciples together with their students, brought thither with much order and modesty.

Thus Divine Providence took care to honor the memory of a virtuous layman, fired with zeal for imparting Christian doctrine, who had spent his life and taken infinite pains to teach it with perfect disinterestedness for the benefit of the poorest and most neglected children. It seems that God in His goodness, by choosing him to be the first promoter of the Brothers' Institute, wanted to have his name gratefully remembered, and to make clear how agreeable the labor of this good Christian man was to Him, and how useful to the Church. So Nyel is rightly mentioned in this history; we have seen how he brought about the founding of the Institute. For this reason the Brothers are under obligation to him, and should revere his name and his memory.

De La Salle did so; and he certainly owed Nyel this in justice; for I dare say that nobody in the world ever rendered him a more valuable service. Was he not the man whom God made use of to open to De La Salle the path leading to the highest sanctity? If this simple layman had not begun founding Christian and gratuitous schools, if he had not interested the pious canon in them and to take charge of them and organize them, most likely De La Salle would never have made those extraordinary sacrifices related above. The pious canon would

have remained what he was; he would have answered God's call and fulfilled the duties of his vocation; he would have continued living like a saint, even as he had begun; but there are many degrees in sanctity, and he probably would not have attained the one he finally did achieve.

The death of Nyel affords us an opportunity of mentioning Father Barré's death also, which had occurred a year earlier, on May 13, 1686. The loss of this great religious was keenly felt by John Baptist. The two of them were moved by the same attraction and felt the same aspirations. Christian instruction and education for the young, abandoned to their unfortunate lot, was the end pursued by the zeal of these two saintly men. Eager to establish Christian and gratuitous schools for poor children of both sexes, the only remedy for their deep ignorance and their faulty upbringing, the two of them undertook projects which could succeed only through the death of their self-love. This common aim brought them together; but they differed in their respective manners of achieving it. Father Barré had received a special grace for founding girls' schools; he did not have it for boys' schools. That was reserved for De La Salle; such was his special charism.

Not that the zeal of the pious Minim had not addressed itself to both aspects of the problem. More than once he tried to establish schools for boys; but he never succeeded because this gift had not been given to him. When he saw that it had been granted to De La Salle, far from experiencing any jealousy, he felt extremely happy. He rejoiced exceedingly when with his own eyes he beheld the man chosen by God to carry out an enterprise which he himself had so much at heart. All Father Barré longed for was to see the Servant of God in Paris, laboring for the benefit of that great city and of the entire kingdom. He had invoked all the authority he possessed over John Baptist to draw him there. De La Salle, who considered the holy religious as a mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit and a man inspired by God in everything that had to do with Christian education, would have conformed himself with his desires, heeded his call and left for Paris at once if his spiritual director had not made him stay in Rheims. At all events, if the saintly Minim did not experience the joy of seeing De La Salle at work in Paris during his own lifetime, he had it from heaven, two years after he had passed away. De La Salle's foundation was the object of his zeal till his last breath; and he saw his end approaching with joy when he learned of the rapid progress it was making.

After all, if before men the saintly Minim cannot claim the glory of this institution, he certainly deserves the merit for it before God. For it was he who first conceived the idea of such schools, who drew up plans for them, who actually started founding them. Nor is this all. He encouraged De La Salle to begin his Institute; he guided him in the undertaking; he supported him amid the difficulties and opposition which he at first encountered; he gave him the heroic advice to rid himself of his canonry and of his family wealth and to distribute everything to the poor, thus founding his Institute on nothing but Gospel poverty, and abandoning himself and his followers to Divine Providence. In a word, it was Father Barré who implanted in the holy Founder's soul the seeds of that sublime perfection we admire in it. Thus in God's sight the holy Minim is the first creator of Christian Schools for the two sexes. He himself labored at establishing one kind and succeeded

admirably. He inspired the other, guided the hand that laid its foundations, traced the plan, and by his advice contributed to the success of the enterprise. Finally, one may say that he left to De La Salle, as to his heir, the heritage of his spirit and of his charism.

Father Barré and De La Salle were two souls that Divine Providence drew together to work for the accomplishment of Its designs. It led each of them by a different route to the same end; It brought them to the same goal by two different paths. Both died in the odor of sanctity, the one in Paris and the other in Rouen. The former was a man remarkable for his works and his words, a great imitator of his holy founder, St. Francis of Paola; like him he left his mark on various localities in France, through the influence of his charity, zeal, humility, penance and heavenly wisdom. The time has now come for us to observe the latter beginning a new phase of his career in Paris, a phase sown with thorns and brambles, a true way of the cross.

Obedience alone had kept the holy Founder in Rheims. His director felt that his presence was needed there when the work was just beginning; hence he opposed his departure, as we have seen. However, John Baptist's heart was in Paris where Father Barré ardently longed to see him establish his Community. The good of the Institute itself required this. Only its presence in the capital could make it known and help it to spread throughout the kingdom. The city of Rheims where it had seen the light of day would have become its tomb if it had not moved out. There, the Institute could not have lived under its own laws, for it would have been subject to those that successive ecclesiastical superiors might have wanted to impose on it. Its constitution would have changed as often as these prelates replaced one another, and thus would never have reached the stage of a fixed and definitive establishment. Much less could it have dreamed of becoming a congregation, of asking Rome for recognition as a religious society, for the approval of its Rules, for authorization to make the three vows of religion. The head of the Institute, depending on local ecclesiastical superiors, who might not always have agreed with him, would have been subject to their caprices; he might have seen his inferiors' subordination diminish and his own authority weakened. His faith itself, along with that of the entire Community, might have suffered according to the mentalities of the different prelates and the diversity of their sentiments.*

Even if all these drawbacks had not been likely, the city of Rheims, which had been the cradle of the Institute, could not have served as its proper environment when it began to grow. Only in the capital could it discover the contacts, the protection and assistance it needed. De La Salle was convinced of all this; but he waited for the hour marked out by Providence, Whose humble servant he was. Not wishing to advance or to retard the appointed time, he

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*Blain no doubt refers here to the Jansenist controversy which broke out later with renewed venom; many Congregations of religious women in particular, being under the control of Jansenistic bishops, bowed to the pressure and became adherents of "the sect."

remained tranquil, ready to leave at the first sign God gave him. With this in view he had made all the necessary arrangements in the house so that everything would proceed as usual in his absence, without any disturbance.

This projected move of his, which he did not try to keep secret, eventually came to the ears of his archbishop, who by this time understood what a treasure he possessed, and began to fear lest he might lose it. He had always loved this priest who had shown himself so submissive to his orders in all things, and had sought approval for all his undertakings. True, he did not fully subscribe to the principles which inspired the heroic sacrifices De La Salle had made, and he considered as verging on folly the sublime wisdom of a man who gave up all his possessions, titles and the amenities of life to make himself a victim of poverty and of the misery resulting from it. Still, having given his consent to all this, he really could not criticize what he had permitted.

Msgr. Le Tellier had been born to a fortune which provided him with immense revenues, more like those of a king than of a private individual. He never had a chance to learn by experience how to rely on the resources of Divine Providence, nor had he tasted the joy that an austere life affords. If at first he showed some irritation towards a man who was calling the priesthood back to its primitive poverty, and who gave the world examples of humility, detachment and other virtues such that we have to go back to the remotest centuries to find a parallel for them, he had had time to change his mind and to realize that this priest, shorn of all his wealth, had been right to place his confidence in God and to rely on the treasury of Providence. For to take care of the needs of his three communities it furnished him greater resources than he could ever have found in his canonry, his personal fortune, and his family.

This prelate, who knew the art of governing and was an excellent judge of men's merits, rated De La Salle according to his works. He could see the Community that the Servant of God had gathered around him; he admired the progress it was making, and he hoped to use it for the benefit of his diocese. To do this he sought to restrain the zeal of the pious Founder within the limits of the diocese, and to keep him there himself. With this in mind, he felt that the surest way to attach John Baptist to the diocese of Rheims was to appeal to the best interests of his Institute, and to open to him the archiepiscopal purse, to endow the Institute, expand it and propagate it to every corner of the diocese, under the express condition that it would not go elsewhere.

If the offer was a generous one, the refusal was even more so, for the glory of God and the benefit of the Church would have suffered as a consequence of the archbishop's great liberality. The offer, however, was unable to touch a heart indifferent to everything that was not God's. Still, De La Salle needed arguments to motivate a refusal of this kind, some solid principle with which to back it up. Msgr. Le Tellier was a man who possessed good sense; he was not an enemy of the greater good, nor was he so blindly attached to the interest of his particular diocese as to want to procure it at the expense of the general good. So he seemed satisfied when De La Salle explained to him the true motives of his refusal, and reminded the prelate of

the obligation he felt to keep the promise made to Father De La Barmondière to establish a school in the parish of St. Sulpice. There was, moreover, another reason that De La Salle did not mention, but hinted at: he was anxious to leave the city of his birth, where his family lived. A place, which was beginning to change its attitude toward him and where he no longer met with contempt, no longer attracted him. He even feared that if he stayed he might begin to be treated with honor, might end up with a reputation for holiness. Finally, under the eyes of his relatives, friends and fellow citizens he did not feel fully at liberty to give his zeal and his other virtues as much scope as he desired.

While the Spirit of God suggested all these thoughts to him, It was also preparing the way for him to move to Paris. Father De La Barmondière, recalling what De La Salle had told him, again longed to see the promise fulfilled. Compagnon, who had charge of the St. Sulpice schools, desired it even more ardently. He had taken over this position from L'Espagnol, who had resigned when, with no other help than a young boy to manage a school with over two hundred pupils in it, he felt crushed by this burden. Desperate for help, he wrote to De La Salle in July, 1687, and asked him to send him a Brother. The wise Superior was in a quandary over the reply he should make; for on the one hand he had always made it a rule never to send a Brother alone on a mission. So important did he consider this principle that to be faithful to it he had turned down several proposed school openings in Champagne, as we have seen. On the other hand, the good of his Institute summoned him to Paris; and this call might open to him the gates of the capital. So, hesitant as to what he should do, he sent an inconclusive reply, which betrayed his indecision. Compagnon, dissatisfied with this, left for Rheims to talk with De La Salle in person and to urge him to send someone. Unfortunately for him his journey proved useless, because when he got to Rheims the pious Founder was absent, and he did not have time to await the latter's return. Divine Providence had arranged things thus, in order to bring about a firmer agreement; because it was not with the man in charge of the St. Sulpice parish schools, but with the parish priest himself that the prudent Superior wished to arrange matters.

When De La Salle came back to Rheims he heard of Compagnon's visit and of its motive. He did not wish to draw any conclusions of his own. His humility which constantly led him to mistrust his own judgment and lights obliged him to submit the matter to another tribunal than his own for judgment. There the difficulty was considered; and the conclusion reached was to keep to the rule inviolably, and not to send any Brother out on a mission all by himself, and to refuse even the most tempting offers unless two Brothers could be assigned to the project.

Consequently, the pious Founder wrote to the head of the St. Sulpice schools saying that he would be satisfied if the parish priest consented to receive two Brothers and himself along with them. This condition was entirely agreeable to Compagnon who disliked the responsibility he bore; it was to his advantage to see that De La Barmondière agreed to it; and in this he succeeded with little trouble. All he had to do was to show this saintly man where the real good lay, in order to persuade him to embrace it.

So, Compagnon wrote on behalf of the parish priest telling De La Salle to come, and that he and the two Brothers would be welcome. The affair seemed to be taking a very favorable turn, and De La Salle saw with pleasure that Divine Providence was opening for him the path he needed to bring him to Paris. He did not, however, feel that the gate had been swung wide enough, or that he should hurry the matter along. After all, it was only Compagnon who had written and made the arrangements; this did not suffice; he might be going too fast, pushing things too much; perhaps he was making De La Barmondière say what he really had not said, a thing that happens only too often with people who are overeager about something. They think they have heard what they really have not, and they lend their own convictions to those in whom they desire to see these. De La Salle wished to receive a positive word from the parish priest himself. To obtain this he replied that his young brother, Louis, was about to set out for the seminary of St. Sulpice; he would make the arrangements, and take all the measures needed to conclude them. So indeed it came about.

The seminarian came to an agreement with Compagnon and told him to let De La Salle know when he was expected in Paris. This was what Compagnon wanted, or so it would seem; yet this man who had at first been in so much of a hurry appeared at this point to let his activity die down. Two months went by without his sending any word to John Baptist, who was expecting some news. When after this lapse of time he did not see either De La Salle or the Brothers show up, as though astonished at the delay, he asked Louis for an explanation. The latter told him that his brother would not set out until he was called and told when he should come. This was obviously something the parish priest should have attended to, not Compagnon. The latter, thinking that a mere letter from himself would be sufficient assurance and that it would bring De La Salle and the Brothers to Paris without delay, wrote him at once. But the Servant of God, who wanted and was waiting for an explicit order from the parish priest, did not move. When De La Barmondière learned why De La Salle delayed, he was much edified. A great believer in the virtue of obedience, who in his career had given outstanding examples of it, he was delighted to discover that there were still on earth men like himself who let all their steps be guided by this virtue. So he commissioned Father Baudran, in whose favor he was soon to resign his position as pastor, to inform De La Salle in his name that he and the two Brothers should come.

When he received this order the pious Founder took his two disciples and set out for Paris to begin this school which everyone so ardently desired, but which was to cause him, even to the end of his life, all sorts of trouble. He got there on the eve of St. Matthias' day, 1688, with two Brothers.* The saintly parish priest of St. Sulpice welcomed them warmly and had them take up their lodging in the school building, where De La Barmondière, who was a great advocate of manual training, had set up a hosiery manufactory to furnish a trade to the poor children. Compagnon, who lived in the community of priests

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*Apparently, February 23.

that officiated in the parish, took care to arrange for the Brothers' meals, and introduced them to the young boy who had been his assistant schoolmaster, and to the man who ran the stocking factory, both of whom were lodged and took their meals in the same place.

The establishment was a regular bedlam, where disorder and confusion reigned. There was no sign of any rule, any kind of discipline or method, so essential when dealing with a large number of students. The doors were open from 5 to 10 a.m. and from 1 to 4 p.m. The children came and went as they pleased.

Nothing began or ended at a fixed time. Everything took place as chance or caprice dictated. Classes began sometimes at one hour, sometimes at another. Today they ended a little earlier, tomorrow they might end later. Catechism was rarely taught, and never according to any system. Outside class time the pupils gathered in the courtyard and played cards or dice. This gave rise to bad conduct, for it is well known how gambling arouses the passions and to what excesses it leads. On work days the children missed Mass; no one even thought of having them practice this greatest of religious duties, although De La Barmondière was very eager that they should do so. There was no piety among the students, no good behavior in this assemblage of rowdy children, run by people who had no piety themselves.

As soon as De La Salle came into contact with this situation, he could not help noting all this disorder and secretly bewailing it. He realized the evil clearly, but could not see how to remedy it. The institution was in sad need of reform; but to bring this about a great deal of effort would be required. When, how, and by what means could he improve things? That was what embarrassed him. His first glimpse of the place showed him the crosses awaiting him, but he kept silent and ordered the Brothers to do likewise: not to meddle in any way, to do their job, to close their eyes to all the rest, to abandon the future to Divine Providence and to allow God to choose the right time to bring order to a place where none existed, and where it was so sorely needed.

He practiced to the letter what he urged the Brothers to do. All of them seemed deaf, blind and dumb in a situation where, for the time being, the best thing to do was to shut one's eyes so as to remain at peace amidst the disorder. However, after a few days of rest the two Brothers began to work along with the young boy who had been employed previously to teach the youngsters. To make their efforts more effective they divided the school population into three classes and gave them lessons on a level with their age and their ability. This first attempt at organization, which did not create any difficulties, attracted so many new students that the two Brothers were overworked. One of them even fell ill and remained so exhausted that he was no longer able to do anything. This empty place was soon filled. De La Salle had not forgotten a function which he had already practiced.

The Superior who once before had taken a Brother's place in Rheims now did the same thing in Paris. It was only fair that Paris should not have to envy Rheims such an example of humility, and that both cities should behold a priest, doctor and ex-canon of one of the most illustrious Metropolitan

churches in France, becoming a schoolmaster. The presence of De La Salle was enough to make the disorder in the school stare Compagnon in the face. He was not in a position to attend to this himself, since he did not remain much at the school; even if he had lived there, he did not feel that he had the capacity for introducing and maintaining strict discipline among so many students who needed it so badly. This was an art which he knew nothing about; and even if he had, he was probably not the sort of man who was ready to accept the unpleasantness it entailed with due patience and longanimity. Thus, the simplest and best thing he could have done, which he finally did do, was to ask De La Salle to replace him and to take charge of the establishment. But the humble Superior could read in the heart of the man who was making him such a flattering offer, a secret unwillingness to give up his position and an inclination to take back his proposal.

So, after taking advice on the subject, he turned the suggestion down in the most Christian and modest manner possible. He again ordered the Brothers not to concern themselves with anything except teaching their classes. The Brothers, however, began to grow tired of the disorder, which led to all sorts of inconveniences for them. They were accustomed to a definite series of exercises which followed each other. They grew disenchanted at having to be the helpless spectators of anarchy which added to their own work and which they could see no end to.

Their virtue, thus put to the test, began to give way; to bolster it they needed both the example of their Superior, who saw all that was going on yet did not complain, and the exhortations he addressed them, urging patience. He encouraged them not to let these thorny beginnings discourage them; he led them to hope that time would eventually bring more order to these chaotic classes, would lessen the annoyances they suffered and smooth out the difficulties they experienced. He knew the remedy that needed to be applied, but he did not want to forestall the hour marked out by Providence.

In the meantime he contented himself with visiting the classes, going about in the yard, teaching the children Christian doctrine and trying to win them over by his mildness, while suggesting modesty to them through his presence and love for what was right by his words. The seeds of virtue he thus sowed in these young souls did not take long to spring up and promised good results. Little by little the children became more docile; their behavior improved. The director of the school noticed it, and this slight change made him realize what a wiser line of conduct and a definite regulation might do to ameliorate the situation in the school.

Things went on in this way till the beginning of April, at which time the parish priest came to visit the school, accompanied by one of his priests named Father Metais. This saintly pastor, while governing such a vast parish where problems abounded, lived an austere life and displayed as much regularity of conduct as the most fervent ecclesiastic in the Seminary of St. Sulpice. He himself was one of the most notable members of this Congregation. He loved order and was full of zeal for the rule. Consequently, he was badly impressed by the lack of discipline he noted in an institution which needed it so badly. He realized quite well that it was useless to gather so many children together at such great expense, in order to teach them their religion, to prepare them

to earn a living, and to bring them up in the fear of God, so long as there was not more discipline among them. He felt that most of them might be better off at home, with no concern for their education, rather than gathered in such an unruly mob. In the first case they would learn less about evil, and would not witness so much bad example.

These reflections led him to conclude that either he should close the school entirely, or else introduce firmer discipline among the students and make order and regularity reign. After thinking seriously about how he could correct the evil, he realized that he had the solution to the problem at hand in the person of De La Salle. The latter possessed to perfection the art of running a school well. God Who had destined him for this type of work had given him the talent to do it right. He had communicated this talent to the Brothers, so that they fullfilled the task with ease. The only reason why De La Barmondière had made them come to Paris was that his parish might share in the blessings that accompanied their labors. To obtain these blessings all he needed to do was to leave them alone to run the school; and this the zealous parish priest of St. Sulpice resolved to do. He begged De La Salle to take charge; and when the Founder observed that two Brothers could not cope with all the work to be done, he consented to have others come, as many as might be needed, and agreed to pay each of them a salary of 250 livres.

Compagnon, who was in charge of the school, was present and suffered no little mortification from what he heard; but what hurt did he not feel when he was invited not to concern himself any more with anything referring to the school! This order wounded him deeply, and De La Salle had to bear the consequences of it. We shall see to what lengths resentment and jealousy led Compagnon. The pious Founder, entirely submissive to the orders of the parish priest, consented, although with reluctance, to do what was required of him for he could easily foresee the problems that would arise on the part of Compagnon and his two associates.

Understanding perfectly well what caused the unrest in the school De La Salle knew that he would never get the classes organized as he wished, and establish proper order in them so long as the hosiery workshop remained in operation as it was. This institution was the apple of the parish priest's eye; he was full of zeal in this matter, and believed it to be extremely important to train young people to work, thus avoiding idleness, the mother of all vices. The time had not yet come, therefore, to speak about doing away with this establishment. John Baptist had to await the right moment and, in the meantime, he needed to promote the manual training program.

Seeing himself thus placed in charge of running the institution, De La Salle, as was his wont, had recourse first of all to prayer and meditation, so as to carry out successfully the mission entrusted to him. Resolved to introduce order in everything and everywhere, he adopted all the measures that wisdom suggested in order to succeed in his endeavor without making much ado, or provoking comments. Since the Brothers should be models of conformity to rule, it was only right to begin the regulation of the school with them. Their example alone might suffice to reform the student body. Consequently, the pious Founder's first care was to live with the Brothers in Paris just as

he had in Rheims. Nothing was changed in their way of life: the same exercises, the same regularity, the same spirit of recollection, silence, retirement, prayer, mortification and obedience.

Next, he undertook to schedule the time for all the school activities, so that each one began at a fixed hour and lasted a definite time. The first rule that had to be enforced concerned entering and leaving the building at a precise time; and once this was decided, the door was opened and closed regularly at that exact hour, so that the students were obliged to be punctual and to show themselves faithful to their duty. The lazy ones who came late found the door shut and could not get in; and the mischiefmakers who wanted to run off when they pleased found themselves locked in and could not get out.

The praiseworthy practice of hearing Mass every day was introduced and became a fixed rule of the Christian schools, and a new and edifying spectacle for Paris. Hundreds of children, boisterous by character, playful and irreverent, lacking piety and respect for the holy place, could be seen walking two by two in order, and each in his proper place, with silence and modesty, preceded and followed by the Brothers, all going to attend the awesome sacrifice of the altar with piety and reverence. Nor was the catechism lesson forgotten or neglected. Its length, the time when it was taught, and the manner of teaching it were all regulated. This holy practice, which is what distinguishes Christian and gratuitous schools from ordinary pay schools, seemed so essential to Father Barré and to De La Salle that both of them obliged their schoolmasters and mistresses to teach catechism every day. The periods for teaching reading, writing, ciphering and spelling were also precisely determined, so that the children had enough time to learn these matters well without ever getting bored.

The rest of the day was devoted to manual training, but in such a way as to sanctify it, for prayer was joined to labor. This did not yet suffice, for these children, by living subject to no restraints, had grown licentious and had become addicted to gambling. There was no hope that these young plants would ever produce good fruit so long as they were affected by this vice. This dreadful passion was like a cancer in them; it dried up the sap of good instructions and corrupted the depths of their hearts; so it was necessary to attempt everything to cure it, and this De La Salle and the Brothers proceeded to do. Finally, since the end of their Institute is to bring up in innocence and in the service of God these neglected children who lack instruction and education, they gave free rein to their zeal and sought to uproot the vices and evil inclinations found in these young souls, and to plant therein piety, along with the fear and love of God.

The schools of St. Sulpice soon seemed to be running so well that the enemy of the human race was frightened and hastened to put a stop to this good work. He thought it would be easy for him to succeed since he had at his disposal three persons who were all the more apt to serve him because their interests coincided with his, and because their passions fell in with his evil schemes. Two of the three were not happy over the new regulations, and the third considered them as a slur on his honor. It was he who guided the intrigue, which aimed at closing down the knitting shop, the activity which, he thought, was the mainspring that actuated the zeal of De La Barmondière for the school.

Convinced that the saintly parish priest who was so keen on manual training would be displeased with any teachers who failed to promote it, he used all his cleverness to bring his wicked project to a satisfactory conclusion. The undertaking, however, must not be too rushed; he had to await the moment when it could be tried with certainty of success. So he slyly sought to gain time; and meanwhile to prepare his vengeance he contented himself with showing by his gloomy silence what he felt in the depths of his soul, and with arousing complaints and murmurs.

We shall see, by this example, that passion is blind, and that jealousy above all seldom delivers a blow which does not ricochet off the cowardly heart which indulges in it. If Compagnon had paid attention to his own reputation, he would no doubt have realized that it was going to suffer as much as that of De La Salle. For it was he who had shown himself so eager to bring the Servant of God from Rheims to Paris; who had gone to Rheims to beg him to come; who had convinced the parish priest to invite him; who had been so glad to give De La Salle the direction of the schools and had urged him, in the presence of De La Barmondière, to assume the control of the establishment. Hence nobody was more interested than he in the success of the schools placed under the direction of De La Salle. The honor or dishonor deserved by the one would infallibly reflect on the other. If he had thought about it a little, he would have seen that he was working against himself by plotting against the holy Founder. But where envy rules, faith and reason have to remain silent. This odious vice which finds satisfaction only in causing trouble, even at its own expense often enough, thought it had perceived in the slackening off of the work in the knitting shop a pretext to satisfy itself.

The students were spending more time in their school activities, in prayer, catechism and attending Mass, and consequently could not devote as many hours as before to manual training. The man in charge of the shop thought he was losing money. As less work was turned out, his profits diminished. Convinced that all these new arrangements were harming his interests, he grew impatient over these losses. At first he did not dare to make too much of a fuss over it, nor to give vent to overly loud complaints, which would have revealed his secret dissatisfaction. De La Barmondière was not a man before whom passion dared to show itself too openly. So he had to dissimulate; and in order to cause trouble cleverly and in such a way as to convince the holy old parish priest, he did not complain about the new regulations as such, but about the diminution of work. The ploy was ingenious, because it aimed only indirectly at the object he really had in view. It seemed that De La Barmondière's verdict would certainly condemn De La Salle's actions, and that, displeased over the lessened amount of work given to the children, he would insist that the new arrangements be cancelled, thus bringing everything back to where it had stood before.

However, the scheme did not succeed as its authors expected; the parish priest did not show himself as sympathetic to their complaints as they had hoped. If the manual training program did not run quite as well as before, the classes were proceeding much better, the children were being taught, their behavior improved considerably, so the gain outbalanced the loss, and the one more than compensated for the other. Thus the saintly parish priest, who always wanted to see the greatest good done, did not seem too much disturbed

over what was, after all, a minor matter. The plotters felt this and decided to take steps to arouse deeper concern on his part. They thought that if the work in the knitting shop stopped entirely, this would have the effect they had vainly hoped to secure by stressing the slowdown of the operation, and they thought that De La Barmondière would finally make up his mind to withdraw the direction of the institution from a man who could not make the shop function. Nothing was more contrary to the interests of the Christian schools than this scheme inspired by pure malice. It should have succeeded according to the desires of its authors; but God, Who makes those who dig the pit fall into it themselves and takes pleasure in foiling the projects of the wicked, made this one turn against the one who had planned it.

Rafrond, the foreman of the knitting shop, thought that by quitting he would force it to close down, and thus oblige De La Salle to call him back in order to make it run again. This was how he and Compagnon (who secretly incited him) expected to place the holy parish priest in a difficult situation, in order to make him accept their terms, the first of which was to send De La Salle and the Brothers back to Rheims.

However, they were both disappointed; and Rafrond was led into ruin by his own malice. At first he spoke of quitting; then he did quite in fact; but it turned out so much the worse for him, because he did not find any other work, or anyone who cared to employ him. The shop closed down; but De La Barmondière did not seem to mind. Then De La Salle thought of reopening it and having it function successfully without causing any disturbance to the classes; and in this he succeeded. Rafrond, abandoned to his unfortunate lot, was the one whom the Servant of God made use of to insure the success of his new project. With the approval of the parish priest he gave Rafrond a sum of money and got him to teach one of the Brothers how to knit hose and how to run the whole manual training program.

In three weeks' time the Brother had learned all that his teacher could teach him, thus making the latter's services superfluous. In this way the malicious intriguer was the first to pay for his evil intentions. The Brother who took charge of the program, along with another whom De La Salle called from Rheims and who already knew how to knit hose, were able to combine the work program with the pupils' classwork and the other scholastic exercises. Indeed, the shop program proceeded even better than before and brought in more profit, because the children were less distracted and more enthusiastic about their work and applied themselves to it more diligently. The classwork and the exercises of piety did not suffer from it, because silence and order economized a great deal of time which previously had been wasted in fooling around and in useless talk.

Chapter VIII

The Head of the St. Sulpice Schools Calumniates De La Salle in a Gathering of Charitable Ladies. The Parish Priest, Taken in by These Slanderous Reports, Is on the Point of Sending De La Salle Back to Rheims with the Brothers; but God Changes His Heart Just As the Pious Founder Was Saying Justice Is Finally Done. Baudran, the Successor of De La Barmondière As Parish Priest of St. Sulpice Establishes a Second School in the Parish, Which Led to a Lawsuit on the Part of the Masters of the Little Schools, and Which the Pious Founder Won.

The collapse of the intrigue fomented by Compagnon did not discourage him. Even though he was not recognized as its author, his conscience made him feel the shame for it, while Rafrond bore the consequences. Still, his jealousy was not ready to admit defeat. Real ill will, which the spirit of envy knows so well how to utilize, finds a ready tool in calumny. It was an odious and abominable tool, but as no other was available, he had to have recourse to it or else resign himself to seeing with equanimity the control of the institution in the hands of a man whom he would have wished to see far removed from it. Everything now was in order in the school: the manual work proceeded smoothly as did the teaching. Piety itself was being cultivated little by little, and everything contributed to the repute of the Superior who was in charge. Hence there was no way to attack him save through slander. But because the presence of De La Salle would have sufficed to dissipate this, Compagnon hesitated to spread his malicious tales and thought it wiser to profit by John Baptist's absence to make his lies sound more plausible. He might have carried them from house to house, but then they would have taken a good while to reach the ears of the parish priest. So it seemed more expeditious to make them public; and by choosing a favorable moment to divulge the calumny, to give it the credit of several different voices.

A meeting of charitable ladies, which took place about this time at the pastor's residence, seemed to him an ideal forum in which to speak and to be listened to. If it proved possible to convince the pious persons who attended this meeting, it was certain that their number and their reputations would carry De La Barmondière along with them in their accusations against De La Salle. Such a favorable opportunity was not allowed to pass by. The impostor had taken pains to clothe his fabrications in a garb of seeming plausibility and to give them all the appearance of truth. He succeeded in putting them forward with so much skill and cleverness that nobody dreamed of suspecting falsehood, or still less of attributing the tale to the envy and resentment of the one who related it.

We do not know what the malicious accusation actually was; but we do know that it produced all the effect that its author expected. It was believed; and most amazing of all, De La Barmondière himself remained convinced of it. It is

a fact that the most upright people are often the least on guard against being deceived. Not knowing what resentment, passion and jealousy are, they cannot even imagine that these vices may move the tongues of those whose hearts they cannot see. The saintly parish priest of St. Sulpice, a lover of simplicity, candor, good faith and truth, could not even suspect that these virtues were being betrayed by a man who was trusted by himself and by many other persons of distinguished merit. So, he let himself be persuaded. This was not the first time that one saint, by persecuting another saint, helped add to the latter's crown.

The calumny had plenty of time to spread and to meet with acceptance; and from July to September its author enjoyed the malicious pleasure of adding more details, calculated to win for it even wider belief. Compagnon saw all his desires about to be fulfilled; and to savor a more complete triumph he went about the school spreading the word that the Brothers and their Superior were going to be sent home, and showing how happy he felt over this. He had brought the parish priest to that point.

It was not difficult for De La Salle to notice the changed attitude; De La Barmondière showed himself cold and even rude towards him, thus giving him to understand by his calculated indifference that he would do well to leave of his own accord, and not wait for the disgrace of being dismissed. In face, De La Barmondière, wishing to spare him this ultimate humiliation made this very suggestion to him through Baudran, who was John Baptist's spiritual director. Accordingly, Baudran gave De La Salle to understand that since the parish priest was apparently not satisfied with him, prudence suggested that he take advantage of the summer vacation and go back to Rheims. He added that he himself was ready to go with him to the parish priest, so that he could bid him farewell.

The pious Founder, who sought nothing but God and who in all things abandoned himself to the care of Providence, agreed. I do not know what sort of impression this farewell made on De La Barmondière; but once he had spoken with John Baptist he was no longer in such a hurry to send him and the Brothers away. He appeared pensive; and after conferring with Baudran about the matter, he remained quite undecided as to what he should do. So, he told De La Salle that he would think over the matter further. "He will think about it for three more years, at least, without changing anything," Baudran told him when he returned. "So, remain as you are, in peace." This was what De La Salle resolved to do. Calm in the midst of all this agitation, not knowing one night whether he would sleep in the same house the next, he remained at rest in the arms of Divine Providence, ready for whatever might happen.

During this time Compagnon did not remain idle. His mind kept trying to invent new ways to blacken the pious Superior's reputation and to indispose De La Barmondière against him and the Brothers. He spied on all they did, tried to read their intentions, scrutinized their conduct. Nothing about them was innocent; his passion made a crime of everything; and without apprising them of it he continually cited them before the tribunal of the parish priest or that of the community of priests who served in the parish, renewing his accusations against them and hoping to force them to leave Paris.

This tissue of calumnies which he presented as proof constituted his whole case against the unjustly accused Brothers; and the renewed zeal he displayed for the good of the school served to accredit his hypocrisy. For, in fact, an evil-intentioned emulation made him very active, vigilant, eager to rival De La Salle, and to appear more capable than he of directing the school and of inspiring the students with piety.

De La Barmondière liked to see the children attend the early Mass; so one way of currying favor with him was to make the students show up at church early in the morning, to be present at his Mass. To get them to do this, the scheming Compagnon spared neither cajolements, caresses nor rewards. He bought their cooperation by his calculated liberalities. To secure funds for this purpose, he persuaded certain pious persons to turn over to him the money they wished to donate to charity, and to let him decide how these sums were to be spent. For the same purpose he laid his hands on the loaves of bread which were offered at the Seminary, and took possession of them, bringing them to school so that he could distribute them to the boys he wished to favor. He did this in the sight of the other pupils, in order to get more of them to come to the early Mass, and gave them to understand that if they wished to share in his largesse, they should rally around him and not around the newly arrived Brothers.

Unruffled, De La Salle beheld all that was being done against him and defended himself only by his silence and patience. It would have been easy for him to oblige all the children to put in an appearance at the early Mass and to have them conducted there by the Brothers. Even without making this a rule, he would have managed to get them all to come willingly and voluntarily; but this would have been a too human manner of acting; he would have been inspired by purely human motives; and a saint finds this repugnant. Far from doing anything of the sort, he forbade the Brothers to do or to say anything special or out of the ordinary to win over the children and to get them to come to the early Mass. "Urge them to go," he told them, "and recommend that they do so out of regard for God and for their salvation; but don't go any further."

In vain had the man responsible for the schools exhausted all the wiles suggested by ill will in order to defame the Servant of God. When he opened a door through which he hoped to expel the latter from the institution, he really provided the one through which he himself would be ejected in disgrace. Was it not just that he should be caught in the web of intrigue which he had spun, and that he should experience the truth of the saying: "Calumny never brought prosperity?" Here is what finally happened.

In order to put an end to the conflicts existing between the persons he had entrusted with the direction of the school, De La Barmondière asked Abbé Janson (later Archbishop Janson) to probe the matter for him, to find out the cause of the trouble, and to discover who was at the bottom of all the dissension. Accordingly, the pious Abbé came to investigate; and it did not take him long to find out who was innocent. The order and regularity which he observed in the school seemed to him an element favoring the one who directed it. The children were polite, busy, orderly; the Brothers were silent, modest and recollected. All this spoke volumes in favor of the accused; and without many words, but with a power superior to human eloquence, it demonstrated that he

was in the right and that he had been the victim of calumny. The virtuous Abbé, not wishing to allow himself to be led astray by first impressions, returned to the house several times and was always similarly edified by what he saw. What he admired most was that De La Salle and the Brothers did not say a word to clear themselves of the imputations spread against them. He beheld men who remained calm, leaving to Providence the care of clearing their names, and whose only defense was silence.

In such circumstances silence is the mark of genuine and perfect virtue, and the convincing apology for innocence. But how many victories must one have achieved over self-love before one can make it remain silent and not give way to recriminations! How deeply must a heart have yielded to the Holy Spirit not to seem perturbed over unjust judgments made against it! Abbé Janson was even more edified when, on urging De La Salle to defend himself and to end his silence with regard to his declared enemy who no longer observed any measure in attacking him, he heard him say that "not being in charge of Compagnon's behavior, he had not examined it or judged it." Finally, the virtuous Abbé understood what manner of man this was, about whose conduct he had been asked to inquire, when John Baptist told him that "the only favor he requested was that the defects observed in his conduct might be pointed out to him, and that he might be given the advice he needed to correct them."

This humble attitude made the investigator understand where passion lay, and where virtue. He realized what sort of man this was whose virtue had been so long put to the test by odious calumnies, yet who did not want to open his mouth to complain about the author of these tales. Hence he lost no time in doing him justice and in opening De La Barmondière's eyes. He declared to the latter the high esteem he himself had conceived for a man who remained so unruffled with regard to those who were the enemies of peace, a man who answered nothing to the lies and impostures which had been so freely heaped upon him. The saintly parish priest, better informed, returned to his earlier feelings towards the Brothers and their Superior. He began taking steps to protect him from these annoyances and to make it possible for him to run the school without opposition or further interference. However, as he resigned his position as parish priest just about this time, it fell to his successor, Baudran, to carry out this project.

The task could not have been entrusted to more capable hands, because Baudran was the spiritual director of the innocent victim of all these slanderous tales, and better than anyone else he knew his eminent virtue. However, in order to act with full deliberation he took all the time he needed to familiarize himself with the turmoil that agitated the school. He assumed charge of the parish in January, 1689, and spent the year examining in detail the conduct of Compagnon; and as this examination showed him that this ecclesiastic was good for nothing except for introducing disorder and dissension into a house where such good order now reigned, he only waited till an opportunity arose for getting him out of the way as honorably as possible. This came about soon afterwards, when the priest in charge of the altar boys of the parish died. At Christmas of that same year Compagnon was given charge of their training.

Thus delivered from an enemy who had shown himself so implacable and so dangerous, De La Salle exhibited no outward sign of joy; he never sought to revenge himself on him for all the evil he had suffered, except by doing him all sorts of favors. He used the period of peace given to him to restore to his house all the fervor and to the school all the discipline he wished to see in them. For, although eager to establish good order in the classrooms, he had not enjoyed full authority to introduce all the pious practices that he wished to see established there. The time had finally come to do this and have them accepted. He made good use of it.

This increase of order and discipline in the school caused a considerable influx of new pupils. Children came streaming in, so that soon the classrooms were no longer large enough to accommodate them. The boys were growing used to the regulations, and became more docile, more attentive, more religious; the change in them showed what good a Christian school can do when it is well conducted. The Servant of God himself was gratified at the blessings God poured out on his labors; he ceased not to bless Him and thank Him for them.

The new parish priest was no less pleased when he came to visit the classes. Seeing the good done, he could not restrain his joy; and he felt a stronger determination to support and multiply the schools. At this time he resolved to open a new school in the Rue du Bac, near the Pont Royal. He suggested this to De La Salle, who was happy to go along with the idea. In fact, it was he who had first thought of this foundation and had mentioned it to De La Barmondière; but the idea had not been pursued any further at that time. This new school was opened early in 1690. Baudran was delighted; for he soon saw it filled with students, and producing all the good results he had hoped for.

De La Salle thought that he would enjoy a period of peace, and that it would last for a while; for he could not foresee anything that might disturb it. He hoped to profit by this season of tranquillity and to use it to consolidate his work. But he was mistaken, for he did not realize how much alarm his Institute was causing in Hell, nor how many stumbling blocks of all sorts the Prince of this world would try to throw into his path. In truth, the old serpent, so clever at fomenting evil and in thwarting all endeavors which aim at the glory of God, exhausted against this one all the resources of his malignant ingenuity. He had just stirred up dissensions within the schools; no sooner had these been allayed than he began to promote attacks from without. For a dangerous and hidden enemy, he was about to substitute another in the shape of an entire corporation which would wage open warfare.

The recent past had brought De La Salle conflict with internal enemies; the coming years would be marked by external hostilities. The former parish priest of St. Sulpice had sided with his enemies; the new parish priest will attack him in a more dangerous and painful fashion. And the beginnings of all these troubles were only the preludes to others more vast, the first stirrings of a persistent opposition which would last as long as his life.

Jealousy had just made the Servant of God feel the sting of a tongue as sharp as that of a serpent; now self-interest was going to induce the Corporation of the Paris Schoolmasters* to take up arms against the Christian schools. These mercenary pedagogues, who lived thanks to their teaching and whose pens provided them with a livelihood, were dismayed by the success and the progress achieved by the Christian and gratuitous schools. They imagined they could already see their own establishments shut down as a result of the founding of the former. These schoolmasters who taught in the neighborhood of the parish schools began to see their revenues dropping; naturally they felt concern lest the Brothers' classes should be filled with children previously enrolled in theirs.

A perfervid and hypersensitive imagination made them think that in a short time they would find themselves alone in empty classrooms, and that they would have to endure the confusion of seeing their schools deserted while those of the Brothers flourished. What a bitter pill it was to see themselves supplanted by these newcomers, who would certainly reduce them and their families to the poorhouse, by changing into a work of charity what had hitherto been a lucrative profession! Must we, they asked, let ourselves be ruined by these interlopers who, under the name of Brothers, have come to destroy our profession? Was it not obvious that gratuitous schools would empty those where fees were charged, and that parents, who are willing to spend money on everything for their children except for their education, would bring them one and all to these teachers who taught out of charity?

These ill-founded arguments caused much emotion in all the schoolmasters of Paris; and without examining how much was false in all this, they followed the impression created by their passions, inflamed by their prejudices. If they had been willing to calm down and consider the purpose of the gratuitous schools objectively, they would have recognized that these schools are open only to the poor who have no means of paying for an education. Such children were in no position to enrich their teachers, and hence had always been neglected. There never had been any great effort made to bring them into the Little Schools or those of the Writing Masters. Men who sell their services expect nothing from people who have nothing to give them in return; they are more apt to drive the poor away from their establishments than to invite them in. So what did the schoolmasters have to fear from the new teachers, who welcomed to their schools only the youngsters who often lacked bread as much

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*In 17th-century France, most primary education was carried on in private schools run by men belonging either to the Corporation of Masters of the Little Schools, or to that of the Writing Masters. The former taught most of the usual subjects, but were restricted in the right to teach penmanship, which was the privilege of the Writing Masters, in virtue of a royal decree dating back to 1570. These latter constantly tried to win the right to teach the other subjects, too; so that the two corporations were constantly engaged in litigation. However, both joined forces to combat the rise of the charity schools which they thought threatened their own schools where fees were paid.

as they lacked instruction? Should they not rather have been grateful to the Brothers for taking charge of a whole category of children whom the world calls "scum?"*

But, the schoolmasters replied, the richer children are also admitted along with the poor; and thus we suffer a loss when they go to the charity schools to be instructed gratuitously. This was the only objection with any substance that the masters could make to the Brothers. It was not difficult to refute. For to send one's child to a school which caters expressly to the destitute is to declare oneself poor. Now, if even the poorest people are reluctant to admit their penury, would well-to-do people try to pass for beggars?** Do we not know how pride revolts against everything that smacks of destitution? It simply passes belief that parents able to pay for their children's education would go to beg for it from charity schools.

Furthermore, it not infrequently happens that people who seem comfortably situated are not really such. Had the schoolmasters verified the financial status of the children who left them to go to the Brothers' schools? How many children are there in these schools who need someone to give them food, not ask them for money! Again, nothing in this world is exempt from drawbacks. If a few well-off parents did send their children to the Brothers' schools, they did so at the expense of their self-respect. Abuses can crop up everywhere; it is not possible to prevent all of them. Certainly, the Brothers had no business asking their pupils to prove that they were indeed poor. By enrolling them in these schools their families publicly admitted as much. The admission was well known; consequently, no one could deny their claim of being poor.

Finally, even supposing that a few well-to-do children did find their way into the Christian schools among the poor, no great harm would be done. On the contrary, it would be a disgraceful and disastrous thing to abandon a whole class of children to ignorance and a vicious way of life. After all, the schoolmasters, too, are part of the general public which is interested to the highest degree in the establishment of Christian and gratuitous schools. The multiplication of these schools is of such capital importance for Church and State that those who are members of both these societies should not hesitate to sacrifice a minor advantage of theirs to procure this great benefit for the public at large.

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*In the French original, canaille.

**It should be kept in mind that in the vocabulary of the times, the "poor" were a real, recognized social class, made up of people who were actually destitute. Many of them had no fixed abode; they had no trade or regular means of earning a livelihood; they lived largely by their wits or by the charity of the wealthy and of the Church. Although the masters of the Little Schools were urged to accept a certain number of the children of the "poor" into their schools, this recommendation usually remained a dead letter.

The Parisian schoolmasters, therefore, were needlessly alarmed over the establishment of the Christian schools. They failed to reflect that these schools were filled with children who would not have been admitted to their own establishments, since they were unable to pay for the instruction given there. They fancied they saw financial ruin staring them in the face, and that their families would be reduced to beggary unless they hastened to have expelled from the city these men who did not charge anything for teaching the poor. Moreover, they were encouraged in their attitude by the man in charge of the St. Sulpice schools, of whom mention has already been made.

Since through his slanders and his secret intrigues, he had not been able to have De La Salle and the Brothers sent away from a position to which he himself had called them, he thought he could achieve his ends by stirring up and encouraging the schoolmasters. Without losing time, these latter had recourse to legal and to direct action. First they caused everything in the schools to be seized; then they subpoenaed the Brothers and their Superior and filed suit against them on the pretext that they were violating the corporation's privileges and, that without any right to do so, they were taking it upon themselves to teach school. The first hearing was held before the tribunal of the Precentor* who handed down a sentence in the masters' favor and against the Christian and gratuitous schools.

This incident came close to indisposing the holy Founder completely and might have stifled his work at its inception; the distaste he felt for lawsuits tied his hands; he would have preferred to abandon the entire enterprise, if he could have done so without betraying God's cause. He could not bring himself to go to court; and he seriously considered yielding to the complaints of his adversaries. However, it was pointed out to him that his cause was also the cause of all the poor children and of the public; that their rights, too, were involved, not merely his. After taking charge of the instruction of these poor, miserable and ignorant youngsters, could he without falling into cowardice and pusillanimity let them return to their first state of ignorance and lack of education? The same charity, which had made him renounce everything in order to found a society of Brothers dedicated to the Christian and gratuitous instruction of the needy, would be wounded if he failed to defend their rights; it demanded that he make himself their advocate, after being their educator. He should have foreseen that these greedy men would not fail to look with jealous eyes on the Christian schools he was setting up, would sound the alarm and cry out to high Heaven; and foreseeing this, he should not have expected them to give up their attacks and come to terms with men whom they considered their rivals.

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*The Precentor was a member of the Cathedral Chapter who, in the name of the Chapter, exercised jurisdiction over the Little Schools. Historically, these had evolved from the Cathedral schools established in the Middle Ages, hence the Chapter's interest in them. The Precentor (Ecolâtre or Grand Chantre in French) was the official protector of the Little Schools and fiercely defended their rights and privileges. The legal battles that went on throughout the 17th century were satirized by Boileau in Le Lutrin.

After all, an unjust lawsuit was just one more cross; a man who had already borne so many others should not refuse this one if Providence placed it on his shoulders. Finally, his Director told him it was his duty in conscience to uphold God's cause, which was also that of the poor. This made him give in. Convinced that this was God's will, he pursued the case, appealed against the first sentence, and in a short time the matter was concluded in his favor.

It is true that the public was on his side. The good that the Christian and gratuitous schools were doing was obvious and pleaded in his favor. Everybody realized that the poor were the only ones who had anything to fear from the loss of this lawsuit which affected them so closely. It was clear that closing the Christian schools would have been to give victory to these unjust passions at the expense of religion and charity.

I almost forgot to mention that De La Salle also owed his success in this case to prayer and to the intercession of the Most Blessed Virgin. To obtain the protection of the holy Mother of God in this affair he brought the Brothers to the shrine of Our Lady of Virtues, a much frequented place of pilgrimage, two leagues from Paris. He celebrated Mass there, and all the Brothers received Communion. Almost the entire morning was spent in prayer; they remained at the shrine for three hours. And the day ended as it had begun, in silence, prayer and recollection. Some crusts of bread were the only nourishment that they consumed during this exhausting daylong journey. As for their Superior, he came home fasting and ate nothing till evening.

As soon as De La Salle found himself rid of this ticklish affair, he was caught up in another, the first in that long series of crosses which he had to shoulder so long as he stayed in the parish of St. Sulpice. Enemies and rivals of his work had just invoked the law against him. No sooner had he obtained a favorable sentence than the friends and protectors of his Institute launched another campaign against him. In the former instance he had been cited before a tribunal where the judges were not on his accusers' side; he was heard, his arguments were listened to, and he won his case. In the latter, he was summoned before a tribunal which was favorable to him personally, but opposed to his spirit and his convictions. Here he found that his judge was the very one who wanted the Brothers to change their habit.

The pious Founder, who had received lights and graces concerning the government of his Community which the great men who opposed him had not, foresaw the consequences of such a change and resisted it. However highly he regarded the authority of the person who was promoting the change, he felt that it was supremely important to withstand it and to back up his opposition by solid reasons. All those who came to know the subject of this controversy agreed with his arguments and adopted his opinion; but this did not prevent him from suffering for his victory, through a drying up of charitable donations and through his being given the reputation of a stubborn and pigheaded man.

We must state things as they are. The person whom he had to contradict was a man who enjoyed great esteem in Paris, and was well thought of. The Brothers' habit, which at the same time seemed so unusual, and drew down on them the raillery of the common people and the derision of the worldly, he found displeasing. He was afraid that this lack of respect for the Brothers

personally might extend to their ministry. His zeal for Christian and gratuitous schools which were beginning to produce their benefits in his parish, made him eager not to let them get compromised in the disfavor shown to the teachers on account of the unusual type of garb they wore, a garb which nobody liked. This great man, whose merits equalled his reputation, felt, as did many other persons, that De La Salle should not remain so inflexible about modifying external details which did not really affect the interior. Since "the habit does not make the monk," he should not have been so set on the Brothers' garb, which attracted attention by its outlandish appearance, and only made people laugh at and ridicule those who wore it.

So Baudran, as parish priest of the parish where the Christian schools were located, as their protector and benefactor, and as the spiritual Director of the Servant of God, felt that he had a right to impose this change and to demand this act of submission and condescendence from De La Salle. He wanted the Brothers to adopt the long ecclesiastical mantle and habit. If he was alone in favoring this particular solution to the problem, the public in general agreed with him in clamoring for a change of some kind. The public, however, was ignorant of the weighty reasons which had led De La Salle to give to the Brothers' habit the appearance it possessed. These reasons are so cogent that they convince anyone who reads them with an open mind. Thinking that no doubt Baudran, who desired only what was best, who loved De La Salle and was genuinely interested in his work, would understand his reasons and accept them, the Servant of God took up his pen once more, to state fully and clearly the reasons which had induced him to give the Brothers their special habit. He drew up a memorandum on the subject.*

This document seemed to be so logically thought out and so strongly worded that the person to whom the holy Founder showed it, and whose advice he sought, urged him to remain firm on this point. It is true that De La Salle does not tell us the identity of this person whom he consulted, saying only that he was considered very wise. But by this laudatory epithet he really indicated the celebrated superior of the Seminary of St. Sulpice, Father Tronson, whose prudence was widely acknowledged throughout France. It was to him that De La Salle had recourse in all his major difficulties, considering him as a source of enlightenment and as a man who had the reputation of being one of the oracles of the French clergy. Since De La Salle had been one of his students and had had the good fortune of being under his guidance while at the Seminary, and since Tronson combined great depth of knowledge and penetration of mind with a high degree of humility and virtue, it was only natural for him to ask his advice. So long as Tronson lived, he did in fact turn to him for counsel; he often went to discuss matters with him at the Seminary at Issy where he then lived. When he could not secure the advice of this enlightened man he would consult Bauin, then director of the Seminary of St. Sulpice, whose holiness was recognized by all those who dealt with him.

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*This document, the Mémoire sur l'habit, is the oldest extant manuscript of St. La Salle which we possess. It is in the Archives of the Institute in Rome.

Thus the holy Founder, whose unfailing rule was obedience, in his moments of doubt sought from the greatest servants of God an indication of God's will for him. Once this had been pointed out to him he remained immovable. For his principle was not to listen to voices other than those which he had consulted in a spirit of faith, and which he had come to recognize as the indicators of God's good pleasure.

What added to his difficulty on this occasion was that he had to go against the wishes of his superior, both as parish priest and as his spiritual director, the man who was the protector of his work. This apparent lack of submission was of course described as hardheadedness and stubbornness. The Servant of God was treated as a person who thought he was always right, and would never give in, and who had to have his own way, regardless. He was told as much to his face, amid bitter reproaches; fortunately for him he had the wisest persons he could consult on his side. Of course, when Baudran became his adversary he could really no longer demand that De La Salle should conform to his every wish; nor could he expect his opinions to prevail with a man who did not feel that the point at issue really belonged to the sphere of confession or spiritual direction.

We should also observe that the form of the Brothers' garb had been settled for a number of years already. If people did not fully approve of it as yet, they had at least begun to get used to it. Changing it now would only have given rise to more talk. Furthermore, it was not appropriate to come back on this matter and to start discussing the habit all over again, since this could have gone on indefinitely, and all the parish priests who already had schools taught by the Brothers, or who would have opened them later, might have put forward their own proposals concerning the Brothers' habit and rule. In fine, in all the opposition that the two great men we have mentioned caused De La Salle, the Servant of God acted only in accordance with the advice given him by the wisest counsellors he could find. With regard to De La Barmondière, he did nothing save on the advice of Baudran; and with regard to the latter he acted only on the recommendations of Tronson. Without this guidance he had not taken a step and had done nothing of himself. This is what the virtuous Superior of the Brothers himself declares in the autographed memorandum he has left us on the subject.

While he was being thus crucified exteriorly, he also had to endure more frustration on the part of the two Brothers whom he had brought with him from Rheims, and whom he had specially chosen to be his collaborators in founding the establishment in the capital. It seemed that he could not have picked two better helpers, for both of these young men had received from God great aptitudes for their mission. At first, De La Salle had no reason to regret the preference he had given these two for this undertaking, for they labored with zeal and shared all his toil. They witnessed his patience, his humility, his silence and moderation amidst calumny and contradiction, and at first they seemed to imitate him. They were associated with him in his sufferings and pains, and shared the chalice with him. But how great is human frailty! These two disciples, apparently so deeply attached to him, so like their father, and so worthy of him, began after two years to rebel against his austere ways and became his persecutors within the Community.

The wicked spirit who knows all the defects of the human heart could discern in these men a great deal of secret ambition and of that hidden pride which seeks the first place and feels it is being treated unjustly when that place is given to another. As jealousy is the usual cause that gives rise to presumption and unmasks it, Satan decided to attack these two Brothers by this means. What was the Servant of God's surprise on seeing his two closest collaborators creating difficulties for him and instigating discord in the house when he placed a third man over them. As we mentioned before, the good order that reigned in the schools had increased the number of students. Two Brothers could not cope with the task, so De La Salle had sent for two more from Rheims to share the labor and help the pioneers gather in the harvest. One of these latter, as talented for teaching as the first two, was superior to them in piety, and so he was chosen by the pious Founder to assume the leadership of the group.

The pride smouldering in the hearts of the first two Brothers flared up on this occasion. Their self-love was deeply wounded when they saw themselves placed in a position subordinate to this latecomer, in a school where they had already labored with so much success and shared their father's humiliations and sufferings. Jealousy, which is always aroused by any preference shown to others, and which considers their merits as a personal affront, embittered them against their Superior and led them to revolt. The first of the two, after having sorely tried his father's virtue, left the house thus wounding De La Salle's heart cruelly. The latter, who loved this wayward son deeply, wept over his departure, as the father in the Gospel wept over the prodigal.

This Brother had great abilities; he would have been irreproachable if, to his remarkable qualities of body and mind, and even to the gifts of grace and virtue, he had been able to join humility. His loss was a severe blow to the recently established Community. Obviously, when a flock is very small the loss even of a single sheep is hard for the shepherd to bear, especially when the one he loses is of such high quality. So the virtuous Founder was extremely distressed over the disturbance this event caused, and over the departure of this Brother. In addition to the scandal he gave the other Brothers, his leaving could not have occurred at a less opportune time for the new establishment in Paris. No other teacher was so useful for this school which was beginning to enjoy a good reputation. Tall, well-proportioned, a skilled penman, he had a way with the boys, was zealous for their instruction, pious and irreproachable in his conduct. He would be remembered today among the most outstanding Brothers, if he had been able to overcome his pride.

The second would have been entirely like the first if his pride had not led him even further. If he did not leave the Society just yet, he made his patient Superior pay a high price for the two or three years he still remained in it. It would seem that the only reason he did stay was to put John Baptist's virtue to the test; and that the devil kept him in the Community to torment his Superior in every way. This arrogant and hot-tempered individual, after having caused his father a thousand kinds of trouble, carried his insolence and disrespect to the point of raising a violent and sacrilegious hand against him to strike him. The devil, as I have said, to whom he had yielded the control of his soul, did not let him leave the Community until he had first sullied his conscience with this crime. Once it had been

consummated, he incited him to withdraw in 1691. What great services this unfortunate man could have continued to render to the Christian schools, for which God had given him such talent, if he had not allowed the spirit of pride to enter his soul! But what good are natural gifts and talents? They can only lead to the loss of the soul which is not humble.

The departure of the first Brother, which happened rather unexpectedly, left a vacancy on the staff of the Paris schools which had to be filled without delay. Apparently, Rheims could not provide a teacher of equal ability at this time; or else the transfer would have occasioned too much disturbance in the schools of Laon, Guise and Rethel if it had been necessary to choose someone among the Brothers teaching there to send to Paris. So, for several months, the deserter's place would have remained empty if De La Salle himself had not stepped into the breach. He replaced the Brothers everywhere he happened to be, and was delighted to show them how much he esteemed and honored their work, since he considered it a pleasure, an honor and a duty to fill this role when occasion offered.

Chapter IX

De La Salle Falls Desperately Ill, but Recovers. He Goes to Rheims, and on His Return Finds Brother Henri l'Heureux Dead. The Impression That This Event Made on Him. Regulations He Adopted for His Community As a Result.

De La Salle's virtue, purified by so many different crosses, was put to a fresh test towards the end of 1690. He fell ill and almost died. This furnished him a new occasion for exhibiting his heroic virtue. The illness began from sheer exhaustion on his part; and by not taking better care of himself he made it worse, so that his very life was feared for. This general weakness with which the malady started was caused by the extreme harshness he displayed in regard to his body. If the reader will recall everything said above about his vigils and fasts, the fatiguing trips he took on foot, his stern and frequent use of the discipline, the poor and unappetizing food he ate after forcing himself to get used to it, his habit of sleeping completely clothed, or stretched out on a board, or on the bare ground, his almost constant use of hair shirts, chains and pointed iron barbs, in short his constant effort to mortify his senses, he will be surprised only that the Servant of God did not succumb sooner to the load of so much austerity, and that illness should have so long spared a frame ruined to this extent by penance. But sickness finally overtook him, and threw the Brothers into alarm because it seemed to threaten his life.

This new Job owed his children an example of virtue in illness which he had not yet given them. The devil may have imagined that De La Salle did not deserve a place among the perfect, since he had not yet endured the trials of ill health. In fact, this wicked spirit, whose malice is consummate, who knows

the human heart so perfectly and the weak points at which it can be attacked most successfully, knew that of all the various kinds of struggle, the one from which a man who is too tender towards his body finds it most difficult to emerge victorious is the trial of sickness. This test prostrates even the most vigorous souls. Man is attached to his body more than to anything else, for it is part of his very nature. It does not take such a very exalted degree of virtue for him to remain indifferent when he sees himself despoiled of his wealth, or even when he loses his children and everything else that he possesses outside of himself. Job, that perfect man whom God Himself praised, did not deserve these expressions of esteem, according to Satan, until he had undergone the test of ill health. Perfect as Job was, the malicious spirit expected that his heart, proof against all other temptations, would succumb to this one.

It must be admitted that a mortal illness could not have befallen the pious Founder at a more critical time for his work; for it constituted a real crisis for his Community. If he had died, it would most likely have perished with him.

The Servant of God had finally opened in Paris the establishment that Father Barré had so greatly desired to see him start. In the process of founding it, he had already undergone all kinds of unusual difficulties. The institution was flourishing in the midst of thorns; it prospered amidst crosses and held out great promise for the future. But the success of this work seemed, according to the ordinary ways of Providence, to be conditioned by his life. If he died, it would fail. This was the double sacrifice which God seemed to ask of him; and it was so that he could offer God this double holocaust with all possible merit that He brought him to death's door.

A man who paid more attention to his health than De La Salle did might have foreseen this illness and avoided it, for the exhaustion he suffered should have warned him that his constitution was weakening, and that he could no longer bear the overwhelming burden of labors and austerities which he had been carrying for so long. By lightening this somewhat and providing his body with some rest and decent food, his strength might have been restored and his health would not have broken down entirely. But, as we know, saints never feel any pity for their body. They are never severe enough towards it, in their opinion; and far from regretting having treated it with too much rigor they accuse themselves rather of showing it too much consideration and of listening to its complaints too readily. If this pious harshness is indeed a fault, we must admit that the hero of our history is as guilty of it as anyone ever was, and that he cannot be blameless. Instead of heeding the muted lamentations of a body which complained of its weakness and of its failing strength, De La Salle, in addition to his usual austerities, undertook a journey on foot from Paris to Rheims, where business connected with the Institute called him.

The physical collapse that overtook him there did not take long to declare itself. He had no doubt felt some premonitions of it during the trip, but his courage disregarded them until he arrived. After taking care of the business on hand as quickly as possible, he planned on returning to Paris immediately. He wished to disregard his malady; but it was too serious. He could no longer

dissemble; and before the violence of the attack he was forced to yield and take to his bed. This decision, by a man who never listened to his aches and pains, gave everyone to understand that the illness must be really serious and made everyone fearful of its progress. What fright seized upon his little flock on seeing its shepherd laid low! What alarm overwhelmed his children when they beheld their father, who was so necessary to his family, obliged to remain in bed! This portended nothing good, as one can well imagine. The tears of joy that his return had drawn from their eyes were now changed into tears of sorrow, and they began to regret the joy his presence in Rheims had afforded them. They would have preferred to know that he was still in Paris, but in good health.

However, in the midst of their consternation, the example of his courage, peace and serenity reassured them; and they thought they could read on his countenance that this illness was not going to be fatal, that they should take hold of themselves, and that the best remedy they could offer him was continual prayer for his health to be restored. So, each one resolved to do violence to Heaven, and to beg God to give back to them the master who was so necessary, the father whom they loved so dearly. Not that they neglected to provide other remedies for him. These were simple enough; for all he really needed was to afford his exhausted body some genuine rest and decent food. The difficulty was to find such food in a house where everything was lacking. True, he still had at Rheims a family that was wealthy, quite capable of furnishing him with the necessary relief; but he had forgotten them and they him. His relatives had washed their hands of him ever since he had gone to share the lives of the poor schoolmasters, and especially since he had given away his patrimony to the poor and resigned his canonry to a stranger rather than to his own brother.

In addition, since he had begun wearing the Brothers' habit, he had become a source of embarrassment to his relatives, just as they had become to him. Thus, no help could be expected from them. His only resource was Divine Providence, Which never failed him. His children provided for his needs with every possible care and tenderness; and Divine Goodness gave them all the help that their father needed to restore his health. But a man who considered himself a stranger in his native city grew weary of so much attention and longed to get away from it. All the relief lavished on his body seemed to offend his fervor. This tender care seemed burdensome to him; and if he could not help making use of it, he did so with a sobriety which mortified his senses, and in such a way that his flesh could not feel very satisfied about it.

This first bout of illness was marked by an outstanding example of regularity given by the Servant of God. His grandmother, who was still living, had always loved him tenderly. This good woman was alarmed on hearing of his failing health, so she hastened to the Brothers' house and was on her way to his room to visit him. She did not imagine that her sex would create any difficulty, or hinder her from visiting her grandson, and felt that her title of grandmother gave her a right which might properly be refused to other women. Anyhow, the Brothers' house was not yet a recognized religious Community, had no special privileges nor any canonical status which would have absolutely excluded all women. And even if it was proper to exclude others from the sickroom, it did not seem right to extend this prohibition to a grandmother.

However, by an order from her grandson she was stopped at the door of the parlor, and was requested to wait for him there. Then the sick man, making a considerable effort to overcome his weakness, gathered together the little strength he had left, got up from bed, dressed, and came down to receive her.

The worthy lady was much surprised at this, and seemed offended that she had not found any warmer welcome from her grandson than any other woman would have received. She found it hard to accept a refusal which seemed to disregard her maternal quality. So De La Salle had to listen to some reproaches from her at first. "What objection can there be," she asked, "for a mother to enter her child's room? Doesn't nature itself give her this right? What evil consequences could possibly flow from such a visit? Are you not failing to return my affection, when I have come here only to show you my tender concern? Must I attribute your conduct to indifference or to lack of feeling? You call it an example of regularity; but is not your conduct itself irregular? At least ought it not to be considered a mere scruple?"

To justify his conduct the Servant of God appealed to the rule he had made forbidding women to enter the house, and to the obligation he felt he was under of upholding this rule by his own example. "There is indeed no objection to your coming to see me when I am sick," he told her, "but I can give an outstanding example by not permitting this liberty between us. In the future, no Brother can ever have anything to say if the door of his room is barred to women, even to his near relatives, when it is remembered that my own grandmother did not have the privilege of visiting me when I was sick, save in the parlor." The Servant of God then tried to make light of his illness, and conversed with his grandmother as he would have done had he been well.

No sooner did he think himself somewhat better than he decided to leave for Paris. A longer sojourn in a city which did not treat him with scorn any more had no interest for him. The desire to leave his native city where his family resided, his impatience to take up once again his regular lifestyle, and to give free rein to his penchant for austerity, urged him to leave Rheims. So he did and set out for Paris against the doctors' advice. He was going to meet in the latter city a new bout of sickness. He reached there so exhausted and so ill that he had to go to bed as soon as he reached the house. The malady grew worse even though he kept to his bed; and after some six weeks he suffered a retention of urine which brought him to death's door.

This new spell of ill health induced in the Parisian Community the same reaction that the previous one had provoked in Rheims: consternation among the Brothers. They were all frightened of losing their dear Superior, the soul and support of their Institute. But, accustomed to expect consolation and help from God alone, they turned to Him in constant prayer, and agreed to carry on gentle but holy violence towards their merciful Father so as to oblige Him to give back to them the one who took His place in their regard on earth, and who as such was their sole support. What power does not this pure, ardent and unanimous prayer have on God's heart? Rarely does it present itself before the throne of His majesty without being heard. The Brothers' prayer, so much like that of the early Church for St. Peter, constantly implored the Divine Mercy to give back to their bereaved family its leader and guide; it was powerful enough to obtain this grace.

Helvetius, a Dutch doctor who enjoyed much celebrity in Paris at this time, proposed a remedy; but he warned the patient that it would involve either his death or his cure. Consequently, he told the Brothers to have John Baptist receive Holy Viaticum before the remedy was applied, so as to draw down God's blessing on the operation, and to safeguard the sick man against all eventualities. Baudran himself came, with much pomp and solemnity, in the procession made up of several priests from the community and seminary of St. Sulpice, all wearing their surplices, and with candles in their hands.

A large number of persons of all social ranks accompanied the Blessed Sacrament, either to honor the pious patient or to have an opportunity of seeing a saint on his deathbed. The doctor himself wished to be present, too, in order to share in the general edification. Around the patient's bed the Brothers wept like children about to lose their father, and showed by their sobs and cries what a deep wound the loss of so beloved and so necessary a person would make in their hearts.

So great was their consternation that the parish priest thought that charity made it a duty for him to comfort them in the presence of their pious Founder, and to comfort him as well, by promising that he would be a father to them. As this great man was naturally eloquent and spoke impromptu with grace and ease, he used all his talent in giving courage, by his words filled with tenderness, to the hearts of the poor Brothers who were bewailing their lot, and already considered themselves orphans. The only legacy that these poor children could expect from a father poorer than they was his blessing and a few words of edification.

The humility of De La Salle was forced to grant them this favor, under orders from Baudran, his parish priest and spiritual director. The sick man was so weak that he could only pronounce these words, that his heart had so often inspired him to utter; but he pronounced them with all the love and tenderness of a father. "I recommend to you close union and complete obedience." He would not have been able to give them his blessing, if a charitable hand had not upheld his. Having thus made his testament, the only one he could make, and seated on his bed wearing the stole and surplice, he received his Creator with that same attitude of faith, reverence and devotion which he never lost.

The great Physician of souls gave His blessing to the corporeal remedies which were so hazardous that they could have led either to health or to death. Helvetius, who took a deep interest in his patient, did not leave his side. He remained with him after the departure of the parish priest, anxiously waiting to see if the remedy would take effect, and wavered between hope and fear for a considerable time. But finally he felt reassured and saw that his medicine had produced the desired result. The patient was relieved; in a few days he was able to take some food and began to mend. As soon as the humble invalid felt a little strength returning, he used it to give a new proof of his humility. This virtue which dislikes imposing burdens on anyone made him endure with impatience the anxiety and the extra care his illness had occasioned for the Brothers.

A public hospital* was the place that his heart longed to be in, and to which he asked to be sent. This last refuge for human misery was the lodging he envied other poor people for. The spirit of poverty made him desire to go there, the spirit of humility made it a duty for him, and the spirit of charity made him eager to go. So, he begged his disciples to have him brought to the charity ward and thus be rid of him. Excusing himself for the trouble he was causing them, he urged them to unburden themselves of it and of him, and begged them as a favor to find a place for him in the asylum open to all the poor. But that, of course, was the very reason why the Brothers could not bring themselves to agree to what he wanted. Never would they have entrusted to the hands of strangers the care of an invalid so dear to them. They looked after him as sedulously as good children can do for a dear father, and provided for all his needs insofar as their extreme poverty permitted.

During these two spells of illness, or rather this one protracted malady, De La Salle showed neither anxiety over the future of his Institute, which his death threatened with imminent ruin, nor any desire to live, nor alarm over what would happen to his beloved children. All he sought to do was to keep himself united to Jesus Christ, to share His sufferings in peace, to maintain his heart detached and in total indifference as regards living or dying, to abandon himself to God's hands, to resign himself completely to His holy will, to offer himself as a sacrifice to His greatness and majesty, and to assume the dispositions of a willing victim awaiting with tranquil submission the hand which was to immolate him.

The pious Founder, having been delivered most unexpectedly from the dangers and agonies of death which had come so close to him, thought only of consecrating to the glory of God and to the progress of his Institute, with renewed zeal and redoubled fervor, the life that God had given back to him. Once recovered from his illness, the first thing he did was to forget all about it. He had just found out by experience that his body was not made of steel, and needed proper care even more than most; but this experience did not make him much more indulgent than formerly towards himself. As always, he was the only one on whom he took no pity, and continued to mistreat.

A second journey to Rheims, where his presence was needed, furnished him with the occasion of offering God a new sacrifice, perhaps the most painful of his whole life. We know how attached earthly fathers are to their children and how much they suffer on losing those who hold first place in their hearts. Spiritual fathers suffer no less when God takes away from them those among their children whose virtue makes them doubly dear, and on whom they had founded high hopes. De la Salle had just offered God the sacrifice of his own life; God had been satisfied with the dispositions of his heart, and in His goodness had given him back to his fledgling Institute which had no other visible support.

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*A "public hospital" at this time was, in spite of the devotedness of the people who ran it, a pretty grim place where the poor were brought to survive if they could, or to die often in conditions of great squalor.

But in his stead He wanted another victim, a choice one, the best that the little flock could provide. This victim was Brother Henri l'Heureux, of whom we have already spoken at length. Among the Founder's children no one else was worthier to replace him in God's sight. By designating him as his successor, De La Salle had preferred him to all the rest, the Brothers had ratified this choice by electing him to be their Superior in the place of De La Salle. He thus occupied in the hearts of all the first place. He seemed to be the Founder's right arm; he was considered the only one capable of replacing him in his absence, and of making him live again after his death. For this reason he was the victim most agreeable to God, and the one whose death would be most keenly felt by the Servant of God.

God chose him and took him away by a premature death, at a time and amid circumstances which added to the pangs that wrenched the heart of this new Abraham, who so loved this new Isaac, and counted on him to insure his spiritual posterity. As we mentioned previously, the Servant of God had called this Brother to Paris to have him ordained. When he left for Rheims, he appointed him to direct the house; he expected to find him there on his return, and to present him in person for ordination. Such was the plan the pious Founder had in mind; but in God's designs Brother Henri was to die a simple Brother, and by his death to disrupt the projects of De La Salle.

No sooner had the latter reached Rheims than a letter arrived informing him that Brother Henri had fallen ill. Another told him that the case was serious; a third declared that the doctors had given up hope. The unperturbed Superior, who had left Brother Henri in perfect health, did not pay too much attention to these missives that apprised him of this illness; he did not think it could be too serious, or that there was any real danger. He felt that the Brothers in Paris were needlessly alarmed, and should not have tried to make him share their panic. He still did not believe there was anything much amiss when a last letter came telling him that the sick man was dying, and reproaching him with disregarding the previous communications.

At this, the good father, as though awakening from a deep sleep, reproached himself for his incredulity, realized the danger in which his spiritual son lay, and understood, with a pang, that he might indeed lose him. Although Brother Henri's condition had not seemed too serious at the beginning, it quickly turned into a fatal malady almost before anyone realized its gravity. John Baptist set out at once for Paris and made as much haste as possible. Apparently, Brother Henri's illness had started by a slight fever which suddenly rose and brought on delirium. Death intervened so rapidly that the dying man barely had time to receive the last Sacraments. Brother Henri had been buried for two days when De La Salle reached Paris, around midnight.

The first thing he learned on arriving was that Brother Henri was dead. The news broke his heart. Never in his whole life did it receive a deeper wound. The first onslaught of sorrow made him shed tears; but getting hold of himself, he appeared ashamed of this weakness and reproached himself for it. This first movement of human grief was followed by a deeply religious reaction and resignation to God's holy will. He adored His eternal designs, and declared on the spot that the sudden demise of Brother Henri was a warning from

Heaven, indicating that the Institute should not include priests among its members. Ever since this event, he remained more firmly convinced than ever that his Community should be based entirely on simplicity and humility, and that it would be destroyed if the priesthood ever were introduced into it.

For, by distinguishing some members from the others, the priesthood would produce inequality among them and cause division. The sacordotal character would oblige those possessing it to apply themselves to abstruse subjects, and would give them more theological proficiency than the role of a schoolteacher requires. With this intellectual superiority over the rest of the Brothers, they would succumb to vanity, curiosity, singularity, controversy, over-attachment to their studies, dispensations from the Rule, ambition, and the desire of exercising the more brilliant functions of the sacred ministry. All these defects would not take long to breed others: distaste for the mission of the Brother teaching in a gratuitous school, boredom in this laborious and tiresome occupation, and finally envy and jealousy. In a word, the Brothers chosen and given preference for promotion to Sacred Orders would not be slow in preferring themselves to the others, in trying to dominate them, in losing esteem for their vocation and the spirit that should characterize it, along with the grace of their state; and they would make others lose all this also.

Would such priest-Brothers be humble enough to confine themselves to the limitations of a vocation which has nothing flamboyant about it in the world's eyes, nothing to flatter self-love? Would they restrict themselves to the role of the schoolmaster, and to the useful and necessary function of teaching catechism simply, without trying to display their talents? Those who thought they possessed special abilities would be tempted to exhibit these to the world, to leave the classroom and to start preaching from the pulpits to win worldly acclaim. The flattering desire to join the reputation of a spiritual director to that of a popular preacher would make them want to be confessors as well as preachers. And would the preacher, the director be willing to leave the pulpit and the confessional to come back to the classroom? Would a large crowd of hearers belonging to the best society, or a following of distinguished and devout women not make these priest-Brothers devote themselves to these eye-catching functions? Would they not be tempted to prefer these reputation-building sermons and the other glorious functions of the priesthood to the instruction of poor and unprepossessing children?

It must be admitted, therefore, that the priestly state is not compatible with that of a teaching Brother, and that De La Salle was rightly inspired when he forbade his followers to aspire towards the sanctuary. Nothing could be wiser; hence nothing can be more necessary than the rule he made that closes this door to them. There is perhaps no other which affects the Brothers' state more directly and which is more important for them to observe, if they wish to preserve the spirit and grace of their vocation. The death of Brother Henri l'Heureux which was the occasion for this rule seems, if one considers all the circumstances, to have been a sign of the Divine Will on this point. All the Brothers should keep this in mind and let this remembrance help them put aside all temptations to study for the priesthood, if the thought ever came to them.

De La Salle felt that this point was so important that he took the precaution of forbidding the Brothers to learn Latin, and of enjoining on those who knew Latin not to make use of it under any pretext, so as to put everybody on the same footing, and to maintain them all in the spirit of simplicity and humility which should characterize them. This rule is the guardian of the others, the strong outer wall which defends the fortress. Experience has shown, in fact, that the Brothers who know Latin or who have some acquaintance with philosophy and theology are not as a rule those who succeed best in the Institute, and that several of them failed to persevere because they never acquired the spirit of simplicity and humility that their vocation calls for. Instead, allowing themselves to be led astray by vain dreams, they wanted to play the role of professors, rather than learn how to carry out the ordinary duties of their state well, something which is not as easy as one might imagine.

There have been, however, several Brothers who put aside what they had learned in their higher studies, and attached themselves only to knowing Jesus Christ and Him crucified, to imitating His hidden and obscure life, to making themselves humble and obedient like Him. Such men, who had truly acquired the spirit of their state, preserved simplicity and humility, and carried out their task as teachers with great blessings from Heaven. Brother Henri l'Heureux was one of these. After finishing his seminary studies he still seemed the same as before: simple, humble, regular, mortified, obedient, indeed a model of all these virtues. After Brother Henri's death, Baudran gave him a solemn funeral, the details of which he arranged himself. The parish priest of St. Sulpice wished by this token of generosity to draw attention to these men whom the world took pleasure in vilifying and making fun of, and to provide a striking proof of the esteem he felt for the new Institute.

This virtuous Brother, who was so deeply regretted by his Superior, had deserved a special place in his heart, and the universal esteem of all his Brothers, who respected and loved him as a living and breathing copy of De La Salle. In those early days of joyous ardor in the Institute this Brother was the leader of the most fervent; he distinguished himself by the practice of the purest virtues. Humility was the one he cultivated the most and of which he gave the most outstanding examples. As he had been one of De La Salle's earliest recruits, he was also one of those who shared from the beginning the insults and humiliations that befell him. He had plenty of occasions to drink deep with De La Salle from the chalice of opprobrium with which the entire population of Rheims rewarded the efforts of these new apostolic workers during the first eight or ten years that they labored in that city.

Brother Henri, far from growing disenchanted with such a humiliating vocation, succeeded in drawing from it all the profit which it provided for his soul. He had learned at the feet of Jesus crucified that scorn and insults were precious graces, like those bestowed on the greatest saints. So he applied to welcome them with eagerness, following the example of De La Salle. This worthy son of such a father had become so much like him that the Brothers thought they beheld the one in the other, when John Baptist's humility forced them to choose Brother Henri to replace him as the Superior. But this son occupying the place of his father, this simple Brother raised above the priest,

never forgot who he was, nor who was the humble ex-Superior whom he saw at his feet. Obliged to command the one whom he should have served, and whom he wanted to obey, he tried to do so in the spirit and with the humility displayed by St. Joseph when he saw Jesus and Mary conforming to his orders.

Embarrassed at seeing De La Salle so dependent on him, he humbled himself and was overwhelmed by confusion the more the holy priest submitted to his direction. In addition to his rare humility which won all hearts, Brother Henri displayed other excellent gifts. He possessed an agile and penetrating mind and a talent for speaking well. To this he joined great mortification of all his senses, a deep attraction for prayer and a thirst for obedience, the fruit of his profound humility. These last two virtues showed themselves very obviously when the Vicars-General came to the Community to depose him and to put De La Salle back in his rightful place. No moment had ever seemed so sweet to this humble Brother as that in which he saw his beloved father restored to his position as superior. He eagerly profited by his return to the ranks, which he had so much desired; and he took up again his former practices of humility and obedience so readily that he seemed to wish to rival the examples De La Salle had just given to them all.

These two virtues proved useful to him in the study of Latin, philosophy and theology which he then undertook on his Superior's orders. They merited for him such brilliant and profound insights that he won sincere admiration at the theology school of the Canons Regular of St. Denis at Rheims. When questioned, or when someone challenged him, he seemed hesitant and thoughtful at first; the words came out of his mouth with difficulty. He delayed his reply, which occasionally provoked the impatience of his fellow students, who laughed at him and called him sometimes the "big ox." But once he began to speak he did so with such ease, and his replies were so penetrating that the others were obliged to consider as an eagle the one they had mocked as the "big ox."

In all this he followed the principle he had been taught by De La Salle, which was not to answer hastily, but to think out his replies before letting them reach his lips, and not to let them strike his hearers' ears until he had offered them to God in his heart. It was his faithfulness to this practice which made him so slow to speak, and afterward obtained for him from God the ability to speak with elegance and ease. Besides, his love for study never dried up his spirit of mental prayer and of mortification. Knowledge did not puff up his heart; he made use of it only to keep himself more and more little in his own eyes, more submissive to his Superior's orders, more humble with regard to his Brothers.

The time he had to devote to study did not at all affect his punctuality at the community exercises. His regularity on this point could not have been more exemplary. Seeing him among the first at community exercises, one might have thought that he had nothing else to do but to be present at the first sound of the bell. But as knowledge is not acquired by intuition, and since only assiduous effort can gain it for us, he borrowed from his night's repose the time he would not take away from the exercises of piety. The loss of such a

remarkable subject deserved all the regret that the holy Founder felt over it. It was indeed a great loss, and could only be felt very keenly by him whose main concern was the progress of the work, the success of which seemed to require a long life for Brother Henri l'Heureux.

Chapter X

Steps Taken by De La Salle to Prevent His Institute from Crumbling and to Organize It Better. With Two of the Brothers He Makes a Vow to Never Give Up the Work. He Resolves to Establish a Novitiate. Opposition He Encounters because of This Project, and Which He Overcomes by Prayer and Penance. Fervor That Reigned in This House of Training.

We have seen previously all that De La Salle did and suffered at the beginning of his work. For almost fifteen* years he had been laboring at this thorny task, this garden watered with his sweat and tears and nourished with the blood of his veins, through his cruel disciplines and other mortifications. And yet his undertaking was making only slow progress. Each time he got ready to lay a new stone in the construction of this edifice, he found new obstacles; and while with charitable hands he built it up with so much effort, other hands, evil-intentioned and actuated by malice, destroyed and tore down what he had built.

When the holy Founder came to Paris, in addition to Brothers in the schools of Laon, Guise and Rethel, he had left behind in Rheims a Community composed of three different sections in which there were about fifty persons. Within two or three years, this triple-community had all but disappeared. The seminary for country schoolmasters which he had launched so successfully, and which, when he left for Paris, was filled with fervor, lost its main support when it lost him. It fell apart almost at once. True, the young men trained there did a great deal of good; but the good they did only made the disappearance of such a useful and promising foundation all the more regrettable. The junior seminary for the Brothers had not met with any better fate. These boys, who were being trained starting at the age of thirteen or fourteen, were the seed that would spring up and yield a hundredfold, and that the regular Community of the Brothers would draw upon in due course; but this fruitful source of new recruits dried up in a short time, under the very eyes of their wise Superior.

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*Not quite. This was 1690 or 1691; the first school in Rheims dated back to 1679.

De La Salle had summoned them to Paris, so as to have them near him, as we mentioned earlier, to train them himself, and to make of them at Paris what they had been at Rheims: a seedbed of future Brothers, well-cultivated and fertile. But he was obliged by Baudran and by Sadourni, the sacristan of the parish of St. Sulpice, to send them to the church to serve Mass. Here they met their downfall. They no longer had activities capable of nourishing their piety, and they also found opportunities for distractions which little by little caused their religious spirit to grow cold.

Finally, De La Salle had left behind in Rheims a Community of sixteen Brothers, not counting the two he took with him to Paris. But that same year, 1688, eight of these Brothers left the Community on account of the Brother whom he had appointed superior over them, a harsh and indiscreet man. To make matters worse, during four long years, that is from 1688 to 1692, these empty places were not filled, and only one new recruit joined to replace the deserters. Who can, at this point, fail to wonder at the incomprehensible designs of God with regard to His servants? At times He is pleased to bless their labors, at other times to strike them with sterility. Sometimes He lends a hand in what they are doing; and then the work prospers and yields fruit to their hearts' desire; at other times He withdraws His hand, and then, like St. Peter, they labor much but accomplish little or nothing.

Such was the disconcerting prospect facing the Founder at the end of 1690. After so many sacrifices, so much labor and trouble, after so many crosses and persecutions, after so much apparent success, he was back where he had been ten years earlier, with only a handful of Brothers. His undertaking had not made much progress and he could fear that it would eventually die out.

No doubt he felt much perplexity, as we can surmise by reason of the vow we shall mention shortly. He saw himself almost alone, abandoned, lacking resources. He had just come back from death's door; and the kind of life he led, which he did not wish to mitigate, would not, it seemed, last too long. Brother Henri l'Heureux, on whom he had relied, was dead; and no one else seemed capable of replacing him. Several of the Brothers still with him were ill or exhausted by their work. The others needed some sort of spiritual renewal, since they had fallen off considerably from their first fervor. All these discouraging prospects gave him ample reason to doubt the future of his Institute, which as yet did not have any definite constitution nor a truly solid foundation.

After prolonged thought about the means for consolidating an edifice which threatened to collapse even as he was trying to erect it, he was inspired:

1) to associate with himself two Brothers whom he considered the most apt to sustain the fledgling Community, and to bind the three of them by an irrevocable bond to pursue the establishment of the Institute;

2) to establish somewhere near Paris a house where the sick and convalescent Brothers could go to recover their health;

3) to gather all his Brothers there during vacation and to have them make a retreat in order to help them recover, along with their first fervor, the spirit and grace of their state. Since all of them needed his advice, direction and attention, he wished to bring them together under his wing, so to speak, as the mother hen does with her chicks, to afford them spiritual rejuvenation and bring them back to their early charity;

4) to establish a novitiate for the training of candidates.

All this was eventually accomplished as he desired, but at the price of what anxiety and opposition, as we shall see!

His first concern, in view of the uncertain future, was to make sure that the Institute would possess at least two Brothers capable of maintaining it in case he himself should die. He needed zealous, courageous men, unwaveringly attached to their vocation. Even so, he feared that, discouraged by the difficulties and obstacles they would encounter, disheartened by the contradiction and opposition they would have to endure, they might lose heart and abandon an enterprise which had as many enemies as there were demons in Hell, and almost as many men as there are on this earth. Hence he thought it proper to oblige them to this by inspiring them to make, along with him, a vow in the following terms:

Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, prostrate with the most profound respect before Thy infinite and adorable majesty, we consecrate ourselves entirely to Thee to procure with all our ability and efforts the establishment of the Society of the Christian Schools, in the manner which will seem to us most agreeable to Thee and most advantageous to the said Society.

And for this purpose, I, John Baptist De La Salle, priest; I, Nicholas Vuyart and I, Gabriel Drolin, from now on and forever until the last surviving one of us, or unto the complete establishment of the said Society, make the vow of association and union to bring about and maintain the said establishment, without being able to withdraw from this obligation, even if only we three remained in the said Society, and if we were obliged to beg for alms and to live on bread alone.*

In view of which we promise to do, all together and by common accord, everything we shall think in conscience, and regardless of any human consideration, to be for the greater good of the said Society.

Done on this 21st of November, feast of the Presentation of Our Lady, 1691. In testimony of which we have signed....

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*The name is variously written: Vuyart, Wiart, Viart...

This group of three men was for the Institute the "triple bond" or cord spoken of by the Holy Spirit, which is not easily broken, and which is capable of drawing everything along with it. The three associates felt an equal ardor to bind themselves to each other, and to confirm it by a vow of never abandoning the Community, of persevering in it till death, and of sacrificing themselves to uphold it, to perpetuate it, to make it live on; and finally to assume, down to the last survivor, charge of all its interests.

They were inspired to make this vow which they pronounced kneeling, one after the other, at a time when it seemed most unlikely that the Institute could, in fact, survive. This frail little bark, which had already undergone so many and such furious tempests, seemed about to founder. Always on the brink of catastrophe, it was preparing a means to escape shipwreck and to reach safety thanks to the indissoluble union and the unconquerable confidence of its leader and its two principal members.

This commitment of these two Brothers, whom De La Salle considered as the pillars of his tottering Institute, was the only resource on which he then based his confidence. If death overtook him before he had finished consolidating his work, he was entrusting to the zeal of these two principal followers the care of completing what he had begun. He was not altogether fortunate in his choice, for one of the two later became a new Judas, as we shall relate. Forgetting both the vow he had made and the father whom he was bound to obey, he created a division in the Society and abandoned it.

As for Brother Gabriel Drolin, he remained faithful to his promise, attached to his vocation, inseparably united with his virtuous Superior. Nothing in the world was able to withdraw him from his holy state: neither isolation nor the offer of benefices, nor the furious assaults that the Community underwent during his absence, nor the desertion of a great many Brothers, nor the "civil death" of De La Salle.

I call "civil death" his flight from Paris and his going into hiding in order to escape the fury of his persecutors. This good Brother, the dean of the entire Institute, who is now some seventy-two years old, returned from Rome where he had been sent, and where he spent twenty-six years in obedience to the orders of De La Salle. He now resides in Avignon. As he had completed his ecclesiastical studies and been admitted to the tonsure before entering the new Institute, he was capable of receiving a benefice and of fulfilling other clerical functions; but his virtue, although several times put to the test on this point, always emerged victorious.

Faithful to the promise he had made to the Most Holy Trinity, he preferred to remain an obscure servant in the house of the Lord rather than to leave it and take a place among those who enjoyed benefices or occupied more distinguished positions. We shall have occasion to speak about him at greater length farther on.

Once De La Salle had made sure insofar as he could that his Community would not be entirely orphaned if it pleased God to call him, his next concern was to try to find at Issy or at Vaugirard* some lodgings or a house where he could send the Brothers with impaired health; for he perceived that several of them had reached a state of exhaustion which could have had serious consequences. Their frugal nourishment, joined to the work they did in the schools and to their deep interior life, contributed a great deal to this situation. They needed rest, and especially fresh air, because the house they occupied in Paris was small and had no garden. It did not afford enough fresh air to men who spent their days in absorbing spiritual exercises, or in classrooms made very stuffy because of overcrowding. After looking quite a while, he finally found a house on the outskirts of Vaugirard which seemed to be just what he needed. It stood apart, offered plenty of open space and fresh air, and was unpretentious enough: all the qualities he thought desirable. It is this modest residence that the Brothers can consider as the second cradle of their Institute. Here it renewed its strength and recovered its early fervor; here the novitiate was launched; here the generous practice of humility, poverty, obedience, mortification and penance rivaled that found in the heroic days of other religious orders. No wonder that the Devil, who was perturbed by all this, did everything he could to prevent the founding of the novitiate.

De La Salle's first thought, after having sent the ailing Brothers from Paris to Vaugirard, was to gather there all those who had joined the Society in the last three or four years, and to try to renew them spiritually by means of a good retreat. Vacation time made this possible without interfering in any way with the work of the schools. He could bring his men together and counter the falling off in their early fervor by a series of spiritual exercises and by his own example. This he did; the first result he aimed at was to make known to these neophytes, in private and in public, by his burning exhortations, inspired by the Spirit of God, how far they had fallen from their first charity and how much they needed a good novitiate to stir up the heavenly flame which was burning so low in their hearts. Indeed, they had become superficial, relaxed and tepid. An eight-day or ten-day retreat was not sufficient to cause them to recover the true interior spirit of recollection, mental prayer, mortification, humility and obedience which they had never perfectly acquired, or which they had at least partially lost. All such a retreat could accomplish was to prepare them to reacquire these virtues, and to inspire them with a sincere desire of doing so.

As we know, grace, like nature, does not achieve a perfect work except by degrees; as a rule both of them take a long time to form a person. The stages of life follow one another, and the transitions from childhood to adolescence, and from adolescence to youth, are necessary before a man becomes perfectly mature. The same rule holds true in the spiritual order. A virtue one begins to acquire demands much time and constant exercise before it becomes perfect. The holy Founder, who wished to lead his disciples to this goal, felt therefore

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*Issy and Vaugirard, at the time, were villages outside of Paris. The new house was about three kilometers from the school on Rue Princesse. A quarter-hour's walk away there was the country house of the minor seminary of St. Sulpice; it was there that Olier had installed his community in 1641.

that he could do nothing more useful than to keep them with him as long as possible so as to complete their formation by all the exercises of the interior life.

Fortunately, he had at his disposal the young men who had studied at the seminary for country schoolmasters in Rheims. They agreed to replace the Brothers who remained with him at Vaugirard. Thanks to their cooperation, all the schools in Paris, Rheims, Laon and elsewhere were able to operate normally, and the novitiate was opened on October 8, 1691.

It succeeded as well as De La Salle had hoped. By the end of the year all the Brothers whom he had kept with him to work at reforming their lives seemed to have become other men. The Servant of God beheld them such as he had desired to see them: leading interior, recollected, mortified and penitent lives, practicing blind obedience and submission. When he sent them away, he told them to write to him an account of their interior dispositions and to receive his advice. He considered this regular account of their consciences as the support of their regularity; he recommended it very earnestly and was very exact in answering their letters. His own letters, filled with piety and unction, helped to keep up the fervor of those who were far from him; and by calling them all back to the novitiate each year during the holidays, he succeeded in renewing them in the spirit and grace of their state.

Thus, whether absent or present, he kept watch over them, guided them, directed their consciences; and by obliging them to give him a faithful account of all the details of their behavior he kept them in perpetual dependence and perfect regularity. Thus he succeeded in making them remain novices wherever they were, and so they lived in their communities as they had at Vaugirard, to which they returned every year to re-vivify in themselves the grace of their vocation, and which they left full of zeal, eager to carry out their mission and to sanctify the students in the schools entrusted to their care, after having sanctified themselves. The holy Founder, without limiting his activity to all these points, made a visit at least once a year to each of the schools and to the Brothers who taught in them, and examined the progress being made by Brothers and students alike.

This first effort at establishing a sort of training center made it plain how necessary it was to set up a regular novitiate, and to have all the postulants go through it before admitting them to the Society, so as to test their vocation and give them a solid grounding in virtue. The favorable results he had gathered from his recent efforts showed him what an abundant harvest he would reap from such an institution. The Devil himself was terrified at the thought and employed all his wiles to thwart the proposal. It was in fact strenuously opposed by the very man who should have furthered it. De La Salle might have gone ahead with what he had begun, keeping quiet about it, and not informing Baudran; if he had acted thus he would not have encountered an adversary in his protector. But a man who sought nothing but God's will in everything and abandoned all his projects to the desires of Providence was incapable of devious behavior, artifices, or disguisement. Candor, simplicity and purity of intention characterized him; these qualities did not allow him to undertake anything without the advice and approbation of the parish priest of St. Sulpice whom he considered as his superior.

He therefore felt obliged to ask for the latter's permission to open his novitiate, but he was unable to gain a hearing. As we know, not all virtuous men think alike; and often enough they oppose one another's projects when the will of God is not obvious. I do not know what led Baudran to refuse his consent to De La Salle's wishes. Perhaps he feared that this new venture, in all likelihood, would grow day by day and might involve added expenses as the number of candidates increased; and that this would add to his own financial responsibilities. Perhaps he secretly wanted to circumscribe the zeal and labors of the Brothers within the boundaries of his own vast parish, as Msgr. Le Tellier, the archbishop of Rheims, had wished to limit them to his diocese. Perhaps he foresaw that times were getting harder* and that he would not be able to show himself as generous as he would wish in providing for the number of postulants who would join the Community. Be this as it may, nobody really knows why Baudran, a man of such genuine zeal and charity, a firm friend of De La Salle's and the protector of his work, would not go along with the proposed novitiate. All we know is that he vetoed the project and forbade De La Salle to even think of it.

This order put the Servant of God in a very difficult situation. On the one hand, he entertained deep veneration for the parish priest of St. Sulpice. He considered the latter's words as laws which he respected. He knew he was sincerely interested in what was good, a friend of all pious works and the main supporter of his foundation. He felt sure that Baudran's intentions were of the best, and that he possessed deep insight and profound virtue. On the other hand he also realized that opening a novitiate was absolutely necessary; that it was impossible for his work to prosper without it. The desertion of several of his disciples, the relaxation into which others had fallen, the superficiality and lack of interior life exhibited by the more recent arrivals, the irresolution and hesitation that most of them showed regarding their vocation, all stemmed from the same source: the fact that they had not made a true novitiate.

Furthermore, have not all religious Institutes established a period of testing for those who seek to join? Has the Church herself not prescribed this for all Orders? Where and how can candidates be tested and trained if not in a novitiate? Without it, how can one judge the genuineness of their call? How gauge their character and dispositions? What guarantee can one have of their perseverance, if one has not taken the time to examine them during a sufficiently long period of probation? How else can they be induced to set aside the spirit of the world and to acquire the spirit of God? How can they purify their consciences by a good general confession, and acquire a strong desire of doing penance and of expiating their sins, of healing the wounds of their souls and of correcting their evil habits? How can they arm themselves against their natural inclinations or learn how to combat their passions and to mortify the flesh, if no one tries to train them in this spiritual combat? When and where will they learn how to live in recollection; to become interior men; to love solitude, silence and mental prayer; to submit their judgment and

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*War had broken out again in 1688, and by 1691 France was faced with serious famine which grew worse.

will to the yoke of obedience; to lose all taste for the world's pleasures; to attach themselves to piety, to cultivate virtue and to make their sanctification their primary concern, if not in a good novitiate?

Sending Brothers out to teach without having for a long time trained them to understand themselves, the world and the devil is like sending workers out to labor in the vineyard without tools, like sending soldiers into battle without weapons to face the foe. What good can a Brother do in the classroom, if he is not firmly grounded in virtue? If he has not sanctified himself, how can he labor at the sanctification of others? As the Holy Spirit asks, how can he be good and useful for them, if he is not such for himself? What ability to teach lessons in virtue can that man have who does not give the example thereof? Piety is taught by deed rather than by word; and even though children are not too enlightened, they trust their eyes more than their ears in this matter. Men called to be teachers in Christian schools should be a light and a fire for those whom they educate. Light to instruct; fire to warm. Light to point out the beauty of virtue and the hideousness of vice; fire to devour and consume all love for sin and to enkindle the love of God. It was to all those who are called to teach Christian doctrine that Jesus Christ said: "You are the light of the world and the salt of the earth."

Since the Brothers share this exalted vocation, can they ever be too holy? And how can they ever become holy if, in a good novitiate, they do not make the acquisition of perfection their unique study? De La Salle was fully convinced of these truths. Hence he so ardently longed to establish a novitiate, and felt that the delay in setting up this citadel of his Institute would spell the ruin of his Community. He had just witnessed the marvelous results produced in the Brothers at Vaugirard by a year spent in the exercises of the interior life.* He had had only too much experience of the evils that the lack of proper formation had produced among his followers. Finally, the Community had lost men who had joined without quite knowing what they had come for, or who were not really settled in their vocation; and others whom God was really calling could not see any gate giving entry to the Community. It was, therefore, absolutely necessary to open such a gate by founding a novitiate, and to show them where to come; a place to put them to the test, to train them and sanctify them.

Seeing that he could not prevail upon Baudran, De La Salle had recourse to prayer and fasting, to vigils and renewed penances. For about a year, while this opposition lasted, he fasted daily and prayed almost all night in a retired room. He ceased praying only when, in spite of himself, sleep closed his eyes and robbed him of the use of his senses. Overcome, he slipped to the floor and rested there. Lying on this stone floor resulted in his contracting a serious case of rheumatism which almost deprived him of the use of his limbs. There the Brothers found him, all but frozen, when they came looking for him in the morning. The concern they felt for his health emboldened them to

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*The session with the Brothers at Vaugirard had actually lasted about three months, from October to December, 1691.

remonstrate with him over the danger of paralysis or something worse to which he was being exposed by thus sleeping in such a spot; and they begged him not to give them any further reason for worry.

He yielded to their pleas, and it was at their insistence that he discontinued this sort of penance. But his use of other corporal macerations---bloody disciplines, hair shirts, iron chains---only increased, and he did not diminish these practices until he found no further opposition on the part of the parish priest to the erection of the novitiate. He had plenty of time to pray and to do penance, because Baudran did not give in very soon to his desire. He even sent word by one of the Brothers that John Baptist might as well give up his austerities and prayers, and stop trying to contradict the orders of God, because it was not His will that there should be a novitiate. But sometime later he himself abandoned the struggle and was obliged to yield to the power of the Servant of God's prayers. The latter took the precaution of securing from Msgr. De Harlay, archbishop of Paris, the permissions necessary to give to the house he intended to occupy the form of a community, so as to avoid all the difficulties which could have been raised.

Victorious, with God's help, De La Salle desired nothing more than to remain in his dear Bethlehem. This is the name deserved by a house where solitude and poverty made it resemble the stable where Jesus was born. In fact, it was as bare and as poor as the Infant Savior's cave. A few benches to sit on, a few straw pallets laid on the floor were all the furnishings available. Open to the elements, the house did not shelter its inhabitants either from the wind, the snow or the rain. Windows and doors were out of joint; windowpanes were broken; and the holes in the walls of the house (which had been unoccupied for some time) which nobody thought of repairing, made it a real abode of penance.

Those who lived there slept on wretched straw pallets, with a small bolster stuffed with oat straw. These pallets were laid on planks extended between sawhorses; they had no mattresses, no curtains; a single thin blanket and sheets of the coarsest cloth completed the equipment. Sleeping thus almost in the open air, the Brothers endured all the rigors of the winter season. Those who were nearer the windows were drenched by the rain or covered with snow in wintertime. The others froze too, since they could not warm themselves because the wind made its entry from every side. When they awoke they found that their breath had congealed on the sheet, making it as stiff as a board. They got out of bed as cold as when they had retired.

Only De La Salle had the privilege of having some warmth during the night. His bed was no better than the others, nor placed in a more convenient spot, since it was near a window. The whole house contained only one or two mattresses, which were reserved for the sick. They had given one to the Servant of God, but he would not use it. The Brothers were careful to place it on his pallet; but he was equally careful to take it off when he got ready to go to bed; and the next morning they could see it lying on the floor by his bed. Thus nobody could conceive of how he kept warm during the night, exposed as he was like the others to the freezing drafts.

In order to sound him out, the Brothers who slept in the same room, amazed because he seemed not to mind the cold, one day decided to complain that, exposed to the drafts as they were, they could not get warm all night and got up as cold as when they went to bed. De La Salle seemed surprised at this when they told him, and declared that on going to bed he felt as cold as the bed itself, but that little by little he grew warmer. He added further that he never felt cold during the night.

Changing one's underclothing was another very painful mortification in this house. All during the winter, every Saturday evening, each one found on his pallet a clean undershirt, which was frozen stiff, since it had not been able to dry out. It had to be taken as it was. Thus the night was spent in thawing, rather than drying it out; and during the day it was another source of mortification to have to wear a damp undershirt and to dry it out by one's body heat. For more than one, this penance must have lasted till the following night, since a half-frozen body could not generate enough heat to dry out a damp undershirt in so short a time. So all through the winter this penance continued. During the day they had no fire; during the night they could not get warm. The only ways these penitents could warm themselves up a bit was by using the discipline.

In fact, they used it constantly; and hair shirts were common also. The example of their Superior made them eager to do this. Although he had for so long been torturing his own body, he had not yet succeeded in satisfying his anger and vengeance towards it. His holy compulsion for tormenting it seemed to grow rather than diminish with time. It is certainly remarkable that he should have been able to hold out for so long against the rigors of such austerity. He never tired of lacerating his flesh and of bloodying the cruel disciplines armed with pointed rosettes that he used on himself. One day, while De La Salle was with some others in the garden, a Brother who was sweeping the room where De La Salle slept found one of these instruments of penance. It was still covered with fresh blood and wrapped in a piece of paper.

With such a model, the Brothers, stung by a noble emulation, made giant strides in the way of penance. Because they wanted to become men of sorrows, they practiced different kinds of mortification to make the body suffer. Only obedience placed limits to their ardor; but what did they not do to win a favorable reply to their pleas? De La Salle needed all his firmness to restrain them, all his patience to endure their importunities in this regard. In truth, this great penitent was not too reluctant to grant them these permissions; he showed himself generous in this matter. After night prayer, the Brothers surrounded him. One asked permission to take the discipline; another wanted to remain in mental prayer till eleven or twelve o'clock; some wanted to sleep on the bare floor while others wished to practice some other kind of mortification.

Thus, in the entire house there was scarcely a corner that was not reserved for some particular type of penance. Each one chose a spot where he could chastise his body without interference and with full liberty. The blows of the disciplines resounded in every direction; but the ears which heard them were used to this sound and paid no attention. And yet, even apart from all these

austerities, the lifestyle followed in this house was in itself a severe form of penance. The entire day was devoted to exercises of piety as constraining as they were laborious; these kept all the dwellers in the place closely applied to God. They recited the Little Office of the Most Blessed Virgin very slowly, standing; at various times they made a total of three hours of mental prayer, always on their knees. There were two hours of spiritual reading, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. The rest of the time was taken up by other similar exercises of piety or mortification.

The repasts were what one would expect, given the poverty of the house and the rigorous spirit of penance that reigned in it. All they drank was water. No cooking ever took place there during the seven years the novitiate occupied the building. Every day someone brought in a hamper from the Brothers' residence in Rue Princesse the ration of bread, the soup and the plain, unappetizing dishes which were all they had to eat; it was quite a concession that they condescended to warm these provisions up a bit before serving them. Who can believe it? The leftovers from the community of the priests of St. Sulpice and from a couple of other poor religious houses in Paris provided nourishment for De La Salle and for his novices; the only thing extra they ever got was tripe and ox feet. As I said before, people used to decent meals could not have endured the sight of such food, so repulsive was it even to behold; or else they would have thought they were practicing great mortification by simply looking at it. Nothing but keen hunger or the habit of self-denial could have enabled anyone to find any satisfaction in such meals.

However, Divine Providence took care to make it more palatable to those who had to eat it, by making them wait for it a good while every now and then. For since the provisions were brought from a considerable distance away, rain, bad weather, muddy roads and other circumstances sometimes delayed the Brother who was bringing them. It even happened that he was robbed on the road. Thieves would lie in wait for him as he passed, and several times did him the favor of relieving him of his burden. As they were probably even hungrier than the Brothers (for this happened only during periods of widespread famine), they were overjoyed at thus finding a dinner all prepared. Although the food was not of the highest quality, their hunger proved an excellent sauce and made them pronounce everything delicious.

When the Brother in charge of fetching the provisions for the novices arrived at the house, terrified, and gave the news to De La Salle, the latter replied with a smile, "God be blessed!" Then he gently begged the Brother to go back to Paris to try to find enough food for another meal, which constituted dinner and supper at once, and which, as one can easily understand, did not seem at all tasteless to men whose appetites had been sharpened by the keen country air and the day-long activities they had engaged in. The admirable part of it all was that De La Salle and his novices thought they were too well provided for, and that most of them deprived themselves of part or all of their meager portions. All of them lived on alms, such as the poorest of the poor come begging for at the doors of rich houses; for the Brothers in Paris, as I have said, would go and ask for the leftovers from the tables of various communities, and out of charity sent these to the novices at Vaugirard.

The custom of making the accusation of faults before dinner and supper led to another, which grew out of the first, and proved no less mortifying. The ordinary penance given at such times was to go to take the discipline in some private place. So it often happened that while the others were in the refectory, about half of the Brothers were performing this painful exercise. As a rule, there were always some who began the meal by this penitential hors d'oeuvre; and the feature which the most mortified ones considered the best part of it all was that they often had time to enjoy this hors d'oeuvre at length. For it happened that the pious Superior, distracted and overlooking the ones who were not present because they were taking the discipline, forgot to send someone to tell them to stop; and thus he gave them ample time to inflict more punishment on themselves. For these humble penitents, who would not have dared to take a discipline in hand except through obedience, awaited word from their Superior to leave off using it; and while waiting they continued to scourge themselves vigorously.

Still, it generally happened, even though a bit late, that some Brother noticing those who were absent, ventured to remind the Superior of those who were doing penance, and had him call them back. Then one mortification was followed by another that completed the first; for the period allotted to the meal was partially elapsed when the penitents got back to the refectory; yet they had to leave along with the others, after taking only part of their food, and so had only half a dinner or supper. As they were never sent back to finish their meal, they had the advantage of joining fasting to the discipline, or whatever other kind of mortification they practiced. The ones to whom this happened appeared the most satisfied and showed the most gaiety during recreation. Far from complaining, like those of whom the Prophet speaks, when they are not filled, they rejoiced over their good fortune and were delighted at having been able to punish their bodies at leisure and to leave them fasting after whipping them like animals that one can goad onwards only by beating them, while regretting the scanty food given them because they seem undeserving of it.

The fervor that reigned in this novitiate was indeed extraordinary, so much so that to satisfy the novices, penances were not parsimoniously handed out. The most difficult ones were those which they accepted with the greatest joy. Most of them, to oblige their Superior to treat them with the utmost rigor, exaggerated their faults; and when he did not impose on them penances as severe as they desired, they threw themselves at his feet to implore him to be more stern, and to punish them himself for their cowardice and tepidity. Others, following the maxim of St. Francis de Sales, asked for nothing; but they accepted with joy mortifications which they had not chosen: eating nothing but a crust of bread; drinking only a swallow of water; remaining on their knees in the middle of the courtyard during almost all the time of dinner or supper, or next to a window when curiosity had induced them to glance through it as they passed. These, too, would come back to the refectory only towards the end of the meal, yet they said grace with the others for food which they had left largely unconsumed. In a word, in this training school for the virtues, the novices sought to practice all of them; they concentrated all their ambition on running in the narrow and thorny path of perfection.

By the poverty of the house and of the meals one can judge of that of their apparel. People who lived only on leftovers given to them in charity and who, if I may apply to them the words of the Gospel, were glad to lick up the crumbs fallen from the masters' tables, like the whelps, were also clad as beggars. The most miserable paupers would not have stooped to pick up anything belonging to the Brothers or to their Superior. To tell the truth, their external appearance was that of paupers. I am convinced that if the stockings, shoes, robes, capotes and hats worn by the Brothers, along with all the rest of the furnishings of the Community, had been dumped out into the street, they might have drawn pitying glances from the passersby, but that no one would have stretched out a hand to pick them up.

All their clothes together would have amounted only to a bundle of vermin-infested rags, fit only to be thrown on the refuse heap. If one had inspected these novices, one after the other, from head to foot, he would have felt either horror or commiseration. Not one wore shoes, hat, robe or other garments that could not have been classified as useless, or fit only to be thrown away. Old, worn-out shoes which hardly held together, faded and torn stockings, robes and capotes patched and mended with various strips of different colored cloth, old hats with holes in the brim, all spotted and soiled, made the individual Brothers look like scarecrows that provoked pity, and made the lot of them resemble a troop of wretches whose profession alone distinguished them from tramps, and that nothing but compassion could make respectable to those capable of feeling compassion.

De La Salle, as poor as the rest, and resembling them in all things, covered his shabby soutane only by a capote which was no better, and which was green with age. He wore a hat with a wide brim which flapped down on his shoulders. When they all sallied forth to go to a nearby chapel where De La Salle said Mass and gave them Communion, they looked like a troop of paupers leaving the poorhouse, or men arriving from another planet. They resembled the Gabaonites who deceived Joshua and made him believe, by the worn condition of their clothes and the disarray of their accoutrement, that they were strangers arriving from a distant land. They made one think of these heroic men who, looked upon as the offscouring of this world, served God in hunger, thirst and nakedness. They were all so pitifully clad that when they had to go to the parish church to make their Easter duty, or to attend Mass on the feast of the patron saint, St. Lambert, it took them two or three days to get ready, to dress themselves up so as to appear in public without offending decency. No matter what pains they took to avoid shocking people who had no use for the holy virtue of poverty (so despised and detested in the world), they still attracted the attention of the most inattentive and indifferent people, drawing down on themselves the former's scorn and the latter's compassion. To make matters worse, the lice which generally accompany extreme poverty aroused the indignation and contempt of all, and kept people at a distance from them, so that even in church they were shunned and isolated.

Most admirable of all, these men who had become poor by choice considered poverty as a treasure and seemed more satisfied than Solomon in all his glory. Their leader, after exchanging the riches of Egypt for the poverty of Jesus Christ, had succeeded in making them appreciate, by his example and his words, the hidden manna which he discovered in destitution. The proof of how

satisfied their hearts were, and of how lovingly Divine Providence watched over the little flock is the fact that not one of them fell sick during seven years of such rigorous living and such extreme poverty, while the novitiate remained at Vaugirard. O truly fortunate village, sanctified by the presence first of Olier and then of De La Salle! The latter can be called the former's spiritual son since he was trained in his seminary and there acquired his spirit. These were two of the holiest persons that Paris possessed during the past century. Fortunate indeed the village that had the honor of being the cradle of the famous Seminary of St. Sulpice where so many saintly ecclesiastics were trained, and that of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian and Gratuitous Schools.

It seems that Divine Providence, Which takes care to oppose the most exalted examples of virtue to the vilest scandals, and heroic sanctity to the outpouring of sin, was pleased to bring all these holy people capable of sanctifying and edifying it to this town, so badly reputed on account of the disorders and debauchery that occurred there. Indeed, wherever the disciples of De La Salle went, people thought they saw a different race of men, having nothing in common with ordinary mortals but the earth they inhabited. Seeing young men in the flower of their age walking silently through the streets of Paris, as recollected as though they had been at the foot of the crucifix, attentive of God's presence, not distracted by the uproar of the tumultuous city, as deaf to the sounds that struck the ears of the other passersby as to the insults offered them, one might have thought that they were dead men risen from the tomb who had come to visit the living without wishing to associate with them. As for me, when I saw De La Salle accompanied by his followers at this time I thought I beheld St. Francis with the early friars, who went abroad to edify others, and who thought they had preached enough when they merely appeared in public.

Chapter XI

Continuation of the Same Topic: the Fervor That Reigned in the Novitiate at Vaugirard.

The Divine fire enkindled in the novitiate of Vaugirard helped to revive the fervor of all the Brothers in the Institute. The generous ones found there a new increase of charity, and those who had let their first ardor cool somewhat returned thither to purchase with their blood and at the price of the most painful mortifications that pure gold which is beyond all price, and makes its possessor sovereignly rich. I would be only telling the truth if I declared that De La Salle's ingenious zeal for the sanctification of his children found means of making all the Brothers become novices once again, and of keeping them such for the entire period during which the novitiate remained under his direction at Vaugirard or in Paris. How did he do this? Each week he called all the Brothers teaching in the Paris schools back to the novitiate; and he summoned those employed in the Rheims area every year during the vacation period. He had them all take their places among the novices and

follow the latter's regulations. In this way the fervor of the Vaugirard novitiate spread to all the Brothers; every Brother was a novice and remained such all his life.

Those from Paris, being the nearest at hand, spent half of their time at Vaugirard; for they returned thither not only during vacation but on Wednesday and Saturday evenings and on the eves of feasts, and went back home on Friday and Monday mornings. They slept on straw pallets laid on the floor. During the time they spent in this holy house, nothing distinguished them from the novices. All devoted themselves to the same exercises. The older Brothers could be discerned only by their greater fervor. They served as models for the more recent recruits, and incited them to the practice of mortification and penance by furnishing them with more striking examples of these virtues. The inconvenience of going and coming between Paris and Vaugirard so often, winter and summer, of covering this long distance in mud or snow, in heat or cold, never made them less willing to come to take refuge again underneath their father's wings in this house where mortification reigned. No matter what condition they were in when they arrived, soaked by rain or snow, muddy or sweaty, once they reached the house they did not grant themselves the satisfaction of resting a while, of cleaning up, of warming themselves or drying out their clothes; they immediately proceeded to join the exercise then in progress, as though they had just risen from a comfortable bed, fresh and rested.

On these occasions, the spirit of mortification advantageously replaced the little satisfactions that natural instinct might have desired in a place so lacking in anything of the kind; for if they had heeded the desires of the flesh, always eager for rest, they would have vainly sought any means of satisfying themselves in a house where everything of the sort was wanting. There was practically no furniture; there was only that which was absolutely necessary for the bare support of life. They could not find there either chairs to sit on, or clothes to change, or even fire for the ordinary necessities of life. The only time they made any fire at Vaugirard was to warm up the food brought in from Paris. The rest of the time, no matter how severe the weather might be, or how cold it got, no fire was ever seen. The poor Brothers, frozen as they were, had no other means of thawing themselves out other than the warmth of charity or the rays of the sun when the weather warmed up again in summer, or, as I have already mentioned, the use of the discipline.

They could have said with truth that the place they lived in was the house where everything was lacking. To find any contentment there one had to leave his body at the door on entering. Only men who forgot that they possessed a frail body, or who remembered it only to maltreat it, could get used to living in a house where nature was crucified while the spirit rejoiced. Consequently, fervor was necessary to sustain human frailty; and for this reason those who did not possess it could not remain very long, as we shall soon see. But at all events, as St. Theresa says, "Where there is less nature, there is more grace." God communicates Himself to the soul that hardly holds to its body any more, and although still joined to it, forgets it and rises above its desires. The abundance of the divine gifts and consolations the soul receives is measured by the courage it shows in renouncing itself. In these academies of virtue, the most mortified people are always the happiest. The Brothers who

came from Paris to Vaugirard, often with so much difficulty, weary after their class work, their long walk, and the novitiate exercises, were happy when a laborious day was followed by an uncomfortable night, which provided them with another opportunity for mortification, on account of the damp beds where they nearly froze during winter in this house where fire was forbidden.

These new inhabitants of the building at Vaugirard, whom their Superior kept hidden with him in silence and obscurity, and who were never seen outside of the house except when they went to church, still could not avoid the eyes of passersby and of the people who lived in the village. Their unusual manner of living and their outlandish garb pointed them out sufficiently and made them known soon enough. The extraordinary character of their virtue impressed everyone; and either from curiosity or from a desire of being associated with them, people wanted to see them at closer range, and to enter into conversation with these men who seemed to have broken with the world entirely. As we know, holiness sooner or later pierces the veils in which it shrouds itself, and in spite of itself it sheds its light abroad. Grace makes use of the attraction it exercises to charm those who are called to live holy lives. The sight of the saints inspires a desire for holiness, and contact with them is a powerful means of acquiring it. After keeping them hidden in the "secret of His face" (as the Scriptures express it), God reveals them to those whom He wishes to make like unto them; and when He does this He inspires these persons to go to join them. This is what happened in the present instance.

Seeing De La Salle at the head of his disciples, people might have thought that they were seeing the famous Abbey of La Trappe transported to the outskirts of the capital; or that a colony of those holy penitents had come to edify the great city and teach it that these latter times had witnessed a revival of the poverty, humility, penitential spirit and life of prayer that had characterized the first centuries of the Church. Candidates, moved by God, and struck by the Brothers' saintly life, asked to be admitted the very year after the house was opened. On November 1, 1692, De La Salle gave the habit to five novices and one serving Brother. Later, he had to make a selection among the many who presented themselves. This was not difficult to do and did not take long; for those who proposed to enter this Community, which could rightly be called the Community of the martyrs of poverty and penance, could not remain in it without a generous determination to embrace both these virtues. Those whom curiosity or destitution had led thither were punished once they entered; for the company, the lifestyle and the example of these crucified men seemed unbearable to them.

The penance and mortification practiced there, which nothing but grace, based on a solid vocation, could make anyone accept willingly, frightened them and very soon obliged them to ask that the door be opened to let them out of a place which they considered as a prison for voluntary criminals, self-condemned to a life sentence of the poorest and most austere existence. If human respect held them back for a few days, this time seemed like months and years to them, and they longed to be delivered from a captivity which tortured their senses, their bodies and their very souls. On his side, De La Salle admitted all who presented themselves, without any prior investigation or selection; for

he felt sure that the kind of life led in the house was like a strong and impetuous wind which, while letting the good grain fall into the granary, would winnow the grain from the straw and the cockle.

He was right. Among those who came without a real vocation and an efficacious desire of giving themselves to God, the strongest and most resolute could not make up their minds to stay more than a week or ten days at most. When they finally left, they did not fail to sound the alarm and to broadcast everywhere that one had to be his own murderer to live with the Brothers. They asserted that if anyone had a secret enemy, he should sing the praises of the Community to the man on whom he wished to take revenge, and should inspire him with the desire of entering, so that he could have the malicious pleasure of seeing the other leave, as he himself had done, after making him expiate the pleasure of satisfying his vain curiosity by a week or so of "jail."

The famine which raged in 1693 and 1694 brought in other young men who had nothing to eat and were looking for some way to survive. These, too, did not remain very long; for the rigorous penance repelled those whom hunger had induced to enter; they preferred to take their chances with starvation outside rather than remain and have food at the expense of their bodies. Others, led by the Spirit of God, were impressed by the good example they found. These soon gave proof of a strong vocation; the happiness that shone on their faces betrayed the fervor that filled them, as did the willingness they showed to lead a crucified life. Thus the house was like that great net in which all sorts of fish, good and bad, were caught; but the heavenly Master did not delay in sorting out the good and rejecting the others. At most, one or two out of a dozen finally remained. Yet this little company of choice souls eventually reached the number of thirty-five who persevered with unconquerable courage in a house which was a center for poverty, penance, humiliation and mortification.

What made God's action appear most obvious was that among this number only two were really poor lads. The others came from comfortable homes and could have lived at ease in their state; but good example and fervor made them like living in a house which offered them nothing but contradiction to nature and rejection by the world. This abundant grace which made the water spring out of the rock, which transformed the bitter waters of mortification for these true Israelites, was the reward won by the generous sacrifices De La Salle had made of his canonry and his family wealth. "Ever since I gave up everything," he himself often said, "I have never met a single candidate tempted to leave us on the pretext that our Community was not endowed." These are the concluding words in his memorandum which we have used up to this point since beginning this Second Book.

The vocation of these young men must indeed have been very firm to make them persevere in such a crucified state as this. Grace must have been very abundantly poured out on all these postulants who requested their admission to such a poverty-stricken place, where even bread was often lacking. We shall soon see in fact to what extremities De La Salle and his flock were reduced in 1693 and 1694. During this period of famine they were spared none of its hardships; it was a miracle of Providence that they managed to escape starvation. No doubt, nothing but their extraordinary fervor could have made

these young men remain in a house where the general scarcity was more keenly felt than elsewhere, especially since, if they had left the Community and gone home, they would have enjoyed everything they needed.

How did De La Salle manage to provide for all those who presented themselves, and whom he admitted without hesitation during these tragic times? A Brother who is still living, who witnessed what went on and has related it all to us, tells us that out of a dozen candidates only two or three remained; hence, there must have been three or four hundred who entered, since thirty-five persevered. That they survived at all was indeed a miracle of Providence. Prodigies of this sort are performed by God for those who abandon everything for Him and have left everything for Jesus Christ. As everybody was welcome in this humble house, and since it was open to all the poor, they came flocking in with confidence. It cost nothing to enter; and if, after staying a while, anyone wanted to leave, he did so as freely as he had entered.

Sometimes the novitiate served as a refuge for people who had nowhere to go, and as a temporary lodging for others who were looking for something better. Among these latter were some wandering priests who stayed there. They remained as long as they liked, with the possibility of saying Mass every day, of rising later than the Brothers, of going out to attend to their business; but except for a demi-setier* of wine which De La Salle had served to them at each meal, their food was the same as that of the Brothers. Such a poor and penitential house had nothing better to offer. However, this free guest house, so near Paris, was convenient for those who had business in the city; thus there were usually two or three of them in residence. When De La Salle had to go to Rheims, one or the other of these priests celebrated Mass for the Brothers in his stead.

When vacation time came, the zealous Superior made haste to procure for the Brothers of Rheims, Laon, Guise and Rethel the benefits that the novitiate afforded, by calling them all to this blessed house to be renewed in the spirit and grace of their vocation. Their stay began by a ten-day retreat; but in fact the entire month of September was a long retreat. De La Salle led them in the exercises and inspired them even more by his example than by his words, filled as they were with unction and the Spirit of God. Thus, this good father had the satisfaction of seeing his children come together every year, from thirty, forty or fifty leagues away, to throw themselves into his arms, eager to learn from him all the lessons he wished to teach them. They vied with one another in listening to his instructions, in seeking his advice, in submitting to his reproofs, and in profiting by his example.

During this month he sought to do for these Brothers what he had done during the year for the ones who lived in Paris, namely, to show himself a tender father, a vigilant shepherd, an enlightened superior, a charitable director, a skillful and experienced physician of souls. He enlightened them by his insights, read the depths of their hearts, laid bare the roots of their

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*A little over half a pint.

vices and passions and taught them how to overcome these, and filled them with the courage and strength needed to win daily victories over themselves. These virtuous Brothers did not receive these graces in vain; like the laborers called late to the master's vineyard, they strove to catch up with those who had begun earlier, and by redoubling their fervor they tried to make as much progress in virtue during this one month as the others had in the course of the preceding year.

Such noble emulation could produce only excellent results; while stimulating the fervor of both groups, it also increased their humility. The early arrivals, ashamed to see the latecomers so far advanced on the narrow path which leads to life, strove to equal and to surpass them. The latter, confused at seeing themselves outstripped, accused themselves of slackness and tepidity, and made strenuous efforts not to be outdone in the race where every step costs so much to nature, and where no progress is possible save by doing violence to oneself.

The little house at Vaugirard was so full that only the attic remained available to lodge the Brothers who came from far away; nor was it wealthy enough to provide each of them with a pallet. So, the only way to accommodate them all was to have them sleep in this attic, after the fashion of domestic animals in barns: on one big heap of straw. Here is an instance of the fervor characteristic of these Brothers from the provinces. One of them had arrived, like the others, on foot. Although very weary, he did not seek repose save in the exercises of piety which he followed all the rest of the day. Then, noting the different penances practiced during supper, he reproached himself with his remissness; feeling ashamed for himself and filled with the holy anger which he saw everyone in the house giving vent to against the flesh, he could not consent to go to bed without making his body feel the effects thereof.

Impatient, unwilling to wait till the next day to carry out his share of penance which was, as he could see, of daily occurrence in the house, he found it difficult to wait till after night prayers to ask for the permission which he felt ashamed for having delayed so long. Once he had obtained it, he was even more embarrassed, because he had either lost his discipline on the way, or had left it behind in the community from which he had come. For in those days the Brothers, like valiant soldiers who always go about armed, invariably brought this instrument of penance along with them wherever they went. So this Brother, now that the time had come for him to engage his domestic enemy in bloody combat, resembled a warrior without weapons; unwilling to withdraw from the fray or to delay his attack for a moment, he had to appeal to another Brother's charity and to borrow his discipline. He wielded it so vigorously that when he returned it, it was stained with his blood. Its owner could feel that it was moist and later saw that his own hand was bloodied. The next day he showed De La Salle the proof of the newly arrived Brother's fervor. He thought the holy Founder would be impressed; but the latter, accustomed to such things, and whose own instruments of penance were dyed with his blood every day, was surprised at the Brother's surprise, and made him understand this by a smile and a shrug of his shoulders.

The way the Brothers from the schools spent the vacation of 1691 at Vaugirard became the rule followed in subsequent years. As long as the novitiate remained there, a period of seven years, all the Brothers gathered there from all over, by the order of De La Salle, and renewed their fervor by a retreat of ten days and a month spent following the novitiate exercises. It was here, as we related previously, that a dish of absinthe was served to them. The cook, seeing that the garden was full of this plant, and thinking that it was edible and might in a pinch replace some other vegetable, went ahead and served it---a fact which proves both his own ignorance and the poverty of the house. Mortification had reached such lengths that no one would have taken the liberty of removing the flies which fell into the soup or into the portions served. Nothing rebuffed these mortified men after witnessing the examples that their Superior gave on this point; for he ate his soup even though it was full of flies, without seeming to notice them. One day he saw one of the Brothers removing the insects from his bowl; he made him a sign not to be so fastidious.

In fact, although life in the house at Vaugirard was so austere, De La Salle found it a real earthly paradise, a place in which he took delight because there he was able to give free rein to his fervor and to yield himself, without restraint, to the spirit of penance and prayer. Concerned with nothing but his own perfection, he pursued this goal in the constant search for and practice of abnegation and death to self. He taught nothing that he did not carry out first. There was nothing humiliating, nothing austere, nothing repugnant to nature that he did not give the others a continual example of. The meanest duties, the most toilsome chores, the most mortifying practices he tried out first before inspiring others to embrace them.

In addition, he was the man who did everything in this little Community; he filled the roles of superior, master of novices, bursar and procurator. True, this latter function in a house which lived solely on alms, and where there was nothing to defend against thieves or swindlers, did not call for a great deal of effort. The task of providing for the Brothers' needs did not take much from his hours of recollection and prayer, nor even from his hours of rest. It often happened that he did not hear the alarm go off, even though he had it near him, for his humility had also led him to take on the duty of awakening the Community; and during several months he added this responsibility to all the others he fulfilled in the house. He went to bed very late, and his sleep was short; so, it is not surprising that it was sound and that at times the alarm was not loud enough to awaken him. When this happened, he made a public penance for it and condemned himself to remain on his knees during dinner, with only a dry crust of bread to eat, after accusing himself in the refectory of his supposed fault and humbly asking pardon of each Brother, kneeling in the posture of a criminal.

While De La Salle remained at Vaugirard, a certain nobleman dwelt in the neighborhood, a man of great virtue who led a very retired life in a sort of solitude near the Observatory. This was the Count of Charmel. He used to spend a part of each year at La Trappe, especially during Lent; he devoted the rest of his time to all sorts of good works. His daily schedule included long periods of mental prayer and, although a secular, he illustrated for the world the recollection of those famous religious whose example he went to observe,

and whose penance he emulated. It might have seemed that a monk from La Trappe had left his solitude and had come, in the person of this gentleman, to the neighborhood of Paris in order to edify the public and to proclaim to men that he belonged to that illustrious monastery. These two great Servants of God, each totally preoccupied with his own life and with pleasing the Lord while remaining forgotten by men, lived close by each other without knowing anything of each other.

One day three Brothers, who were on a journey, were brought to the Count's chateau by the local parish priest. This meeting apprised him of the fact that his neighbors in the village on the outskirts of Paris were a Community whose lifestyle could be considered as a worthy rival of the penitential and mortified existence proper to the monks of La Trappe, and also that De La Salle was from the same part of the country as himself, since the Count's chateau in the diocese of Soissons was only nine leagues from Rheims.

When the three Brothers came through the village, they asked for hospitality at the parish priest's house. The latter was even more surprised at the modesty shown by these young men, at their piety and decorum, than he was at the unusual dress they wore; he wished to share his astonishment with the local aristocrat. When he had described the virtue of his guests to the Count, the latter was eager to see and speak with them. He inquired after their manner of living and the purpose of their Institute. Everything he learned impressed him very favorably, and what he observed in these three young Brothers edified him so much that he wished to offer hospitality in the future to all the Brothers who might pass through the village. He even urged them to ask De La Salle, on his behalf, to choose his chateau as the Brothers' regular lodging place, and to send all those who might be travelling in the vicinity to stay with him.

The sight of these Brothers whom he welcomed and entertained with so much charity, after making mental prayer with them in his chapel, inspired him with a strong desire to know their Superior. Next time he went to Paris, therefore, he did not fail to stop to see the man whom God had made use of to establish a work so useful to the Church; and as a pledge of his esteem and affection he presented him with a very richly decorated antependium and a chasuble to match. In short, he and the Servant of God became fast friends, a relationship which ended only at the Count's death. On his side, De La Salle entertained a singular esteem for this pious nobleman, and to sum up his high regard for him, he used to say that he was a man whose prayer was uninterrupted.

Bauin, the celebrated spiritual director, whose eminent virtue shed such lustre on the Seminary of St. Sulpice, also came from time to time to visit the "Bethlehem" of Vaugirard and to converse with its Superior; but before asking for him, he was always careful to inquire whether he might be at prayer or engaged in some exercise which required his presence. If such was the case, he did not allow anyone to inform De La Salle of his arrival, and contented himself with asking after his health. Such was the punctuality and the faithfulness in observing little details shown in all things by this great master of the spiritual life. If he was told that De La Salle could easily leave off what he was doing, he would go into the garden, and kneeling would wait there for his disciple; for it was he whom the pious Founder had chosen as

his spiritual director in lieu of Tronson. As the Brothers' Community at Vaugirard was not far from the country house belonging to the junior Seminary of St. Sulpice, which is located in the neighborhood, De La Salle himself sometimes went there to consult Bauin, the superior of this establishment, replacing Bernier who at that time resided at Angers.

I am referring here to the vacation of 1695, a blessed period when the seminarians could see one saint coming to consult another, ask for his advice, and conform to it with respect. When De La Salle entered this house, he made the presence of God felt there, so deeply did he himself seem penetrated by it. He impressed those who did not know him by the aura of grace and virtue which always seemed to hover over his face. Those who had never seen him before said to each other, "Who is the venerable priest who looks so much like a saint?" Bauin sometimes told them that this was an ex-canon of Rheims who had given up everything to walk in the footsteps of the Apostles. The father showed much esteem and respect for the virtues of his spiritual son; and when some of the young ecclesiastics waxed eloquent on the subject of John Baptist's poverty, his penance, his recollection, while others praised the humble and mortified life embraced by De La Salle and his disciples, Bauin gave them to understand that what he himself admired most was his perfect abandonment to Divine Providence and his unreserved resignation to God's good pleasure. He added, to give them an idea of the degree of perfection which the Founder of the Christian schools had reached, that he was prepared to see the ruin of his work with unfaltering gaze, and that regarding this supremely sensitive matter he had established himself in a state of total indifference, and remained completely abandoned to God's holy will.

Once, during those same holidays, the ecclesiastics of the St. Sulpice minor seminary and the Brothers saw their two Superiors officiate one after the other, celebrating the sacred mysteries. This was on the feast of St. Lambert, the patron of the Vaugirard parish. The Blessed Sacrament was exposed. Bauin had brought his Community there to attend Mass, and De La Salle had done the same with his group. Never was there a devotional spectacle more striking and more edifying than to see at the altar these two holy priests of the New Law renewing in an unbloody manner the sacrifice of the cross. The mere sight of them inspired the onlookers with faith, respect, recollection and devotion. They seemed so filled with these sentiments themselves that one might have supposed they saw Jesus Christ in the Most Blessed Sacrament with their own eyes. Both held themselves before Him in total annihilation and in that sacred awe which St. John in the Apocalypse ascribes to the twenty-four ancients and to the four living creatures prostrate before God's throne.

Bauin celebrated holy Mass first and gave Communion to his seminarians, but with what an air of sanctity did he not do this! One might have taken him for one of the seven highest spirits who stand closest to God and are consumed with love before His eyes. It did not seem possible that there could be on earth another mortal holier than he, more filled with God and His holy love. Still, I dare say, De La Salle, who celebrated Mass after him and gave Communion to his followers in his turn, appeared even more distinguished and superior in the order of grace. In truth, on beholding these two saintly priests one might have thought he saw two Seraphs, but the latter seemed to betray on his countenance a greater elevation before God and a more eminent sharing in His

holiness. No one should be surprised at this; the life he led at Vaugirard was a real martyrdom, a true crucifixion of his flesh, as we have abundantly shown. All his senses were in captivity; scarcely one member of his body remained without its own special torment. And still it pleased God to add to so much voluntary suffering certain physical ailments even harder to bear; and most astonishing of all, the remedy that the former Canon of Rheims had recourse to was more painful than the illness itself and constituted a new form of torture.

The reader will recall what was said above, namely, that during a whole year the Servant of God had spent most of his nights praying and doing penance; and that the repose he did take was on a stone floor. He there contracted a severe case of rheumatism which later on afforded him ample occasion for practicing patience. Indeed, after suffering violent pain for a considerable time, he eventually found himself unable to move his arms, legs, indeed his whole body. Remarkably enough, the illness grew less severe on Sunday; thus the incapacity for celebrating Mass which he had suffered from all week diminished. On Sundays he had himself brought to the chapel and dragged himself to the altar as best he could with the Brothers' help. They held him upright so he could say Mass. Every step cost him as much suffering as if he were walking barefoot upon a carpet of thorns; but his joy at being able to celebrate Mass made him disregard his pains. Once he stood at the altar, his own fervor and divine grace upheld him; and surmounting his natural weakness, he forgot his pains and remembered only the sacrifice he was offering to God. Then, happy at having immolated the Divine Victim and been nourished with His body, he gladly returned to his bed of suffering.

Still, this malady, although it won great merit for him, would have made him incapable of serving his Community if it had lasted indefinitely; so he sought some remedy for it. I do not know who the doctor was who proposed the therapy which only a saint would have accepted. It was one of those cures which nobody wants to experiment with on his own body, and which one would recommend only to an enemy. But De La Salle considered his body his greatest enemy; so there is nothing to wonder at, if he seized this opportunity to add a new species of torment to so many others which he had inflicted on his flesh. Here is what they did.

They laid the patient on a sort of wooden grate; underneath him they placed two big iron pots full of hot coals. On these they strewed branches of juniper, so that the hot, penetrating smoke might enter the pores of his body, thus provoking a sweat that would draw out the rheumatic humors, or consume them, while fortifying the nerves and the other parts of the body. In addition, while one side of the patient's naked body lay exposed to the burning heat, he was covered by blankets and quilts, to concentrate all the warmth in his members. So, in this new form of torture neither side of his body had reason to envy the other.

The Servant of God suffered in every part of his frame; none of his members could escape. The little room where this operation was carried out was heated up so much by the burning coals that it soon resembled an oven, so filled with smoke that it was difficult to breathe. The Brother who was taking care of the sick man did not dare complain. Having before his eyes a spectacle of patience that impressed him so much, he could not even think of his own discomfort.

Seeing De La Salle stretched out on this sort of gridiron, he could not help recalling St. Lawrence who was burned at a slow fire; and he judged by the generosity of the holy priest what strength charity must have imparted to the young Deacon martyr to enable him to endure this cruelest of all tortures. The Brother was curious to find out how hot were the slats on which the patient was laid. He soon came to understand what De La Salle suffered because, on touching them, he found that he could not keep his hand on them or stand their temperature. The only relief that the pious patient allowed himself during this cruel procedure was to sigh and to repeat constantly but softly the following words: "My God!" Even more frequently were these others which he constantly had on his lips: "God be blessed!"

Furthermore, he had to make use of this torture repeatedly. As a rule, rheumatism is an inveterate malady which often recurs and which at certain periods of the year becomes more acute. So, it was necessary to utilize this barbaric remedy several times and to put the martyr of penance back on his grill more than once. However, this state of suffering did not prevent him from keeping an eye on his novitiate, and from maintaining exact regularity in all the Brothers' houses. He did not even wait till he was completely cured before going to visit the places where his presence was needed. For he considered his health as of no account whenever the service of God was at stake, and he took pleasure in sacrificing it to His glory.

The reputation of the new Institute began to spread, even as the number of the Brothers increased. Virtuous ecclesiastics came to Vaugirard to make retreats directed by De La Salle. Among others, Father Guyard, a Canon of Laon, made a fifteen-day retreat under the guidance of this great master of the spiritual life. Impressed by so many examples of virtue which he beheld and touched by the intensity of grace which he felt in this holy house, he left it edified and consoled.

Thus, the reputation of De La Salle's saintly life spread abroad and brought to him notorious sinners, who came seeking from his charity a cure for the infirmities of their souls. He was a fit instrument for God's hand to use in these most difficult operations of grace. God did indeed make use of him to bring about conversions which had been despaired of, and which can be considered as real miracles of divine mercy. Indeed, the charity of John Baptist provided these sinners, steeped in iniquity, with a confessor such as they desired: affable, obliging, patient, unruffled at the recital of the most horrible crimes which they blurted out to him.

When they opened their consciences, lacerated, blackened and perverted by sin, to a man whom they honored as a saint, they were amazed to find him unperturbed, unmoved, as calm as if they had related to him the life of a saint. They were even more astonished to note that he seemed to entertain a higher regard for them than for himself. Thus, in the most wretched souls there was born a confidence in this priest who considered himself a greater sinner than they, and who thought he was only doing himself justice by adjudging himself the greatest of criminals. We shall say no more on this subject here, for we intend to speak of it at greater length in dealing with

the holy Founder's virtues. Let it suffice to mention at this point in the story of his life how God, at this time, made use of him for His glory and for the salvation of several souls wavering on the brink of despair.

Thus, the Servant of God's charity obliged him to lend himself to those whom the Spirit of God sent to him, as to a new John the Baptist in the desert, so that they might receive the baptism of penance and learn how to practice it in a house devoted thereto. This ministry, however, did not distract him from the attention he owed to his novitiate. Nobody understood better than he that all hope for the future of his Institute depended on the seriousness with which the candidates made their novitiate. For this reason he would not entrust the guidance of the novices to anyone else. This tender father accompanied his children everywhere; he consoled them, encouraged them, instructed them, addressed to them pathetic and touching exhortations, presided over their various religious exercises, led them in the most tiresome labors and in the humblest tasks. He showed them in his person with what calm mockery must be endured, how to take pleasure in derision, in poverty and in the cross; finally he illustrated for them the meekness with which insults, outrages, calumnies and persecutions should be accepted.

The efforts of the zealous Superior, watered by his sweat, tears and sufferings, were blessed by God. His words fell upon willing hearts and brought forth fruit a hundredfold. He had the joy of seeing his novices, like tender plants, docilely taking the direction he sought to give them, and allowing him to shape them without any resistance on their part. On their souls, open to grace, he made whatever impressions he wanted. His sons, modeled after their father, showed by their conduct that they had been schooled in virtue by a great master, and that they had profited by his instructions and example. Even if the unusual habit they wore had not attracted attention, they would have been noticed because of their inviolable silence, their unfailing modesty, their perpetual recollection, their unwavering mildness amidst outrages, which showed everybody that they were novices or Brothers of the new Institute.

Chapter XII

The Famine of 1693-1694 Forces De La Salle and His Group to Come Back to Paris to Find Means of Subsisting. Along with Them He Endures the Hardships of the Times, but Divine Providence Does Not Abandon Them. Later, He Returns to Vaugirard to Continue the Novitiate. He Commits the Rules to Writing.

The house at Vaugirard seemed to De La Salle a paradise of delights. The fervor that reigned there made it a gratifying place for him. However, he had to leave it, at least temporarily, when famine began to make itself felt with greater rigor towards the end of 1693. Vaugirard was no longer a safe refuge for the Brothers. The house was open to anyone who wanted to come in and was entirely unprotected. Occupied only by lambs, it was exposed to the wolves.

Their food, frugal as it was, excited the rapacity of the starving. It had already happened that the provisions were carried off from the Brothers bringing them from Paris; and the same miscreants, or others like them, were ready to pounce upon a meal which could be had already prepared, every day at the same place and time.

Hearing of the robberies which were being committed everywhere by force and knowing that the Community's food had also been stolen, De La Salle realized that he risked being cut off from his source of supply, and that the Community's meals could no longer be brought in safety from Paris to Vaugirard. So he decided that it would be best to move to Paris. This was what forced him to leave his beloved retreat for a few months, and to bring his novices back to the Brothers' house in Paris.

Not that they thereby escaped famine. Before long he could say with the Prophet: "There is no bread in the house." Indeed, although he remained calm in the midst of the general alarm that agitated the public, he saw hunger threatening his Community, and his followers suffering from the "terrible arrows" of starvation which God's hand in anger aims at both just and sinners, to stir up the piety of the former, and to remind the latter of their disorderly lives.

As for him, he knew how to live in abundance and in penury, for he had grown accustomed to this, thanks to his long and rigorous fasts. However, even though he and his Brothers suffered much during those calamitous times, he experienced the truth that "to those who fear God nothing will be wanting." What is most admirable is that at a period when the rich as well as the poor feared with reason that they might go without bread, he sought in Providence alone the means of forestalling the rigors of this cruel famine. When robbery was to be feared everywhere and nothing was safe from violence, when people disregarded justice and scorned authority, when some stole the crust of bread from others' mouths, he and his followers always had something to eat. Of course, they ate sparingly, but without concern for the morrow.

In those days in Paris and nearly everywhere else, one could see people in revolt demanding bread and threatening sedition. Some searched through the heaps of garbage in the streets hoping to find something to satisfy their hunger and gathering for food things that they could not have endured to look at a few months earlier. Others, driven out of the city by starvation wandered about the countryside, seeking herbs, leaves and roots to eat. During this time De La Salle gave his disciples, less confident than he as to the future, daily commentaries on these words of Jesus Christ: "See that you do not grow solicitous, saying, 'What shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewith shall we be clothed?' For all these things do the heathens seek. Your Father in Heaven knows that you need all these things."

It was a time when one could find, at the gates of Paris as well as in the city streets, swarms of poor starving people whose piteous cries would have moved hearts of stone and whose cadaverous faces already bore the imprint of imminent death. The sight was enough to strike terror into the most intrepid souls. Mothers could no longer provide milk for the babes at their breasts. Others barely displayed the ultimate signs of life that was ebbing away. They

had lost almost all human appearance, so pale and emaciated were they, so disfigured by hunger. Some poor wretches lay on the ground here and there; others could barely stand, but no longer had the strength to stretch out their hands for alms, or to open their mouths to beg for it.

Unperturbed over the future, sure of the care of his heavenly Father, De La Salle patiently awaited from Him the food, or at least part of the food, needed each day; and when it did not arrive, or rather when it was delayed, he had recourse to the compassion of Him Who distributes it, begging for it confidently from our common Father Who never refuses us in our need when we implore Him with humility and trust.

Before giving the reader a detailed account of the heroic virtues that the famine provided De La Salle an extended opportunity for practicing, we must recall the various differences of opinion between him and Baudran concerning the Brothers' garb and the founding of the novitiate. Ever since that time this great man, although so zealous for all sorts of good works, had closed his heart towards the new Institute. He no longer looked upon John Baptist as he had done in the past, no longer showed him the same marks of his good will. God permitted this to afford the patience of His servant ample room for exercise; for, as we know, the hardest crosses saints have to bear are those fashioned by the hands of virtuous men. God uses the one to sanctify the other and often allows them to crucify each other. Apparently, Baudran foresaw that the novitiate at Vaugirard might become his responsibility at a time when charitable donations grew rarer and would have to be shared by a large number of destitute people. Thus he might be unable to help out financially; so it was no wonder that he objected to its founding, and that he was slow to assist it during the famine. In addition, the venerable parish priest had not forgotten the opposition he had met with on John Baptist's part to his proposal to change the Brothers' dress. He felt that he did not owe a share in his liberalities to a man whom he considered too inflexible in his convictions.

De La Salle began to suffer the consequences of this coolness when the salary of 500 livres due to the Brothers at the school in the Rue du Bac was withheld. Yet Baudran himself had established this school and had agreed to pay this sum; but God allowed him to forget this, or perhaps he changed his mind. The fact is that De La Salle and the Brothers had to bear the consequences of his forgetfulness or his change in attitude, since the non-payment of such an amount of money came as a serious blow during a time of public calamity. This sudden and unexpected refusal of the 500 livres, and of the other donations which De La Salle and the Brothers might have expected, knowing the outstanding goodness and charity of the parish priest, and also in view of the fact that they too were poor, left them a prey to destitution, so that they were exposed to "the piercing arrows of famine," as the Prophet says, and felt their cruel wounds.

To be brought to such an extremity must have seemed very trying to a man born into a wealthy family, reared in the lap of luxury, and nurtured on the choicest food; to a man who had been wealthy himself, and who could have lived in the most comfortable circumstances if he had not divested himself of everything. On such an occasion almost anyone else, less given to God, might have allowed regrets over his sacrifices and his renunciation to penetrate his

soul and might have reproached himself with having been indiscreet and imprudent. But he, immovable amid the storm of famine, never lost his peace and his confidence in his heavenly Father.

Still, to put his trust to the extreme test, God allowed it to happen that he reached the point where he had absolutely nothing left: neither bread, provisions, money nor the barest necessities of life. The bread had been served up parsimoniously, but finally there remained no food in the house, nor any money to buy more. So he told the Brothers: "We have no bread in the house." He encouraged them and exhorted them to be patient; he seemed so content that none of them show any chagrin. At times it happened that they left the refectory as hungry as when they had come in, and that the thanksgiving after meals followed hard upon the blessing before them; sometimes the whole meal consisted of a thin soup made from herbs.

However, even when they arose fasting, even as they had sat down, they left the table with renewed joy which the spirit of God pours out into the hearts of all the truly poor men of the Gospel. Thus their souls were refreshed, even though their bodies remained fasting. Once they were agreeably surprised, for, expecting nothing for dinner, they found on entering the refectory a small amount of very black bread. De La Salle presented it to the Community but kept none for himself. But nobody would eat any until he did; so being forced in this way he took a tiny bite. His example was followed by all; each one took such a small amount that there was some left over. This bread was the result of a diligent search by the bursar, who apparently received it as an alms.

This insignificant, short-lived relief left them all as famished the next day as they had been before; and this lack of food continued for so long a time and remained so severe that it wore down the most resolute courage and the most heroic patience. Finally, the Brothers' long-suffering gave way, and they found fault with their Superior for exhausting, as it seemed, their confidence in God; for even during this time of supreme calamity he continued taking in new candidates who were driven more by hunger than led by a true vocation, and who by augmenting the number of mouths merely added to the common wretchedness. However, nothing upset or frightened De La Salle, nothing could shake his trust in God's Providence, in the arms of Which he rested without any concern, like a little child asleep on its mother's bosom.

God, Whose loving Providence had never abandoned him, gave a new proof of His solicitude to His servant and to his disciples, who were all at the last extremity. God showed that He had not forgotten them and that He had not overlooked their needs. After putting John Baptist's virtue sufficiently to the test, God took pleasure in providing for his family by means of an unusual happening.

Baudran, peeved with De La Salle, as we have said, had forgotten him, and his charity seemed asleep as far as his needs were concerned. However, God had His own way of awakening him. One day, when there was nothing in the house in the way of money or food except one coin worth four sols, the Brother in charge went out to buy some cabbage for what promised to be the last meal for a Community which, after eating it, had nothing to look forward to but starvation. This Brother sought to buy some respite against death by

purchasing a few vegetables. He might have said, like the widow of Sarepta, "I am going to buy a few cabbages, to prepare for the Brothers; after this we can only wait in patience for the end to come." But that day God inspired him to present himself, along with other beggars, at the door of a charitable lady who was distributing alms. The noise made by this rabble caught his attention; he saw this crowd of poor people stretching out their hands for charity and was moved to join them. When he did, his tall stature and his habit caught the eye of the charitable lady, who was quite surprised. She made him come in and asked him what he was doing out there among that throng of starvelings waiting for a trifling sum of money.

"Is it possible," she asked, "that the famine is making itself felt among you, too? Is the parish priest letting the men who have the first claim on his charity suffer from want? The very men whom he employs to teach the poor children?" The Brother replied with much simplicity that his Community was reduced to the last extremity; that for quite some time it had been suffering the effects of the famine; and that he was just then on his way to buy some cabbage with the four sols, the only money left in the house. He was going to serve the Brothers a meal which might well be their last.

The virtuous lady was more and more amazed at his tale. "Go in peace," she told him, "I shall see about it." She did so indeed, because she went and called Baudran's attention to the extremity to which the Community of his teachers was reduced, the men to whom he had entrusted the education of the poor children of the parish. As this lady was one of the major contributors to the parish fund for the relief of the poor, Baudran paid attention to what she had to say. Her remonstrance was like an order for him, and he did not delay in sending De La Salle a little money to take care of the most pressing necessities of the house. However, his heart, which had opened, whether by compassion for the wretched state in which the Brothers were, or out of regard for a person from whom he received such generous contributions for the parish, soon closed again. About the middle of January, 1694, when the famine was raging most cruelly, whether Baudran had exhausted all the funds he had left, or whether he felt that he owed no special consideration to the Brothers over other needy persons, he informed John Baptist that he would not give him anything more, and that he would consider what he had given him at the end of the previous year as an advance on the salaries of the Brothers who taught in the parish.

Once again De La Salle's patience was sorely tried. Once again he saw his Community reduced to extreme want; his children asked him for bread, and he had none to give them. What will he do in this new affliction? Fasting and prayer are two certain means of obtaining everything one wants from the Father of all mercies. De La Salle employed both of them. Filled with confidence, he went to the church on the eve of St. Paul's Conversion, and prostrated himself at the feet of Jesus Christ to lay the needs of his family before Him, and to beg Him to remember that He was its true father.

Apparently, when he finished this prayer, the Servant of God was inspired to go to Baudran and felt a kind of presentiment that he would be heard. He did go to see him, to report to him the desperate plight of his family. He could not have come at a more favorable moment, because Baudran had just

received a sum of money from the King for the relief of the poor in his parish. His joy over getting such sorely needed help at such an opportune time, just when conditions were most tragic, help which enabled the charity of the pious pastor to reveal itself, enlarged his heart and inspired him with pity for the needs of the Brothers and their Superior. He embraced John Baptist and gave him 200 livres on the spot, promising that he would not take into account the extra money paid the previous year, and that he would send him 200 livres more in two or three weeks, a promise which was kept. Thus the Servant of God received a new proof that God's goodness never fails those who hope in Him.

To tell the truth, his help was slim enough; the 400 livres did not last very long in a house where everything was wanting. When this sum was exhausted De La Salle found himself once more in the same abject penury as before. He had no other recourse than to apply once again to Baudran, hoping to find in the latter's charity the help that all the needy had a right to expect, and trusting that the parish priest's heart, so easily moved by the plight of the poor people in his parish, would show compassion on that of the Brothers. For the moment he was not disappointed. The pious pastor, touched by the difficulties of the Community, agreed to provide the bread they needed; and at De La Salle's request he gave the orders to his baker to send the former a fixed quantity daily. This gesture agreeably surprised the Servant of God. Bread, the staff of life, was the main thing he wanted and the principal staple consumed in his poor Community. The rest might be lacking, but if bread was assured, he did not worry too much. But if his joy was great, it did not last long.

He had deceived himself in thinking that Baudran would give him the bread necessary for his Community out of pure charity. If Baudran had in fact intended to do this, he did not take long to regret it, and even to go back on his word. Towards the end of July, the baker sent him a bill for 800 livres, representing the cost of the bread he had supplied to the Brothers for two and a half months.* This bill frightened Baudran and made him rescind his promise, persuaded that he could not sustain such a heavy expense. He even made De La Salle assume this debt, because he refused to give him any money, and pretended that he had only intended to advance him the sum he had promised for the annual salary of the Brothers who had taught in the parish schools.

No matter what De La Salle told him on the subject, Baudran remained deaf to his prayers and remonstrances and would listen to nothing. But Divine Providence again came to the rescue by a sudden drop in the price of wheat, and by an even more unexpected return by Baudran to his former sentiments of esteem and love for the Institute of De La Salle. In fact he promised to give the

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*In 1690 bread sold in Paris for about 2 sols a pound. During the famine this price must have gone up to at least 4 or 5 sols per pound. If the baker's bill was 800 livres for two and a half months, this works out to a daily cost of 10-11 livres. This money could have purchased from 45 to 55 pounds of bread a day, which could have fed about 50 people. The figure seems perhaps a bit high. Of course, the bread they had was more nourishing than ours!

Brothers 100 livres a month for the rest of the year. This was a considerable gratuity, even though it did not suffice to cover the cost of the bread, which amounted to 50 écus (300 livres) a month. But Divine Providence, which had tested the confidence of Its servant by the most painful trials, remained his unfailing resource. It provided for the necessities of the poor Community in Paris, while other much richer religious houses encountered great difficulties in coping with the hard times; and to make De La Salle understand that He alone had provided him with the unexpected help he had received, God once more permitted Baudran to shut his eyes to their needs. With regard to De La Salle and the Brothers, he seemed to lose the tender compassion he felt towards all other poor persons.

During the first six months of the following year, 1695, the Brothers received nothing from the pastor who employed them in his parish schools. Worse yet, Baudran refused to pay the rent on the residence which he himself had leased for them, and which he had always paid for in the past. In addition, he wanted them to pay the rent for the previous year, 1694, the year of the cruelest privations, which had been for them a year of patient endurance, penance and extreme poverty. This refusal was motivated by De La Salle's reluctance to move the Brothers from their lodgings in Rue Princesse. Baudran wanted to send them to another house in Rue Guisarde; and to force them to go, he refused to renew the lease on the first house. But as this second residence was not proper for a community, De La Salle would not accept such an unfavorable change.

Once again he preferred to risk incurring the displeasure of the parish priest and to suffer, in consequence, the privation of the money which was due him in justice and in charity, rather than to expose his followers to the drawbacks of the new house. Still, hesitant as ever to follow his own opinions, he consulted others as to what he should do. The advice he received was to assume the lease on the house in Rue Princesse himself, if he could get it. But would this be possible? It hardly seemed so, for what assurance could the owner of the property have that a purse as empty as John Baptist's could ever furnish the 700 livres per annum which was what the rent amounted to? How could he count on the poorest Community in the kingdom, which lived on alms alone, which had to struggle so hard to secure the bare necessities of life, and which the famine had all but swallowed up in the year just gone by, as it had so many other unfortunates who had died of hunger?

However, De La Salle, who in almost all things hoped against hope, took a chance and leased the house. The agreement, although only a verbal one, held firm, to the great astonishment of the Servant of God himself, who could not sufficiently admire the action of the Almighty in this affair. It is indeed amazing that the owner of such a large house risked leasing it to men as poor as any in the poorhouse. When Baudran learned of the new lease, he sent for De La Salle and made a scene over it; but the Servant of God mollified him by assuring him that he would assume full responsibility for the lease and would pay the rent from then on. So the parish priest had nothing more to say except that "he was a stubborn man who had always wanted to have his way in spite of himself (Baudran) and in spite of De La Barmondière." And yet, as regards De

La Barmondière, the Servant of God had always acted according to the advice he got from Baudran; and as regards the latter, he was guided by the advice of men for whom Baudran himself entertained the deepest respect.

The worst of the famine being now over, Paris no longer held any attraction for De La Salle. The racket in the streets, the important people who lived there, the constant turmoil of affairs which went on, made him sigh after the solitude of Vaugirard. So he hastened to go back there as soon as he could, taking with him five or six novices and some of the Brothers. There, at peace in the place of his repose, he seemed once again to forget that he was in this world, and that the world itself still existed, so completely occupied was he with God and with the pursuit of perfection. At this he labored like a man who has but one thing to do and who takes that thing totally to heart. Considering that each day might be his last, and feeling that he had not yet done anything for God, he sought to please Him at every moment, and to make his days full by the continual practice of virtue. Keenly scrutinizing the road he still had to travel, he hastened to advance with giant steps, without seeking either rest or relaxation. Like the great Apostle, he forgot all that he had done and suffered for God and thought only of what he still had to do and to suffer.

The eight or nine Brothers, whom he had left in Paris to teach in the schools of St. Sulpice, would come to spend their holidays and feasts at Vaugirard, as they had been in the habit of doing before the famine. Thus they shared the company of their father and joined in the exercises of the novitiate during a good part of the year. Their worthy Superior, in solitude with them, was concerned only with helping them advance on the road to Heaven, while doing the same thing himself. He thought only of their sanctification and his own; he disregarded everything else, and did not even think of it any more than the dead do in their tombs. In him everything spoke of, and incited others to, the practice of the sublimest virtues: humility, mildness, mortification, penance, charity, recollection, the interior life, the spirit of prayer, the practice of poverty and detachment. These virtues shone forth in all he did. He proclaimed them even by his silence and preached them by his constant example. In order to arouse their own fervor, all the Brothers needed to do was to observe him. Since he was always at their head in the humblest duties, the most servile occupations and those most distasteful to nature, they learned from his example that whatever one does for the love of God is done with joy.

Seeing that he was now able to have a certain amount of leisure, he felt inspired to profit by this to work at composing a Rule. As he had been careful to make experience precede the regulations he wished to establish, all he needed to do was to set down in writing the practices which the Brothers' fervor had already sanctioned. Such was the wise conduct of this pious Superior. Everything that he planned to include in his Rule he had taken the precaution of having insinuated by his words and authorized by his actions. By studying Jesus Christ he had learned to do before teaching, to lead before advising, and to advise before commanding.

In this way his wise procedure tended to create lasting laws and faithful observers thereof, not changing laws, the obligation of which is thrown off as easily as it was accepted, thus multiplying infractions and violators of the

law. Convinced of this, he had made a long trial of all the regulations which he planned to establish, and the experience of over fifteen years had taught him what he should add to or eliminate from the customs previously introduced. When he collected them all together in a code of Rules, he was merely proposing practices which everybody had accepted and recognized. The least perfect among the Brothers could not object to them, because nobody was imposing new restraints on them; only that which had already been established was being reduced to writing.

Still, before taking up his pen, this new Moses, as was his wont, had sought the light and inspiration of the Holy Spirit; and to draw down these on himself he made use of fasting and prayer and fresh practices of penance. When he had done this for a considerable time with great fervor, feeling his heart open to Heaven's will and filled with the Spirit of God, he composed his collection of Rules. Nor did this suffice; the humble Superior did not wish to impose anything by his own authority. He wanted everything to be adopted by the Brothers' consent and good will. Although as their father, founder and leader he had every right to lay down laws for them and to make them submit thereto, he had the humility never to impose anything on them without their agreement. He proposed to their judgment and submitted to their decision his concepts, sentiments and desires; and he eliminated whatever they were unwilling to accept and to confirm by their approbation.

As he had always acted before, so did he act on this important occasion. To an assembly of the older Brothers he gave the Rules, such as they still exist today, for them to read and examine. He allowed them full liberty to make any remarks they chose, and to tell him frankly what they wished to see added to or eliminated from the text. When each one had offered his observations, he listened with meekness and docility to what they had to say; they all found him ready to make changes according to their desires. But these good children, convinced that their virtuous father had greater lights by himself than all of them put together, and that he had not included in the Rule anything but what the Holy Spirit had inspired him with and what custom had authorized, received the book of Rules with respect and submission; and with one mind and heart they approved all the articles contained in it.

The attitude of a humble and docile heart, which led De La Salle and even obliged him in all things to submit the Rule he had just written to the approval of his disciples, was in him a permanent and habitual disposition, not only on this point but on all the rest; for later on, when some relaxed Brothers told him that the Rule was too irksome and too austere, they found him ready to make whatever changes wise and enlightened men might suggest. "Take the Rule," he said, "to three religious superiors, as virtuous and as enlightened as can be found. I submit it to their judgment and willingly accept the additions and modifications that they may see fit to make."

The only major change he made in the customs already in force was with regard to the community recreations. These took place among the Brothers, as they usually do in most other religious groups; each one had the liberty of speaking as he wished, unconstrainedly. In this way certain defects had crept in. A practice needed for the relaxation of the body was becoming dangerous for the soul.

If the disorders flowing from unchristian recreations had not yet been observed in his Community, at least it was to be feared that, with the passage of time and a slackening of fervor, such abuses might creep in. As he did not think that in this matter he could expect for his Institute a special privilege which no other Order has ever received, he considered it wise to see how he could prevent this from happening. The simplest remedy, if it had been feasible, would have been to do away with such a dangerous action altogether, since it is so easy to abuse it to one's detriment. However, some relaxation is necessary for both mind and body, and human frailty can scarcely do without it. The bow that remains constantly bent ends up by snapping. A mind forever under constraint grows exhausted; exercises of piety become wearisome and unpleasant if never interrupted. Only in Heaven can man live by the spirit alone and find rest and ever-renewed satisfaction in the actual, exclusive and constant exercise of the love of God. So long as he remains in this mortal body, the burden of which weighs down the soul and directs its desires to things below, he needs recreation even as he needs food and sleep. The great secret is to recreate oneself in a Christian manner and to sanctify oneself in the process.

This secret De La Salle had sought for a long time; to discover it he had recourse to prayer. After the example of the saints, he had made it a rule for himself never to do anything of any importance without consulting God long and often. To achieve purer and more protracted prayer, he was in the habit of going into retreat on such occasions. So he made one when he was trying to decide what to do about the recreations, to learn from God the secret of making them proof against the defects which are so commonly found in them, and which make them occasions of disorder. What he did after this retreat will indicate to us the resolution he was inspired to take regarding the means of sanctifying the Brothers' recreations. At the same time, it will illustrate for us with what gentleness and wisdom this prudent Superior insinuated, by his own example, the practices he wished to introduce into the Community. On leaving his retreat he told some of his most fervent disciples the plan that God had inspired him to adopt concerning this matter, and begged them to help him introduce several new rules regarding it. We shall not mention them here, since we shall have occasion to discuss them farther on.

Once De La Salle had arranged as he wished in a codified body of Rules all the practices and customs followed in the Community, he thought of providing the Brothers with other works which would be of use to them and to the schools. Among these were the volumes on Christian Politeness, the Instructions on Holy Mass and the manner of hearing it well; the book on how to receive the sacraments of Penance and of Holy Eucharist with profit, Catechisms of all sorts: short ones for the children, others for the Brothers which were more developed, thorough and learned, including examples and pious practices. These books are the sources where the teachers in the Christian schools can find material to help them explain the great truths of religion. He also composed meditations and prayer books for the personal use of his disciples.

Chapter XIII

Perpetual Vows Are Introduced among the Brothers. After the Ceremony Where These Vows Were Pronounced, De La Salle Once Again Tries to Resign As Superior, but in Vain. He Obtains from the Archbishop of Paris Permission to Erect a Chapel in the Novitiate House. The Parish Priest of Vaugirard Opposes This.

The Brothers who were fervent and firmly attached to their vocation had not lost either their longing for perpetual vows, or their hope of pronouncing them. Vows for one or three years seemed to them too temporary an engagement; they did not fear to take on definitive obligations with regard to a Master Who is immutable by His nature and infinitely good by His essence. They felt that they only half belonged to Him so long as the ties that bound them to Him were not indissoluble; and they trusted that His grace would afford them the strength that their wills did not find in themselves. Determined to belong to God without any possibility of turning back, they felt ashamed at not having yet made Him the full sacrifice of their liberty.

"Shall we," they asked De La Salle, "not be attached any closer to God than farm laborers are to the master they serve? At the end of their year of service they can move on and enter the employ of someone else, or renew their yearly contract with the first. With one foot inside of the house where they labor, and the other outside, they are always ready either to stay in or to get out, as their interests may require. None of the proprietors can count on their services beyond the stipulated time, because none of them possess the hearts of these mercenaries. Now, are we not serving God after the fashion of these paid laborers by binding ourselves to Him for a year only, or for three at most? Once this period has expired, we are again as free as air. Unfortunately, in thus recovering our liberty we once more find the cause of our ill-regulated conduct, and this can lead to the loss of our souls. If the sacrifice of our freedom were made once and for all, we would have to persevere in our holy state; this would fix our wills irrevocably; and by binding ourselves to God forever we would attach our hearts definitively to Him."

De La Salle was happy to hear such words, and his silence gave the Brothers a chance to repeat them often. He enjoyed hearing them express such desires; but unsure whether they were really mature, and arose from deep-rooted piety, or were merely superficial aspirations, he preferred to disregard them and seemed not to pay too much attention to them. But by this apparent indifference he wished to find out what spirit inspired his disciples, and whether human considerations or the Spirit of God led them to insist on making perpetual vows. Longanimity and perseverance, which are gifts of the Holy Spirit, are also signs of His inspiration; and it was these signs that the wise Superior was waiting for, to let him know what he should think of his disciples' wishes.

Although he saw their constancy, he chose to temporize further before giving them any hope of being satisfied. To test their dispositions further he

told them at the beginning of 1694 that he would leave them four months, until the feast of the Most Holy Trinity, to reflect on the matter. He also wrote to the senior Brothers who were away from Paris in the four other schools, asking them to think seriously about the matter and to recommend it to God in prayer. As for himself, he as usual turned to vigils, fasting, prayer and other austerities, to draw down God's grace and light because he considered this a matter of the highest importance, one which called for serious thought and circumspection.

On the one hand, he was delighted to see that his children showed such great zeal for perfection and such eagerness to belong entirely to God. But, as experience teaches, perpetual vows which, by their nature are bonds of perfection, often become occasions of damnation for those who make them rashly. Hence he feared to see his disciples bind themselves in this way without sufficient forethought. Unsure whether the obligations which they wanted to assume would prove to be means by which the Spirit of God might draw them up to perfection, or chains by which the evil spirit would drag them down to their destruction, he hesitated and remained undecided and consulted God unceasingly.

But God did not at once make His will clear to him on this point. Ever wavering, he kept weighing the reasons for and against the idea; and the more he considered it, the more he feared to draw back or to go ahead in a question of such importance and delicacy. As he did not find within himself the light he needed to make up his mind, nor sufficiently obvious indications of the divine will, he sought these in his disciples themselves; and to establish them in a condition where they might receive such lights, he called on those whom he judged the most capable of binding themselves by irrevocable commitments to come to make a retreat, one after the other. What he had in mind was: (1) to prepare them for such a sacred and important step; (2) to study at leisure each one's dispositions and to see if he could find in their souls the degree of virtue and grace needed for the decision being considered; (3) to put each one's soul in a condition where it could be purified and exposed to the rays of the Sun of Justice, in order to merit God's divine light.

These private retreats of the twelve senior Brothers, whom he had selected and who were the only ones he considered ready to take perpetual commitments, were over with by the end of the four months. He then called them to Vaugirard, and on Pentecost Sunday they all began a general retreat which lasted till the feast of the Most Holy Trinity. During this week the wise Superior did not fail to address to his disciples the necessary admonitions concerning the engagements which they sought to assume; he made plain to them the consequences that these vows entailed as regards one's salvation. He instructed them thoroughly on the merit and excellence of perpetual vows, but he also made clear their dangers and the obligations they involve. He pointed out forcefully that these bonds of perfection often become snares, as St. Paul says.

With reference to the vow of chastity, which presumptuous or imprudent souls sometimes embrace rashly, he reminded them that not everyone is called to make this vow; and that if one has not received the required grace, one does so for his own misfortune. On such slippery terrain, he said, it is better to withdraw prudently than to advance too boldly; a wise and prudent delay in view

of testing oneself and of ascertaining God's will cannot have any unfortunate consequences, whereas precipitation might expose one to regrets, perhaps to horrible sacrileges, or at least to requesting dispensations, which are always shameful and odious.

Not content with lending them his own lights on this most important point, he wished to learn from their own lips just how far their understanding went. For this purpose he had the Brothers join him in dialogue, where all of them were at full liberty to declare their feelings in this matter. The only topic discussed was that of the vows; each one said what he had on his mind and shared his opinions with the rest. Judging by the conclusions reached during these colloquies, it would seem that the Brothers, enlightened by the insights of their Superior in this very delicate matter, did not allow themselves to be carried away by indiscreet fervor; for the upshot was that the perpetual vows pronounced would be those of obedience and of stability. The future showed how right De La Salle had been in not following the impetuous zeal of his children in this matter, since of the twelve Brothers who bound themselves perpetually by these vows of stability and of obedience, only six persevered. Three of them are still living at the present time.

He wanted the ceremony of making these vows to be kept secret from the rest of the Brothers. Those who would be the witnesses to and the actors in the occasion must appear to forget it, and he made them bind themselves by an inviolable promise of secrecy. To make sure that no one else might entertain any suspicion of what was going on, he retired with these twelve Brothers into a remote room of the house, where they held the ceremony at their ease and in full liberty. He began, kneeling in the midst of the Brothers, and read his consecration aloud, in a tone and with an air so filled with unction and devotion that he reduced them all to tears.

The vows (which were the same for all of them) came to this: that he consecrated himself to God to procure His glory as far as he was able; and that for this purpose he joined himself with so-and-so (naming the twelve Brothers), to keep together and by association gratuitous schools, etc.; and that he was making a vow of obedience both to the body of the Society and to its superiors. To this he added the vow of stability in the Society for all his lifetime. The formulary of these vows was signed by him: John Baptist De La Salle, Roman Priest. All the other Brothers, imitating him, pronounced the same vows, one after another.

This assembly of the twelve principal Brothers, linked to one another and finally established in their vocation, seemed to offer the humble Founder another favorable opportunity for relinquishing the first place. His humility, still displeased at having to occupy it, had never given up the idea of having a Brother replace him. Once before he had taken advantage of a similar gathering to put forth this scheme, and he had done it so skillfully that he had succeeded as fully as his passion for humility desired. More than ever he hoped that he would succeed again in this second assembly, similar to the prior one. Ever eloquent on this subject, he was prepared to put forward the same reasons which on the former occasion had won the Brothers' votes, while seducing their good judgment. The respect, affection and attachment that they felt for him made him even stronger against their own interests; and he hoped

that their reluctance to refuse him what he asked, and to cause him any chagrin, would induce them to grant him the last place once again, in spite of his priestly character.

With this in mind, he called the Brothers together again the next day and spared nothing to win them over and to make them accept his point of view. Laying aside the reserved air which he usually assumed, he adopted a more familiar, more engaging, more insinuating attitude, opening his heart to them in such a way as to lead them where he wanted them to go. Among other things he told them: "Since Providence had now joined them in a body through the perpetual vows they had pronounced the previous day, it would be wise to seek means to make this union so strong and so permanent that neither the world nor the devil could alter it."

The first such means, he said, was to place all their trust in God alone, remembering that those who rely on mortal man are leaning on a frail reed which, as Scripture says, pierces the hand that holds it when it breaks. As for himself, they should consider him only as a poor priest who lacked both the power and the prestige to uphold them and their Society. It was the height of folly to count on any man and to base their hopes on human resources. They should recall that, although he had recovered from a mortal illness three years previously, he might find himself again at death's door any day; and in that case they would be obliged to elect someone else as superior. Hence, it was better to provide for this eventuality ahead of time, rather than wait for it to happen and then be forced to make a choice.

Imperious reasons demanded that they do this without further delay; for if they kept on putting it off till his death, this could bring about very serious consequences for their Society. He added that the second means of rendering their union indissoluble was to have as their head one of themselves, someone who was not a priest. For the sacerdotal character would place a vast gulf between them and such a superior; this would weaken their union; and inferiors not closely united to the one who governs them are like a body in which the head and the members are badly joined, and which consequently remains either lifeless or languishing. For these reasons it was time, and high time, to take away from him the government of the Institute; and if they delayed in doing so, they would come to regret it.

The first result of neglecting this advice of his would be that, if he happened to die, there would spring up as many superiors as there were schools. This diversity of leaders would infallibly cause divisions in the flock; once the sheep were dispersed, they would lose contact among themselves and all subordination to a common shepherd. Then, not following the same line of conduct, they would cease to have the same spirit, convictions and sentiments. These diverse groups, no longer constituting a single organism, would adopt differing ideas, modify their doctrine, their way of life and their habit. Very soon this division would cause their ruin; these Brothers going their separate ways could not be replaced save by men having different talents, customs and views; thus before long, they would see hired teachers taking over the schools which, once they ceased to be gratuitous, would cease to be Christian and would no longer prove effective in the education of poor children.

Suppose, for the sake of argument, he continued, that the various ecclesiastical superiors of the localities where the Brothers are established should agree on giving you, after my death, a priest as your superior (a highly improbable supposition), would he be the right man to lead you? Would he understand the spirit of a community? Of yours in particular? Would he follow its rules? Would he be willing to adopt your manner of living? Could he sympathize with you, or you with him? Would you be prepared to give him your confidence? Would he be prepared to live with you, as one of you? Even supposing that he were a saint, a man filled with the spirit of God, zealous for the salvation of his neighbor, full of charity and tenderness in your regard, would he be the right man for you, not having been brought up like you and with you? In addition, his dignity as a priest would always create a gap between you and him; and with his being unacquainted with your customs, traditions, principles and practices, how could you have but one heart and one soul with him? Would he not wish to change your Rules? In a word, would he be the right sort of person to direct you? How long would it take him to acquire the experience needed to govern you according to the spirit of your Institute? Would it not call for a miracle to find a man really apt to govern you? Can you expect such a miracle? If not, why delay in doing away with your present priest-Superior, and in making it a law for yourselves never to give this title to anyone clothed in this dignity?

His discourse was moving; the reasons advanced were impressive and conclusive, and De La Salle expected that they would win the Brothers' assent. He did not doubt that they would have the same effect as they formerly had had in similar circumstances; but he was mistaken. The Brothers had been swept away on the first occasion by the cogency of these arguments, but this time they did not yield to them. They remembered the mistake they had made, the reproaches addressed to them for it, and the embarrassment that had overtaken them when they had put the feet at the head and the head at the feet---I mean when they had allowed De La Salle to be vanquished by his own humility, and had permitted this former canon, this doctor in theology, this saintly priest, the Founder of their Institute, their father and first Superior, to obey a simple Brother, to live in dependence on him and to submit to him with childlike simplicity.

True, this admirable example of humility and obedience, which recalled so vividly that of Jesus when he subjected Himself to Joseph and Mary, had provided great edification to all, within and without the Community, and had illustrated the virtue of a man who carried his love of dependence and abjection to such lengths. But it had done no honor to those who had allowed the father to abase himself before his children, and to put one of them in his place as superior. By authorizing this, they had committed a fault; they had repented of it and were not in a mood to repeat it.

The humble Superior, feeling that the Brothers were not yet ready to satisfy his love of abjection, and that they could not bring themselves to proceed to an election which he alone thought necessary and advantageous, sought in the depths of his humility new words of eloquence and fresh reasons to bring them around and to overcome their reluctance. For this purpose he spoke again with so much vehemence and energy that he worked himself into a

profuse perspiration. The Brothers were distressed at the disappointment he felt over their resistance; they did not want to contradict him; so they feigned to be convinced by his reasons and consented to hold an election.

"It won't do him any good," they said to each other, "for he will see himself confirmed as superior by a unanimous vote. Putting our father back among his own children and choosing one of them to guide him would be to violate the very order of nature and of grace. If we did this, people would make fun of us as before, saying the our simplemindedness had been duped by his humility. Are we ready to give ourselves once more to the reproach, which we heard in the past, that we agreed to put the sheep in the shepherd's place, a Brother above a priest, a penitent to direct his confessor? Apart from his priestly dignity, his titles of doctor in theology and former canon, place him far above us. And even if he were our equal in these respects, who among us is like him as regards enlightenment, learning, wisdom, experience, virtue and holiness? Should we go along with his dominant attraction for abasement and obedience to the detriment of our Society? Must his humility win out over our duty, our gratitude and our sense of justice?" These thoughts occurred to all of them, but as they did not venture to express them they kept them to themselves; and so De La Salle imagined, in his humility, that he was once again going to be able to occupy the last place.

He was overjoyed when he saw the twelve Brothers get ready to do what he desired and to cast their votes for the election of another superior. Convinced that the Holy Spirit would inspire them to replace him, and that He would repeat to them in their hearts what he himself had impressed so forcibly on them, i.e., that they should put a Brother at their head, he asked them to make mental prayer for half an hour to prepare themselves to make their choice in a truly supernatural manner, and to ask God to show them the one whom He had chosen to be their superior. So they all made mental prayer; but the language the Holy Spirit spoke in the depths of their hearts was quite different from that which the Servant of God's humility had inspired him with. They all resolved that as long as he lived they would never have any other superior but him. So, when the votes were cast and the ballots counted, every last one had voted to put back in the first place the one who had wished to relinquish it.

Great was De La Salle's surprise at this turn of events. He had already begun to sing victory in his heart and to congratulate himself on once more being the least among the Brothers. He had flattered himself that they would not refuse him this favor which he expected on account of the services he had rendered them, of the supplications he had addressed to them, of the forcefulness of the arguments he had laid before them, and of the interests of their Society which, according to him, demanded his replacement. But he was disappointed. Confused over their apparent stubbornness in refusing him the last place, he grew somewhat emotional over it; his countenance revealed his agitation. However, recovering his usual calm, he began to speak and gently reproved them, saying that they were forgetting themselves in disregarding all the reasons which he had explained to them, and which required the choice of a Brother superior. He said that they were losing sight of the Institute's best interests; that they were disregarding these. He asked them to think of these interests and to come to a better judgment.

In a word, his humility was indignant on this occasion and seemed to arouse his anger. No one had ever seen him show so much emotion. He was upset and seemed unable to control himself when he saw himself returned to the first place. Anyone else would have accepted the decision in peace; and adoring God's designs would have sacrificed his yearning for abjection to God's will. Instead, he thought he should make one last attempt to leave his position. His distaste for the first place was all but invincible; and so he felt that he should not make fewer efforts to be relieved of it than ambitious people make to attain it. To succeed in this, his only recourse was mental prayer; so he begged the Brothers to begin over again, hoping that the Holy Spirit would finally put into their hearts what He had put into his own, and would make them realize that he was unworthy and incapable of being their Superior, as clearly as he realized it himself.

But once again his low opinion of himself led him astray; for the Brothers, after giving themselves once more to mental prayer, judged of his capacity to guide them on the basis of his humility. They never thought him more worthy to be at their head than when he sought to give them proofs of how unworthy he was of this position. So, without conferring with one another, all of them persisted in their inviolable resolve to keep him in the first place. When they had finished praying, there followed a second vote which turned out exactly like the previous one: John Baptist was once more designated Superior by a unanimous vote.

Then the Brothers, feeling themselves emboldened by these repeated and precise indications of where the divine will lay, took the liberty of pointing out to him that he was bound to submit, and that by resisting their choice he was contradicting the will of God. They begged him not to refuse to recognize them as his children, and to allow them to honor him as their father. They added that his death, no matter how late it might occur, would always be soon enough to enable them to give him a Brother as his successor; and that the grace they begged of God was not to have to make such a change before the end of his days.

Finally, the humble father yielded to the pious desires of his children; and raising his eyes and hands to Heaven, he submitted to the will of God, thus so obviously manifested, and returned to his previous calm. However, the prudent Superior, unwilling that this election should serve as a precedent, before or after his demise, for conferring on some other priest the title and role of superior of the Brothers, agreed to his election only on condition that all twelve Brothers present should sign the official act of his election, and that they should add to this document a statement formally excluding any other priest, or anyone in Sacred Orders, from ever governing the Brothers. On this point they were happy to satisfy his desire, so as to have him continue without reluctance in his role as their Superior. Consequently, all signed the following declaration:

"We, the undersigned, Nicolas Huyart (sic), *Gabriel Drolin...etc., after associating ourselves with John Baptist De La Salle, priest, to keep together gratuitous schools, by the vows which we pronounced yesterday, declare that as a consequence of these vows and of the association which we have formed by them, we have chosen as our Superior John Baptist De La Salle, to whom we*

promise obedience and entire submission, as well as to those whom he will assign to us as our Superiors. We also declare that it is our understanding that the present election will not have the force of a precedent for the future. Our intention is that after the said John Baptist De La Salle, and forever in the future, no one shall be received among us or chosen as Superior who is a priest, or who has received Sacred Orders; and that we will not have or accept any Superior who has not associated himself with us, and has not made vows like us and like all those who will be associated with us in the future. Done at Vaugirard, on June 7, 1694."

Thus obliged to remain in the place which he occupied, De La Salle applied himself with renewed zeal to fulfill his obligations worthily. His whole concern was to model himself on Jesus Christ, to make Him live again in his person, to represent Him to the Brothers by reproducing His life and His virtues, and by seeking to imprint His image in their souls. The number of his disciples kept growing, but his Community remained just as poor, and the life led there equally austere.

It was about this time that two great bishops expressed the desire of having Brothers and asked De La Salle to open Christian schools in their dioceses. But he did not rush to accede to their wishes. He wished to give himself the time needed to train his disciples well and to make them proficient in humility, patience, mortification, charity and all the other Christian virtues before making them good schoolmasters. As we have already remarked, he was convinced that before trying to sanctify others they could never be too holy themselves, and that they would never make their ministry useful to the public save when they joined notable examples of virtue to the lessons in piety that they imparted to the young, thus adding weight to their words by the holiness of their conduct.

Convinced of this, he preached to his novices nothing but a high esteem for virtue and a great desire to acquire it. By the zeal he manifested to acquire perfection himself he taught them that it was the "one thing necessary," and that, since it depended on their efforts, it was the only thing that deserved such efforts. He said that they would never prove useful to their neighbor except insofar as they were truly virtuous; that real piety is the Gospel pearl which alone has value in God's sight and which should be purchased at the cost of everything else; that they should not imagine they could obtain it save through long and toilsome efforts; and that to find it, they must seek it diligently and painstakingly, and labor as hard at it as those do who seek gold in the entrails of the earth, or pearls in the depths of the sea.

Thus two years went by, in calm and in the pursuit of virtue. About this time the See of Paris, vacant since the death of Msgr. François De Harlay, was filled by Louis Antoine De Noailles, bishop of Châlons-sur-Marne. His arrival brought about some notable changes. During his visitations the new archbishop took note of various abuses which had crept in, and was particularly displeased at the great number of private chapels which could be found everywhere. He resolved to put an end to this situation. Private chapels had become so common that even ordinary citizens wanted to have them in their country houses.

To reform this abuse, the archbishop issued a decree placing all these chapels under interdict. The one which was next door to the novitiate, and where De La Salle was in the habit of saying Mass and giving Communion to the Brothers, was included in this general prohibition; thus the virtuous founder was caught in a most inconvenient situation. This chapel, so close by, was extremely handy for him and the Brothers. It made it unnecessary for them to go to the parish church, situated at a considerable distance, and of difficult access on account of almost impassable roads in winter or during spells of bad weather. In addition, by frequenting this chapel the Brothers kept away from the people who insulted them, made fun of them and played tricks on them; it also helped them avoid whatever might have been an occasion of temptation or seduction, or even an opportunity for frivolity.

In this difficulty, the zealous Superior of the Brothers approached the new archbishop, explained the problem to him, and asked for permission to set up a chapel in the house at Vaugirard so as to celebrate Mass there. He was received in the most gracious and obliging manner by the prelate, who esteemed him and was delighted to show him every mark of consideration. De Noailles knew of this saintly priest and had a high idea of his virtue. When bishop of Châlons, a city not far from Rheims, he had heard him spoken of as a saint. For all Champagne had retold the story of the sacrifices and of the heroic virtue of this canon who had left everything to take charge of a few poor schoolmasters. A man who had given such great examples of virtue had seemed to him, in truth, one of the "new men" worthy of the apostolic times, according to all those who had heard of him.

Thus De Noailles, favorably disposed by the esteem which he had for a long time entertained for De La Salle, was happy to give him this special mark of it. While granting his request, he also confirmed in writing the oral authorization that his predecessor had given him to establish a Community in Paris; and to this he added without any limitation of time, all the powers he needed to exercise his ministry---a favor he granted to very few priests. By this token of special consideration, he wished to indicate that De La Salle was a distinguished man, in his judgment, and an even more distinguished one in his heart. In fact, this prelate preserved these sentiments towards De La Salle until his death. He always saw him with pleasure, received him cordially, granted his requests with kindness, and when he met any of the Brothers, as he did for instance at St. Denis-en-France when he was making a visitation there, he would ask them for news of their Superior, and bade them recommend him to his prayers, adding: "He is a saintly man; I request his prayers."*

Thus provided with the authorization of his archbishop, De La Salle did not delay in making use of it. He had an oratory set up in the most appropriate room in the house and he himself helped erect the altar. This little chapel,

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*Blain's fulsome praise of De Noailles' kindness to and esteem for De La Salle should be balanced by the recollection of the harsh and unjust treatment he meted out to the Founder in 1703 during the difficulties created by De La Chétardye.

outfitted in a few days, was blessed by one of the Vicars General who came for this purpose. The joy of the little flock and of its shepherd was indeed great.

However, it was soon disturbed by the parish priest of Vaugirard. Although he was De La Salle's friend, he was upset over this innovation and came to complain about it to him. The strange thing was that he had endured patiently and without objection the existence of the private chapel in a layman's home nearby, and had not found fault when De La Salle brought the Brothers there to say Mass for them and to give them Communion. Yet now he seemed to take offense and even scandal when he saw this chapel opened in the Brothers' house after the other one was shut down, even though the Brothers' chapel had been erected with the express and written consent of the chief pastor of the diocese. In spite of this the parish priest made a great deal of fuss about it; and without any consideration for the superior and venerable authority which granted the canonical erection of the chapel, he made its opening a crime for De La Salle.

To hear him, the deed was scandalous, because it withdrew the Brothers from his parish. In addition, like the good doctor from the Sorbonne which he was, he appealed to theology in order to intimidate the conscience of the virtuous Founder, and to make him entertain a scruple over the bad effects this step was going to produce in the locality. He added that he could not understand how a man who professed such attachment to the Church's regulations seemed to care so little about ignoring them on such an essential point. John Baptist was depriving the Brothers of the merit they could gain by assisting at the parish Mass. His example would be an excuse for the rest of the parishioners to stay away also, and thus he would have to answer to God for the harm his nonconformity would lead to.

At bottom, this parish priest of Vaugirard was a good pastor who did all this solely because he thought his pastoral duty required it. He honored De La Salle for his eminent virtues, and he admired the Brothers as well. The more he cherished the one and esteemed the others, the more eager he was to see them come to Mass at his parish church, and thus edify all his people. Their staying away was something he could not swallow. He was prepared to give back his esteem and friendship to John Baptist provided he obtained satisfaction on this point which he had so much at heart. So, he appealed to all his erudition to prove to him, in strictly logical form, that he should give up his private chapel and bring the Brothers back to the parish church. Good example, the Church's regulations, the danger of giving scandal and of providing others with an excuse for not attending parish services...in a word all the arguments that a good theologian is so skillful in marshaling were invoked in order to make it a question of conscience for the Superior of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, if he and his Community failed to attend the parish Mass and Office.

It must be admitted that all the pleas advanced by the parish priest of Vaugirard were excellent in themselves; but they admitted of exceptions and they did not nullify the privilege granted to John Baptist by the highest authority in the diocese. The conclusion to be drawn from these arguments was that a good Christian should include among his other duties that of assisting

at the sermons and instructions given by his pastor, and at the parish Mass; but they did not do away with the right that the archbishop had given to the pious Founder to establish a Community and to erect a chapel in his community house.

De La Salle listened with much composure to the complaints of the parish priest and paid great attention to his arguments. He honored the pastor even more highly than he was honored by him. They were good friends. The Servant of God was persuaded that the other was only doing what he conceived to be his duty as a good parish priest, full of zeal for the best interests of his parish; and he would have wished with all his heart that he could have satisfied him, and attended the services in his church, if he had been able to bring there in safety and without so many inconveniences the group of young novices who needed to live a retired life, subject to their Rule, and who must be kept watch over and not allowed outside of their own house. So the zeal shown by the parish priest of Vaugirard for having his church filled on Sunday only stimulated that of De La Salle to keep his young men from a place which, while it is infinitely holy because of the presence of Jesus Christ, still offers serious dangers to young novices who have only recently left the world.

In conversation with the parish priest, the Servant of God agreed with him that as a general rule, his position was sound, and admired him for pleading it so vehemently. It was a praiseworthy thing in a pastor, he said, to want to see his sheepfold filled; and his zeal in carrying out all the duties of his mission was highly edifying. Certainly, the mind of the Church is that people should frequent their parish churches, at least all those who are free to do so. She even makes it a law to be present at the sermons and instructions of the parish priest, if one can do so without any major inconvenience, as the last General Council explains.

Still, there is no rule without exceptions; no human law which cannot be dispensed from; no superior authority which does not have the right to grant privileges. If the rule about attending Mass in one's parish church can admit of exceptions, surely one should exempt from it a group of young men who cannot leave their residence without danger. You would allow an exception in the case of a man menaced with prison. If such a man, to avoid capture by the police, came to hear Mass early in the morning, you would excuse him from attending the parish Mass. Let your charity do likewise for people who cannot appear in public without risking their vocation and incurring detriment to their souls.

If this ecclesiastical law, like all others, admits of dispensations, who deserves one more than these young men who have not yet put aside all the worldly inclinations they once experienced, who cannot appear in the midst of the world without feeling a renewed attraction for it welling up in their hearts and without being exposed to mockery, derision and insults which their virtue is still not strong enough to endure patiently? If you agree that superior authority has a right to grant dispensations, respect the authority of our archbishop who has permitted me to establish a Community and to erect a chapel, even if this privilege seems to involve an exemption from fulfilling out duties in the parish. Indeed, how can you demand that those who have

rules, special exercises and a type of life entirely different from that of seculars, who in a word form a sort of special parish, should be present in your church, where there is nothing for them to gain for their souls?

Further, the Servant of God begged the parish priest to consider seriously the danger run by these young novices, recently come from the world, who had not as yet lost the inclination for, their attraction to, or their curiosity about the world, if they had to attend services in the church where people, who often came there from Paris, gave examples of conduct that was hardly to be imitated. True, by bringing them to the church, he would be bringing them to a holy place; but it was also true that, even in the presence of Our Lord, they could see dangerous sights, capable of leading their hearts astray or at least of distracting them and causing their fervor to cool. The parish priest himself could not keep out of his church many suspicious and questionable characters, whom the proximity to Paris drew thither on Sundays and feasts; nor could he make sure that the roads leading to the church were free of young scamps who enjoyed making fun of the Brothers. In fine, he could not deny that novices, who need recollection, the practice of the interior life, and much solitude in order to withdraw their minds from the vain images of the world and of creatures, could not frequent the parish church without running the risk of losing, not gaining, piety; consequently, he begged him to approve his resolution to keep them home.

The dialogue thus concluded was not followed by the success that either of the interlocutors expected. As the parish priest did not succeed in convincing De La Salle, neither did the latter persuade the former. However, they did agree that John Baptist would go on the first Thursday of each month to celebrate a solemn Mass of the Blessed Sacrament in the parish church, and that he would bring the Brothers with him. This he faithfully did. De La Salle carried the Blessed Sacrament in the procession, sang High Mass, and officiated at the entire ceremony with the recollection, modesty and devotion of a saint. During this time he was so absorbed in God that the deacon was often obliged to remind him of what he had to do next.

Like him, his disciples showed themselves so recollected, so devout and so completely prostrated before God's majesty that the whole parish was highly impressed and joined in their devotion. That day, Vaugirard was no longer recognizable as Vaugirard. The parish priest, even more deeply edified than his parishioners, felt more eager than ever to get the Brothers and their Superior back to his parish; he renewed his pleas and conjured them not to refuse him this consolation; but as he did not succeed in convincing them, his disappointment only increased and sometime later it burst forth in full fury.

On the feast of the Most Blessed Sacrament the parish priest, more disappointed than words can express because he had not been able to overcome De La Salle's opposition either by the arguments he advanced or by his insistence, tried to win from him by violence what he had not been able to obtain through friendship. For this purpose he came to the Community and disturbed its silence and peace by his outcries and bitter complaints. He raised the specter of scandal and disorder; according to him everything was topsy-turvy in the Church of God, because the novices no longer appeared in the procession of the

Blessed Sacrament. At that very time they were reciting the Office, and by paying close attention so as to recite it piously, they remained deaf to the unaccustomed uproar that had invaded this sanctuary of silence.

Becoming even more enraged because his voice was covered by those of the Brothers who were singing the praises of God, the parish priest only redoubled his protests. He upbraided them for a devotion which kept them within their residence when, in his opinion, they should have left it to pay honor and homage to Jesus Christ as He was carried in the procession. In vain did De La Salle try to calm him down and to justify his own conduct by alluding to the many inconveniences which he feared, if his novices went outside. The parish priest would listen to nothing; he departed even angrier than he had been on his arrival. However, sometime later he gave his friendship back to De La Salle; and the latter, on his side, in order to placate him, occasionally brought his Community to Mass in the parish church, especially on Easter and on the feast of St. Lambert, the patron of the parish.

The parish priest of Vaugirard was not the only one with whom the holy Founder ran into difficulties on this same subject. The most pious pastors are the most zealous for getting people to attend services in their parish churches; so a number of them caused trouble for the Servant of God by their importunate demands and by their complaints which were, at bottom, generally unreasonable. These saintly parish priests wanted to make faithful parishioners out of men who lived under a Rule; by this they showed that they indeed had the spirit of their own state, but that they did not understand what community life requires.

When, some years later, De La Salle established the Brothers in Rouen and opened his novitiate at St. Yon in the suburb of St. Sever, two of the best parish priests in the city became his enemies and denounced him repeatedly to the ecclesiastical authorities, to oblige him to make his Brothers act like model parishioners.

The parish priest of St. Sever was a worthy and zealous man who, because of these qualities, was held in great esteem by Msgr. Daubigné, the late archbishop, a very estimable prelate who loved upright clergymen. It is hard to believe to what an extent this pastor's solicitude for seeing his church filled with parishioners wearied and harassed the Brothers at St. Yon. He constantly cited them before the prelate's tribunal, so that they would be obliged to assist at the parish services and to bring the novices there also along with their boarding students.

This was impossible, for a number of Brothers were occupied with keeping guard over the prisoners shut up in the institution either by the King's orders, by decree of Parliament, or at the request of their parents. Nor were these the only ones who had to be watched; the other boarders, who enjoyed a greater degree of liberty, only sought a favorable moment to escape. It was necessary to keep an eye on them all the time; and in spite of the Brothers' vigilance, several of them managed to run away, climbing over the walls or sneaking out through a door left unlocked, or opening it with a false key.

When the Brothers, to placate the parish priest or to avoid his harassments, took it upon themselves to bring to church their young boarders, most of whom were kept there against their wills, they had seen several take to their heels with the readiness that prisoners show when they find the doors of their prison ajar. If one of the Brothers on such occasions wanted to take out after them, either he could not catch up with them, or else the remaining ones, profiting by his absence, decamped also. In vain, the Brothers of St. Yon made the humblest remonstrances to the parish priest of St. Sever on this subject; they begged to be excused from bringing to the parish church their young prisoners whom they kept in the house on the orders of the latter's parents, so that they might be instructed and corrected there. They explained that it was impossible to take them out without giving them a chance to run away. These arguments were considered frivolous, and the pastor would not listen to them. Nothing would satisfy him except bringing these inmates to the parish church; but to do this it would have been necessary to chain them down.

As regards the novices at St. Yon, the parish priest of St. Sever demanded what the parish priest of Vaugirard had previously wanted; and the Brothers objected to this, invoking the same reasons that De La Salle had used with the parish priest of Vaugirard. These arguments did not satisfy the pastor of St. Sever; and although he showed himself very charitable towards everybody else, he considered as his enemies those whom he could not have as his parishioners. As time went on Divine Providence put an end to these harassments thanks to the recognition of the Brothers' Institute and to their profession of vows, which set the Brothers free, as it does all those who embrace the religious state, from the parish priest's jurisdiction and from the ordinary duties of parishioners.

The dispute with the late parish priest of St. Nicholas in Rouen did not go quite so far, because De La Salle put an end to it by having the Brothers who taught in the city go to live in another parish. This parish priest, since deceased, enjoyed a very high reputation for virtue and was one of the most exemplary, zealous and pious pastors in the diocese. But like everybody else he had his blind spots. He would have liked to run his parish and his clergy as if he had been the superior of a seminary. He restricted his zeal to the confines of his parish. Any good work which transcended its boundaries was of no concern to him. He did not want people to go outside of his parish, he expected them to be as assiduous as he was to the Offices, to make all their donations to the parish, to limit all the good that could be done to the parish. Whoever acted thus was his friend. He understood nothing of the exercises of piety required by community life; he could not conceive of any beyond those practiced in the parish; and he could not admit that the Brothers who lived in the parish should prefer their community prayers to the devotions in vogue in the parish.

Not that the Brothers who teach in the schools try to separate themselves from the life of the parishes; on the contrary, they are rather its firm supporters and frequent the church assiduously on Sundays and feasts, at the head of their boys; but their Rule requires (it could hardly do otherwise) that they attend services in the parishes where they teach, not in those where their residence may be located; for one of their main duties is to bring their students to church for High Mass and Vespers. This obligation, so essential to

the good education of the young and to the Brothers' Institute itself, of attending services in the parish where they go with their students, made it impossible for them to frequent the parish where they lived in Rouen. This was what the parish priest of St. Nicholas complained about so bitterly. He even wanted the Brothers to come in their turn to present the "blessed bread,"* something that no other parish priest before him had ever thought of requiring them to do.

As a matter of fact, their poverty dispensed them from having to do this, and so did their obligation of being with their students on Sundays and feasts. The parish priest of St. Nicholas, vexed over this refusal, complained to the archbishop. He did obtain satisfaction of a sort, but not exactly the kind he expected. For he was told to pay for the blessed bread himself. "Can't you see," said Msgr. d'Aubigné, "that, poor as they are, the Brothers are dispensed from making this contribution for the blessed bread? Since you want them to present it anyhow, buy some and give it to them, then they can present it back to you at Mass. Your charity, by making up for their indigence, will satisfy your piety."

So that was how the matter was resolved. The parish priest had his way and got the blessed bread made as he wanted it. But since he was having it made for the poor, he took care to have it baked inexpensively. Yet, as eager as he was to carry out all his parish duties, he showed himself less so in the future, when he had to fulfill this one at his own expense. Still, being the most punctilious man in the world, if he could not find fault with an offering which had been prepared to his own specifications, he was irritated over the manner in which it was presented. None of the Brothers was present when the blessed bread was offered; so this led to more complaints on his part. This time, however, he did not go to the archbishop, for the favorable verdict he had obtained the last time was not the sort he cared to see multiplied. He contented himself, then, with addressing reproaches about this to the Brothers and to their Superior when the latter came to Rouen.

In vain, De La Salle tried to make him understand that it was impossible to satisfy him on both points: to have the blessed bread made, and to come to present it, since the Brothers had to bring their students to High Mass and Vespers in their own parishes, and to watch over them to make them behave. "This," he added, "is something necessary for the proper education of these children, the essential end of our Institute. Should the Brothers abandon their students in order to show themselves at St. Nicholas? The parish priests of St. Maclou, St. Godard and St. Eloi would hardly be pleased if their teachers let the students run wild on Sundays and feasts in this way. Would the children not lose on those days the benefit of all the instructions given

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*Custom required that parishioners should present loaves of bread at High Mass to be blessed and then distributed to the poor. This was the "blessed bread" about which the pastor of St. Nicholas caused so much fuss.

them during the week? What would be the use of founding Christian schools, if the teachers left the sanctification of the Lord's Day to the discretion of these youngsters, ignorant and prone to mischief as they are?"

All these arguments made no impression on the parish priest of St. Nicholas who, although very glad to find sheep not of his flock come into his fold, could not endure to see his own sheep attend other churches. It happened, however, some years later, that he contradicted his own principles, because he was delighted to see a certain Sister, who did not live in his parish, bring her students to his church for services on Sundays and feasts, and assist thereat with them. Nor did he pay attention to the protests of the other parish priests involved in this matter. However, since De La Salle could not convince him, he decided to find a residence for the Brothers in some other parish; for he loved peace and hated all such bickering, and was ready to sacrifice anything to avoid it. If we have anticipated somewhat in mentioning these last two events, which did not occur till several years after the period we are now discussing, it was only because the opportunity of speaking of them happened to come naturally at this point. We might have overlooked them later.

Chapter XIV

The Number of De La Salle's Disciples Increases Considerably; He Is Obliged to Look for Another House Big Enough for Them. De La Chétardye, the Successor of Baudran As Parish Priest of St. Sulpice, Seconds His Project, after Hearing His Reasons. The Zeal He Showed for the Institute.

The Lord poured out abundant blessings on the novitiate of Vaugirard. The reputation for virtue which it enjoyed drew to it such a large number of postulants that the house became too small to contain them. De La Salle was thus forced to look for another, more spacious residence; but poor as he was, how could he ever hope to find one? He was not only poor, but the father of the poor. His house at Vaugirard seemed to the eyes of the flesh the refuge of all the indigent. Everything was lacking, and it took a truly genuine vocation to keep young men there when they could have lived at their ease in their own homes. Still, poor as was the sort of life lived there, so many came and went, and so many stayed, that considerable expenses were incurred. It is difficult to understand how a man who had kept nothing of his fortune could discover the means of meeting the needs of the house.

He found help in the generosity of certain charitable persons, and in that of the parish priests of St. Sulpice. All of the latter were zealous for the Institute of the Brothers, and vied with each other when it came to claiming the right to confer favors on it. On the other hand, De La Salle preferred to suffer privations for a long time before revealing his needs; it was only when he found himself reduced to the last extremity that he turned to his benefactors. He did not like to importune them, or to go to visit them; he

approached them only when it was absolutely necessary; and as a rule nothing was known of the Community's needs save that which could not be hidden from the public view.

The Brothers, who were not so detached as he, were sometimes tempted to fail in their trust in Providence, and to lay aside provisions when they had a chance. But their Superior, who did not want them to entertain fruitless anxieties about an uncertain tomorrow, would not countenance these precautions which seemed to him an unworthy response to the care Providence had always shown them. And the fact is that Providence never abandoned him. Just when he was poorest and least provided for, God sent him in the successor of Baudran a new father, a zealous protector, and a man eminently capable of furthering his work.

In 1697 De La Chétardye took possession of the parish of St. Sulpice, on the resignation of Baudran. It did not take him long to show that no other good work interested him to such a degree as that of the Christian and gratuitous schools. He had inherited not only the parish, but also the piety of De La Barmondière and Baudran; and he surpassed them in his generosity towards the Brothers, and even seemed to envy De La Salle the honor of having endowed the Church with such a necessary Institute.* In fact, he declared himself its father, defender and promoter; and we shall see what progress the Christian schools made under his auspices. First, however, we must return to the account of the events that occurred in 1694.

The twelve Brothers who had made vows of obedience and stability, and whom the pious Superior had chosen as his twelve principal disciples, were dispersed by him among the five houses of the Institute, to be their firm support and foundation stones, as it were. Of those whom he had called in from the Provinces, he kept with him several who were not sufficiently well established in virtue, and had their places taken by others whose religious spirit was more solid.

At this period, between 1694 and 1698, when he was concerned solely with sanctifying himself and sanctifying those whom God had sent him, he took in a goodly number of candidates. He could not close the door to them when they requested admission, especially since the famine had been succeeded by a time of plenty. Therefore, there were no grounds for supposing that, in asking for admission, they were actuated by any motive other than that of consecrating themselves to God. Moreover, the novitiate at Vaugirard quickly separated the chaff from the good grain. The life led there was so uninviting for nature that nothing but grace could make it bearable; nothing but a genuine vocation could survive in such an environment. Our heavenly Father left His servant

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*This remark of Blain's, as Rigault observes, gives us the key to the entire history of the conflict which later on opposed De La Chétardye to the Saint, and led to so much difficulty for the latter.

three full years of leisure and deep peace, so that he might cultivate, water and bring up the young plants whom He had transplanted from the world into His garden.

After this period, the growing number of Brothers and the multiplication of his concerns obliged John Baptist to give up the personal direction of the novices at Vaugirard and of the Brothers in the Parisian schools, and to entrust these functions to two of his oldest disciples. Although these two men were not among the twelve who had made perpetual vows in the Society, still, because they seemed pious and endowed with good will and zeal for regularity, De La Salle thought them capable of replacing him during his absences. But experience taught him to his cost that he had chosen badly. These appointments lay at the origin of the terrible persecutions which he had to face during the rest of his life and which, on several occasions, introduced division into his Community, and for a while threatened its spirit and its very life.

Not that these two Brothers lacked a certain basic virtue; but their religious spirit was of a rather untamed and, so to speak, fierce and unmeasured variety; it was neither enlightened nor prudent. They lived a penitential life; they were stern men, hard on themselves, and equally hard on others. They could never succeed in moderating the ardor of their zeal, nor in seasoning their corrections with the salt of wisdom, nor in adapting the penances they imposed to the human weakness of their subordinates, nor in gauging the degrees of strength and weakness, of pusillanimity and courage, of grace and virtue present in those they were in charge of.

Here, as always, the judgments of God are incomprehensible. He often abandons His greatest servants to their own lights and, by the mistakes they make, He shows that a man's personal opinions, however good and reasonable they may appear, if they are not specially inspired by His own Spirit are capable only of leading him astray. God permitted St. Francis, that apostolic spirit, that divine man who seemed to be led by the Holy Spirit and guided by the hand of Jesus Himself in all things, to make a serious blunder when he designated Friar Elias as his successor. So, too, God several times allowed De La Salle to make some serious mistakes in the choice of men to represent him. If those he appointed had been worthy of his trust or had enjoyed the qualities needed to fulfill their duties properly, his Institute would have made remarkable progress in a short time; but unfortunately, the Brothers to whom De La Salle entrusted the direction of his Institute frequently destroyed what he had built up with so much care and sacrifice. Pride or lack of prudence took possession of them, and they revealed themselves, when at the head of their Brothers, what they had been in themselves: men lacking insight and prudence, blind guides who could neither direct themselves nor guide others.

We have already mentioned the flourishing state of the communities that De La Salle had left behind in Rheims when he came to Paris. If these had endured as they were, they would have been a fruitful training school for Christian schoolmasters for country parishes and of novices for the Brothers' Institute. But scarcely had the pious Founder absented himself, when the harshness of the Brother whom he had left in charge brought strife and division into the house. The seminary for country schoolmasters fell apart; the junior novitiate closed, and half of the novices left.

As we shall see shortly, a second seminary for country schoolmasters was launched in the parish of St. Hippolyte in Paris; but after a very auspicious beginning this institution too soon crumbled, all on account of the Brother in charge of it.

At the period we are speaking of, De La Salle was about to take up his residence in a spacious house, with a large number of fervent novices. After having had the consolation of seeing his disciples and their good works multiply, his Institute progress, spreading everywhere the good odor of Jesus Christ, he would have to witness, on account of the imprudent actions of those whom he had chosen to replace him, the most furious storms and tempests assail his work, so that during almost twenty years his Community would totter on the brink of ruin. His protectors became his most violent persecutors; his best friends and advisers turned their backs on him and refused even to lend him the help of their counsel. Bishops who were most inclined to favor him, and who honored him as one of the holiest men in France, would lose all esteem for him, and would feel that they were doing him a favor by not forcing him to vacate his own house. He himself would be in difficulties with the law and would have to flee to avoid the police and even prison.

During De La Salle's absence, Satan began to test the Brothers, to throw them into consternation, to discourage them, make them grow disheartened with their vocation, so that a good number of them left the Society. He also managed to introduce into it a new form of government and to alter its primitive spirit. Before dying De La Salle had to witness all these misfortunes, to admit that they all sprang from the harshness and indiscretion of the master of novices and the director of the Parisian communities. This thorn remained deeply embedded in his heart for the rest of his life. Only after he got to heaven was he able to obtain a complete remedy for this wound that his Institute had suffered.

This master of novices, of whom I am speaking, was quick to assume the authority of De La Salle, in the latter's absence, but did not know how to use it wisely. The imprudent use he made of it tended to destroy, not to build up; and by making his arm weigh down heavily on the young people he was in charge of, by his harsh corrections and the ill-chosen mortifications he imposed, he made more malcontents than real penitents. Of course, he wanted to imitate De La Salle and to copy him in all things, for what he lacked was not so much good will as good sense. But he was like a clumsy painter who disfigures the objects he wishes to depict; he misrepresented his wise Superior while trying to be like him, and instead showed himself as he really was. Far from reproducing his original, he caricatured him; and without being able to surmount his own character defects or to attain a true likeness to De La Salle, by his faulty imitation he dishonored the very man whom he was trying to resemble.

John Baptist had always been the leader of his novices and had instructed them more by his example than by his words. In him everything spoke to and impressed others. His fervor aroused the most sluggish and brought the most negligent back to the path of duty. When he wanted to correct anyone, it was often not necessary for him even to open his mouth; his countenance did it for him; his attitude, his look, his gestures were enough to keep others faithful

to the Rule, or to make them return to it; they prevented faults or led to their being atoned. Kind, affable, ready to oblige, he won all hearts and inspired their trust in himself. Enlightened and clear-sighted, he could read what was hidden in their consciences. His appearance was always cheerful, serene, calm, gracious; he attracted even the most timid persons and made them feel entirely at liberty. He was ever the same, ever equable in his attitude. One did not need to study his moods or to wait till the right moment struck before approaching him; and whenever some cloud floated over his countenance, one only needed to look into one's own heart to find what had displeased him and caused his sorrow. He acted in a cordial, tender and charitable manner, and this drew all souls to him; in all his disciples he found the hearts of children because in him they found the heart of a father.

If he imposed penances on them and corrected them, these were always willingly accepted, because it was neither ill humor, passion nor natural inclination that inspired them. His kindness tempered them; nothing but charity was at their source; and rare wisdom regulated them. Never did he give a blow without measuring the depth of the wound he was about to inflict, and without having prepared an effective balm for it. His perfect understanding of all his subjects taught him the different means to use in winning them over. He knew their strengths and weaknesses, their defects and virtues, their passions and the graces they had received; thus he had the means of weighing and measuring everything in order to balance the severity of his corrections with the gravity of their faults and even more with their individual dispositions.

Furthermore, the rule he had adopted, namely, to command nothing that he himself did not practice, to advise nothing that he had not tried, had won for him a perfect knowledge of all the different kinds of mortifications and penances; and had deserved for him the grace of not imposing them except in a judicious manner and with fruit. Finally, his own example, his fervor, and the unction of his words made everything easy and gave him a power over hearts which could not be separated from his person, and which he could not share with those to whom he had entrusted his authority. Thus, the exercise of that authority, when not supported by his own example, his own charism, his own prudence, became odious and produced effects entirely contrary to what had been expected.

When De La Salle was away, this master of novices, strict on himself and even harsher to others, undertook to correct the slightest faults by sanctions that were exaggerated; he punished right and left, without producing the least amelioration, handing out bitter reproofs and imposing severe penances. If he had been amenable to correction himself, his mistakes might have sufficed to induce him to change; for the discontent of these novices, who were imperfect and tepid, was easy to read on their faces; this should have told him clearly enough that he was laying an unbearable burden on their shoulders, and that prudence and charity both suggested that he should tailor the mortifications he assigned to the level of his subjects' spiritual strength.

The young men, excessively maltreated by a hard and pitiless taskmaster, did not fail to complain to their good father. He consoled them, encouraged them, and tried to heal the wounds in their hearts and to implant therein

respect, confidence and submission towards the one whom he had put in charge of their formation. As sound government requires, he made the inferiors feel that they were in the wrong; he told them that they lacked virtue and obedience by thus showing their resentment and bitterness; he obliged them to make up for their bad example by a generous apology and by full acceptance of the chastisements inflicted on them.

The Servant of God feared lest he might add fuel to the flames if he admitted the mistakes made by the master of novices; he feared lest he might accustom the novices to complain of the behavior of their guides, and thus encourage immortification, self-will and pride, which would have led to revolt and the spirit of independence. So, in order to make them learn obedience and death to self early in their career, he left them under this harsh and burdensome yoke. Furthermore, since he still planned to give up the government of the Community and to put his disciples in charge of everything, he sought by all means to transfer confidence from himself to the Brothers he had appointed as leaders, thus accustoming all the others to do without him and to find him in his representatives alone.

It may be that De La Salle judged too favorably the master of novices and did not think he was guilty either of harshness or of imprudence; or again it may be that he thought experience would correct him of these two defects; perhaps, finally, he felt it best not to condemn a superior on the reports of a few discontented and ill-disposed inferiors. At all events he did not feel it necessary to take the matter up with the master of novices, or to make any remarks to him about it. Thus, the latter did not change his conduct, and so with time the wounds he had inflicted only festered. He added new hurts to the old, and thus multiplied the malcontents.

This master of novices had his like in the director in charge of the Brothers teaching in the Paris schools. These two men, cut from the same cloth, imitated each other in everything. Both of them had some virtue and a certain piety; but their piety and virtue were devoid of prudence, were rooted in moodiness, and characterized by harshness and extravagance. Thus the imperfect Brothers in the Paris schools were no less dissatisfied with their director than the novices were with their Superior. The former, like the latter, not finding in De La Salle's representatives men like him, not finding charitable fathers and kind spiritual physicians, groaned under the yoke of an obedience which was not tempered by Divine Love.

Towards these discontented Brothers De La Salle observed the same kind of conduct he had shown towards the novices. Acting, so to speak, as a mediator between them and their Superior, he tried to bring them back together again, to unite their hearts by the bond of perfect obedience. Constantly trying to bind up ancient wounds and to prevent new ones, he wanted them to find peace in patience; he hoped they would become so humble and so mortified that they would not even think of complaining except of their own shortcomings. He sought to lead them all to this level of virtue; but not all were capable of rising so high; and we shall soon learn of the crosses he had to carry as a result of the behavior of these two imprudent men that he had put in charge of the novices and of the Brothers.

The house at Vaugirard was too small to lodge all the postulants; it was fairly distant from Paris, and this added to the difficulty of transporting provisions every day from the capital. Moreover, it made it hard for the vigilant Superior to watch over the temporal and spiritual concerns of the Brothers and of the novices, since the two groups were separated. All this induced him to seek another place, offering more room, more facilities and greater proximity to Paris.

There existed such a spot, unoccupied for a long time, which had belonged to the religious of Our Lady of the Ten Virtues, where the children of France* had been brought up. It was located a little above the barrière** of the Carmelites, on the main road leading to Vaugirard. Withdrawn and solitary, spacious and ample, enclosed on all sides by stout gates and well built walls, containing open spaces and large gardens, and close to the city, this property was all that De La Salle was looking for. The cost of leasing it was the only thing that seemed to put it beyond his reach. The owner was asking for only 1,600 livres rent a year; but what an enormous sum that was for men as poor as the inhabitants of the poorhouse! Would the proprietor be willing to rent it to a man who had nothing, and who, with a large Community to provide for, never knew from one day to the next whether he would have food to set before his men? Would he himself dare to ask for the lease? And was it prudent on his part to take upon himself an obligation which exceeded the entire value of all the property his Institute owned? For he had neither funds nor fixed income. These thoughts occupied De La Salle's mind and made him hold off from concluding the lease of this property, so commodious and so necessary. Still, after recommending this transaction to God in prayer, he felt emboldened; and his confidence in Providence, Which had never failed him, persuaded him that he could not find any better guarantor than God to answer for his solvency.

He, therefore, mentioned the idea to De La Chétardye who at first showed some surprise. If you find it so hard merely to live, he told him, how will you ever be able to pay such a considerable sum for the rent? However, when he heard the arguments with which De La Salle supported his plan, he agreed with it; and to do his part, he increased by fifty livres the annual salary of the Brothers teaching in his parish schools. This unexpected liberality made the pious Founder understand how right he had been to trust in Divine Providence, how agreeable his project was to God, and how little risk he himself would run if he assumed this heavy obligation, relying on Heaven's help. So, he signed the lease at the earliest occasion; he and his Community took possession of the place in April, 1698.

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*"Children of France" was a term that included the children and grandchildren of the reigning monarch.

**The barrière was a spot on the roads leading into a city where incoming goods were stopped and inspected, and where the import duty (octroi) was collected. This particular checkpoint was near the Carmelites' monastery; hence, the name.

Once he and the Brothers had moved in, the house was peopled indeed, but it still looked bare and unfurnished, for the objects they had brought from Vaugirard were so poor and shabby that they were hardly worth transporting; and there were so few of them that they could hardly be noticed in so vast a residence.

Touched by this extreme poverty, De La Chétardye sent one of the Brothers to Madame Voisin, a generous widow, to ask her to extend her liberality to a house which so sorely needed it. This pious lady, who gave abundant alms to the poor of the parish and to various religious communities in Paris, contributed 400 livres on the spot and promised the same amount every year. But what was that to furnish a house sheltering some sixty people, where there was practically nothing, where everything was lacking? The parish priest called her attention to the disproportion between her gift and the needs that existed in this run-down house, and she generously gave him 7,000 livres right away to cover the cost of purchasing the absolutely necessary equipment. This money made it possible to buy beds, curtains, mattresses, clothing and a few indispensable pieces of furniture. The house assumed a new look and made its inhabitants realize the advantages of its location and the conveniences it offered.

However, if the novices' dwelling became somewhat more livable, their lifestyle did not become any more pleasant. When moving them to a larger location, De La Salle had in mind only to lodge all of them, not to give their bodies any more relief. A bigger house was needed to shelter the postulants who presented themselves, and those already there; but all who lived in it were not, for all that, any more at ease as far as nature went. In this new residence they still drank water only, and the food was no better than it had been at Vaugirard. The exercises of piety, the mortifications and penances went on as before. As the number of novices increased, so did their fervor. Never had the new Institute been so flourishing; in a short time it would begin to spread out like a great tree, covering Paris and then all of France, and bearing fruit...if the enemy had not succeeded in checking its progress.

In the new residence there was a chapel once used by the nuns who had lived there. This was enlarged by adding a choir to it. When it was ready, one of the Vicars General of Paris came to bless it and dedicated it to God in honor of St. Cassian, martyr. I do not know the reason why De La Salle chose this holy martyr as the patron of his chapel, unless it was that the mission of instructing children in the principles of Christianity, which this saint had exercised, gave him some kinship with the Brothers of the Christian Schools. For, in these later times of the Church, the Brothers are doing precisely what the holy martyr did in the early days at the risk of his life; thus it seemed natural enough to have him as their patron. It may be, also, that Divine Providence, by inspiring De La Salle to take as his patron this saint who was put to death by his pupils, wished to hint that he would himself endure a similar martyrdom because of the many sorrows that his disciples would cause him.

As De La Salle found in De La Chétardye the heart of a father and a zeal for Christian education which seemed to rival his own, he took advantage of this to suggest the opening of a new school in one of the thickly populated

quarters of the Faubourg St. Germain which needed such an establishment very badly. The pious pastor, willing to undertake all sorts of good works, satisfied his own zeal by fulfilling the desires of the holy Founder. This new school, which De La Salle had been projecting for some time, was set up in the neighborhood of the "Incurables" hospital, in St. Placide's street. It is still there today. As soon as it opened its doors, so many students flocked in that the four Brothers assigned there were overwhelmed with work. It became necessary to send two more to help them out. Thus the parish of St. Sulpice in Paris, which is bigger and more densely populated than some of the larger cities of the kingdom, was divided into three sections where the Brothers taught school (and still do), thanks to the liberality of the parish priests.

It is only right to call attention here to the enthusiasm that these saintly pastors showed for Christian education. It seems that this zeal was conferred on them when they were appointed to this position, and that they vied with each other in protecting such an excellent work. De La Barmondière, the solicitous pastor who died in the odor of sanctity in 1694, was the one who first called the Brothers to his parish to run gratuitous schools. His successors, all of whom were men of remarkable merit and uncommon piety, far from neglecting the Christian education of needy youth, distinguished themselves in promoting it; and it seems that the most recent parish priest deserved credit for surpassing his predecessors in heaping benefits and proofs of his goodness on the new Institute. Let us now return to our story.

This multitude of pupils, who flocked into the Christian and gratuitous schools, left those of the paid schoolmasters empty. This once again roused alarm among the Parisian schoolmasters; and again, as on the two prior occasions, they felt that physical assault was the shortest and easiest way of closing down the new school. Fearing lest they might not be able to secure the verdict they wanted, they decided to seize it for themselves; so they proceeded to lay their hands on everything used by the Brothers and the students in the school on St. Placide's street, just as they had done a few years earlier in that of the Rue du Bac.

De La Salle happened to arrive on the scene just when this vandalism was in progress; and seeing that they were making off with what they had laid hands on, he said to his charitable rivals with his usual tranquil air: "Here, take me along too!" "We have no quarrel with you," they told him, "but with these Brothers." In fact, the Brothers were summoned to court, and during the three months that the lawsuit lasted all the gratuitious schools remained shut. During this interval the zealous Superior fell ill; but his illness did not lead to any complications. Divine Providence had destined him to be the advocate as well as the founder of the Christian schools; so God gave him back his health in order that he might once more plead before earthly magistrates in favor of the public and of poor children. De La Chétardye took the cause of the gratuitous schools to heart as much as De La Salle did; it was by his order and on his advice that the zealous Founder undertook to fight the case.

When summoned, the Brothers appeared, accompanied by their Superior. He very adroitly seized a favorable moment to speak, when a pause had intervened in the proceedings, so that they could not refuse him the favor of showing how his rights were being violated. He pleaded his own case, therefore, in which

nothing but his charity made him an interested party. He did this with so much wisdom and with such cogent reasons that he made the judge's verdict inevitable, and led the latter to ask the schoolmasters one question which covered them with confusion and vindicated the Brothers.

To make clear the reason why the judge put this question to the Brothers' adversaries, we must note that the schoolmasters based their argument on a piece of imposture. Knowing that the cause of the gratuitous schools was the cause of the public, and that it concerned the interests of the poor; recalling that they had once before attacked and been shamefully defeated, the schoolmasters knew that their plea would once again be turned down by the court, if they showed themselves to be the enemies and aggressors of the needy. On the contrary, they were sure of winning if they could convince the court that the Brothers were financially as interested as they themselves were, and that they likewise profited by their teaching. If the judge had believed this calumny, the Brothers' case would have taken on a very different appearance in his view. It would no longer have been a question of the public interest or that of the poor; thus, deserving of no special favor, the Brothers would have been condemned to pay the costs of the lawsuit, and enjoined from interfering with other people's rights and livelihood. So the advocate of the charitable schools laid all possible stress on the fact that the Christian schools were completely gratuitous.*

He had left everything to establish them; he had resigned his canonry and given away his fortune; and this disinterestedness inspired him with genuine eloquence and lent him a convincing tone. But the prudent Superior knew that the judge was hesitating between an affirmative and a negative decision. With equal confidence, each party was expecting a favorable judgment. (As we know, a bold-faced liar can sometimes reduce a defender of truth to silence.) De La Salle also realized that the magistrate might leave the matter in suspense if truth did not immediately prevail over falsehood. So he dared the schoolmasters to bring forward the slightest proof that what they said was true. He declared himself ready to admit defeat and to close all the Brothers' schools if his rivals could demonstrate that they were not gratuitous.

This challenge disconcerted the masters and naturally prompted the judge to ask them the obvious question. When they could not reply he gave judgment in the only way possible: against the slanderers. For when he demanded that the schoolmasters show proof that the Brothers, like themselves, sold the services they rendered to the young, they had to keep silent and withdrew in shame. By withdrawing their complaint, they obliged the judge to condemn them. De La Salle recognized the finger of God in this whole affair and considered the happy issue thereof as a singular favor from the Divine Bounty. This is what he himself said about it in a letter he wrote to a Brother in a community

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*This was the real reason for the extreme insistence by the saint and by his successors on maintaining total gratuity. The schools would not have been able to exist, legally, if they had not been such.

outside of Paris. Among other things, he informed him that God seemed to have given him back his health only to bring a favorable conclusion to the lawsuit which had ended to the advantage of the Christian schools.

Thus delivered once again from the unjust pursuits of their rivals, the schools quickly resumed their forward march and once more began producing the abundant and evident good results they had previously afforded. The Lord's blessing flowed out on them as soon as they reopened; and from that time to this they have never known decadence. Order and discipline are maintained in them, and the effects of the Christian instruction and education they impart are notable in the lives of the students.

As no one was more interested in all this than the parish priest of St. Sulpice, nobody else appeared happier over it. His pleasure was to go to visit the schools, to inquire about the progress made by the students, and to encourage them by distributing small prizes. He made these visits regularly every month, accompanied by Madame Voisin, who brought him along with her in her carriage; each visit afforded him new satisfaction. Laden with recompenses when he arrived, he left behind him proofs of his liberality; he spread joy and noble emulation among the children whom he urged to come to school regularly, and to distinguish themselves there by their modest behavior.

On one occasion De La Salle, knowing that De La Chétardye and Madame Voisin were going to come for their usual visit to the school in St. Placide street, made it a point to be there to welcome them. Seeing the large number of children who filled the classrooms (there were over 400 of them), De La Chétardye could not restrain his joy; and addressing the one responsible for all this good work he said to him, "Ah, Sir! what a work! Where would this multitude of children be if they were not gathered here? They would be running the streets, fighting, and learning to their cost the ways of sin and evil!" In the presence of Madame Voisin he questioned the children on the mysteries of our holy religion; and, delighted by their replies, by their modesty and by the good order that he witnessed, he embraced the Brothers and gave them the kiss of peace as a sign of his friendship. Thus, going from one class to another with eagerness and a sort of holy curiosity, he thoroughly enjoyed himself and departed only with regret. But he left behind him a new determination among the students to study hard, and among the Brothers, to instruct their pupils well.

His zeal went even further, because to demonstrate and advertise the good being done in the Christian schools, he organized a sort of procession for the children in the various classes on every first Saturday of the month. The Brothers brought them, lined up two by two, to the parish church to attend a solemn Mass in honor of Our Lady, after which a portion of blessed bread was distributed to all of them in turn. Madame Voisin bore the cost of this, which amounted to some fifty livres. De La Chétardye's joy knew no bounds when he saw about a thousand children gathered under his eyes, who were being instructed, thanks to his charity, and brought up in such an edifying manner. He pointed them out to Madame De Montespan, to Madame Voisin, and to other pious ladies who derived much edification from the spectacle. He mentioned to

them what a sort of miracle it was to see the perfect order, the modesty and silence which reigned among these children, who were usually considered to be so wild and ungovernable.

Thus, the worthy parish priest of St. Sulpice showed his affection for the Christian schools, and this sustained that of Madame Voisin and encouraged this pious lady to continue her donations to them. She felt she could do nothing better with her money than to support a work so useful to the public and so necessary for the poor. At the parish priest's suggestion, she agreed at this particular time, when the price of bread had again increased considerably, to have a pound of it distributed daily as an alms to all the Brothers' pupils.

As De La Chétardye's zeal for the Christian schools grew day by day, he sought to multiply them as much as he could in his parish. In view of this, he caused another one to be opened in the street of Fossez de M. le Prince, near St. Michael's gate. This school, like the others, soon attracted so many students that four Brothers had to be assigned to it. It is true that it did not last more than three or four years, because the charity of those who supported it eventually grew cold, and it had to be discontinued. Of course, the schoolmasters were not happy at the opening of this new establishment; but they did not dare to cause any trouble. The influence enjoyed by the parish priest of St. Sulpice, who had declared himself its founder and protector, tied their hands and obliged them to maintain an uneasy truce with the Brothers, even though their hearts were filled with thoughts of strife.

Chapter XV

Second Attempt to Establish a Gratuitous School and a Training College for Country Schoolmasters in St. Hippolyte's Parish, Paris.

By giving De La Salle the opportunity of opening a school in the parish of St. Hippolyte, in the St. Marcel section, Divine Providence also furnished him with a chance to establish a new training college for country schoolmasters. No other type of institution interested the Servant of God so much as this. In the conception he entertained of his Institute, there was a place for the Brothers who would teach in towns and cities, and one for lay schoolmasters destined to work in country villages. The first part of his scheme was succeeding well enough in spite of opposition and persecution on the part of the world and of Hell; but the second, which he had started in Rheims with so much success, had not survived his own departure from that city; and he yearned with a holy longing to revive it. God gave him this joy, but not for very long; for he witnessed the destruction of this undertaking through the treachery of the one among his sons on whom he counted most, and whom he had chosen to preside over its foundation. Here is how all this happened.

The parish priest of St. Hippolyte, learning of all the good done by the Christian schools in the parish of St. Sulpice, was inspired to secure the same advantages for his own parish. He found De La Salle quite willing to give him

two Brothers, and he provided for their upkeep in a truly generous fashion. When he saw for himself how much benefit could be derived from a gratuitous school conducted by disinterested and truly pious teachers, he looked even farther afield and conceived the idea of extending to country parishes the blessings that the Lord was bestowing on his own. He broached the idea to De La Salle and asked him how it could be carried out. The wise Superior, determined not to send his Brothers to small villages because of the reasons previously mentioned, made the parish priest understand that it would be possible to replace the Brothers by schoolmasters brought up and trained in virtue and in the art of their profession. Then, seeing that the parish priest was eager to cooperate with him in founding a training college for these country schoolmasters, he informed him about the project and added that he was impatiently awaiting the day when he would see this important work get under way once more.

The pious pastor, delighted to learn that his idea was feasible and that simple and easy means to realize it were available, resolved to second the scheme of De La Salle, and entrusted to him the job of establishing the training college, while he himself undertook to provide the funds. Never did two men intent on a good work seem more satisfied. De La Salle had found in the parish priest of St. Hippolyte the man he had been hoping to meet, the man who would resurrect in Paris the training school for country schoolmasters which had failed in Rheims; and the parish priest of St. Hipployte found in De La Salle the right man to carry out his desires and to satisfy his zealous wishes.

Each one did his part in the undertaking. At the suggestion of the pious pastor, a gentleman gave them a house; a virtuous ecclesiastic donated an income of 800 livres a year to underwrite the foundation. As soon as the house was ready, De La Salle brought in a number of young candidates from Champagne. To instruct them he chose one of the pioneer Brothers in whom he had unlimited confidence, but who, a few years later, turned into a new Judas. The parish school classes were also housed in this same building; the second Brother taught one of these, while the other was conducted by the apprentice schoolmasters under the eyes of their director. The young men, in turn, practiced teaching so as to learn the methods of handling a class effectively.

The Brothers' manner of living and most of their regulations were followed in this training college. The students rose at 4:30 a.m. and went to bed at 9 p.m. During the day, mental prayer, spiritual reading and examination of conscience alternated with the exercises proper to their profession, namely, reading, writing, arithmetic; these subjects, along with Gregorian chant, were taught at specified times. Silence and recollection were observed, as well as other practices of piety in use among the Brothers. Each young man wore the clothes he had brought with him on entering; all of them dressed in secular garb. Moreover, they were provided with board, lodging and instruction gratis; all that was asked of them was good will.

This training college flourished for as long as the parish priest lived, some five or six years; but his death brought about its ruin on account of the

very means he had taken to provide for its survival---so true is the observation of the Wise Man who says that "man's views are short" and his wisdom as well as his precautions are most uncertain.

On his deathbed the pious parish priest of St. Hippolyte, realizing better than ever the importance of this good work he had helped establish, had no greater concern than to insure its continuation after his own demise. Since the institution was not legally recognized and enjoyed no official status, he had to find a way to make sure that it was provided with funds. After considering the matter carefully, he thought he could solve all the difficulties by naming the Brother who directed the college heir to the invested capital that supported the institution. The worthy parish priest had no doubts about this Brother's honesty; indeed, who could have questioned it? He was one of the two men whom the pious founder considered as his two arms, and whom he had selected as the pillars of his Community. Together with De La Salle and Brother Gabriel Drolin, this Brother constituted the triumvirate who had obliged themselves by vow never to abandon the Institute and to labor with all their strength for its progress, till death, as we have related above.

De La Salle had so much confidence in him that he had chosen this Brother as the dirctor of the new training college. It would seem, therefore, that the parish priest of St. Hippolyte could not have acted more prudently than in making this Brother his heir. It was not normal to imagine that this man, aware of his true wishes and chosen to execute his projects, would abuse this confidence and appropriate for himself the funds given him for the training college for country schoolmasters. Certainly, the Brother could not have been ignorant of the intentions of the parish priest, since the latter had personally told him of them. Still, the funeral of the parish priest of St. Hippolyte was hardly over when De La Salle found out he had chosen a Judas in the man he had appointed as superior of this institution, and that this wretched Brother, like the perfidious apostle, intended to enrich himself with money given to God and destined for the support of a good work.

When the vigilant Superior learned of the death of the parish priest and of the dispositions set up by his will, he came to make arrangements with the Brother. But he got a rude shock when he found his principal disciple ready to turn his back on him; the latter told him superciliously that he no longer recognized him, could do very well without him, and, in a word, wished to have nothing more to do with him. The avaricious man, elated over his good fortune, was determined to make the most of it. He claimed that the will had been made out in his favor, and that the money belonged to him alone.

On this occasion De La Salle's eminent virtue appeared in all its splendor. His disciple's perfidious conduct was obvious; his ingratitude, notorious; his injustice, crying; his insolence, outrageous. But they only served as shadows which brought out in bolder relief the mildness, humility and disinterestedness of the Servant of God. De La Salle accepted the unjust and insulting greeting of the Brother in humble silence, and did not allow himself to complain in the least. Happy over such a turn of events, which made him resemble Jesus Christ betrayed by one of His disciples, he felt chagrin only over the ruin of the training college which he had so long hoped to see flourish again. If no man ever had imitated Judas more closely in his perfidious and avaricious conduct

this unfortunate Brother, never did anyone better imitate Jesus in His meekness and patience than De La Salle on this occasion. He came home in peace and seemed to forget about the wrong done to him. He never dreamed of vindicating his rights in the question of the training college, for which the legacy had been destined.

As abyss calls to abyss, as those who fall from the loftiest positions are the most seriously hurt, the ambitious Brother did not limit himself to this first offense. He laid aside his habit and put the other Brother, his companion, out of the house; he secured a dispensation from his vows and thought only of enjoying in peace the goods he had unjustly stolen from the Church. The charitable ecclesiastic who had joined the deceased parish priest in supporting the good work, and who at the latter's request had agreed to make over to it an income of 800 livres per year, was outraged at the unjust use made of the funds left by the former parish priest; so he revoked his own donation. Thus, this training college, which had been started so quickly and successfully, fell into complete ruin, to the great regret of the Servant of God who was powerless to prevent its destruction.

However, the sacrilegious usurper did continue the school established in the parish; and sometime later, either because he had wasted most of the legacy he had appropriated, or because he hoped to appease the remorse of his conscience which tormented him, he sought to be re-admitted into the Community from which he had separated himself with so much shame and scandal. Like a good father, De La Salle opened his arms to this prodigal and unnatural son. He would have taken him back into the Society with joy, but the advice of wise and prudent people, who feared the effects such a pernicious example might cause, dissuaded him from doing so.

Such was the second wound in De La Salle's heart which he received in the new house. We shall soon speak of the first one which, if it preceded the second, also followed it. It is easy to understand how much the Servant of God suffered on account of the callous behavior of the Brother of whom we have spoken. Our heart can sympathize with, easier than our lips can express, the pangs caused by ingratitude, perfidy, injustice, insolence, meanness and cruelty. Still, a pure soul suffers less from the consequences of these vices than from the ruin of an important establishment destined for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. But the time had not yet come for the Superior of the Brothers to start counting his crosses. The ones we have spoken of were only the beginning of his sorrows. When he moved from the small house to the larger one, he found bigger crosses awaiting him. If his Institute achieved important progress there, it was also there that he saw his troubles multiply. The ground on which he walked produced nothing but thorns and brambles for him. He was to encounter new persecutions at every step, and these would leave him only when he departed from this life. However, this new Job faced these most trying happenings with a confident and tranquil air which amazed those who shared his confidence. Ever the same, he sought comfort in his perfect submission to the orders of Divine Providence and in total abandonment to God's action.

The perfidious disciple of whom we have spoken survived his master, but not for long. After continuing the school in the parish of St. Hippolyte for over

twenty years, he fell ill of a mortal ailment the day after De La Salle expired. The Servant of God died on Good Friday, April 7, 1719; and it seemed that on the very next day he interested Heaven in avenging a crime which during his life he had pardoned so wholeheartedly. The former Brother fell ill on Holy Saturday, the day the Servant of God was buried; and after five months of suffering, he went to give an account to his Judge for the tremendous injustice he had been guilty of towards the Church, for the affront he had offered his Superior, for his scandalous desertion which had shocked his Community, and for the complete ruin of the training college for country schoolmasters which he had brought about.

It was about this same time that De La Salle opened his house to fifty young Irish lads who had recently taken refuge in France so as to preserve their religion. This had been proposed to him by the parish priest of St. Sulpice, acting on the suggestion of the archbishop. The prelate had been asked by the King of England, who had taken refuge in this kingdom, to find a suitable place for the group of young men who had voluntarily left their country to safeguard their faith from persecution. Archbishop De Noailles found no more fitting solution than to send them to the Brothers' Community, where their piety might be nourished, and the innocence of their hearts, even more threatened than their faith, preserved from the corruption of the world.

The archbishop's mind had not yet been poisoned against the former Canon of Rheims. The reputation for holiness that John Baptist's heroic virtues had won for him in the archbishop's opinion, when the latter was still bishop of Châlons, had not yet been erased. He loved and honored the Servant of God as an apostolic man, and on this occasion he wished to give him a striking proof of his trust, by confiding to him the education of a group of fervent Catholic youths whom His Britannic Majesty had entrusted to him. In doing this the prelate showed great consideration which he was not, strictly speaking, bound to do, since as the first superior of the diocese he could have, of his own accord, opened to these young Irishman the doors of a community which was entirely subject to him. He preferred, however, to request as a favor what he could have required by an order, and sought the agreement of the Brothers' Superior for something which he could have demanded.

De La Salle strove to correspond with the trust that the prelate showed him. Out of obedience to his superior and out of charity towards these pious refugees, he provided them lodging and let them occupy his house. He himself took a special interest in their education, without relying exclusively on the vigilance of the Brother whom he placed in charge of them. In this way they were soon in a position to fulfill honorably the various responsibilities for which they were destined.

While these young men, so staunchly Catholic and so deeply attached to the Roman Church, were being educated in this school of virtue, the King of England accompanied by the Cardinal honored them by paying them a visit. This great prince, a victim of his religion, who had sacrificed his throne to be faithful to his faith, showed himself extremely concerned about the education of these youths who had suffered persecution on his account. Everyone knows, and it is hardly necessary to mention here, that the great revolution that had taken place in England several years prior to the persecution we are speaking of, was

a result of the zeal that this worthy King had shown for the Catholic faith. With the Queen, his spouse, and their son, the Prince of Wales, he was forced to flee before the tyrant who had pursued the path of crime even to the throne itself. They had sought shelter in France and the protection of Louis XIV, the zealous defender of their rights and of their faith. The faithful subjects who had followed the royal couple into exile, and who had been welcomed in a kingdom which had just recently* freed itself from heresy which had wrought such carnage within it, had given the example to those whom they had left behind in their country, exposed to the fury of persecution, and encouraged them to come in their turn to seek their safety and security in France.

Since zeal for the Catholic religion was the only reason for the fall of the King and Queen of Great Britain, the usurper of their crown constantly strove to extirpate the faith from the country. The tyrant knew full well that the rightful King still had a large number of faithful adherents in the kingdom he had been forced to abandon; he realized that their attachment to the true religion kept them firmly bound to their legitimate sovereign. So he felt that the best way of overcoming their double fidelity was to make them feel the weight of his murderous arm, and to grind down Roman Catholics under his authority. Thus, not ashamed of adding to the odious title of usurper that of tyrant, he often stirred up the flames of persecution again; and since those who practiced the old faith preferred to abandon their lands and their country rather than give up their religion, they came begging the protection of the Most Christian King, who made it an honor and a duty of piety to welcome them into his kingdom.

These faithful subjects, whom the sword of persecution had caused to flee their homeland so as to remain with their legitimate prince, were very dear to him. Since their cause was his own, he showed a father's concern about everything that affected them and took care of them as though they had been his children. He certainly showed this on the occasion we mentioned; for without feeling himself liberated from the responsibility for these Irish youths whom he had recommended to the Cardinal and entrusted to his charity, he wished to see with his own eyes the place where they lived, to find out what kind of education they were receiving, and to inquire about everything concerning them. Having seen for himself the Christian manner in which they were being brought up, he was very satisfied; and after showing much courtesy to De La Salle, he expressed his gratitude to him for the trouble he was taking to educate these young men, and for the progress that they had accomplished.

This great gift which John Baptist possessed for bringing up youths in a Christian manner and for converting hardened souls drew to him the confidence of the greatest sinners. Parents unable to cope with their unmanageable children, and despairing of ever being able to bring them back to the path of duty, sought in him the grace that they could not find in themselves, to withdraw these children from their evil ways. He often succeeded beyond their

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*Blain is, of course, alluding to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV in 1685, which had led to an exodus of Calvinists from France.

expectations, and gave back these wild, ungovernable children to those who had entrusted them to him, now gentle, docile, submissive and pious.

The prompt and sudden change in a young ecclesiastic belonging to a noble family, who had been sent to him, seemed to be a sort of miracle to those who had known this young man. In vain had every means imaginable been used to induce him to act reasonably, and not to lose sight of the state of life to which he was destined. In vain had his relatives thought that sending him to spend some time in the most regular communities would enable him to pick up a smattering of ecclesiastical spirit, or at least would make him ashamed of his scandalous and ill-regulated life. He turned all the remedies offered him into poison; and by a tragic abuse of these means of salvation he had made them become additional causes of damnation. Only in the Brothers' Community did he return to the use of his good sense and his faith; but as we intend to speak of the conversions brought about through the ministry of De La Salle in our fourth book, where we shall treat of his virtues, we shall say no more about this case here.

The holiness of the Brothers' Superior had become known in Paris; it acquainted people with their Institute, and inspired several great bishops with the resolution to call them into their dioceses. The first of these was Msgr. Godet Desmarets, bishop of Chartres, a prelate whose zeal and piety so often served as a bulwark for sound doctrine. He could be looked upon as the scourge of innovators in his time, one whom they all feared as the most uncompromising enemy they had. He was the first to declare war on false spirituality, and to point out clearly the subtle venom and the latest perversity it veiled. He and De La Salle had known each other at the Seminary of St. Sulpice when the latter was a young Canon of Rheims; and just as they had edified each other then, so later on they preserved a mutual esteem and consideration. The great bishop of Chartres had asked De La Salle for some of his disciples several years before this; but the Servant of God, under the plea that at the time he did not have enough of them sufficiently well trained, had begged his friend to wait. Although he had every reason to satisfy a prelate who enjoyed such great credit at Court and who, on account of his piety and the purity of his belief, wielded such influence over the King, he felt that he should delay sending him any Brothers until he could see clearly that such was the will of God.

Msgr. Godet Desmarets had been asking for Brothers since 1694 and had frequently reiterated his request. Finally, in 1699 he insisted so strongly that De La Salle could no longer hold back. However, before promising to send any of his subjects to Chartres, the humble Superior wished to obtain the Brothers' consent. So, he called them together and informed them of the illustrious prelate's proposal; and after praising the latter's eminent piety and ardent zeal for religion, he let them come to their own decision as they pleased.

The Brothers, conscious of the honor paid to them by a bishop whom the partisans of sound traditional doctrine honored as the shield of the faith in France, vied with one another in offering themselves to their Superior for this mission. On the other hand the pious prelate had the satisfaction of seeing all the parish priests in the city of Chartres, without exception, join him in carrying out his design.

These zealous pastors, learning that their bishop was trying to secure for Chartres a group of capable and exemplary schoolmasters, unanimously begged him to bring his project to completion as soon as possible. They were so well satisfied with the schoolmistresses whom he had obtained for their parish schools for girls that they ardently desired a similar provision for the boys. The fear that this project might not come about at all, or might be long delayed, led them to address to the bishop a petition signed by all the parish priests, urging him to conclude the matter speedily.

In this petition they speak like experienced, vigilant and zealous pastors who realize that they are bound to labor for the instruction and sanctification of their parishioners, and who recognize that the worst evils afflicting their flocks arise from the lack of a suitable education for the young; and that therefore the remedy must be sought in securing for them knowledgeable, pious and disinterested teachers. "After discussing this matter among ourselves several times," they continue in their petition, "we have come to the conclusion that one of the main causes of the indocility, immodesty, ignorance and the obviously disorderly lives led by the majority of the children in this city, both boys and girls, is the fact that either there are no gratuitous schools for the poor, or that the schoolmasters and mistresses who up to now have conducted these schools have done so without proper authorization and without the knowledge of the ecclesiastical authorities. In their work they have no end in view other than earning a livelihood; hence, they do not fulfill their tasks for the children's good. Either they lack aptitude, or zeal, or constancy. It is necessary to find a remedy for so great an evil; and this means obtaining for this city some schoolmasters and mistresses, established by Your Excellency, whose professional qualifications, piety and zeal will be well vouched for, so that they may educate the young. In particular, some gratuitous schools should be set up for the benefit of the poor children who, because they cannot pay the fees required by the schoolmasters and mistresses, remain without instruction, do not frequent the schools, run wild, and so are easily perverted and become incorrigible.

"Having learned that there is in Paris a priest of great piety who has undertaken to prepare and train young men who possess all the qualities needed to carry out this task properly; that this priest is willing to send his subjects wherever they are asked for, provided that their upkeep and livelihood are guaranteed---which requires only a modest sum---we feel obliged to have recourse to Your Excellency, very humbly begging you to use all your influence and your charitable alms to secure for this City such a powerful agent for the reform of the people's morals."

The bishop of Chartres, delighted to see that his own zeal was seconded by that of the parish priests of his episcopal city, urged the Brothers' Superior to give him some Brothers. Six were sent to teach in the gratuitous schools, and a seventh to take charge of the material concerns of the Community. The virtuous prelate received them with great joy. Forgetting who he was, he displayed great friendliness towards them and gave them all sorts of proofs of truly Christian charity; for he was not one of those men who never get off their pedestals and wish never to be seen, except arrayed in all their dignity. He was of easy access; and by his character, as well as through virtue, he

liked to show himself approachable even to the humblest people, and to make them feel that in their bishop they had a brother and a father.

As enlightened as he was zealous, and no less wise than pious, the prelate took all the steps necessary to make the Brothers' ministry effective among the young. The outright protection with which he favored them, the generous provision he made for their upkeep out of his own purse, the petition forwarded to him by the parish priests of the city urging him to bring the Brothers to Chartres, were all strong reasons that led the faithful to entrust the education and instruction of their children to these new spiritual guides whom God in His goodness was sending them. All that remained was for the bishop to officially authorize, by a pastoral letter, the opening of the Christian and gratuitous schools. This he did on October 4, 1699.

In this pastoral letter, the pious bishop, with his customary unction, declared that ever since it had pleased God to entrust to him the government of the diocese, he had nothing more at heart than the establishment of Christian schools, especially charity schools, in the parishes which needed them most.

"Nothing," he added, "seemed to us better calculated to inspire the people confided to our care with a knowledge of the Gospel maxims which should regulate their conduct. Sad experience has taught us that the moral turpitude which has invaded all ranks of society results from the little care taken to provide the faithful during their youthful years with an education worthy of their status as children of God--a status given to them in baptism. We felt that in doing this we would considerably facilitate the task of fathers and mothers, who are so strictly bound to bring up their children in a Christian manner, yet who are often unable to do it successfully, prevented as they are by their occupations and their daily labor, or because they themselves lack the qualities needed to succeed in this task.

"Still, they should think seriously of St. Paul's weighty words: 'that mothers (one should say the same thing, with even greater reason of fathers) will not be saved except by giving their children a good education', which means acting in such a way that they may preserve their faith, grow in charity and holiness, and lead well-regulated lives. Our own experience in governing souls has convinced us more firmly than ever of the truth of these words of one of the greatest churchmen of these last centuries, a man who, despite the eminence of his learning gladly spent the declining years of his life teaching religion to children: 'I do not know whether there is anything nobler and more agreeable to God than to cultivate these young plants in the Lord's garden, and to water them with the salutary waters of heavenly doctrine.'*

"We have observed, and were much consoled in doing so, that God was beginning to pour out very abundant blessings on the charity schools which we had established for girls in certain parishes of the city; this confirmed us in our desire to extend this favor to other places and to procure similar advantages for boys. What encouraged us even more in this undertaking was to

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*Jean Gerson

see that our King (always great in everything he undertakes, but never more so than in what relates to religion) was extending his solicitude to the establishment and the multiplication of schools and, inspired by his piety, was striving to arouse the zeal and vigilance of pastors in this matter. To second his pious intentions we have brought here some teachers, very well trained for such a noble task and capable of edifying the children by their example as well as of instructing them through imparting the necessary lessons."

After this he set the opening of the schools for October 12 of that same year, 1699.

The pastoral letter had all the effect that its author could have hoped for. Docile to the voice of their chief pastor, parents hastened to send their children to the charity schools, which were soon filled. The great good produced by the Christian education of these youngsters, heretofore left to themselves, was a source of deep joy for Msgr. Godet Desmarets, who provided for the schools with a generosity worthy of his great heart. He saw to it that nothing was lacking to them. Fearing lest concern for the necessities of life should distract the Brothers from their ministry which was so useful to the public, or lest worrying about their needs should impair their zeal, he took care to provide for everything. It was only after his death that the Brothers realized how much good he had done for them, and how deeply indebted they were to him. When they lost him, years of famine followed the years of abundance; and their charitable labors were rewarded by persecutions, as we shall see farther on.

The prelate's generosity towards the Brothers was linked to an admirable zeal for the success of their schools. His humility led him to visit them and caused him to take pleasure in doing so frequently. He seemed to consider this one of his pastoral duties; he carried it out with noble familiarity and majestic simplicity. He showed the children a father's interest, spoke to them with a mother's tenderness. It would be hard to say who remained most charmed, who felt most strongly the pleasure of his visits: the Brothers or the students. He exhorted these, consoled those, and urged all to persevere in their good work. The unction of his words left the good odor of Jesus Christ and seeds of virtue behind him wherever he went. Above all, he neglected nothing that could sustain the Brothers in the difficult beginnings; and he spared nothing to restore their health when they began to suffer from exhaustion.

On this score he had frequent opportunities to display his charity, because the zeal which devoured these fervent Brothers for the instruction of the young, and the effort of their constant application to their classwork, joined to the exercises of a severe interior life, and often to the exaggerated practices of mortification and penance common among them, ruined the health of several of the most robust. Some of them died, blessing God for having led them to so holy a profession. The charitable bishop, deeply chagrined over the loss of some of his best schoolteachers, spared nothing to reestablish or to preserve the health of the remaining ones. As he was convinced that their excessive fervor was the principal threat to this, he begged and implored them with all kindness to confine themselves to the limits of prudence.

Although he himself was no enemy to penance and a zealous promoter of evangelical austerity, as one can see from the admirable pastoral letter he wrote against the false spirituality in vogue at the time, he warned the Brothers to restrain their fervor so that it might last longer, and to wait for God's own good time to offer Him the sacrifice of their lives, without trying to anticipate His decrees. He told them that if they did not wish to fatten the victim before immolating it, they should at least nourish it, and not overburden it with excessive work and an unbearable load of austerity. He reminded them that the Christian instruction and the proper education of poor children were the end of their vocation and the source of their merits for heaven; hence they should tailor their penances to the requirements of the work that this vocation demanded of them, and subordinate the one to the other. After all, the fatigue induced by teaching was in itself a considerable mortification which should be preferred to all others; it cannot countenance what conflicts with itself.

The good prelate did all he could to bring relief to these sick Brothers. He did not disdain to visit them, to examine their spiritual books, and hunt out their instruments of penance, and to take away from them those that in their fervor they might have made indiscreet use of. So much condescension, on the part of a prelate so distinguished by his merit, sprang from that basic goodness of heart and charity which characterized him, from the ardent zeal he had for the Christian schools, and from the singular veneration he entertained for their Founder.

On his side, De La Salle omitted nothing to demonstrate his gratitude towards the bishop. In Msgr. Godet Desmarets he honored a true successor of the Apostles, who was even dearer to him by reason of the purity of his faith and his morals, of his zeal for sound doctrine, of his horror of all profane innovations, than on account of the protection extended to his disciples.

When the Servant of God, during the visits which his vigilance obliged him to make to Chartres to inspect the Brothers' Community and the schools, went to present his respects to the pious bishop, he was received by him like an angel from God, or like a former fellow student at the Seminary of St. Sulpice, with that cordiality and holy familiarity which great souls, even in the exalted dignities they attain, never fail to show towards their old friends. The good prelate invariably invited the virtuous priest to dine with him; but in vain did he exhaust all his most engaging manners to induce him to stay.

Finally, weary of inviting a man who always took refuge behind the Rule established in his Community of never eating outside the house, except when travelling, he decided one day to obtain through a pious subterfuge what he could not win through appeals to friendship. The Servant of God, without suspecting the innocent trap into which he was walking, had not failed, on his arrival at Chartres, to go as usual to the episcopal palace to pay his respects to the bishop. He found all the doors open when he wished to enter; but discovered that they were all shut tight, by the orders of His Excellency, when he wanted to leave. So, finding himself a prisoner, he learned that the sentence the bishop had imposed on him was to dine at his table; and thus he had to pay the penalty before he would be delivered. In this way he finally yielded to the prelate's insistence.

After the meal, the bishop of Chartres and Msgr. D'Aubigné, then his vicar general, who later became bishop of Noyon and finally archbishop of Rouen, discussed in detail with the Servant of God everything relating to the Brothers' Institute, and tried to bring him to mitigate the manner of living followed in it, and to treat himself with less rigor. Observing his simplicity, his penance, and the extreme poverty to which he had condemned himself, they combatted in him virtues which, in their hearts, they admired. These distinguished men thought that the virtuous priest carried the practice of austerity too far; and that the labor of the classroom, added to such a hard and mortified life, would undermine even the strongest constitutions.

With this in mind, and to bring him to moderate his own fervor and to place a limit on that of his disciples, they told him everything that friendship could suggest. But a man who never thought he was doing enough for God looked upon these charitable remonstrances only as reasons for greater confusion, and as tacit incitements to imitate Jesus Christ more closely. Finally, he became a sort of spectacle to this group of friends, who examined him from head to toe; nothing in him escaped the censure or the reproaches of these charitable hosts. Some chided him for the poverty of his clothes; others for their unusual style; some found fault with his thick-soled, clumsy shoes; others with the shape of his wide-brimmed hat; all of them criticized a man whom they accused of exaggerating in virtue, and joined in exhorting him to keep to the common mean.

In this opposition to his garb, the poverty of his mantle was what struck these gentlemen the most, because not only was it made of very coarse material, but it was also so old and worn that it was fit only to be thrown away. This caused the charitable bishop to have another one made for him; but so that it might be to his liking, and that he might not refuse it, he had it cut out of very common and cheap cloth. Since this gift was a true alms, the holy priest accepted it with good grace, humility and gratitude. This mantle, however, did not remain his to use for very long, because sometime later a couple of highwaymen stole it from him one night when he was returning from Paris to where he was then staying. He surrendered it to them with the same willingness with which he had received it; as he had accepted it from charity, so now he gave it to them through charity.

The most outstanding and visible change that the gratuitous schools brought about in the children at Chartres was an extraordinary modesty in church. Like young saplings which, because of their youth bend easily when a charitable and skillful hand inclines them, to the astonishment of the entire city they finally adopted the attitudes that the Brothers wished them to take, and conformed to the example of piety they could see in their teachers. The sight of the Brothers at their head, in a humble and recollected posture, impressed them even more than the lessons they had heard. Observing the Brothers as they entered the house of God, they learned from their silence and their devout exterior how to behave in the same way; and witnessing the piety with which their teachers attended the Divine Office or holy Mass, they felt ashamed for never having assisted thereat up to then in heart and mind, and for having been present only in body. The children were finally persuaded on this score and, in their turn, became silent preachers of devotion, and of that respectful

awe which should seize every faithful Christian at his first step into God's temple.

Msgr. Godet Desmarets was delighted over such an edifying change in the young people brought up in the Christian schools. So he conceived a great desire of profiting by this to reform the entire city on this very important point. For a long time he had been bewailing the profanations too common in the Lord's house; he had witnessed how little faith and religious spirit the people showed in so holy a place, which they should have entered only with the deepest reverence. However, he did not know what barrier he could oppose to the flood of impiety which showed itself brazenly in the very presence of Jesus Christ. In Chartres, as everywhere else, the worthy prelate could see with sorrow the churches profaned by laughter, conversations, displays of worldly vanity, and a thousand other disorders which constitute the abomination of desolation in the holy place; yet he did not know how he could prevent these sins, which were drawing down God's malediction on his people.

Finally, after thinking the matter over carefully, he decided on a course of action. Convinced that if the people could witness the religious respect that the Brothers displayed in church, the latter's example would have on the citizens of Chartres the same effect that it had produced on their students, he resolved to send them on Sundays and feasts to all the parishes of the city. This idea, although a holy and praiseworthy one, did not correspond with the end of the Institute, nor did it sufficiently safeguard the Brothers' own spiritual good. That was why their wise Superior could not go along with this scheme. He also had another difficulty with the bishop of Chartres over the question of having the children learn how to read Latin.

The established practice in the Christian schools is to begin by teaching children how to read French, before teaching them to read Latin. This unaccustomed procedure did not seem to Msgr. Godet Desmarets the most natural one; he wished to have it changed. De La Salle, who had introduced this modification in what was commonly practiced only because he had serious reasons for doing so, asked to be allowed to explain them, and proceeded to justify the practice by such cogent arguments that the prelate agreed with him.

Here, in substance, is what John Baptist said: (1) Knowing how to read French is far more useful to all children than knowing how to read Latin. (2) Since French is their native language, it is incomparably easier for them to learn how to read it than to read Latin, given that they know the one and do not know the other. (3) Consequently, it takes far less time to teach children to read French than to teach them to read Latin. (4) Ability to read French facilitates learning how to read Latin; the reverse is not true as experience shows. The reason for this is that to read Latin properly, all one needs to do is to articulate each syllable and enunciate each word correctly. This is easy when the child knows how to spell and to read French; it follows that anyone who knows how to read French well can easily learn to read Latin while, on the contrary, when much time has been spent learning to read Latin first, still more is required to learn how to read French.

(5) Why does it take so long to learn to read Latin? As already mentioned, Latin words are just sounds to people who do not understand them; hence it is

difficult for them to omit none of the syllables and to spell out words, the meaning of which escapes them. (6) Why should people learn to read Latin when they will never make any use of this language during their lives? What use do the children of either sex, who come to the Christian schools, have for the Latin language? Nuns who must recite the Divine Office in Latin need to know how to read it well; but of 100 girls who frequent the gratuitous schools there is scarcely one who may become a choir nun in a monastery. So, too, of 100 boys in the Brothers' schools, how many will later on wish to study the Latin language? Even if there were several of them, should they be favored at the expense of the rest?

(7) Experience shows that those children who frequent the Christian schools do not stay there very long; they do not attend classes long enough to learn how to read both Latin and French well. As soon as they are old enough to start working, their parents withdraw them; or else they stop coming because they have to earn a living. Under these circumstances, if we start by teaching them how to read Latin, the following inconveniences will result: they will quit school before learning how to read French, or at least to read it well. When they leave, they will know how to read Latin only imperfectly; in a short time they will have forgotten what they learned, with the result that they will never really know how to read at all, either French or Latin.

(8) The most serious drawback is that they almost never learn Christian doctrine. For, in fact, when the children begin by learning to read French, they know how to read fairly well by the time they leave school. Knowing how to read easily, they can learn Christian doctrine by themselves; they can study it in the printed Catechisms, they can sanctify Sundays and Feasts by reading good books and by reciting well-written prayers in French. Whereas, if when they leave the Christian and gratuitous schools they know how to read Latin only, and that badly, all their lives they will remain ignorant of their duties as Christians.

(9) Finally, experience shows that those who do not understand Latin, who have not pursued further studies and acquired familiarity with the Latin tongue, especially the common people and, a fortiori, the poor who come to the Christian schools, never succeed in reading Latin well, and make fools of themselves when they try to read it in the hearing of those who understand that language. It is, therefore, completely useless to waste time teaching people to read a language which they will never use.

It has been thought proper to summarize these arguments so as to silence the critics who object that in the gratuitous schools the children are taught to read French before learning to read Latin, contrary to the prevailing custom. It is to be hoped that those who find fault with this procedure will pay attention to the reasons which justify it; then they will be the first to recommend this method.

The illustrious bishop, Paul Godet Desmarets, did not live long enough to benefit the Christian schools as he would have wished to do. His death, so deeply deplored by the defenders of traditional doctrine, robbed the Brothers of a true father and a powerful defender of their Institute, and deprived De La Salle of a faithful friend. The zealous prelate would have done all that he

could have in favor of the gratuitous schools if, before his death, he had created an endowment to establish them permanently in Chartres, as several other great bishops have done. Without any financial support to fall back on, the Brothers whom he had generously cared for during his lifetime were left in the direst misery. The Christian schools, lacking any fixed revenue, have often been in desperate straits in a city where they found enemies among the very persons who everywhere else showed themselves their defenders. Since nobody was providing for these men whose ministry was wholly gratuitious, it would have been natural for their zealous Superior to withdraw them from a city which seemed to think it was doing them a favor by not expelling them.

But John Baptist, whose actions were inspired only by the sublime principles of heavenly wisdom, paid no attention to the promptings of nature or to the reasons for dissatisfaction that the world gave him. On the contrary, the places where his disciples had to suffer the most and where they were most neglected were the places to which he grew most strongly attached, convinced that the cross is what characterizes God's works as well as His elect; and that there is always much good to be done in localities where there is much to suffer. A man who was led only by the maxims of the Saints felt that the institutions which have to struggle hardest are those which eventually receive the greatest blessings from Almighty God, and that when creatures fail us, we have the most to hope for from Heaven. He had taken for his motto that "there is more grace where there is less nature;" he felt that the foundations against which the devil arouses the most furious persecutions are those which prove most useful for souls and give most glory to God.

In accordance with these principles, he preferred to let his disciples remain a prey to the direst poverty rather than withdraw them from Chartres. However, necessity obliged him to reduce their number from seven to four, while waiting for Divine Providence to change the attitude of the city's inhabitants towards the Brothers--a city which is placed under the special protection of the Most Blessed Virgin, and where one finds true and deep religious spirit and genuine piety. The great devotion towards the Mother of God which distinguishes the city of Chartres and makes it so illustrious in the kingdom was one of the reasons that kept the Brothers there. They were reluctant to leave a city so favored by the Queen of Heaven and preferred to stay on, even if it meant living in extreme poverty.

As a matter of fact, they still subsist only on a certain quantity of wheat and wine furnished them by the illustrious nephew and successor of Msgr. Paul Godet Desmarets as bishop, and on the rare alms given them by a few pious persons especially the Reverend De Truchis, today the sub-chanter, whose zeal for supporting the Christian schools is worthy of a man filled with the spirit of the Seminary of St. Sulpice where he was educated. This pious canon, devoted to all sorts of good works and very active in the instruction of the ignorant, within the last few years has obtained the opening of a Brothers' school at Nogent-le-Rotrou in the diocese of Chartres. We must also give honorable mention to the piety of his Highness, the Duke of Orléans, who recently extended his charity to the gratuitous schools of Chartres. By granting an annuity of 500 livres, he came to the help of a good work which could no longer survive in that city, and made it possible to add a fifth Brother to the four who were already laboring there like St. Paul, in hunger

and thirst, in cold and nakedness, in poverty and persecutions. It is to be hoped that, thanks to the protection of this illustrious prince, the Brothers will not in the future be robbed of the legacies which generous people leave them in their wills, and which they now have a right to receive, thanks to the Letters Patent which His Majesty granted to their motherhouse at St. Yon near Rouen.

The fact is that a pious lady named Madame Lardé, who had helped the Brothers by her donations during her life, on her death left them by will an annual income of 3,500 livres. But her heirs and the administrators of the poorhouse at Chartres felt themselves justified in using this money for other purposes, on the pretext that the Brothers did not have Letters Patent for that city. However, the opinion of 27 Parisian lawyers agreed that the Letters Patent granted to the house of St. Yon near Rouen were valid for all the cities of the kingdom where the Brothers live. But the poor Brothers, although unjustly deprived of their rights, had learned from their Founder, the most disinterested man in the world. They did not lay any claim or start any lawsuit to obtain justice. Still, they did not despair of securing redress some day from those who now refuse it to them, when these latter are convinced that natural law, as well as civil law, makes it a duty to follow to the letter the pious dispositions of testators.

It is difficult to understand why, at Chartres and elsewhere, people convinced themselves that the Brothers might some day shut themselves up in a cloister, or become too numerous. What likelihood is there of such a change which would destroy the Institute? It is natural for every being to seek to remain what it is. No being aspires to its own destruction. Everything tends to its end by a natural inclination. One is always attached to one's first vocation and esteems it more than any other. Consequently, the idea of shutting themselves up in a cloister would have little appeal to the Brothers; for if they did this, they would cease to be what they are; they would destroy their Institute; they would turn their backs on their vocation; they would change their state.

Even if they entertained for a moment such a ridiculous temptation, they could not carry it out, because it would be impossible to execute it without losing all the endowments established in favor of the gratuitous schools; and if they lost these, the Brothers would have to go to live not in a cloister but a poorhouse, where they would perish of starvation.

Furthermore, what would they do in a cloister, since they are formally forbidden by their Rules to aspire to Sacred Orders and to the priestly ministry, forbidden so strictly in fact that they cannot even wear a surplice in church or sing at the lectern? Their Constitutions also prohibit them from learning Latin or using it if they already know it. To imagine that, in spite of these fundamental laws of their Institute, the Brothers might some day abandon their profession and prefer a cloistered life to their role as teachers in Christian schools, is to conjure up ghosts for the pleasure of exorcising them. Still, it is hardly imaginable to what an extent this silly notion gained currency in the city of Chartres. If it was not the only cause of the court sentence so unfavorable towards the gratuitous schools for the poor, it was certainly one of the main ones.

It is well known how violently the masters of the pay schools oppose the Brothers' establishments, since the latter receive no fees for their services. During the lifetime of Msgr. Paul Godet Desmarets they kept quiet enough; the protection that this great prelate afforded the Brothers whom he employed and whom he himself had called to Chartres, successfully foiled their machinations. But his death delivered them from their fear of his authority, and afforded them full liberty to declare war on their pious rivals. Unfortunately for the latter, who were like defenseless orphans after the death of the bishop who acted as their father, the accusations of their enemies were accepted by the court. The magistrates, along with the mayor and the town councillors, believed that the public good required that the gratuitous schools should be emptied, while those where money mattered should be filled! Thus, by a decree issued in 1717 or 1718, the Brothers were ordered not to receive any longer all the children without distinction who came to them as they had done up to that time, but to take in only those whose names were inscribed in the "Register of Paupers" and therefore entitled to public alms. It was also specified that not more than four Brothers should be employed in the charity schools, that they should not display a cross above the school door. Other similar prohibitions were enacted, and the Court ended by ordering that the said sentence should be read publicly in the parish churches at Mass.

When De La Salle, who had returned from Marseilles and was then living at the Seminary of St. Nicholas du Chardonnet, read this sentence which closed the gratuitous and Christian schools in Chartres to all the children of the poor who were not quite on the destitution level, he was extremely distressed. He could not help marvelling at a decree which so courteously dismissed the Brothers from the city of Chartres, or praising the politeness of the magistrates who thus fired those whom they could have expelled outright! But when he came to the conclusion of the document, which prescribed that the sentence be read in the churches at Mass, he suspected some hidden connivance. His first thought was that either the new bishop of Chartres was speaking by the mouth of the judges, or that the latter were taking it upon themselves to speak for the bishop. "Such an order," he told the person who had brought it to him to read, "can come only from the authority of the bishop; it follows that either the bishop has lent his authority to the magistrates on this point, or that the latter have usurped it."

Whatever may be the truth of the second alternative, it is certain that the first was not true. The pious ecclesiastic who was speaking with De La Salle refused to entertain this suspicion, and convinced him that the nephew of Msgr. Paul Godet Desmarets was a worthy successor of his uncle, a prelate who honored the Seminary of St. Sulpice where he had been educated by his rare piety, by his ardent zeal for sound doctrine, by his austere, mortified and laborious life, and by the practice of the other virtues which make him a bishop worthy of the early days of the Church. He was very far from having lent his authority to a measure which infringed on it, and which was so unfavorable to the Christian instruction and education of the children belonging to needy families.

For after all, is it only those whose names appear on the lists of the families who get alms from the poorhouse who can be called truly poor? How many there are who perish in their indigence, or languish for a long time in

hunger, before they turn to public charity? How many secretly put up with all that is most unendurable in poverty and prefer to be its victims, rather than sacrifice their pride by making their needs known? How many workingmen and humble folk trying to raise families are not listed on the charity rolls, and do not wish to receive such help, yet do not have the means to purchase for their children the instruction that the Brothers are ready to give them gratis? All such children, the majority, were banished from the gratuitous schools by the decree of the Court; they found the doors of the pay schools closed to them because of their poverty; thus they grew up in ignorance, in idleness, and ran wild. If the public good requires that they be abandoned to their sad lot, and that they remain without the education which they cannot pay for, this is indeed the mystery that De La Salle could not understand; like him we must leave the riddle to be solved by the wise of this world.

The bishop of Chartres realized full well how seriously his authority had been flouted in this matter and the public good damaged by the sentence we have mentioned. So he did not fail to appeal against it to the Parliament of Paris which, early in the following year, on January 31, 1719, issued an injunction against the execution of the said sentence which forbade receiving into the charity schools any children whose parents were not inscribed on the lists of the "Poverty Bureau."

Now, as it is characteristic of perfect charity to grow stronger instead of dying out when it is badly treated, the Servant of God thenceforth seemed even more attached to a city which showed itself so ill-disposed towards his disciples. His charity, in 1705, went so far as to let them be exposed to the contagion of a dread disease which ravaged Chartres and carried off a large number of its citizens, rather than take them away from the poor children who needed them so much. On this occasion the pious Founder sacrificed to the public good the lives of four of his principal disciples, whom the epidemic laid low, just as it did so many other people, in less than six months. The first was a very virtuous novice. The second was an older Brother, an excellent penman and very talented teacher, and, what really deserves special praise, a true disciple of De La Salle, filled with his spirit and the grace of his vocation. The third, who had been the master of novices, was a man who was very hard on himself and greatly given to mortification*. The fourth was the infirmarian of the Paris community, whom their tender father had sent to his children, to care for them in their illness. But his saintly death, which was the test of his obedience, was also the reward of his charity.

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*This is the master of novices spoken of earlier who, by his imprudent severity with some of the young men under his charge, had caused them to complain to the parish priest of St. Sulpice and thus occasioned much persecution and criticism for the Founder.

Chapter XVI

Founding of the School in Calais: 1700.

The opening of the Brothers' school in Calais, which took place shortly after that of Chartres, was entirely different from the latter in the circumstances accompanying it, and in the measure of success it achieved. When he sent his disciples to the capital of Beauce, De La Salle might have said with St. Paul: "For a door has been opened to me, great and evident, and there are many adversaries" (I Cor. 16,9). On the contrary, he was expected at Calais, impatiently awaited, and welcomed with honor and joy. He could say with the same Apostle that he had been received there like an angel from Heaven and like a minister of Jesus Christ. I am inclined to attribute this fact to the sort of reluctance and repugnance which the pious Founder felt when he was asked to send his disciples to Chartres and, on the contrary, the alacrity and satisfaction he showed over sending them to Calais. Perhaps a prophetic spirit or some sort of supernatural instinct apprised him of what would happen in those two cities.

As a longtime friend and former fellow student of Msgr. Desmarets at St. Sulpice, it was natural that he should hasten to send some of his followers to a prelate who was so kind, so pious, so highly regarded in France, who was in a position to render such great services to his Institute, and who in fact offered to do so. For the worthy bishop of Chartres was kind enough to offer De La Salle the help of his influence in obtaining Letters Patent for the Community, as we shall have occasion to relate later on. However, the Servant of God, far from seizing such a favorable opportunity, made the prelate wait for several years before sending him any of the Brothers. On the contrary, if he did not actually push the matter of the school in Calais, he received the proposal with joy and showed a holy eagerness to carry it out.

This city, almost a frontier city with England, from which it is separated only by a 20-mile strait, is one where openness, good faith, generosity and liberality reign; its inhabitants are characterized by deep religious spirit, piety and sincere attachment to the Roman Church and to traditional doctrine. Not surprisingly, therefore, it drew the attention of the Servant of God. He felt attracted to it and seemed to read in the hearts of all its citizens the favorable dispositions they entertained towards the Brothers. Indeed, no locality was more propitious for the establishment of Christian and gratuitous schools. The people were good; the magistrates and upper classes, religious minded and well disposed; all this afforded the holy priest entire liberty to advance the glory of God and to teach Christian doctrine through his disciples with ever renewed success and abundant benedictions. Here is how the foundation came about.

Towards the end of 1699 or the beginning of 1700, Father Ponthon was a student of theology at the Seminary of the Bons Enfants. One day, happening to pass by St. Sulpice, he was agreeably surprised to see a crowd of children, with a Brother in charge of them, who were assisting at Mass with a piety not very common among youngsters of that age. The order and discipline which

maintained these naturally unruly urchins in line, the modesty and reserve shown in the holy place by such a large number of boys, irreverent and disorderly by character or by reason of the lack of seriousness proper to their age; the silence and piety of so many children usually so easily distracted and so inclined to laugh and chatter; finally the unusual recollection and the devout air he noted in the Brother, all of which was for him a new and edifying spectacle, struck him very forcibly. He immediately conceived the desire of providing the same exemplary sight to Calais, where he was the parish priest-designate, through the resignation of his uncle, the incumbent.

He immediately wrote his uncle, the elder Father Ponthon, retiring parish priest and Dean of Calais, relating to him what he had seen in the church of St. Sulpice. So arresting was the portrait of the Brothers painted by the younger Ponthon for his uncle, a zealous and pious pastor, that the latter conceived a most ardent desire of having some of them in his parish. He feared he might die before seeing them in Calais; so his eagerness caused him to write without delay to his nephew, begging him to do everything necessary so as to obtain for the children of Calais some schoolmasters like the ones he had seen in Paris.

The venerable old man longed for the Brothers' arrival. He wrote letter after letter to his nephew to hasten the conclusion of the affair. Feeling himself on the threshold of eternity, he awaited only the arrival of De La Salle's disciples in order to surrender his soul in peace to God. The consolation he desired before his death, which he begged the Divine Majesty to grant him, was to see the opening of a Christian and gratuitous school in the city.

Another compelling motive added fuel to this desire and made him urge the prompt execution of the plan. God had just called to Himself the former schoolmaster of the city. His place was vacant, the classes were empty, the children lacking a teacher were losing their time; and idleness exposed all these youngsters to great dangers. Thus, while necessity urged the opening of the school, the circumstances were favorable for establishing gratuitous classes at this particular time. It was then necessary to seize the opportunity and not let it escape. To do so the uncle wrote his nephew to contact the pious Founder and to ask him for some of his disciples, and to do everything so as to obtain them. When the younger Ponthon came, in his uncle's name, to ask De La Salle to send some Brothers to Calais, he was received with joy and listened to with pleasure. However, as the Servant of God never hurried anything, he took the time needed to carry out all the necessary preliminaries to insure that the foundation would be a stable one.

The former pastor of Calais, who could see his end approaching, and who feared to die before the Christian schools were opened, could not brook delay. Impatient over the inevitable bureaucratic red tape encountered in negotiations of this kind, he wrote letter after letter and got everybody in the city involved in speeding up the Brothers' coming. The city magistrates, at the entreaty of their pastor, wrote to the Duke of Béthune, Governor of Calais, to obtain his approval, and at the same time to beg him to use his influence to hasten the carrying out of the scheme. The matter could not have been put into better hands.

The Duke of Béthune was a nobleman even more distinguished by his piety than by his dignity. He took to heart the petition presented by the city, more out of zeal for God's glory than out of condescension for those who had appealed to his influence. He did not disdain to join his own pleas to those of the pastor of Calais and his flock, begging De La Salle to send some Brothers to Calais as soon as possible.

The Servant of God acceded to his request, and sent to Calais two of his disciples* to open the Christian school there. Before this took place, it happened one day that De La Salle left his residence very early one morning to go to call on the Duke of Béthune at his palace. About 6 a.m. he entered a church nearby to pray, while awaiting a convenient time to present himself at the palace and to ask for an audience. Scarcely had he entered the church when he beheld the duke himself, who was just then receiving Communion. As he was unknown by sight to the holy priest, the latter noticed only the blue sash** which distinguished the illustrious personage. De La Salle was both surprised and edified on seeing one of the greatest nobles in the kingdom performing his devotions so early in the morning with so much piety. When he had finished praying, he left the church and went to knock at the palace door. His surprise was even greater when he recognized in the duke the very man whom he had seen receiving Communion with so much devotion. So impressed was the Servant of God by this example of piety that, against his custom, he wished to edify his Community by telling the Brothers about his early morning adventure.

A gentleman so favorably disposed towards all that was good no sooner heard the Brothers' Superior than he granted him everything he asked for, namely, to send his own consent in writing, signed by himself and sealed with the seal of his arms, to the magistrates of the city; and to recommend to them the good work which they themselves had recommended to him, and to exhort them in his turn to support and favor it. This recommendation, coming from such a highly placed personage whose authority in the city of Calais was loved as much as it was respected, produced all the effects that could have been desired. The city officials have always shown the Brothers all sorts of courtesies, and have always acted towards them as fathers rather than mere protectors. Bignon, at this time the Intendant*** of the king for Picardy and Artois, a nobleman who in all the positions he occupied has always protected gratuitous schools with truly Christian zeal, also contributed to the establishment.

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*One of them was Brother Gabriel Drolin who, with the Saint and Nicholas Vuyart, had made the "heroic vow" in 1691, and who would shortly be sent by the Saint to establish the Institute in Rome.

**A blue sash was the insignium of the Order of the Holy Spirit.

***In 17th and 18th century France, the Intendants were the direct and effective agents of royal absolutism; administrative, legal and financial matters were almost entirely in their hands. They wielded the real authority, as compared to the almost purely nominal functions of the provincial governors.

Thus this foundation, destined to do so much good, was made with the unanimous cooperation of all who possessed any power and authority; for that of the bishop of Boulogne was not long in being added to the rest. The Brothers had been ordered by their Superior not to open the school until they had requested the bishop's permission to teach Christian doctrine, and had asked for his blessing. Accordingly they went to Boulogne and were very kindly received by Msgr. Pierre De Langle, bishop of the diocese, who at this time had not become as notorious as he later did.* He authorized the Brothers' mission by a public letter to his clergy, in which the chief pastor of the diocese of Boulogne urged the faithful in Calais to send their children to the Christian school.

On their arrival in the city the Brothers found everything prepared in a most becoming manner. They were impatiently awaited. Nobody took more concern about their coming than the man who had so longed to see them, the former parish priest, Ponthon. His joy on this occasion matched the ardor he had shown in securing their services. At first the two Brothers were lodged in a wing of the college, which for the past several years has been placed entirely at their disposal by the mayor and the town council, for these gentlemen's kindness towards the Brothers and towards the schools they conduct seems to grow day by day. However, as the Brothers had little in the way of revenues to count on, the Dean wrote on this subject to the Marquis De la Vrilliere.

This was the last service that Ponthon rendered to the Brothers, because he died shortly after this; and his nephew, in whose favor he had resigned his position as parish priest, survived him only a few months. This young ecclesiastic, a most promising youth, died when he was still in Paris continuing his studies, with perhaps too much ardor. His eager application to study caused him to find a premature death, because of his too great earnestness. It seems that he would still be among the living had he known how to moderate a desire which, while noble and rare, leads those who yield to it to an early grave. His death, which was the price he paid to purchase knowledge, and that of his uncle which had occurred a few months earlier, were deeply regretted.

In the uncle and the nephew the Brothers lost two friends and protectors; and the city of Calais lost two faithful pastors. If the death of the younger Ponthon had not left the position of parish priest vacant, it is probable that those who later appealed against the Bull Unigenitus would have found the gates of such a Catholic city shut to them, and would not have been able to foment so much trouble there. In this way the zealous defenders of the Bull, professing

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*Pierre De Langle, bishop of Boulogne, was one of the four bishops in France who "appealed" from the encyclical Unigenitus to a future Council. He was a dyed-in-the-wool Jansenist who later caused the Brothers a good deal of trouble.

the ancient doctrine of the Church, would not have been exposed, in Calais, to persecution and imprisonment; and Father Quesnel would not have been able to flatter himself that he had, on the coast facing England, a single partisan. But let us return to our story.

The Marquis De la Vrilliere* replied to Ponthon's letter saying that he would mention the subsidy for the Brothers to the King at the first council meeting; and this he did. Here is his letter to Ponthon.

"Sir: I have received the letter you wrote me on the 5th of this month concerning the schoolmasters in Calais. I shall take the matter up with His Majesty at the first Council meeting at which there is any discussion of the 'new converts'** and I shall advise Bignon what His Majesty decides. Please ask them (i.e. the Brothers) to be patient until then, and to continue to carry out their duties faithfully. I am, my dear sir, your affectionate servant. la Vrilliere. Versailles, June 12, 1701."

Louis XIV, as zealous for good works as he was for the promotion of religion, granted an alms to the Brothers as a result of the request made to him; and in the next two years they received over 450 livres derived from the sale of property that had belonged to the expelled Calvinists. A similar favor was granted them in 1702 at the request of the Duke of Béthune. When this pious nobleman mentioned to Daguesseau*** that the two Brothers in Calais had no endowment to support them, the latter promised to see about it.

The following year he sent them a considerable sum likewise derived from the sequestered Calvinist properties, according to the promise he had made in a letter to the town officials, dated February 4, 1702. The success that the school met with was so prompt and so complete that means were sought of founding others. During two years the Brothers had taught school with so much edification, and had given so much satisfaction that the authorities decided to ask for two more Brothers and for another to handle the temporal affairs.

The promoter of this new foundation was Father Le Prince, chaplain in the sailors' quarter, who actively campaigned for its establishment in 1703. This zealous priest wished to secure for the sailors' children the same opportunities for instruction that the children in the town enjoyed and resolved to obtain this for them. He mentioned the matter to De Thosse, president of the city, who was delighted at the suggestion and supported it as much as he could with truly Christian zeal.

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*Also known as De Phelypeaux; he was a councillor of state.

**The new converts were people who had been (more or less forcibly) converted from the Huguenot religion.

***Another member of the royal council.

Without wasting any time the worthy magistrate conferred with the members of his council whom he found as eager as himself for the implementation of the project. Together they wrote to De Pontchartrain* through their parish priest, explaining to him that another school and two more Brothers were needed in Calais to teach the children of the sailors, and they begged him to obtain from Louis XIV a vacant lot in the Court-Gain section of the town, where a guardhouse had once stood. The king granted the request; so De Pontchartrain wrote to Bignon sending him the king's order, which was at once executed, thanks to a special tax which the Intendant imposed on the inhabitants of the Court-Gain section for the expenses incurred in erecting a building to house the Brothers and their school. De Pontchartrain was even kind enough to reply to the parish priest, telling him that the king had agreed to his request and that of the city. Here is his letter, dated May 4, 1703: "I have received your letter of April 24. I have explained to His Majesty's Intendant in Picardy and Artois the intentions of His Majesty concerning the Brothers of the Christian Schools who have undertaken the instruction of the children of the sailors who live in the Court-Gain. Please address yourselves to him, and he will provide for their upkeep."

The Court-Gain was a section separate from the rest of the city of Calais, situated closer to the port. It was populated by sailors: people who, as we all know, have usually received in their youth neither education nor instruction. They are religious at heart, but their religion is somewhat sui generis since they fabricate it for themselves. Their children are accustomed to the sea from their early years, and thus become like their parents, men who might be mistaken for half-men or for talking animals, if one did not know that they have immortal souls. Nearly all of them are born with a propensity for the fisherman's trade, or for sailing, and thus by instinct and by natural inclination they follow the vocation of their fathers. When they can scarcely talk, they already know how to handle the oars and are glad to go to sea. Since their ignorance is profound, they are usually as silent about religion as the fish they catch; and when they do undertake to speak of it, they do so with the awkwardness natural to them. Rarely do they observe it correctly, without superstitious practices. It was, then, very important to provide for these poor children of the mariners the means of receiving the instruction that their parents were not able to give them.

This school, which opened in 1705, has always produced much good. Filled with the children of sailors, it is for them an academy where they learn the science of salvation. At last these poor creatures find out why they were created and sent into this world; they learn how to know, fear, love and serve God. They are taught Christian doctrine and the practice of their religion. To provide for the upkeep of the Brothers engaged in the instruction of these youngsters in the Court-Gain the piety of Louis XIV led him to grant them an annual pension of 50 écus, which was paid to them every year by an order drawn up in these terms: "Keeper of my royal treasure, pay and deliver in cash to

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*De Pontchartrain: Louis Phelypeaux, 1643-1727. He was Chancellor of France from 1699 to 1714; a sound Catholic and opponent of the Jansenists.

the Brothers of the Christian Schools of Calais the sum of 150 livres which I have granted to them in consideration of the pains they take and the care they display for the instruction of the sailors who serve on my vessels. Given at Versailles..."

Before the opening of the Christian school in the Court-Gain there was an old man named De La France, who also received from His Majesty an annual pension of 150 livres to teach the sailors. Towards the end of his life he could no longer accomplish his task because of his age. This old man died a few years after the Brothers reached Calais. All the principal people of the city gave a new proof of their zeal for the gratuitous schools and of their affection for those who taught there to such general satisfaction. They all got together and arranged for the pension hitherto paid to the old schoolmaster to be transferred to the Brothers.

These two pensions, faithfully paid to the Brothers during the lifetime of Louis XIV in spite of hard times, were suppressed by the Regent during the minority of Louis XV. But this young prince who inherited his great-grandfather's zeal for religion along with his throne, reestablished the grant when he reached his majority, at the request of the Marquis De La Vrilliere, Minister and Secretary of State; and the money has been paid regularly ever since. Here is the first royal Order which was issued on July 19, 1716: "Keeper of my royal treasure, Jean de Tulmence de Nointel, pay in cash to the Brothers of the Christian Schools of Calais the sum of 300 livres granted to them by the late King, my great-grandfather, in two installments of 150 livres each, one of which should have been sent in advance on December 15th last year, and the other on February 8th; and this in consideration of the pains and care which they take for the instruction of my sailors. Done at Paris, July 19, 1717. Signed: Louis, Phelypeaux, Philippe d'Orléans."

The charity of the magistrates of the city of Calais for the Christian schools was not limited to all these favors. It was not satisfied until it had finally secured an assured livelihood for the Brothers. The city finally did this some years ago when it obtained for them a pension of 900 livres, the money coming from the duties collected on goods entering the city.

Not only the city administration, but nearly all its inhabitants sought to help the Brothers. Many of them vied with each other in showing them charity. There is hardly a merchant or businessman who on returning from a trip overseas, or after a successful business transaction, or a particularly fortunate fishing expedition, does not, so to speak, pay them the tithes of his profits. In a word, the Brothers can say of the city of Calais, what Tobias said of the Angel Raphael: "We have been blessed through him."

So long as the Duke of Béthune lived, the Brothers always found in him a true father's heart. His charity was active in whatever concerned the Christian schools, and his attention extended to all the Brothers' needs. His influence, his authority, his interventions were very helpful to them in getting solidly established in Calais and in obtaining from His Most Christian Majesty the pensions they needed to live on. After he died, the Brothers mourned his demise; but it did not take them long to realize that the father continued to live, in their regard, in the son; for the Duke of Charost who

inherited the piety of his father, the Duke of Béthune, had also inherited the latter's zeal for the Christian schools. He was a true friend of the Brothers, if I may say so, and their zealous protector; his desire to help them seemed to know no limits; and one can indeed say on this point that the son surpassed the father. O happy family, where piety seems hereditary, and where love for religion is handed down to the children along with their father's noble blood!

In all their difficulties the Brothers turned to the Duke of Charost with the confidence that children show to a father, and they have always found him such. Never did they beg for his protection in vain; never did they approach him and suffer a rebuff; never did they seem to importune him. Ever gracious and affable, he always listened to them, everytime they sought to speak with him, with unexampled kindness. His high position and his dignity never placed any barrier between them and him. Even more, on several occasions, with singular generosity and condescension, he himself undertook to plead their cause, and lent them the support of his influence and his authority, by taking action on their behalf. Here is an example. When the officials of the royal treasury did not pay out exactly the pension that His Majesty had granted to the Brothers---which happened not infrequently, despite the royal orders that came from the palace---the Duke of Charost, forgetting his dignity, took it upon himself to inquire about the matter, and did not disdain to speak to the treasurers and to urge them to expedite the payments. When these were delayed, he would send his secretary to the treasurer, bearing the royal orders, to collect in the Brothers' name the sums that were overdue, and to make sure that they were paid in full.

It was not only the Brothers in Calais and Boulogne whom the Duke of Charost took under his protection; he never refused it either to their confreres when they asked it of him. They always found the door of his palace open to them, his ears willing to listen to them, and his heart prompt and generous to be of service to them.

In particular, what zeal did this pious nobleman not display to obtain from His Majesty the Letters Patent for the house of St. Yon! He himself went to secure the consent of the Duke of Luxembourg, Governor of Rouen, which was necessary; and he brought it, written and signed, to those who were in charge of pursuing the affair. It would take us too long to go into the details of all the other favors that the Brothers of the Christian Schools owe to this illustrious benefactor. To him more than to anyone else they owe their present status. He always did them good and still does. His memory should remain forever green among the Brothers; and it is only right that he and his father, the Duke of Béthune, should have first place in their gratitude and their prayers.

In speaking of the establishment of the Christian schools in Calais, gratitude also obliges us to make honorable mention of Gense. This pious layman, so fervent in the practice of virtue, so devoted to good works, so zealous for the traditional faith, possessed a considerable fortune which he used only to relieve the poor and to promote the glory of God. Although an only son, he adopted a life of perpetual celibacy, so as to enjoy the happy liberty of devoting himself entirely to God and to prayer, and of consecrating his heart unreservedly to Him. His humility alone shut before him the door of

the sanctuary, and forbade him to aspire to a ministry which his learning and his virtue rendered him highly qualified for; but he preferred to remain in the ranks of ordinary Christians, and there to give himself to the practice of perfect virtue, rather than be exposed to the dangers inherent in the sacred functions.

A lover of all good works, he was either their author, their promoter, their helper, or their adviser. His zeal for the Catholic faith made him so well known that it won for him the honorable commission of keeping watch over the Huguenots, and of finding out what they were doing, this at a time when the public exercise of their religion was forbidden in France. Thus, while wearing secular attire, he acted in some sort as an Inquisitor of the Faith, as a vigilant sentinel in the house of the Lord; he devoted himself to driving away from it the wolves dressed in sheep's clothing, or else to helping the strayed sheep come back to the fold. After public (Protestant) preaching had been forbidden, he showed himself admirably active in going here and there to seek out the preachers and the false pastors. He found out about their gatherings and the places where they assembled, so as to have them prosecuted and thus obliged them to depart from the country.

This constant activity brought him everywhere that the Huguenots tried to gather. Ever on the move, all over (French) Flanders, he caused the partisans of error to flee before him, and he converted a great number of those whom false doctrine had deceived; for he was both learned and eloquent, and to these natural talents he joined a divine grace and power which touched and persuaded others. He had to discontinue his activity against heresy because of the senility of his father, which obliged him to remain at home with him, to take care of him in his old age and to comfort his declining years. If the old man, who died around 1704 at the age of 90, interfered with the evangelical activity of his son, he never prevented either his hand or his tongue from combatting the errors of the times. Unceasingly, Gense spoke against the innovators; and wherever he was, he attacked them with saintly intrepidity.

Never was anyone more openly in favor of Christian and gratuitous schools. This great lover of all good works gave this one his highest esteem and prized it above all the rest. His joy was complete when he saw them established in Calais. He had brought the Daughters of Providence there also, and endowed a community of six, after turning over his own house to them, where he also built them a chapel. As for the Brothers, they never had a more faithful friend, a more ardent defender, nor a more zealous protector. He took interest in everything concerning them, and made whatever affected their Institute or their schools his own business. He enjoyed being with them, and his happiness was complete when on some occasions he was allowed to join them in prayer and to share their recreations. He came to be edified by their company; but he himself left behind a remarkable example of the very virutes he had sought to admire.

It is difficult to express how much he esteemed the Institute. He spoke of it with so much enthusiasm, gave it such high praise, that he made young men desire to join it, and gave those who belonged to it the most exalted idea of

their vocation. He encouraged them to fulfill its duties, to accept its pains and fatigues joyfully. In persecutions he became their shield, and taught them to endure these crosses with patience and joy.

"You take your place," he told them, among other things, "as harvesters in the Lord's vineyard; and if you were not among the first invited to labor there, you have at least been called to work in the most abandoned corner in it. You are like the gleaners who hasten after the reapers, to gather the stalks which have been neglected and trodden under foot. Your consolation is that there are so many of these that you can pick them up by the handfuls and with them fill the granary of our Heavenly Father. If you do not stand at the altar, if you do not preach from the pulpit, if you do not sit in the tribunal of penance, nor officiate at baptisms, if your work does not put a censer in your hands to offer incense to the Most High in the temple, at least you have the honor of preparing living temples for Him, and to labor at the sanctification of the most abandoned children. If your ministry is less showy than others, it is also the least exposed to danger. If in the Church there are more honored roles, there are scarcely any more useful ones. She possesses plenty of monks and religious, but she lacks catechists dedicated by their state and vocation to the instruction of youth. When you teach Christian doctrine, you are doing the work of the Apostles. As you know, their zeal led them all over the world to preach and to proclaim the faith; you know, too, that prayer and the preaching of the doctrine of Jesus Christ were the two features of the ministry that they considered the most worthy of their attention as Apostles. They rid themselves of all other occupations, even those directed to corporal works of charity, so as to dedicate themselves unreservedly to these two. St. Paul concentrated on these same activities, and he himself declared that Heaven had sent him to evangelize, and to teach Christian doctrine."

In a word, this fervent Christian could not find expressions strong enough to make the Brothers entertain a high idea of their vocation. Gense was in close contact with De Rancé, the Abbot of La Trappe. Every year he spent considerable time there and returned therefrom with a truly religious heart under his secular clothes. His esteem for the Brothers had caused him to conceive a very high regard for their holy Founder; and before dying he wished to have the satisfaction of seeing him. Without waiting for time to bring about the opportunity for this visit he so longed for, he undertook a long trip with De La Cocherie, the founder of the schools in the city of Boulogne, and went to St. Yon near Rouen to meet the Solomon who had drawn him from so far.

The satisfaction they experienced in getting to know each other was reciprocal on the part of these two Servants of God. The Divine Spirit Who filled both of them gave them a mutual understanding; and they loved each other even before they had seen each other because their inclinations and sentiments were in harmony. In the layman, the priest admired the fervor of the early Christians, a noble evangelical simplicity, an ardent zeal for the salvation of his neighbor, and a great and magnanimous heart entirely dedicated to the service of God. In the priest, the layman admired a truly apostolic man, a vessel of election that the Lord in His mercy had prepared in these later times to be the ornament of the Church in France, and a man accustomed to crosses and sufferings, who had been tried by all sorts of tribulations and ignominy.

De La Salle received his two visitors with the cordiality and the testimonials of gratitude due to two friends and benefactors of his Institute. He spoke with them at length, and fully satisfied their desire of seeing him and enjoying his presence. When they had visited and spoken with him, they were so edified and delighted that they declared that the esteem which they had entertained for him previously was far below what was really due him, and that the reputation he had acquired did not equal that which his eminent virtue deserved.

They did not grow weary of admiring this new Solomon, filled with heavenly wisdom, not in the splendor of glory and wealth, but living in a vile and abject condition, in the greatest poverty, yet more serene amidst sufferings, humiliations and persecutions than the famous King of Israel was on his throne and in his magnificent palace.

They found in him the Spirit of God which they sought, and a perfect example of the most eminent virtue. The conversations that took place among these three men, so alike in their inclinations, were all about God and the things of God. To speak with them with more seclusion and leisure, De La Salle brought his visitors to a little bower at the far end of the great garden at St. Yon. The meal served to them in this little hermitage did not interrupt their pious conversations. The three Servants of God, more eager for spiritual than for bodily nourishment, spent the greater part of the day thus, inciting one another to a greater love of God.

The satisfaction that Gense derived from this visit was proportionate to the desire which had brought him from Calais to Rouen. With equal satisfaction he received De La Salle in 1716, when the latter for the first time went to visit the Brothers in Calais. The holy priest could not refuse to go to dine with this pious layman. He did so twice and would have gone again, if he had not noticed a painter concealed behind a drapery, engaged in sketching his portrait. His humility was alarmed by this, to such an extent that Gense could not prevail upon him to come back to his table. This fervent Christian crowned such a holy life by an equally holy death, which took place a few years after that of De La Salle.

Chapter XVII

Opening of a Sunday School in the Novitiate House in Paris. Other Establishments at Troyes and Avignon.

De La Chétardye, so well known by his firm attachment to sound doctrine and by his noble refusal of the bishopric of Poitiers which had been offered to him by Louis XIV, seemed to rival De La Salle in showing himself a father to the Brothers, so filled with zeal was he for their Institute. This saintly parish priest of St. Sulpice, who had so wittily remarked that his 66 years were 66 reasons which prevented him from ascending the episcopal throne (as he said in the letter of thanks and excuse which he sent to His Majesty), considered his

years as so many reasons for trying to sanctify the great number of souls whose pastor God had made him, and for trying to contribute to the multiplication of Christian schools.

Ingenious about everything which could promote the education of the poor, he conceived the idea of establishing a Sunday School for the young men who, occupied all the rest of the week in earning a living, had no time to receive instruction except on Sundays and feasts. No one but De La Salle was in a position to carry out a project of this nature. So, out of necessity and also of inclination, De La Chétardye asked him to take charge of it. The Servant of God, who had no less zeal than the parish priest of St. Sulpice, was glad to cooperate with him, and willingly undertook the organization of this work which obedience entrusted to him, and which he found much to his liking. Thus, without delay, after securing the archbishop's approval and permission for the project, on a Sunday in 1709, at noon, in the novitiate house he began a sort of Christian academy, open to all young men under 20 years of age. It did not take long for it to be filled to capacity.

Two hundred students divided into various classes were given instructions proper to their age and capacities. The least advanced learned how to read and write; the others were taught arithmetic; some learned drawing. This first class period, which lasted two hours or so, was followed by the Catechism lesson, and this by a spiritual exhortation given by one of the Brothers. The doors of this school were open to all who presented themselves, provided they showed good will. Thus, none of these young men could excuse his ignorance of Christian doctrine and of the duties required for salvation, on the pretext that he had to earn a living during the week.

It is easy to understand how much good was produced by this novel type of school, so necessary for young people who have nothing to do on Sundays and feasts, and who as a rule spend this time learning vice. By means of this school De La Chétardye had found a way:

(1) To withdraw a large number of young men from vice, disorder and occasions of sin; their most innocent occupations on these holy days had been to run the streets and lose their time, while others profaned these days by gambling and debauchery;

(2) To give them a taste for learning, to stimulate them to work, and even to withdraw them from their laziness and lack of good manners, and to give them a chance to get ahead and establish themselves in the world;

(3) To keep them away from bad company, taverns and other dangerous places, so often fatal to these young people already inclined as they are to evil;

(4) To encourage them to live the rest of their lives in a Christian manner.

If I stated above that Sunday Schools were something new, I did not mean to suggest that De La Chétardye was the first to have thought of them, because before his time they had been established in Flanders, as one can see in Van

Espen's De Scholis puerorum. These Sunday Schools, says this Flemish canonist, were often mentioned in the Councils held in Flanders. They grew out of the Catechism lessons taught in the parishes on Sundays and feasts by the parish priests and their assistants. Although these schools, says the Council of Malines, were not founded to teach children to read and write, it is however proper to offer these subjects to the children who attend them, and to strive above all to instruct them in the principles of religion and the truths of faith. Van Espen adds that this regulation of the Council of Malines, held at the beginning of the 17th century, was confirmed by the authority of the Prince, and that it was strongly recommended that bishops should arrange for the establishment of such Sunday Schools, and should provide for the livelihood of masters and mistresses capable of teaching in them, whose duty it was to instruct the children on Sundays how to read and write, and above all to make them learn the Catechism. What De La Chétardye added to this institution of Sunday Schools was to join other subjects to the curriculum, such as drawing, geometry, and other branches of mathematics.

De La Salle, seeing for himself the great good done in the Sunday School, spared neither care nor expense to promote it. But God, Who seemed to take pleasure in crucifying him in all things, permitted the enemy of all good to destroy this excellent institution by the very means that His servant had taken to consolidate it. He had placed at the head of the school two Brothers gifted with great talents and with considerable ability for art. So as to make excellent professors of them, he had them learn drawing and whatever else might enable them to carry out the farsighted projects that De La Chétardye had in mind for this academy; but he soon had the disappointment of seeing that he had raised these Brothers up only for their own downfall.

Proud of their talents, and hoping to use them for personal gain, they dishonored themselves by shamefully deserting their posts. Their departure caused this new school to close, because De La Salle had no other Brothers capable of replacing them; and the time it took to prepare others for this task brought about great changes in the circumstances, and caused him to lose all hope of reviving the enterprise. In addition to the painful affliction he endured over the failure of so excellent a work and the loss of two of his dearest followers, he had to bear the shame of being considered the cause of all the trouble. He was told to his face that he was responsible for the failure, and heard bitter recriminations on this score from several persons in authority. The innocent victim, who never excused his own conduct, allowed himself, as usual, to be accused and condemned; and relying on the testimony of his conscience alone, and on God's approval, he abandoned his reputation to censure and to the effects of the most false and unjust prejudices, confining himself to bearing it all in silence and patience. We shall have more to say about this in the next chapter, when we relate the history of the new persecution that Hell raised up against him, and which lasted for the rest of his life.

In 1702 De La Salle received a request for Brothers to establish a gratuitous school at Troyes in Champagne. He sent two of them who opened the school with the approbation of the bishop and under his auspices. This school owes its origin to Le Bé, parish priest of St. Nizier's. A pious lady had left him an annuity of 200 livres to establish a charity school in the parish. He

felt that this money belonged by right to those who make profession of conducting gratuitous schools. During a trip he made to Paris he spoke of this matter to De La Salle; and although the sum in question was most inadequate for the upkeep of two Brothers, the Servant of God accepted, fearing, lest out of too great a concern for material interests, he might let slip an opportunity of teaching the poor children in a large city. Provided the Brothers had what was absolutely necessary, he was satisfied. However, they also needed a place to stay; and if they had to pay rent out of the 200 livres, they would have had practically nothing left to live on. So he asked the parish priest of St. Nizier, who lived at the seminary where he was the superior, to lodge the two Brothers in his presbytery, which was vacant. Agreement having been reached, the contract was signed in Paris without further delay.

The Brothers lived in the parish house during the lifetime of this zealous priest, who always did all he could for the Christian schools and those who taught in them. But when he died, his successor, who did not care to reside at the seminary, obliged them to move. They were quite hard pressed at having to pay rent for a residence out of the annuity, which scarcely sufficed for their living expenses. However, God, Who never abandons those who consecrate themselves to His service, inspired several persons to help them pay the rent. And some years ago a pious person willed them a considerable sum, which is invested, to contribute towards the purchase of a home.

A few years after the opening of the first school in Troyes by Le Bé, Chantreau, who highly esteemed the Institute of De La Salle as well as his person, successfully undertook to increase the number of Christian schools in the city, his birthplace. This famous Oratorian, who possessed great speaking ability and who preached with unction and fruit, saw God's blessings lavishly poured out wherever he went. As he sought nothing but God, he enjoyed much influence through his preaching and possessed a special grace for touching hearts. His faith was pure, his doctrine sound and perfectly orthodox, his piety profound. His virtue was proof against the greatest personal trials, which his modesty and prudence took care to keep hidden.

He had been born poor, as he often stated to his intimate friends; he lived a poor life, often lacking the necessities, and he was obliged to have recourse to charitable persons to defray the cost of his travels and to supply his most pressing needs. Thus, this zealous preacher announced the Word of God after the example of St. Paul, in perfect disinterestedness. He remained detached from the goods of this world, while enriching others with the treasures of Heaven. Not surprisingly, he did not preach in vain; and his word, like that of the Apostle, was effective and accompanied by virtue and power from on high which converted souls.

The only thing he had at heart was God and His interests, and these he sought to promote by the multiplication of Christian schools. The use he made of the authority he had acquired over his fellow citizens by the success of his preaching, was to persuade them to ask for five more Brothers and to provide for their subsistence, so as to afford Christian instruction and education to all the poor children of the city. For this purpose, during the series of Advent and Lenten sermons which he preached at Troyes, and in his meetings with

various people, he unceasingly stressed the need for, and the advantages of gratuitous schools, which produced such abundant and such noticeable fruits in the places where they were already established.

His zeal aroused the citizenry to put together an annual sum of 300 livres, and he induced various persons to contribute to the good work. It was thus possible to open two new schools, one in the parish of St. Mary Magdalen, and the other in the parish of St. John, all with the approval of the bishop of Troyes, who took these schools under his protection. Thus there are now seven Brothers in Troyes, who labor successfully at the instruction and the pious education of a rather turbulent school population. The salaries of the Brothers are as modest as their work is heavy; still, concern for securing the necessities of life does not dampen the zeal of these sons of Providence, who have learned from their father to confide in God.

In that same year, 1702, De La Salle finally carried out a project which God had been suggesting to him for a long while: to send two of his disciples to Rome to establish a school there. The desire of implanting his Institute in the Capital of the Catholic Church, so that from there it might spread throughout Christendom, was not the main objective he had in mind; perhaps indeed his humility would have forbidden him to raise his eyes so high.

His real motives were the following:

(1) To plant the tree of his Society and make it take root in the center of Catholic unity, in the shadow and under the eyes of the Pope and the Holy See;

(2) To found his Institute on the solid rock, that rock against which the gates of Hell will never prevail; and to attach it to that Church which can neither perish nor falter;

(3) To prepare for himself a way to go some day to prostrate himself at the feet of the Vicar of Jesus Christ, to ask his approbation for the Rules and Constitutions, and for the Brothers the privilege of making the three solemn vows of religion;*

(4) To obtain the Apostolic Blessing for his Institute, to strengthen it by putting it under the protection of the Head of the Church, and to obtain approval of its mission of teaching Christian doctrine under the supervision and authority of the bishops.

Finally, the pious Founder wished to send to the chief city of the Church, the source of Catholic unity, some of his disciples who could vouch for his own

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*Here Blain reveals his unfamiliarity with canonical legislation concerning religious life. The Brothers, of course, never did make SOLEMN vows, nor is there any evidence to suggest that St. De La Salle ever sought approval to do so.

faith, for his inviolable union with the Holy See, and for his submission to its decisions, at a time when so many people in France seemed to flout them without remorse.

Such were the sentiments which he had always sought to impart to his disciples, in which he had carefully brought them up, and which he had explained to them from 1694 on, when they made the perpetual vow of obedience. From that time forth, he had decided that they should work to obtain the approval of the Holy See. He mentions this himself in the first article of his last testament. It was this that he wished to give evidence to when he added to his name the title, "Roman priest," which is how he signed the vow we mentioned previously.

If up to this time the pious Founder had not been able to send any of his disciples to Rome, it was solely because he was too poor to do so. So far, he had lived in hope that Providence would procure for him the means of defraying the cost of such a lengthy trip, or would offer the Brothers, whom he wished to send, a chance to make the journey at the expense of some charitable person. But whether he found such an opportunity too long in coming, or whether after serious reflections, it seemed to him that there was too much danger in exposing the virtue of his disciples to the hazards of so long a trip, if they went on foot in a group, or if they traveled in the company of some benefactor, he made up his mind to send them alone, and to pay their way himself.

But where could he get the money needed by the travelers going such a long distance, who had to have some means of subsisting in Rome once they got there? This difficulty which might have stopped anybody else did not even occur to him. Nothing upset this man who relied on Providence, for he had often learned by fortunate experience that It takes care of those who trust in It. He therefore abandoned to God's hands the two generous Brothers who, at his invitation, put their trust in God to provide for their needs when they got to the place where obedience assigned them. He gave them only a small sum of money to help them on the road. In 1702, his Community was still so poor that it took all the cash on hand to furnish the travelers with ten pistoles.* Of course, such a modest sum, although representing the entire wealth of the Community, was far from sufficient for the expenses of such a long trip; but on occasion it could at least make up for the lack of liberality among the faithful.

What De La Salle had foreseen did, in fact, happen. The money, which was insufficient to get the two Brothers to Rome without the help of outside charity, gave out. So they found themselves in the hands of that Divine Providence to Which he had entrusted them; and It provided for the Brother**

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*The value of a pistole varied; it was worth approximately 10 francs.

**Note the singular. The Brother who got discouraged seems to have been Gabriel Drolin's younger brother, Gerard.

who showed great courage and patience in persevering under all trials. For as regards the other one, the younger of the two, he came back to France a few months after departing from it, and left behind in Rome his older companion, named Gabriel Drolin, who persevered unwaveringly for 26 years. At first he had to endure stringent poverty and met with great difficulties; but finally, in the third year of his stay he obtained the direction of one of the charitable schools founded by the Pope in various sections of the city of Rome. His salary was only 15 livres a month, barely enough to live on.

Not that this virtuous Brother could not have found a more lucrative situation. One had even been proposed to him; he was offered different benefices to which were attributed fairly substantial revenues. These he could have accepted since he was a tonsured cleric and had studied theology. But this faithful disciple of a master whom he had seen giving up everything, preferred to follow his example rather than profit by the good fortune that was offered him.

Since the Institute of gratuitous schools* was approved by the Holy See only a long time after De La Salle had sent his two disciples to Rome with the mission of preparing for this approbation, Brother Drolin was obliged to modify his dress. Most likely he stopped wearing the Brothers' habit on the advice of his wise Superior, who considered that it was hardly proper to display before the eyes of the Mother Church a garb which she had not yet sanctioned by her approval.** Since the Brother was tonsured, he donned the clerical habit, which was well suited to his profession, and one in which he could appear to best advantage before the Court of Rome. Despite differences in local customs, the disciple tried to follow the wise advice of his spiritual guide, and kept in close touch with him. Nor did the good father forget his child so far away; he was careful to send him money from time to time so that he would not be in want.

The perseverance of this faithful disciple in Rome has had, at least in part, since the death of De La Salle, the effect that the latter had hoped it would; for the Institute has since been approved as a religious Order, with the three solemn vows.*** To this favor of the Apostolic See, Pope Benedict XIII of happy memory added another, which may become the source of many more, for he gave the Brothers the school where Clement XI had established Brother Gabriel, under the name of Gabriel Drolin. Once this was done Brother Gabriel, having after 26 years succeeded in the pious design which had been the main object of his coming to Rome, left the school in the hands of the two Brothers sent to replace him, and returned to France in 1728.

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*Blain is not too accurate in giving correct titles!

**Blain's charitable supposition is contradicted by one of the Saint's letters, calling Drolin to task for adopting a garb that was at least partly clerical.

***Incorrect. The Institute was never approved as a religious ORDER with the three SOLEMN vows.

When he got back to Avignon, at the age of 65, he made his vows which were received by the Brother Superior General who happened to be there then; and now at last his soul can rejoice in the grace which he had gone so far to seek, and which he had waited for perseveringly from 1702 till 1728. Thus this venerable Brother accomplished perfectly the vow which he had made with his dear father, never to abandon the Institute and to labor till death to promote its establishment by every means at his disposal. He deserves all the more praise because the second Brother, who made the same vow with him, was not faithful to it, and compounded his infidelity with ingratitude, rebellion against his Superior, and the embezzlement of the funds destined for the establishment of a seminary for country schoolmasters: an act which led to the ruin of this excellent enterprise, which has never been revived since.

In these two men we see verified the truth of the words of Jesus Christ: "One will be taken, and the other left." The director of the St. Hippolyte seminary for country schoolmasters, who had kept only the most tenuous connection with the Society, ended up by leaving it when chance provided him with a profitable way of doing so; and He Who knows the human heart and its attachments let him succumb to the ambition which ruled him and dragged him down to such great crimes. Brother Gabriel Drolin, on the contrary, who was sincerely attached to his state and walked generously in the footsteps of his saintly Superior, had renounced all worldly desires, and thus was not tempted even by the most legitimate offers; he preferred his lowly and despised vocation to a more honorable and comfortable one which would have allowed him to emerge without delay from a condition of extreme poverty to one of relative affluence. This fidelity obtained for him the grace of finally seeing the Holy See approve his Institute and of making his profession in it, after giving the Brothers an example of inviolable attachment to his vocation, of perfect detachment from the things of earth, of union and constant submission to his worthy father.

Although they were not opened until 1703, we shall mention here the founding of the Christian schools in Avignon, because they had been requested and agreed upon as early as 1702. This was just when the persecution we shall describe in the next chapter was beginning to get under way. Humanly speaking, this persecution, which shook the new Institute to its very foundations, should have caused its collapse. As we behold it always on the brink of destruction during 15 years, we can only wonder that it was not eventually buried beneath its own ruins. We can also wonder that God chose the first four years of this long persecution, the most trying ones, to extend to several cities of the kingdom a Congregation which was still in its infancy, not securely established, and threatened by imminent shipwreck. In fact, we shall see the highest and most respectable authority strike the shepherd, intimidate the sheep, undertake to place them under a stranger's direction, and strive to keep them disunited, to cause several of them to grow disenchanted little by little, and to alter the form of government. All this was due to the intrigues of a highly placed personage who enjoyed great prestige and a notable reputation; who, from being a protector of the Servant of God, became his most bitter antagonist. De La Salle, obliged to flee before him, had to leave his flock to the care of Providence; and the enemy of the virtuous Founder took advantage of his absence to attempt to set aside his Rules, along with his memory, and to make his children forget their father.

Yet the very period when these spiritual ravages were occurring in the new Institute was also the epoch of its greatest expansion. This was the time decreed by Divine Wisdom to establish Christian schools in various parts of France. This Institute, which at this period seemed to be in flames, afterwards appeared to rise again from its own ashes. Persecution only served to spread it and to multiply its members, and produced in its favor the same effects it had brought about at the beginning of the Church. What results did persecution have when Christianity was in its cradle? It attacked the Apostles furiously and obliged them to disperse all over the world; and God made use of this dispersion of the first heroes of the Gospel to convert the Gentiles. In the same way, just when the cruelest persecution deprived the Servant of God of nearly all his authority over his men; when it obliged him either to flee or to go into hiding; when it incited his enemies to raise their hands against him everywhere, God opened up new, vast fields for his zeal and multiplied the Christian schools. In fact, in less than four years, ten new establishments were created, the first being in Avignon.

For a long time the pious Founder had been urged by several pious persons of rank to send some Brothers to open gratuitous schools in Provence, in Languedoc and the surrounding areas. This suggestion, which might have flattered a man who still retained some vestiges of self-love, and who might have been pleased to think that his disciples would carry his name so far away, on the contrary seemed to the Servant of God a dangerous thing, and one deserving of serious thought. Far from hastening the execution of this project, the fear of the perils which his disciples might be exposed to held him back and made him hesitate for a long time over what he should do.

He feared lest his sheep, too far from their shepherd and out of reach of his voice, might choose new paths for themselves. He feared lest distance, separating the children from their father, might in the long run induce them, little by little, to set aside the yoke of his legitimate authority. He feared lest, not having them under his immediate direction, without the encouragement of his presence, they might lose the spirit of their state, and lest once their piety grew weak, they might seek to liberate themselves and fall into relaxation, might cease cultivating regularity and finally might become victims of a disorderly life. He saw the danger that multiplying new foundations might cause prejudice to the existing ones; he realized that with the growth in the number of schools he would have to find more Brothers, which might mean accepting candidates unfit to carry on the work already started.

Finally, his most serious concern was with exposing his inferiors to heresy in lands formerly infected with it, especially in Languedoc. There was a danger that they might be led astray or might succumb to the bad example of so many people who lived with no religion at all, whom the so-called Reformation had left behind, even after it was supposed to have been abolished. Still, since he abandoned himself to the guidance of Providence in all things, he thought he could discern God's will in the continual requests made to him to send some of his disciples to these distant places.

The city of Avignon was the first to obtain some Brothers. This was at the request of De Chateau-Blanc, the Pope's Treasurer in the County of Avignon.* His wife, a lady of great piety, had left a legacy to found a charity school and had strongly urged her husband to hasten the establishment of this much needed institution for poor children. The husband, as virtuous as his wife, took this good work to heart; all he was waiting for, in order to execute the last will of his deceased wife, was to find men capable of carrying out her intentions.

While he hesitated over the choice of masters to whom he could entrust the charity school, it happened, fortunately, that a pious person from Lyons informed him that in Paris there existed an Institute of Brothers devoted to this very type of work.

This first acquaintance he had with the Brothers' Institute made De Chateau-Blanc anxious to have them; he did not delay in writing to De La Salle, begging him to send him two Brothers. The deliberation with which the Servant of God went about answering this request did not abate the gentleman's zeal; then, an unexpected meeting with a Brother of the Institute caused him to renew his efforts. This Brother was one of the two whom De La Salle had sent to Rome, and who on his return to France came through Avignon. De Chateau-Blanc, along with several other pious personages, was delighted to meet him and made him stay for a while. Then, together they addressed new appeals to the wise Superior, asking him to send them some of his disciples as soon as possible. The Servant of God recognized the will of God in all this; he no longer dared to delay in answering the requests made to him. So he sent two Brothers to Avignon who were received there with extraordinary tokens of esteem and affection.

The pious treasurer of His Holiness, who had so ardently desired the Brothers and had pleaded for them, lodged them in a house he had the use of, while waiting till the one he had bought for them was ready for occupancy. And since the legacy of his late spouse did not suffice, he supplemented it with a liberality worthy of a man who had consecrated his own person and all his goods to God and to good works. While everything was being prepared for the opening of the charity schools, the Brothers went to prostrate themselves at the feet of Msgr. Francois Maurice De Gontery, archbishop of Avignon, to receive his benediction, his orders, and their own commission. This pious prelate welcomed them with uncommonly cordial tokens of kindness. They won his heart and his good will, and time has only strengthened these dispositions. This illustrious archbishop, one of the outstanding benefactors of the Brothers' Institute,

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*The County of Avignon (Comptat Venaissin) on the left bank of the Rhône, had belonged to the Count of Toulouse, Raymond VII, who ceded it to the papacy at the Treaty of Paris in 1229 which ended the Albigensian war. The Popes did not take possession of it till 1274; Clement V installed his court in Avignon in 1309; but the city itself was purchased from Queen Joanna of Naples only in 1348. Up to 1692 the area was governed by a Cardinal Legate; after that by a Vice-Legate. It remained in the hands of the papacy till the French Revolution seized it in 1791.

should not be passed over in the life of their Founder. It is only right to memorialize him in the annals of their Society and to keep fresh the memory of what it owes him. Under the auspices of this zealous prelate the charitable school was opened in Avignon in 1703. From the start, the good it produced was so great and so obvious that all those interested in religious enterprises wished to have more such schools.

They did not fail to let De La Salle know how they felt about this. As early as March, 1705, De Chateau-Blanc wrote to him to persuade him to send a second contingent of Brothers. He urged him to do this, invoking all the motives which can impress a man who cared only about God. He assured him that "he was extremely satisfied with his disciples; that the city was very much edified by their conduct; and that His Excellency, the Vice-Legate, was so happy over this foundation that he gave expression to his pleasure wherever he went."

The prelate certainly continued in these dispositions, as we shall see; and later he helped the Brothers very much by his influence at the papal court, when the time came to secure approval for their Institute. When De Chateau-Blanc was writing the above mentioned letter, one of the parish priests of the city was negotiating to secure the opening of a gratuitous school in his parish; but the death of a very wealthy and pious nobleman, on whom he had counted, and who, he hoped, would underwrite his project, made it come to nothing.

De Chateau-Blanc, however, was not discouraged. When he asked De La Salle for two more Brothers he undertook to provide for their upkeep until such time as Providence would do so by some other means. "I have no doubt," he said in this letter, "that God will do so; because this is, of all charitable enterprises, the one most necessary in this city. I hope, my dear sir, that you will come and see for yourself, and that we shall have the honor of welcoming you."

This request by De Chateau-Blanc was too reasonable to be turned down. In the classes already functioning, the work was becoming heavier than two Brothers could handle. It was therefore necessary to send them some help and to increase the number of classes. Divine Providence did indeed come to their aid, as the pious treasurer had hoped; for the archbishop and the vice-legate, by order of the great Pontiff, Clement XI, undertook to provide for the Brothers' needs. The Holy Father's representative wished to be the founder of the new school. God did not delay in granting to the pious archbishop the foretaste of the reward He had prepared for him in Heaven for this good work, for he saw with his own eyes the great good that was done.

He himself went to visit the schools and took pleasure in beholding the fine order and discipline which reigned in them. Delighted by the methods the Brothers used in teaching, he spent hours in observing them and listening to the students. He made himself the judge of their progress in the knowledge of Christian Doctrine; and his joy was to hear them disputing, in innocent rivalry, the honor of knowing and reciting the Catechism lessons best and winning the prize awarded to the victors. He even had them come to his palace where he could judge of their grasp of what they had learned, and honored them

by listening to them recite the Catechism. Finally, when the holidays came, he kept for himself the privilege of going to announce them and to dismiss scholars and teachers for the vacation. The influence of the prelate was of great weight in Rome when the time came to secure the approval of the Brothers' Institute by the Holy See. The authentic certificate which he gave them to present to the Roman authorities, dated February 20, 1720, contained high praise for them, and strongly influenced the Court of Rome to grant them what they asked.

Among other things this document declared "that since the founding of the gratuitous schools in the city of Avignon, (the Brothers) have always fulfilled their duties with great zeal and assiduity; that the public derived great advantages from their labors and their efforts to educate children in the Christian manner; that their modesty and the purity of their morals had always been a source of edification to everyone." This virtuous prelate showed his kindness towards the Brothers even in the least details; he went out of his way to give personal testimony about them to people whom he knew.

In 1728, he welcomed to Avignon the Brother who had at one time been the director of the gratuitous schools, and now was Superior General of the Institute;* he gave him extraordinary tokens of his tender charity, and permitted him to erect a chapel where Mass could be celebrated and where the Brothers from the area could hold their assemblies for their retreat after which they pronounced their vows, just as the others had done at St. Yon after receiving the Bull of Approbation which Benedict XIII of happy memory had recently granted to them. The humility of the prelate would not have been satisfied if he had not come in person to visit this chapel and greet the Brothers, and if he had not honored their gathering by his presence. The house where this chapel is located is at the present time the general gathering place where all the Brothers living in these regions, too far removed from St. Yon, come every year to hold their meetings, make their retreats, and renew their vows when the Superior General passes through on his visitations. Such is the testimonial which justice and gratitude make it a duty to pay to this pious prelate, whom the Brothers consider as one of their powerful protectors, and as a true father.

To a lesser degree De Chateau-Blanc also entertained similar sentiments towards them. He, too, helped them with his influence in the Court of Rome, making himself their panegyrist rather than their patron. There is no sort of service which this pious layman is not happy to do for them. He would deserve a place among the ranks of the early Christians. His modesty does not allow us to speak any more of him; it is after his death that he should be praised, as the Holy Spirit says; for he was the soul of all the good works undertaken in the city of Avignon. After consecrating his person to God, he used his great wealth in bestowing liberal alms on the poor, and in promoting works of charity.

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*This was Brother Timothy, second superior general.

Chapter XVIII

The Origin and First Stages of the Furious Persecution Which Arose against the Holy Founder, Which Obliged Him to Leave Paris and Which Wrought Havoc in His Institute until the End of His Days.

The violent persecution which in 1702 struck the Founder of the Christian schools with the sudden and unforeseen impetuosity of a bolt of lightning from heaven, arose, to all appearances, out of the harsh and indiscreet conduct of the Master of Novices whom he had appointed to take his place when he was absent. In reality, its cause goes back to an unjust and biased attitude towards him assumed by a person who enjoyed great influence in Paris, which he gave vent to on this occasion.

If we were to name this person, now that he is dead, we would not consider ourselves to have blackened his memory nor in any way to have tarnished the outstanding reputation which he enjoyed all his life, and which was not buried in his tomb. It is nothing new, indeed, for extremely worthy men to disagree, to adopt divergent behavior patterns, and to entertain contradictory views. A diversity of appreciations about how to procure the glory of God makes people oppose each other, even though all of them aim at the same thing. At all times the saints who walk this earth have occasionally caused each other to suffer; and although each follows his own path towards God, it sometimes happens that their paths cause them to clash.

If it is true that the persecutions suffered by God's favored children in this mortal flesh ordinarily come from the devotees of the world, it is no less true that similar contradictions at times arise from good people; and that of all the different kinds of trials they have to put up with, this is the most humiliating, the hardest to bear. For if the saints are attacked by the world and meet with scorn and outrage on its part, this experience simply fulfills God's prophecies. "For if the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before you; if it persecutes you, it has persecuted Me before you. All those who live in piety will suffer persecution."

But for God's own servants to declare war on others of God's friends is something that surprises us and increases the latter's dismay and anguish. For in this world, everybody condemns in advance those who are blamed by men enjoying a reputation for virtue; and everybody considers as justified the unfavorable judgments and the unkind conduct the latter display to the former. The world's malice leads it always to suspect the worst; it issues its guilty verdicts without examining the facts; with the most shocking lack of thought and the most extreme temerity it tries and condemns the greatest saints as soon as it sees them attacked by people who have a deserved reputation for probity. In such cases, even the most pious persons are tempted to agree with these accusers and to take their side. Hence it happens that opposition from good men is for persons of the highest virtue a cloud which hides, or a veil which entirely obscures, their merits.

Let us not, therefore, be surprised if we see earthly angels at odds with one another, so to speak, since those of Heaven sometimes engage in seeming disputes, so long as the will of God remains hidden to them on subjects they are interested in. The angels who sought the conversion of the Babylonians wished to keep among them the Jews who adored the true God, so that their belief, confirmed by their example, might open the eyes of these misguided people, and make them understand that God is one, and that He deserves worship---in a word, help them to accept the true religion. On the contrary, the tutelary angels of the People of God feared lest the contagion of bad example from these idolators and daily communication with such a corrupted people might, in the long run, alter the purity of faith and the morals of the Israelites; so they sought to hasten their departure from a land given over to sin, and strove so that the Prince might allow them to return to Jerusalem. Thus these blessed spirits opposed each other in a combat inspired by charity, which might have delayed the Jews' return from their captivity in a strange land, had not the authority of the Prince of angels, St. Michael, decided in favor of the guardian angels of the People of God.

The dispute between St. Paul and St. Barnabas, which occasioned their separation and made them break away from each other in their apostolic mission, is known to everyone. Who is ignorant of the quarrel involving St. Cyprian, and other bishops of his party, with St. Stephen, Pope, who upheld by his authority and by appealing to tradition the Church's doctrine concerning baptism conferred by heretics? Constantinople and the entire Orient were aware of the difference of opinion that opposed St. Epiphanius to St. John Chrysostom on the question of the monks called "the Great Brothers". At about the same time the dispute between St. Jerome and St. Augustine flared up sharply, even though it did not last very long. Church history provides many other examples of this kind: of opposition between saints who often strenuously opposed each other, and even stirred up opposition against each other on this earth, while pursuing the same goal, the glory of God, but by different means.

It was, then, nothing new if De La Salle had to endure persecution on the part of a person whose merits and virtues caused him to be highly regarded in Paris. If we do not reveal the name of this person, and avoid giving any details which might arouse any suspicion as to his identity, it is not because we feel that naming him might stain his memory; for he may have had the best of intentions in doing what he did. The truth is that the pious persecutor of the innocent Founder was right in disapproving of, and in having condemned by superior authority, certain exaggerated and imprudent penitential practices; but as these had been commanded and carried out without De La Salle's knowledge and in his absence, he should not have been held responsible for them; it was wrong to attribute to the father the indiscretions and violent procedures of two of his children whom he had placed in charge of the others.

So, I have come, little by little, to the start of this persecution of which we must now speak. As indicated previously, the need of attending to the business of his Institute, as the latter progressed, had obliged the Founder to appoint a Brother to take charge of the novitiate during his absence. This Brother possessed solid virtue but lacked judgment and prudence; he was harsh with himself and even harsher with others; and he had his equal in the Brother Director of the schools in Paris. These two men, so much alike by their want

of discretion and their intemperate zeal, made quite insupportable a yoke which was already heavy enough in itself, but which fervor, good example and the wisdom of De La Salle made more endurable to those weakling souls who dwelt too much on what they suffered.

At first these novices, disgusted and repelled by the excessive severity of their Novice Master, found in their father's kindness and charity a balm for their wounded spirits. As the wise Superior expected true virtue of them, he led them to attribute their ill-feeling with regard to the Novice Master to their own lack of humility and of obedience; he got them to humble themselves for this by admitting their failings and by submitting promptly. He taught these malcontents to condemn themselves, never to question the one placed over them, and to seek peace of heart in patience and mortification. But the two Brothers in charge, who had not enough sense to profit by their own faults and to make use of these to correct themselves, abused the submission which their wise Superior caused their inferiors to show them. They embittered more and more these hearts already badly disposed towards them; and by pushing these weak individuals too hard, in the end they caused them to fall; and fall they did.

The presence of De La Salle was a remedy for all these evils. He uplifted those who had fallen, encouraged the fainthearted, fortified the wavering; and by the grace and unction of his words he soothed the hurt caused by the conduct of the two indiscreet Brothers. The problem, although it had been in existence for some time, remained secret so long as the suffering Brothers could see the physician who knew how to heal them; but in his absence the harshness and imprudence of his delegates, which were at the bottom of all this, so outraged some of the young men who were already embittered, that their ulcerated hearts sought vengeance and led to public complaints, thus revealing the exaggerated penances imposed on them.

The one who was most shocked by all this was the one who should have been least impressed. Although a man of outstanding merit, enlightened, solidly pious, and experienced, he let himself be prepossessed to such a point (God allowed this for the sanctification of De La Salle) that, from being a friend, protector and benefactor, he turned into a secret enemy and a hidden but violent persecutor of the Servant of God. Oh strange example of human frailty! This great man, who seemed to honor De La Salle as a saint and to admire his virtue, changed overnight his heart and his attitude towards him, lost all esteem for him, considered him as a person lacking in common sense, as one who did not know how to deal with people. He reported him to the higher superiors and to several other outstanding prelates, painting him as a ridiculous and extravagant victim of his own ill-considered piety.

And yet the man, who under the pretext of principles and of piety was thus blackening the good name of the Servant of God, was the man who should have known him best, because he had had the closest contacts with him, had for a long time worked together with him in various good works. He had shown himself John Baptist's defender, his patron; and had displayed remarkable zeal in furthering the growth of the new Institute.

His error lay in blaming on an innocent man the faults committed in his absence---faults which he knew nothing about---which two indiscreet Brothers had indulged in without his approval. Certainly these actions deserved condemnation, and those who had corrected others in such a barbarous fashion themselves deserved severe reprehensions; but why, without hearing him, blame and condemn a superior for the deeds of his inferiors accomplished in his absence? The reason seems to be that the two imprudent Brothers were thought to have acted at their father's instigation, and that their notions were inspired by him; that he had authorized, either by his orders or by his example, the inhuman type of correction which had given scandal. That was precisely the idea which was taken for granted, and which instead should have been verified. It amounted to making a wise and virtuous priest responsible for the intemperate actions of men led by unrestrained and imprudent zeal. At least, before proceeding to accuse and depose him, care should have been taken to establish the facts, to listen to witnesses, and to show convincingly by unequivocal proofs that the Superior was the real author of, or at least the conniver in, the indiscreet practices which were being censured.

Since he had been away from Paris at the time these things happened, there certainly existed a presumption that he was not aware of what had gone on in the house, and that the indiscreet Brothers had profited by his absence to carry their spirit of harshness to the extreme, and to yield to their penchant for a type of penance inspired by ill-humor and an uncouth temperament rather than by the Spirit of God. Charity and prudence would have demanded at least that judgment be suspended on this occasion, and that the condemnation of the Superior should not have been so hastily decided on account of what his inferiors had done.

The truth of the matter, however, is that John Baptist's enemy was seeking an occasion to create difficulties for him. For some time prior to all this, he had been growing less well disposed towards the Servant of God. It happens often enough that very minor clashes lead to major consequences, and it is not rare for slight misunderstandings to develop into broken friendships and definitive breaks. The man of whom we are speaking, who before this had been so favorable to the Servant of God, had allowed himself little by little to grow prejudiced against him, although no one knows why. These ill-founded prejudices had prepared his heart to listen to and to believe anything anyone might say against the Brothers' Superior. The moment was ripe for misunderstandings to break out between two men who, when working together, had already brought about such great progress for the gratuitous schools, and whose cooperation provided hope for even more advances in the future. No wonder that the evil spirit was so quick to take advantage of this occasion, and to add to their mutual incomprehension by fomenting gossip and tales which completed the task of irritating their unsettled relations.

We can leave to Him Who reads the depths of minds and hearts to decide by what sort of casuistry De La Salle's former friend became his most redoubtable, although secret, adversary; and to determine whether some secret passion, disguised under the honorable aspect of zeal, was not in reality the moving force which led him to stir up so much trouble for the Servant of God. "So often," says the author of the Imitation, "we are moved by passion, and we call it zeal; so often cupidity reigns where in appearance nothing but charity is

present." It is a fact that the complaints which this man listened to against the harsh and indiscreet conduct of the two Brothers were entirely in line with the prejudices he had already formed against De La Salle; thus it was easy for the devil to deceive him and to make him conclude that the Superior was responsible for the faults of his inferiors. This is how the devil always finds within us the tendencies he uses to tempt us. But whatever may be the truth concerning the secret motives that aroused these violent prejudices against the Servant of God, here are the facts which provided the pretext for them and led up to them.

The imprudent Novice Master, who was in charge at the Grande Maison during a short trip that his Superior had to undertake, felt that this was his chance to give free rein to the impetuosity of his intemperate zeal with regard to some candidates who had even less virtue than he had prudence. The indiscreet penances he inflicted on these young men did not help them to correct their faults, but provided obvious proofs of his brutality; and this furnished the evidence needed to back up the complaints lodged against De La Salle at the archbishop's palace. These angry and scheming young men brought their grievances out publicly, and sought to avenge on the presumed author of the penances, which had irritated them, the shame and resentment they experienced.

The person to whom they went with their story, already ill-disposed towards De La Salle, as we have seen, welcomed the plaintiffs and listened to them with a kind and gracious air which not only loosened their tongues but also made them feel free to vomit forth all the venom pent up in their hearts. He then asked them to put their charges into writing and to sign them, which they were glad to do. These written statements served the purpose of the Servant of God's enemy even better than he could have hoped, because they exaggerated the ill treatment these youths had received and the penances inflicted on them. Thus, enjoying the pleasure of revenge, their self-love taught them how to paint the situation in false colors and to mingle false accusations with the true. Blinded and furious as they were, they did not realize that it was not their Novice Master but their good father who would have to drink deep, for the rest of his life, this chalice which they were filling with the bitterness welling up from their hearts.

The confidant of these rebellious novices was not the man to cause an immediate uproar, and thus give warning of the secret trap he was preparing. He knew how to handle affairs of this nature and to insure success by careful and circumspect behavior. Furthermore, not being conscious of the secret passion which indisposed him against John Baptist, he proposed to himself, in the persecution he was preparing, nothing but the noblest motives having to do with the glory of God, the advantage of the gratuitous schools, the necessity of giving the Brothers a new form of government and of protecting their Institute by taking away from them a superior incapable of governing them properly.

For after all, this man was not De La Salle's superior and had no authority over him, his Community or his person. Thus, he could do nothing against him except by intrigue and clandestine maneuvers. What he had to do was to sow doubts in the minds of the higher superiors about John Baptist, to make them think of him as an unyielding, stubborn, presumptuous man, wedded to his own

ideas, austere and pitiless in dealing with his inferiors, and exaggeratedly harsh in punishing the slightest faults: as a man who never made any allowance for human weakness, and finally as a person of limited understanding, quite unequal to the task of governing the new Institute properly.

It was not, however, all that easy to depict De La Salle in such an unfavorable light in the eyes of an archbishop who entertained no prejudices against him, was naturally benevolent and moderate, and indeed strongly inclined to favor a man whom he loved and whom he had come to esteem even before knowing him personally, on the strength of the reputation for holiness he had acquired in the country around Rheims. Furthermore, the written statements he received had not been directed against De La Salle but against the Novice Master; and it was not easy to lay on the former the blame for the faults of the latter in the mind of the Cardinal, who did not share the secret animosity animating the accuser. Prudence, therefore, suggested delay until new accusations might be forthcoming, until new charges might entangle in the affair the responsibility of the innocent one whose ruin was being sought.

The opportunity came soon enough. The Novice Master had his counterpart in the Director of the Paris schools. Inclined to the same sort of violence and imprudence, he did not fail to proceed to the same lengths, thus providing the persecutor with new ammunition against his innocent rival. This Director of the Paris schools, with the other Brothers of his small community, had come as usual to the novitiate to spend the Sunday. There he made the same misuse of his authority as his friend, the Novice Master, had done. The object of his brutality was a novice who had been put under his jurisdiction when he was sent to do practice teaching in the Paris schools.

This young man, who was already strongly tempted to give up his vocation, ran away and went to testify to the harshness of the penances inflicted on him. He spoke to the very same person whom the first accusers had approached with their complaints. The marks left by the cruel treatment he had received were obvious proofs of the truth of his story. No doubt, they should have turned to the disgrace of the one who had inflicted them; but before imputing them to De La Salle, it should have been ascertained whether he had in one way or another taken part in such shocking behavior. As the Superior, he could have been held responsible for it if he had given occasion to it by secret or public orders, by his approval or advice, by his example or even by his silence; but if the second fact, like the first, had happened during his absence, without his knowledge and against his intentions, if his own conduct, his mentality, his way of acting had never occasioned such indiscretions, it was not right to blame him for them. Yet this is what was done. People thought that since the second Brother, appointed to his position by De La Salle, was acting like the first, they were not doing so of their own accord, but were simply following the lead of their Superior.

On such flimsy grounds, which a heart already persuaded took for proofs, the enemy of the Servant of God felt that he was authorized to impute to the father the faults committed by his children. But to proceed against him with greater surety, he told the latest accuser, as he had the earlier ones, to set down his complaints in writing; he then summed up this and the previous denunciations in a memorandum to which he added his own comments. In this

document, without calling the pious Founder the author of his disciples' conduct, he blamed him for it and concluded that he should be deposed and someone else put in his place, someone with greater wisdom, better able to govern the Brothers and to take care of an Institute which was so useful to the Church. When the manuscript was ready, he presented it to His Eminence and did not fail to add, in person, his other prepossessions and grounds for his hidden displeasure against a man whose only crime, in fact, was that he did not blindly follow his advice, and did not let him run the new Society as he saw fit.*

The accuser was careful to back up all the accusations contained in the memorandum and to give them an air of verisimilitude. He imagined that there was sharp division among the Brothers, and that many were disillusioned with their vocation; then he sought a reason for this and found it in their Superior's lack of ability. He described him as a man inept for maintaining good order and peace, and insisted that it was necessary to depose him. Since this was the result he really aimed at, he exhausted all his eloquence to lead Msgr. De Noailles to this conclusion. According to him, His Eminence would have to give the Brothers a new superior immediately if he wished to save the Institute from total ruin.

However, the Cardinal, who was not given to precipitous action, was not ready to go so far. He found it hard to believe everything he heard; and he would have treated the document as a calumny and ordered it burned as defamatory libel, if it had come from any other hand than that which presented it. For that hand belonged to a man even more venerable for his virtue than for his age. He possessed the art of saying what he wished in a pleasant manner, and with majestic simplicity; good faith, candor, and truth seemed to dwell in all his words. Everything in him inspired trust and deserved full confidence; his morals were irreproachable; his thinking was profound; he knew how to deal with the world while remaining a man of deep piety; his external appearance was imposing; and above all, he displayed an appearance of moderation and prudence which did not allow any sign of emotion to pierce through.

On this occasion the worthy prelate could not get over his surprise; and the more he reflected on the accuser and the accused, the greater perplexity he felt. Whom should he believe? Obviously, either the one must be at fault or the other was guilty of calumny. At least he had to conclude either that the one was extremely prejudiced and led astray by false suspicions and biased reports, or that the other had given occasion for the accusations against him. Charity did not allow him to charge the author of the memorandum with imposture and calumny, or to believe him capable of bearing false witness against his neighbor. His great reputation and his real virtue placed him above any such

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*Despite his show of coy reticence, Blain makes it quite clear who the Founder's "secret enemy" was: De La Chétardye; and why he was so determined on the former's replacement: he wanted to govern the Institute.

suspicion. To tax him with passion, prejudice, imprudence, low jealousy, resentment and hidden spite, all veiled under the cloak of zeal, seemed highly improbable. His very looks gave the lie to any such suspicions; probity was written on his face. On the other hand, to believe that the accusations were correct and contained nothing but well ascertained facts was something that the prelate's deep regard for De La Salle would not allow him to do.

The reputation for holiness which everywhere followed a man who had condemned himself to a life of such poverty and mortification, and who had made his name famous by so many examples of heroic virtue, forbade the archbishop to listen to such accusations. He was surprised to see a man already considered as a Founder, who had created a new Society and for the past 28 years had built it up, who had managed to preserve it from shipwreck amidst the most furious storms and constant tempests that had assailed it, treated as a man of limited ability and understanding, a victim of presumptuous and ill-considered piety. Finally, the Cardinal, who had always thought that the Servant of God possessed great talent for governing his house, and had admired the fine order he saw there when he had visited it with the King of England, remained uncertain in his mind about what he should believe and about what he should do. The decision he made, and which was indeed the wisest course open to him, was not to judge of the matter too hastily and to let time bring the truth to light. The business was as ambiguous as it was delicate, and it called for precise information so as to discover exactly what was what.

Thus the Cardinal decided that he would look into the question; and so the only answer he gave to the bearer of the memorandum was that he would reflect on what he should do. In fact, a few days later he sent one of his Vicars General to conduct an on-the-spot investigation to find out all he could about what was going on.

To make matters worse, the complaints against the two Brothers in question reached the ears of De La Chétardye. The malcontents showed him on their bodies the welts left by the bloody disciplining they had received, and in exciting his compassion they also excited his indignation. Although De La Salle was innocent, their story made him the principal object of De La Chétardye's wrath. Convinced that the Brothers' Superior was the primary author of everything that went on among them, he attributed to him, as to the first cause, the indiscreet and cruel penances complained about. This conviction changed his attitude towards the pious Founder. He no longer considered him with the same benevolence; he lost all confidence in him, and went from the highest esteem to the most utter disregard, from the warmest friendship to cold indifference. During several months he broke off completely with him, sent his disciples away, and closed the schools. True, sometime later he took the Brothers back into his good graces, but he never restored to their worthy Superior either his early confidence, his former protection or his financial support which previously had always been forthcoming for the needs of his Community. In this way the Servant of God, abandoned by his best friend and the most zealous promoter of the Christian schools, was obliged to go to seek refuge and better conditions in another parish, as we shall mention farther on.

Meanwhile, the Cardinal Archbishop, uncertain and troubled over what he should think of all this, took all the steps required to get to the bottom of the affair. So as to give himself firm grounds for his judgment, he resolved to establish a sort of inquisition on the spot where the faults had been committed. Pirot was charged with investigating the matter.

This Vicar General spent about a month gathering information; he would come one day each week to observe what was going on, and interrogated each Brother in private. Lest he should be deceived, and in order to force the truth out, so to speak, he obliged the Brothers to swear to tell the truth when they came to speak with him. This precaution may have been wise, but it was not necessary in a house where sincerity, candor and respect for authority reigned. Men accustomed to accuse themselves of their shortcomings and to avow their least faults before the entire Community for the purpose of humbling themselves and drawing down on themselves confusion and shame, did not need to take an oath to tell the truth. Children accustomed to admitting to their good father with naive simplicity the slightest evil motions of their hearts, to revealing to him their lapses and confiding to him their temptations and all the evil movements that vices, passions and self-love might occasion within them, were not men who were apt to speak against their consciences.

De La Salle had returned by the time these unusual occurrences began at the instigation of his hidden rival and enemy; he noticed this sort of inquisitorial tribunal which had been set up in his house, but looked upon it with respect, with a submissive heart and an unruffled and calm attitude. He did not know what had inspired all this, what was its origin and cause, where it would lead; and he did nothing to find out. Self-love was so completely dead in him (as much as it can ever be on this earth in God's greatest servants) that it did not arouse in his soul either curiosity or complaints or concern about all that he saw going on. His silence was truly admirable on an occasion where anyone else would have found it impossible to remain quiet. He did not mention to any of the Brothers what was taking place under his eyes. He asked none of them what was the matter, even though he could read their dissatisfaction in their faces, and it would have been easy for him to find out everything that was happening, and to get them to admit to him what they had deposed under oath. He inquired about nothing.

His silence was imitated by his children; and his restraint kept them from disclosing to him that he himself was the one being investigated, and that in all likelihood some humiliating decision was being reached concerning him. Pirot was careful to keep all the information given to him entirely secret; nobody spoke about what transpired or about what was being said. No one mentioned the questions put to him, or his own answers. No one was even tempted to try to find out; and if anyone had done so, his Superior would have imposed silence on him, so great was his veneration for higher authority.

The former professor at the Sorbonne who alone was in charge of the investigation did not delegate his responsibility to anyone else and did not associate anyone with himself in the inquiry he was conducting. He was the sole judge, the only witness, the accuser, and the court secretary. He wrote

out in his own hand the statements he received, and placed under solemn secrecy the various testimonials he so scrupulously gathered. He finally completed his visitation and his scrutiny without giving De La Salle any idea what it was all about, or any reasons for such extraordinary proceedings.

The facts collected by Pirot contradicted the report presented to His Eminence, except for the complaints signed by the three plaintiffs. Nothing in the memorandum was substantiated. In addition, the Vicar General stated how edified he had been to see the good order, peace and union which reigned among the Brothers; he could not recognize in the house he had visited that hotbed of disorder, revolt and discord which had been painted in such lurid colors.

Pirot, having found out the truth about the whole affair, was in a position to see for himself and to understand, through the depositions he had gathered, that the prepossession against the Brothers' Superior in the mind of the Cardinal was nothing but a tissue of slanders. Did he ever state this? No one knows. His report remained as secret as his investigation had been, so that it is not possible to say whether his conclusions were for or against the pious victim of an evil tongue. If we may judge by what happened, it would seem that the investigator decided against the testimony of his own eyes and ears, and gave credence to the accuser; and that he preferred to think that he had failed to discover the truth, rather than to suspect the veracity of a cleric who was above all suspicion and who in assailing De La Salle gave great weight to his charges, thanks to the consideration of his merits, the authority he enjoyed in Paris, and his reputation which nothing could counterbalance. Thus, it would seem that the commissioner was more impressed by the reputation of the holy Founder's adversary and by the plausibility of his prejudices than by the facts, or else that he was not man enough to uphold John Baptist's innocence, which he had clearly recognized, in the face of the powerful enemy who attacked him; or perhaps again, and this is probably the fairest supposition and the one nearest to the truth, the investigator, relying on the complaints signed by the three malcontents against the two Brothers in charge, and which were certainly substantiated, felt that this testimony compromised De La Salle, and that he should be considered as the accomplice of the two guilty Brothers, and as such should be demoted like them, deposed, and declared incapable of governing the new Community.

However, even if De La Salle had deserved some share of the blame merited by the conduct of his two appointees, it would seem that the degree of his responsibility was quite out of proportion to the chastisement which it was proposed to inflict on him. It would seem that before subjecting him to the disgrace of deposition, his superiors should have charitably warned him to moderate with due wisdom the corrections practiced in his house, to limit the use of penances, and to forbid all indiscreet ones. It would seem that the authorities should have waited to see whether he would show himself docile in following their wise advice, and that they should not have despaired of amendment on the part of a man who up to this time had never deserved reproof either on this score or on any other. It was certainly surprising that, on the strength of mere suspicions, they should have proceeded to dishonor a man who just a few years previously had been held in such high regard by the archbishop, and whose virtues Msgr. De Noailles himself had recognized by

approving all his requests for his Community, and by granting him full powers as regards the administration of the sacraments.

Even if it had been true that De La Salle had introduced into his Community the type of penances which had given rise to the indiscretions of the two Brothers in charge and to the complaints of two or three malcontents, the holy Founder could have justified these practices by appealing to the example of the holiest and most ancient religious Orders.

He could have found such examples as far back as the eleventh century in the famous monastery of Fonte Avellano in the diocese of Gubbio, whose superior was Cardinal (and Saint) Peter Damian; and in the Constitutions of the Order of Mount Carmel as well as in several others. St. Peter Damian himself relates, in his life of St. Rudolph, bishop of Gubbio, one of the great penitents of his century, that among his other extraordinary austerities, when he came back to his fellow hermits of Luceola in Umbria: "He never came to the Chapter without taking the discipline there, or having it administered to him; his joy was perfect when this was done to him not only by one of the Brothers, but by two."

St. Peter Damian relates another fact of the same kind as that which caused the complaints of the dissatisfied novices, but which turned out altogether differently. "In this same hermitage," he says, "there was a Brother who often left his cell for no reason, out of light-mindedness and lack of serious recollection. John, the Prior of the hermitage, after having reproved him severely for this, had him soundly whipped. While the guilty one was putting his clothes back on, he spoke arrogantly; thereupon the Superior ordered them to strip him and whip him again, which was done. This happened six times. Finally, when the Brother had for the seventh time received a severe whipping, he learned wisdom, and said, as he was putting his clothes back on: 'This time the devil is gone; he was the one who tormented my heart and controlled it; now he has been put to flight and leaves me at liberty. From now on I will obey my Superior.'"

St. Peter Damian relates that he himself made use of this kind of correction on a young religious who insisted on exaggerating the practice of abstinence. He also states, in Chapter II of his Life of St. Dominic: "This Saint never failed, when he came to the Chapter, to strip and receive the discipline."

The Life of St. Romuald provides us with a very strange instance of correcting faults by similar chastisements, for he made use of them on his own father. The latter, after retiring to a monastery to do penance for his sins, had made up his mind to leave it and return to the world. St. Romuald, his son, on learning this, undertook a long journey to go to him; and having reached the monastery of St. Severus near Ravenna where his father was, he made use of his authority as superior in his regard, and resorted to a severity which seems surprising, but which resulted in good; for he had chains fastened to his father's feet, threw him into prison, and had him beaten severely. An action in itself so reprehensible was the occasion for an extraordinary enlightenment, as the sequel proved; for Sergius, the father of St. Romuald,

came back to his senses, admitted his fault, received many special favors from God, and died a very edifying death. St. Peter Damian tells us all this in his life of the Saint.

In the General History of the Reform of the Discalced Carmelites we read of something quite similar to what gave rise to the complaints we have mentioned. "One day," relates the historian, "the Father Vicar had left the convent of Our Lady of Succor at Altomir, with a professed Brother; so there remained in the house only the novices and a lay Brother who had made profession, and who, during the two days he governed the convent, arrogated to himself an authority as absolute as though he had been superior general of the entire Order. The very first day he was in charge of the community he held the Chapter of faults, as was the custom, right after the collation; during it he did not spare anyone, and reproved each one according to his zeal and the light that God gave him.

"But so as not to omit anything which he considered the obligations of his position, he gave them an exhortation in which he reminded them of their duties. These acts of jurisdiction were not enough to satisfy the zeal of this good Brother, who took his authority so seriously. With this in mind, he ordered all the novices to get ready to receive the discipline from him; and once they were prepared he commenced laying the lash on their bare shoulders very vigorously, for the space of a Miserere and a De Profundis. These innocents received this harsh treatment with as much humility as though the lay Brother had been the provincial on his visitation, and had wanted them to suffer in this way in penance for their sins. So far were they from wanting to murmur about it or complain, they did not even mention it to the Father Vicar on his return."

Here we see an instance of an occurrence which so inappropriately became the origin of the great persecution raised against De La Salle; but there were two differences. The first was that this sort of correction was customary in the Reformed Order of Mount Carmel and was authorized by the Constitutions. The second difference was that those fervent novices in the hermitage of Altomir were so mortified that not one of them allowed himself to indulge in complaints and murmuring against the lay Brother whose indiscreet zeal had armed him with the discipline which he used so vigorously on his confreres. One can, however, say, in excusing this good Brother, that in the absence of his superiors and of others who outranked him, he thought he was in charge of the monastery, and therefore duty bound to do what was their responsibility to do---to do what the Superior should have done.

In fact, the same historian, speaking of the strict observance that reigned in this Convent of Our Lady of Succor, established in the grotto of the Virgin Catherine of Cardonne, relates that on ferial days at the end of Matins, the Superior gave the discipline to all religious, to make up for any negligence they might have been guilty of in reciting the Office. Everyone knows also that, according to the Rule of St. Benedict and the Canons of the Council of

Agde,* religious who were recalcitrant and disobedient were to be scourged; and that because of his errors the monk Gothescalq was condemned to this same penance by thirteen bishops at the council held at Quercy-on-Oise in 849. Here is what the Council of Agde held in 506 (Can. 38) says: "Let the same be done to the monks; and if words do not suffice to correct them, let the lash be used on them."

These examples show that even if it had been true that De La Salle had given occasion for these indiscreet penances which caused the complaints made against him by the two or three malcontents, his fault, caused only by an excess of fervor, would have been sufficiently remedied by the reproofs of his superior. It was, consequently, to fall into a much greater excess of severity than that which he was reproached with, to make him expiate his fault by a shameful deposition. But according to the testimony of Brothers who lived nearly all the time with their holy Founder, and who are still alive, he never gave occasion to these indiscreet penances either directly or indirectly; he never authorized them or approved of them; they had taken place without his knowledge and in his absence. Was it right, then, that on a mere suspicion he should have been accused of these excesses, reported to his ecclesiastical superiors, and condemned to removal from office on the grounds that he was a man given to exaggeration, lacking in common sense and knowledge of proper behavior? Yet this is what was done; this was the good turn that his former friend and protector did him, all under the pretext of piety and zeal.

Chapter XIX

De La Salle Is Condemned Unheard.
Another Ecclesiastic Is Chosen to Take His Place.
Pirot Comes to the Novitiate House to Install the New Superior
and Encounters Invincible Opposition from the Brothers.

De La Salle saw the visitation carried out by the Vicar General come to an end with the same tranquil attitude with which he had seen it conducted. He showed neither the slightest movement of curiosity about the reasons for it, nor the slightest apprehension over its eventual outcome. Pirot, who could not hide his coming and going from the Superior of the house, had no trouble in keeping the purpose of his activity hidden from a man who never inquired into the motives of his superiors' behavior, and showed such marked respect for their actions. This visitation took place during November, 1702. Once it was over, the pious Founder thought that he should go to pay his respects to His Eminence, and thank him very humbly for the attention paid to his Community. The prelate, who had not lost the basic esteem and affection he entertained for
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*Small town in southern France, near Montpellier; several Councils were held there; the most important in 590.

the Servant of God, in spite of the malicious reports by which he had been circumvented, received him with his usual graciousness and marked tokens of friendship.

So flattering a reception seemed to indicate a favorable attitude towards the man of God and to presage a favorable outcome of Pirot's visit, while at the same time it augured a continuation of the archbishop's good will.

It was at this point that his deep humility, blind submission and perfect death to self appeared in De La Salle in all their clarity. This was one of those critical moments in the history of holiness where true virtue is revealed in circumstances where imperfect virtue would allow its deficiencies to show. When a man is taken by surprise and sees himself, all of a sudden, the victim of calumny, injustice and persecution, how easy it is for him to reveal himself a child of Adam by allowing his lips to form murmurs of protest against harsh and humiliating orders, complaints against his open or secret enemies, or at least by permitting his heart to elicit movements of resentment and recrimination! On such mortifying occasions how difficult it is even to the most virtuous persons not to show on their countenance some sign of chagrin and displeasure! How difficult it is to find oneself at one and the same time accused and condemned, without knowing why, without having been convicted, even without having been heard!

Even the greatest criminals hear the charges against them read out; along with the sentence, the motives for their condemnation are stated; they are not kept in the dark about crimes imputed to them which deserve punishment. But De La Salle was condemned without having been heard; he received from lips which had just been paying him gracious compliments the sentence by which he was deposed. He found himself disdainfully rejected by a kind and benevolent prelate who had always favored him and from whom he had received all the tokens of honor, esteem and affection that a simple priest can expect from one of the highest ranking Princes of the Church. At that moment the Servant of God realized that the archbishop must have been terribly misled, and that slander, which finds its way even into the palaces of the great, had appeared plausible enough to circumvent the Cardinal's religious spirit. But since his former friend and supporter was the secret enemy who had blackened his name in the prelate's eyes, he had no idea who was behind the story. Or rather, paying no attention to the secondary causes, he adored God's action and listened in silence, with deep respect and gratitute, to Jesus Christ telling him through the mouth of the archbishop: "Monsieur, you are no longer the Superior; I am appointing another for your Community."

These words, although accompanied by gentleness and politeness, nonetheless constituted a most humiliating condemnation. As much as to say, with all due proportion, what the prophet Ezechiel in God's name said to King Sedecias: "Come down from your throne." Take a lower rank; you occupy the first place but it is not the right one for you. You are at the head of a Community which you are not fit to govern. Your own best interests and those of the organization which you have brought into being, require that a different and wiser superior be appointed to govern it.

The sentence of deposition, which His Eminence pronounced in a calm and moderate tone, included the hidden meaning of the commentary which we have just given of it, as it is easy to see in what preceded and in what followed. De La Salle was not a man who could fail to notice this and to feel it; and his full realization of what was happening added to the merit of his humble acquiescence in his own disgrace, an acquiescence as prompt as the verdict by which he learned of it had been sudden and unforeseen. He could have asked for the reasons for his replacement, and inquired who were the enemies that had recommended it; he could have demanded to be heard concerning the facts and the imputations. It would have been easy for him to justify his own conduct, and to show that his removal from office was founded on nothing but false suppositions, on complaints which did not refer to him personally, and on faults which in all justice nobody could blame him for.

He knew that he stood before a judge who was good and kindly by nature, who was condemning him in spite of himself, who would have gladly listened to what he had to say in his defense, and who, having always shown himself well disposed in his regard, must have felt in his heart a desire to be fair towards him. But the humble Jesus Who had heard in silence His unjust condemnation as coming from His eternal Father, and Who had submitted thereto with the meekness of a lamb that remains silent even when being sacrificed, had not taught him how to demand justice, how to present a vindication of his conduct. Thus, the Servant of God who wished to resemble his Master in all things did not speak except to thank his judge; and after doing so with joy in his heart, a joy which showed on his face, he withdrew from the archbishop's presence unruffled and happier than when he had come in.

After all, the crown they were taking from him was mostly a crown of thorns; his position as superior which they were depriving him of had, up to then, brought him nothing but crosses, ignominy and persecution---the only thing about it which made it attractive in his eyes. Anybody else would have found it unbearable; self-love could never have endured it. The Cardinal could never have done the Brothers' Superior a greater favor, or one he more desired, than by removing him from the government of his Community and entrusting it to someone else. His hidden enemy could not have rendered him a more signal service than by assuming this position himself, and bringing John Baptist to his feet. This man, although so prudent and clear-sighted, never seems to have realized that he was attacking his rival's weakest point when he favored his love for a humble and hidden life, and his horror for the first place. How often had the humble Superior of the Brothers not tried to secure for himself the relief to which they were now condemning him in such a disgraceful way? A situation which made it possible for him to indulge his attraction for continual prayer, for solitude, penance and union with God, seemed to him a desirable anticipation of eternal repose.

When he got back to the Community he said nothing about what had happened. He did not confide to anyone the secret of his impending disgrace; not even among his dearest disciples did he seek a faithful confidant, not to obtain comfort, not even to express his joy over what had happened. He went instead to the feet of Jesus Christ to beg Him to confirm by His authority the deposition that His minister had pronounced; and to make it permanent. While awaiting the happy moment of his deliverance, which was not long in coming, the

Servant of God went about his business in the house as usual, and did not allow either his looks, words or actions to afford anyone a hint or presage of what was going to happen.

Pirot, wishing to complete his task on the spot where he had begun it and to carry out in person the sentence which he had placed in the mouth of the Cardinal, sent a trusted messenger to tell De La Salle of the day he had chosen to go to install the new Superior, and to have him acknowledged by the Brothers. This certainly was to put John Baptist's virtue to the supreme test; or rather we may say that the Vicar General wanted to show forth this virtue in all its splendor by obliging his victim in person to open the door to his competitor. The archbishop's emissary must have been very sure of the submission of the "guilty" one whose condemnation he had managed to bring about, when he ordered him to be present at the execution of the sentence which would remove him from his position as Superior. This confidence he felt was a testimonial of sorts to what he thought of the persecuted man's virtue. Did this not prove his innocence and justify his conduct?

The Vicar General was quite right in counting on the perfect obedience of the saintly priest; for the latter executed his orders with all the exactitude he could have desired; and did so, in addition, with a discretion and circumspection which showed that, if he did not share the wisdom of the world, he was filled with that which comes from God. The only way Pirot's plan could succeed was to keep it secret and not allow the least suspicion about it to take shape in the house; for if the Brothers had had the least inkling that they were being called together for no other purpose than that of witnessing the deposition of their Superior, the Vicar General would not have found them as submissive as he hoped. It was even to be feared that children so deeply attached to their father might reject the emissary's orders, so contrary to John Baptist's honor and to their own best interests; and that Pirot might compromise the archbishop's authority by trying to impose on them, in his name, a superior whom they had not chosen, whom they did not even know, and who as far as they were concerned was a nonentity.

It was certain that Pirot who, during his visitation had found so much simplicity, candor and submission among the Brothers, would see his visit end in scandal and confusion if he mentioned too soon the idea of giving them a stranger as their shepherd. If the saintly priest's humility made him indifferent to his public degradation, the love and confidence which the Brothers felt for him would never allow them to witness it; and all of them were prepared to leave the house empty rather than to see another superior installed there, and their father disgraced. All the sheep were resolved to disperse rather than to change shepherds, or to leave the diocese and gather again in some other, where they would be free to live under De La Salle's direction.

Since silence was so necessary for the success of the operation, the Servant of God kept the project so secret and so well hidden that no Brother suspected what was afoot. Without telling them anything about the new visit that Pirot was to make, the reason for it or what its results would be, he took all the necessary precautions so that Pirot would be welcomed with the honor and respect due to his position; and he arranged for the Brothers to be

gathered together, as though by chance, when he arrived. So he sent word to those in Paris, and to whose who might have gone out for a walk, to be sure to be present in the house after Vespers, without telling them why. This he said with an indifferent air which successfully avoided any curiosity or suspicion. Anyhow, the blind obedience towards their holy Founder which reigned among them did not permit them to make the least comment on his orders. The only point on which they would not agree to his desires was precisely the one on which Pirot would try to give them orders.

If it had been easy to surprise them, it was not possible to change their hearts. Angry at having been the dupes of their great simplicity, once they learned why they had been called together against their wishes, they resolved to be neither the instruments nor the witnesses of the shameful deposition of their Superior whom they considered as their Guardian Angel. At first they were greatly surprised when, at 4 p.m. after Vespers on the first Sunday of Advent, they heard in the courtyard the sound of a carriage approaching. They were even more surprised when they saw Pirot come in, accompanied by a priest whom they did not know. But what was their amazement when they learned from the lips of the Vicar General that this unknown priest was the new Superior whom he had come to install in the place of their holy Founder!

Then indeed Pirot beheld unbelief written on their faces. Sorrow painted on their features informed him clearly enough that by bringing into it a new superior he was bringing strife into a house which till then had been very tranquil and very united. As soon as he had taken his place in the armchair prepared for him, he began explaining the purpose of his visit. In vain did he start by praising their former Superior before going on to praise the new one whom he was presenting to them. In vain did he strive to convince the Brothers to receive the new one with the respect due to the authority which had sent him. In vain did he try to win their confidence for the intruder; in vain did he attempt to inspire them with a liking for his person by reciting in glowing terms his extraordinary merits. In vain did he wish to make them hope that under a new type of government they would enjoy a more comfortable life, to entice them by holding out the prospect of a more pleasant existence, less poor, less penitential, less constraining, under a less austere leader, one who would show himself more understanding and more indulgent towards human weakness. Their hearts were bound by the ties of their vocation and by the attractions of grace to him who had begotten them in Jesus Christ.

For their father these men had the hearts of true sons; these disciples were convinced that their spiritual master was without a peer in this world. They were not about to bestow their confidence on an unknown priest. These Brothers, accustomed to respect Jesus Christ in the person of their Superior and to follow the most difficult orders, were not inclined to revolt, resistance or mutiny. So they sought a natural defense in their tears; and by their very humble remonstrances attempted to ward off the execution of the sentence which Pirot had come to impose. At any rate, those who were not bound by vows knew that the door of the house was open for them to leave; and by leaving they were glad to give the new Superior a chance to bring in new sheep to make up a new flock, which might consent to be ruled by him and his new laws. Those who had made a vow of obedience to De La Salle considered this vow as a personal one, binding them to him; they did not think they were under any

obligation to pay the same submission to a chief who was not a member of their organization, whom they had neither selected nor asked for, who did not possess their peculiar spirit or ways, who was ignorant of their customs and procedures, who was not fit to maintain discipline and the Rules, who could not sustain the austerity required of them or give an example of it. Thus, all of them, without having concerted any line of conduct, had resolved to withdraw and to leave the new Superior alone in the house, if the deposition of De La Salle was carried out.

However, since prudence had suggested to Pirot not to mention the change of Superiors at first, but to try to win over the hearts of De La Salle's disciples by praising him in front of them, he was listened to with much satisfaction so long as he spoke so highly of their holy Founder. He stated that it was an honor for John Baptist that God had chosen him to begin a work so useful to the Church, which he had guided so wisely up to the present. But then he took the laurel crown which he had just placed on the Founder's head and wanted to transfer it to that of the new Superior. He began to enlarge on the latter's qualities and virtues; and by a well-known oratorical device he added that he did not dare to say in his praise all that he could have said, for fear of offending his modesty and humility. However, the Vicar General noticed that the Brothers, who had heard the first half of his speech with great satisfaction, seemed much less attentive to the second, and were not listening very willingly.

Still, he had to get to his conclusion; and since the purpose of the meeting was to install the new Superior, he had to state that His Eminence had chosen Bricot as their new Superior, and to order the Brothers to accept him. Here Pirot displayed his prudence once again; for without reading the text of the decree he gave the gist of it cleverly, and sought to prepare the Brothers' hearts to assent to it with joy, saying that the person he was presenting to them deserved all their esteem and confidence, and that they must show themselves obedient to him in all things. That word, obedient, was enough for men who were attentive and on their guard against the proposal the Vicar General had come to make. Scarcely had he pronounced it when one of the principal Brothers respectfully went up to Pirot and, in a modest tone, told him that the Brothers already had a Superior, and that they would be obliged if he would not mention giving them another.

Pirot could anticipate the scene which was about to start; but since he was deeply involved in the affair, and did not wish to lose the fruit of his investigations, nor to let the sentence he had convinced His Eminence to pronounce (against the latter's deepest wishes) to remain unexecuted, he continued his talk without answering the Brother, but gently motioned him aside and sent him back to his place.

But the Brother who spoke for the rest remained calm and did not move. Without showing any irritation, Pirot then spoke more openly of the orders which he had come to transmit, and of the Brothers' obligation to submit to them. The Community's spokesman, raising his voice, repeated what he had said in a low tone. The former professor of the Sorbonne, accustomed to open contradiction in the schools, did not lose his equanimity, but hastened to conclude a discourse which had for its purpose to get the Brothers to accept

gracefully the Superior chosen for them, and to promise him the same obedience as they had given to De La Salle. But the other Brothers, fearing this very conclusion, hastened to drown out the words he was pronouncing. They joined the first Brother who had spoken up in their name. They were indignant over what they were hearing. They needed all their virtue to remain faithful to their duty and not show disrespect for the one who was haranguing them. Finally, their patience exhausted and unable to hold back their emotions, like children who see their father being torn from their embrace, they all lifted up their voices to protest the orders given them. They all cried out that they had no other Superior than De La Salle and His Eminence.

"De La Salle is the only Superior we desire; we won't have any other!" That was the only reply the Vicar General heard. The novices joined their voices to those of the older Brothers and added to the uproar with their additional numbers. All, with one voice, appealed against the sentence of the archbishop, badly informed, to that of the archbishop, better informed; and felt assured that if they were honored by being heard by so kind, benevolent and just a prelate, they would obtain justice from him, since this was what he truly wanted; and that he would revoke his decision.

Pirot, interrupted by the cries and lamentations of these afflicted men, finally grew disconcerted by this unanimous demand of the children who wanted their father back. Surprised at finding such close union between the members and their head, at seeing in the disciples such a strong attachment to their master, he began to surmise the falsehood of the reports made to him concerning the lack of concord and the subordination that was supposed to exist in the house; and he began to regret his excessive credulity.

De La Salle, a witness to this scene, was awaiting the happy moment when his deposition would put an end to it; he suffered more than the Brothers, but for opposite reasons. What they feared, he desired. Appalled at their resistance to superior authority, he called for silence; and in his turn he spoke to the Brothers, trying to make them obey. Any other order that the humble Superior might have given them would have been carried out on the spot and to the letter; and Pirot would have learned from this submission of theirs that a man who could obtain such prompt and complete obedience was more capable of governing than he had been represented; but to accept another superior instead of John Baptist was more than the Brothers could swallow; all of them felt they had a right to persist in their refusal. In their opinion, taking their Founder away from them was tantamount to destroying their Institute; it was like giving a guardian to children whose father was still living.

How cruel, they said, to tear from a mother's breast the babe she has brought forth, when she wishes to feed it and is capable of doing so! Who can have the grace to promote our work if its very author is supposed to lack it? Who will have the gift of guiding us if our Founder has lost it? When did the Spirit of God abandon him and turn to someone else? You want to change our Superior only to change our government; and you want to change our government only in order to introduce new laws, new ways, a new spirit among us, perhaps to soften our discipline and emasculate our austerity and spirit of penance. In a word, you want to make us soft, tepid, relaxed, unmortified. By trying to make us into a new type of men you are really destroying us. We shall cease

being what we are: regular, set apart from the world, lovers of poverty, disciples of a crucified God, if you take away from us the master who inspires us with the love of these virtues, who by his example sustains us in practicing them, and by his prayers obtains for us the grace to imitate him.

It is useless, they told De La Salle, for you to appeal to your authority over us to oblige us to stop obeying you. In vain would you command us in the name of obedience not to obey you any more; it is because we want to obey you always and in everything that we refuse to obey you on this point. Finally, all of them protested that they would leave their state, if their natural Superior was taken away from them.

Pirot saw that De La Salle had succeeded no better than he. So he spoke again, more forcefully; and to give his words even more respectable authority he showed them and read aloud to them the decree of His Eminence, signed by him, which appointed the new Superior. This reading put the finishing touch on the consternation that reigned in the Brothers' minds, added to their bewilderment, and did not hush the tumult. All of them were amazed that someone should have slandered their Superior to such a degree; and their astonishment was followed by indignation against the authors of this calumny and persecution. They felt they had a right to suspend their obedience to a decree which fraud must have secured from the lips but not from the heart of a prelate always ready to defend the innocent. They felt that they would be acting according to his true intentions if they refused to follow his orders.

At this point the Novice Master, who by his imprudence had stirred up the storm which was breaking over De La Salle, wanted to step in and plead for himself as well as for his Superior. Self-love could well have suggested this to him, since his conscience must have told him that he was the one guilty of the indiscretions which were being punished in the person of his innocent Superior. But he paid dearly for this liberty he took. He should have humbled himself and publicly avowed his faults; he should have cried out that he was the Jonas who had provided this tempest; he should have asked to be thrown out of the house, or at least out of the novitiate; he should have begged to be punished with all rigor in order to calm the storm. He should have spoken in the posture of a criminal, asking pardon and a penance, and not have tried to act the part of an advocate.

He did not do so for very long; because although the Vicar General had kept cool up to then, he now felt his indignation arising; and he silenced this indiscreet defender by reproaching him forcibly with being the source of the whole trouble and the main cause of all the disorder. The Vicar General's anger flamed out and, with holy indignation, he upbraided him in the impetuosity of his zeal: "What? You dare to speak? You, unworthy as you are of the responsibility which is yours!"

Bricot was a tall, young man from Lyons. He was painfully surprised on seeing an occasion prepared for his glory turning to his confusion. Everything he saw and heard embarrassed him extremely. The new Superior, chosen by Pirot and appointed by His Eminence, found himself unanimously rejected by the Brothers. He felt quite disconcerted, as who would not have, in such awkward circumstances. Having come to witness De La Salle's deposition in order to

replace him, he was mortified in no small degree by becoming a foil to emphasize the virtue of the master who was being lauded to the skies by all his disciples. So, to put an end to a spectacle which had already gone on too long, and of which he was heartily sick, he wisely suggested to Pirot to leave the Brothers the Superior whom they desired to have. All he wanted was to get out of a house, the keys of which could be handed over to him, but not the hearts of its inhabitants.

The Vicar General, who had thought he could conclude this affair as easily as he had begun it, insisted on the execution of the sentence that he had read; he felt that his honor, as well as that of His Eminence, required that he should not leave until it had been accepted. So he called upon all his learning to prove to the Brothers that they were obliged to do so and submit. Since these children, so firmly attached to John Baptist, were not easily convinced that anyone had a right to ask them to consent to their father's proscription and banishment, the former Sorbonne professor wasted his time and his arguments trying to demonstrate to the Brothers that they had to receive the new Superior, even at the cost of the former one's disgrace.

On their side the Brothers made use of all the talent they possessed in the art of eloquent speech, to get the Vicar General to suspend the execution of the order he had come to enjoin on them, so that they might have time to ask His Eminence to revoke it, convinced as they were that the archbishop would do so as soon as he learned that his confidence had been abused. This sort of debate between the Vicar General, who wanted to fulfill his commission before leaving and to install the new Superior, and the Brothers, who only asked for a chance to plead their own cause even more than that of De La Salle in Msgr. De Noailles' presence, went on for over half an hour.

It seemed like an eternity to the one who was the subject of it all and its unwilling witness. His countenance showed that he suffered more from the Brothers' resistance than from the public affront which had been offered him by superior authority. As he respected the latter infinitely and welcomed its decisions as coming from Heaven, he seemed ashamed at his disciples' appeals and requests for delays in the execution of an order which he found so much to his liking. Self-love in him experienced no joy whatever in this constant fidelity of his children; on the contrary he felt deep affliction in his heart at not finding them as docile as he, and as willing to accept his removal from office as he himself was. From time to time he attempted to speak to reaffirm what Pirot was saying, and to oblige the Brothers to end the discussion by the act of humble submission; but it was no use. On this point the Brothers felt that they were dispensed from obeying him.

The very obedience which they had promised him furnished them with an argument for disregarding his wishes. Since we have promised to obey you, they said, we are bound to subject ourselves to your control; and this obligation brings another with it: namely, to maintain you in the Superior's position. For if you are not at our head, whom shall we obey? We made a vow to obey you, not someone else. The very authority which wishes to impose a stranger on us to govern us in your place does away with our vow, leaves us free, and opens for us the door of a house where we remained because of our vow. If a vow is a free act and a deliberate choice, we have a right to refuse to obey anyone

else, as soon as anyone tries to tell us we must no longer obey him whom we promised to obey. So we recover our rights and our former liberty; and we declare that we wish to make use of it by refusing a superior that is being imposed on us in spite of ourselves, and in whose regard our vow no longer obliges us.

Such language made Pirot understand that he could not convince men who based their resistance on principles of justice and religion, and who invoked their vow of obedience made to De La Salle as a justification for their refusal to accept the new Superior. So, after exhausting all his arguments, he finally left. On accompanying him to his carriage, De La Salle begged him to let time bring the Brothers around, and assured him that he was positive he could make them do so and convince them to submit. "Don't promise him that!" was the instant reply of some who had resisted the hardest, and who were quite excited. "Our decision hinges on our vow; the one depends on the other, and by the one and the other the new Superior is excluded. If they force him into the house in spite of our opposition, he had better bring with him his own subjects who will obey him; he will find the place empty; as for us, we will all leave with the one we promised to obey."

This reply, more peremptory than the preceding ones, finally convinced the Vicar General that he could not succeed in winning over children whose father possessed their hearts. He even doubted whether time would ever change their attitude. All the steps he took later on were merely a sort of rearguard action intended to enable him to withdraw with honor from an engagement into which his blind confidence in De La Salle's persecutor had so unfortunately involved him. He was piqued, however, because his authority had been flouted; he made His Eminence believe that this discomfiture reflected on the latter's own authority, and that he should make the refractory Brothers feel the weight of his displeasure. But what could he do? When one has overstepped the bounds of a legitimate use of one's authority without success, how can this be remedied? Is there any way of making people knuckle under when they can avoid one's authority and, by changing their residence, seek a different superior for themselves?

This, then, was what that man, so zealous for God's work, had gained; the man who felt that the work was not safe in De La Salle's hands, and that the Institute needed another leader to insure its safety. He believed his own illusions, and that was why he deceived himself. His prudence was as shortsighted as his zeal was mistaken. Both of them proved to be deceitful guides which led Pirot into a labyrinth he did not know how to get out of. After much reflection, it appeared evident that things had to be left as they were.

There were really only two alternatives: either destroy the new Institute, or leave its government in the hands of its Founder. To do away with an institution visibly inspired by God, so useful to the Church and so necessary for poor children, was a violent and pernicious solution which the Cardinal and his counsellors could not accept. Even the man behind the accusations directed against De La Salle would have protested against such a decision; for he had great esteem for the Christian schools. The only reason he had caused all the uproar against the Servant of God was that, actuated by erroneous prejudices,

he felt that the Founder was not capable of bringing his creation to its full perfection. But even he preferred to let De La Salle retain his position rather than to see the whole work ruined; this would have made him inconsolable. A man of such deep piety would not have been able to survive its ruin; he would have died of sorrow if he had felt he alone was responsible for its torpedoing.

So everybody finally agreed that, even if it were true that De La Salle did not govern his Community in the most desirable fashion, it was better to let it continue to thrive under his direction than to see it destroyed by removing him from office. The whole difficulty lay in finding a way to save appearances, and to secure for legitimate authority the respect due to it and the tokens of submission which had to be obtained from the Brothers, while leaving them in possession of their rights and the Superior they wanted. To succeed in such a delicate task called for a man as prudent and as enlightened as De La Chétardye. He undertook it and brought it to a satisfactory conclusion, as we shall soon see. In the negotiations he secured the help of Abbé Madot, today bishop of Châlons-sur-Saône.

Chapter XX

The Excitement Subsides. De La Salle Remains in His Position. The Brothers' Situation Is Not Changed, and Peace Is Made between Them and the Archbishop. But the Persecutor, Not Having Succeeded through His Accusations to the Archbishop, Tries to Use Another, Equally Dangerous Stratagem: to Sow Discord among the Brothers and to Inspire Them with Disaffection for Their Superior and for His Mode of Government.

This last visit of Pirot to the novitiate house had caused more commotion than his previous ones. It finally became known in Paris why the former professor at the Sorbonne had carried out his investigations. People also found out how little success had attended the intrigues so artfully contrived; and they began to suspect who was the author of these maneuvers. This information gave De La Salle's true friends, and those who showed an interest in his work, an opportunity to take the measures necessary to undeceive His Eminence and to counterbalance at the episcopal palace the influence exercised there by the Servant of God's enemy. This we learn from a letter that the parish priest of Villers in the diocese of Paris wrote about this time to a parish priest in Laon in Picardy. Here is a copy of this letter.

"I was no less surprised and concerned than you were, my dear sir, at the news you gave me about De La Salle. As I honor and esteem him no less than you do, I have taken, and still take, all the share one can in the affliction that has been caused him. I did myself the honor of calling on him; it is impossible to be more edified than I was at his constancy, his firmness, his perfect resignation and his entire abandonment to Providence. I will not be telling you anything new in speaking to you of his virtues, for your knowledge of his rare merit does not date from yesterday.

"I have seen the Cardinal and Pollet; and I hope that with time His Eminence will get over the impressions given him against De La Salle. Quietism has nothing to do with the matter.* He was simply accused of being too austere towards the Brothers, of making use of exaggeratedly rigorous penances, and of being so strongly attached thereto that he did not want to cut down on them in any way. An attempt was made to make him appear to the Cardinal as incapable of guiding others, and especially as a man extremely wedded to his own opinions, who conducts himself and the Brothers by his own lights alone. His great crime, from what I have been able to ascertain, is that he does not conform to the opinions of....**.

"The latter would like to take over the government and the interior direction of the Brothers; but this is what De La Salle has not been willing to let him do up to now. I do not know how this affair will end, for you know well enough the mentality that characterizes...., the main adversary of De La Salle. If the latter were willing to accommodate himself to the former, he would have no problems at the Archbishop's. Two or three novices left De La Salle's novitiate, complaining of ill-treatment they were supposed to have received there. ....inflated their complaints, conducted investigations, wrote up a memorandum and presented it to His Eminence. Upon this, the Cardinal appointed Pirot, one of his Vicars General, to make a visitation of the house and to interrogate the Brothers. He did pay three or four visits for this purpose; and on his last appearance he brought along Abbé Bricot, whom His Eminence had sent to be the Brothers' new superior.

"On hearing this word 'superior,' all the Brothers protested that they already had one, De La Salle, and that they recognized none other than him and His Eminence. After this, Pirot departed. Since then, various meetings have been held privately at Pirot's residence, involving De La Salle and several of the Brothers. Finally, eight days later, Pirot came back to De La Salle's house, with the said Abbé, and spoke to the Brothers. He made them a thousand promises, among others that nothing would be changed, that they could always keep their Rule, that De La Salle would not be taken from them; but he also made it clear that they must obey and accept the Abbé Bricot for their Superior. He added that they would always have the consolation of having De La Salle with them, and that the Abbé would come to the house only once a month.

"On these conditions they accepted him; or at least they did not object as they had done the first time. And if the proverb is true which says that silence gives consent, they would seem to have consented to the appointment of this Abbé, since none of the Brothers said a word.

"This is how things stand at the moment; but nobody believes the situation can last very long; and it is hoped that all this will not lead to any untoward

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*Quietism was still a much discussed question. Only three or four years prior to this Fénelon's book, Maxims of the Saints, had been condemned.

**Blain uses...., but in the text of the letter (a copy is in the Archives in Rome) the writer put down "the parish priest of St. Sulpice."

consequences. A first step has been taken, and we shall try to keep up the momentum for a while. All that can be done now is to seek for favorable opportunities to undeceive His Eminence, and to stress all the qualities of De La Salle. This is what I have already begun doing, and what I shall continue to do on all the occasions that Providence may give me. I owe him that much in justice; and in addition, the interest that you take in what concerns him makes me all the more eager to act in this way with all possible zeal."

This letter clearly shows the motives behind the accusations formulated against De La Salle, and what weight should have been attributed to them. His crime consisted in not wanting to relax the Rules he had established for his Community after consulting the Brothers. The disunion said to exist among them was clearly shown to be a hoax, by the unanimous concurrence of their voices and sentiments which showed that they all had but one soul and one heart.

Indeed, Pirot, although irritated over the lack of success which had attended his mission, and over the Brothers' opposition to his orders, could not help doing them justice and saying, when he reported to His Eminence, that "if all inferiors were as attached to their Superiors as the Brothers are to De La Salle, their Communities would be like paradise, and only Saints would be found in them." He added that he had tried everything that his learning and experience had suggested, to influence them and make them consent to the change of superiors, but in vain; and that the more he had tried to detach the children from their father, the closer he had brought them together. On hearing this report, the Cardinal began to see that he had been taken in, and that he should not have so readily lent himself to the machinations of a pseudo-zeal; that his heart had been right in not wanting to get involved in the condemnation of a man whom he had always held in high esteem, and in feeling reluctant to issue the sentence published against him on the strength of the accusations made, and of the accuser's reputation.

He also felt that the proceedings against the innocent criminal were really odious and had been carried out with too much violence and precipitation. In the depths of his heart he was not too happy with his Vicar General for getting him involved in this affair, and for not having succeeded, in all his investigations, in discovering the falsehood of the accusations made against the Servant of God. All these reflections put the archbishop in a bad humor; and because he felt embarrassed, he remained with a certain lack of sympathy for the new Community. He found it extremely odd that mere Brothers should have delayed in accepting his orders, and should have resisted his Vicar General.

After all, the dishonor in this whole sorry business fell upon the one who had promoted it. He should at least have opened his eyes and recognized that he had made a mistake in imagining that De La Salle did not possess the art of governing his Community, and still less the ability of making himself loved. He should have realized that he had made another mistake in thinking that the new Community was filled with a spirit of discord, and that the Brothers were disenchanted with their vocation. The events should have made him see that he had been wrong in blaming an absent superior for the errors of two indiscreet disciples, and that he should now try to repair in the archbishop's estimation the honor of the man whom he had defamed through excessively eager zeal and

thoughtlessness. How then was it possible for such an enlightened man to delude himself still and not to see that it was his duty to calm the tempest he had aroused? That was indeed something astonishing; but is it not only too common for those who are so prudent in their own eyes, and who think that all wisdom is lodged in their heads, to actually lack it? They dishonor themselves by lack of discretion and by very real, very palpable errors of conduct, while they reproach shadows and appearances of evil in the greatest of God's friends.

Such was the disposition of the man we are speaking of. The failure of his intrigue only confirmed him in his opposition to De La Salle. Filled with prejudice, he did not think he had been mistaken, nor did he consider that he had deceived anyone. Acting in good faith, and for what he conceived to be the greater good, he felt no remorse; and his conscience, at peace over all the uproar he had caused, not only did not reproach him with any fault, but provided him consoling testimony to his uprightness, and flattered him that he had sought only God, when he was trying to remove De La Salle from his own house. Thus, not discouraged over this first setback his schemes had met with, he cleverly made use of this very circumstance to reach his goal.

He insinuated to His Eminence that the Brothers' opposition to the orders given them had been fomented by John Baptist, who wanted to keep his position. It was a skillful ploy, and quite capable of inspiring the most powerful prelate in the kingdom with the determination to push to the wall these simple, uncalculating men, these children whose only fault was that they loved their father and did not want to subscribe on the spot to his condemnation, but hoped that a delay might dissipate the shadows of calumny and sooner or later bring his innocence to light. At any rate, if this new accusation did not win full belief, it did succeed in part. If the Cardinal did not accept it entirely, it was listened to in the world. The word got around to the public, and indisposed the credulous against the Brothers and against their Superior. It was even said that the Parliament had wished to look into this affair,* to oblige the Brothers to make full amends to their first ecclesiastical Superior, or to punish them if they refused. However, De Noailles who, in his heart, had not lost the high esteem he felt for the virtue of De La Salle, prevented any such steps from being taken.

In addition, it was in vain that the author of this intrigue tried to make De La Salle responsible for the Brothers' resistance to Pirot. The Cardinal realized that De La Salle was entirely innocent on this score. This unfounded suspicion was completely contradicted by Pirot's own report of what had happened in his presence. A witness to the Servant of God's humility and submission, and also of his efforts at getting his disciples to show prompt obedience to episcopal authority, he had exonerated their Superior in accusing the Brothers. He testified that De La Salle had used all the influence he possessed over his disciples to get them to submit, but that he had been silenced by their unanimous reply that they would all leave if another superior

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*In fact, it was the Cardinal who had inquired of the Parliament what could be done to punish the rebels; later Pirot threatened the Saint with exile if he did not make his disciples give in.

was imposed on them. Finally, when he was leaving, the Vicar General had heard the promise made by De La Salle that he would get the Brothers to obey; and he had also heard this statement contradicted by them with a promptness which showed that their mouths spoke from the abundance of their hearts. This, too, made it impossible for him to admit the new accusation.

On his side, the holy Founder had never found himself in such an embarrassing situation. Although he had seen his Community seriously compromised in the past, never had it been so close to complete ruin as now. What could he do to shore it up again and preserve it from total destruction? He no longer had any valid title and lacked all authority. If he yielded to the remonstrances of the Brothers who wanted no other superior, he would become a rebel, usurping a position he was forbidden to occupy. If he left the house, the Brothers would follow him. In such a delicate situation, not sure of what he should do, he consulted Heaven and abandoned to It the defense of his cause. On the one hand, he dreaded seeing the work which had cost him so much suddenly overthrown; on the other, he felt consoled in remembering God's help which had so often upheld him in the frequent attacks of the world and of Hell. Thus he wavered between fear and confidence. After much prayer and serious thought, and persuaded that the Cardinal's intentions were of the best, he felt he could put his trust in the latter's goodness. All he needed to do was to dissipate the unfortunate impressions made on De Noailles, and especially to offer him humble reparation for what had happened.

This did not seem impossible to the Servant of God. On the one nand, the archbishop must realize that he had been duped; and he might regret having lent too willing an ear to false reports. He did not approve the way his representatives had proceeded against John Baptist. He was even credited with having said that they had pushed this affair too hastily, and had not taken all the measures prudence required to conclude it without so much public outcry. On the other hand, a man as humble as De La Salle did not hesitate to seek humiliations. He was always ready to assume the posture of a repentant criminal, to feel like one, and even to take upon himself the blame for the faults of his disciples. So, with this in mind, he went and prostrated himself at the feet of his archbishop and, with tears in his eyes, sought to offer him reparation for the Brothers' refusal to accept their new Superior. He begged the Cardinal not to think that he had anything to do with this. Protesting that he had made every effort to cause the Brothers to pay blind and prompt obedience to His Eminence, he called on Pirot and Bricot to vouch for the truth of what he was saying.

The Cardinal, who was leaving for Conflans,* remained silent when he saw De La Salle at his feet. Did he feel touched by the sorrow and humiliation of this saintly man? Did the pain he himself felt over all that had happened make it impossible for him to speak? The holy priest remained prostrate on his knees in the presence of a crowd of people who felt sorry for him; and still the archbishop did not address him a single word. Then, turning, he left,
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*It seems he was going hunting with the Court!

still without a word, whether out of indignation or of commiseration which robbed him of speech, while the Servant of God remained there, his lips still in contact with the floor which he bedewed with his tears.

On his return home, De La Salle said nothing about this new, shameful treatment, this fresh affront which he had just received. He abandoned his cause and that of his disciples to God and recovered his habitual serenity. No one ever saw him looking morose or disturbed over what would happen, and the only advice he gave the Brothers who went to consult him was to urge them to obey. Five or six days went by in this way. During this time the Brothers in Paris, who had not been included in Pirot's investigations because they were busy in school, conceived a plan for warding off the impending storm, by trying to appease the person who had stirred it up. They knew that although he had been indisposed towards De La Salle for some time, he had not lost his appreciation for the Institute; and they hoped to make him change his mind about their Founder. The undertaking was a bold one, for in this visit they ran the risk of drawing down on themselves, too, the ill will of a man who knew how to disguise his prejudices in the most glowing colors. The Brothers were well aware of this. They were about to engage in a struggle with a giant whose arguments they could not refute, whose presence they could not withstand.

Still, after fasting on bread and water the day before their visit, and having spent the night in prayer, one after another, on their own initiative and without informing De La Salle, they went to see his redoubtable adversary. Like prudent men, they kept their resentment hidden, affected ignorance of his schemes and intrigues, and showed him much confidence. After this beginning, they came to the point and explained the resolution they had all formed of leaving the house, if they saw any superior there other than De La Salle. In conclusion, they begged him to make use of the great influence he enjoyed at diocesan headquarters to obtain the revocation of the order given them to acknowledge as their shepherd a stranger whom they did not know, and who did not know them, instead of the one who had first communicated to them the spirit of grace.

It would have been hard to pay a less welcome compliment to a man who had not given up his project. He was vexed to the heart by this visit and by what the Brothers said, but he did not dare to show it. They had come to beg him, as a favor, to make use, in order to keep De La Salle in his place, of the influence which he had so recently employed in order to put him out! They were asking him to undo what he himself had done, and to play the role of intercessor after that of accuser. They were taking away from him all hope of succeeding in what he aimed at, and this they did very adroitly by displaying inviolable fidelity to his rival. Thus, they were shutting in his face the doors of a house which he sought to enter only to dominate everybody in it.

He and De La Salle would have quickly come to terms, if the Servant of God had been willing to consult him and follow his advice in everything, and to let him run the affairs of the Community as he wished. If the Founder had agreed to take him as his master and to become his docile disciple, all he needed to do was to present himself before him and vow to obey him; then he would have seen his erstwhile persecutor become his protector. Finally, the Brothers' remarks were for the antagonist of De La Salle a silent reproach for his

unfounded prejudices and suspicions, his talebearing, his disloyal behavior, his intrigues; and they tended to make him admit his faults and repair them, by inviting him to go to the archbishop to try to undo what he had done. This simple and naive discourse, which exteriorly showed so much esteem for the confidence in him, possessed a fund of hidden eloquence. It obliged the persecutor to lay down his arms.

Indeed, as regards the substance of what they told him, he could adopt only one of two possible alternatives: either to proceed with the entire destruction of the Institute, or else to refrain from interfering with the Founder in carrying out his proper role. Now, he had too much religious spirit, too great a sense of responsibility to be tempted to follow the first course. His piety would have felt deep regret had he beheld the ruin of an Institute he thought so highly of. So, although highly displeased over what the Brothers said, he pretended not to seem so.

Convinced that he would not arouse among the Brothers anything but dissension, whereas De La Salle still possessed their hearts, he saw clearly that the only thing for him to do was to yield and to wait for a more favorable moment for detaching from De La Salle these disciples who clung so firmly to him. However, even in this he could see his schemes failing; for he had based his intrigue on the supposed dissatisfaction the Brothers felt against their Superior. He thought that they were sinking under the burden of the inhuman yoke that the latter was imposing on them, and that they would be delighted to throw it off. Now he realized his mistake. All that had happened, and what the Brothers had just told him, made him understand how badly he had misread their dispositions, and filled him with confusion over having pushed things so far on the strength of an unjustified suspicion, and having so imprudently compromised the archbishop's authority which he had succeeded in winning over to his own warped views.

The scheme which had failed immediately suggested another to him, to achieve his end of getting rid of De La Salle. This consisted first of all in trying to sow among the principal Brothers a certain diffidence towards their Superior, to make them critical of his behavior and to indispose them against him personally. Next, in stirring up against him outside enemies on every hand, so that, assailed from within and from without, he might be obliged to give way and withdraw of his own accord. This, in fact, is what happened later, as we shall see.

To start the first sort of attack, clever as he was and skilled in dissembling and assuming the mask he wished to use, he appeared satisfied when he had heard the Brothers. At first he had received them with fire in his eyes, a harsh look on his face, and a forbidding and angry air. But then, assuming a gentler tone and a more gracious aspect, he said to them with a show of simplicity: "You can't be serious! You are really too naive! De La Salle is an arbitrary leader whom you placed over yourselves, or who rather has put himself at your head to govern you. He has no ecclesiastical jurisdiction over you; he is not a religious superior. Who made him your judge and your shepherd? By what authority does he set himself up as your master?"

The Brothers could have replied that Archbishop De Harlai had given him permission to set up his Community, that De Noailles had confirmed this in writing and had fully empowered him to act as their Superior. Thus this first assertion was incorrect; but let us proceed. The Servant of God's enemy continued: "What a mess you have made of things! You practically spat in the face of the Vicar General. What can I do now?" However, he promised them that he would set to work to try to conciliate all parties.

Not to omit any useful step, the Brothers thought that they should also see the parish priest of St. Sulpice to try to get him on their side. It is true that at this time De La Chétardye was strongly prejudiced against De La Salle and no longer showed himself in the latter's regard what he had formerly been. During the first few years, no man had ever seemed more zealous in supporting the Founder and his Institute. He declared himself its patron, defender and financial supporter. However, (God allows this to happen) by this time De La Chétardye had lost practically all his esteem for a man whom he considered as a sort of religious fanatic, entirely wedded to his way of looking at things, and, in addition, possessed of very limited ability and a tendency to exaggeration.

Still, he had not lost his interest in the Christian schools nor his zeal for them. If it had been a question solely of the Brothers' Superior, he would not have lifted a finger to halt the persecution against him, and would have left him to extricate himself as best he could from the embarrassing situation in which he had been entangled. In reality, he would not have been sorry to see in John Baptist's position someone else who would show himself more accommodating, less austere and rigorous, more accessible, more yielding to the world's ways and more open to the good advice given him for the proper government of his Community and for the good of his work.

But the future of the Christian schools was also involved, and in this the parish priest of St. Sulpice was deeply interested. His clear-sightedness showed him in what had happened and in the Brothers' attitude that either it would be necessary to accept the overthrow of their Society, or to let their Superior remain in his position. So this great friend of what was good, this sincere promoter of the Christian schools thought he should make use of his influence to find a solution to this impasse which would save the honor of His Eminence, while turning to the advantage of the Institute. It was quite an undertaking; and the means for succeeding in it were not that obvious. To do so took a man as influential and as wise as De La Chétardye. No one knows what arrangement he sought to resolve the problem. The task was delicate. To bring it off successfully he had to leave the Brothers their true Superior, and yet oblige them to make amends for having refused the new one. These two requirements seemed difficult to conciliate; yet it was necessary to save the archbishop's honor and authority, as well as the advantage of the Brothers, and then to have the agreement approved by the archbishop and by the Community. De La Chétardye undertook the task and finally succeeded, although we do not know exactly how he managed to do so.

All we do know is that he got Abbé Madot to take this thorny problem in hand. At this time Madot was a member of the Community of St. Sulpice; since then he has been raised, thanks to his rare merit, to the episcopal see of

Châlons-sur-Saône. The matter could not have been placed into more skillful hands. Madot had a keen and fertile mind, the talent of speaking well, and the ability to win hearts. Four days after the visit the Brothers paid to the parish priest, the Abbé came alone, in his carriage, at seven in the morning, to the novitiate at the Grande Maison. It was the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin. He wished to look into the Brothers' hearts, so to speak, and sound out their minds, so as to tailor his proposals for a reconciliation according to the attitudes he found among them.

Nothing was more prudent. What he wanted to do was to bring the Brothers to submit purely and simply to the archbishop's orders. But if he could not win their consent to this, he had thought of a compromise which might make them get to the same point indirectly. This was to promise them that De La Salle would be left in his position if they acquiesced in whatever His Eminence decided. If he found them too suspicious and on their guard, lest after their act of total submission the accomplishment of the promise might not follow, his final resource was to offer them a conditional submission. This last alternative was one he did not wish to propose except as a last resort; but firmly resolved not to yield beyond this point, he was determined to bring the Brothers to it and to convince them to accept the conditions of peace and the promise of pardon that would be necessary.

Madot spent four whole hours in his negotiations; he spoke gently, pleaded, remonstrated, advised and cajoled. There was no type of blandishment he did not use, no type of argument he did not advance, no inconveniences which he did not point out and paint in vivid colors. Never did he show to better advantage the gift of eloquence that Heaven had granted him. He did not preach; nor did he, in carrying out the mission he had received, make use of this talent which he enjoyed to such a remarkable degree. It was apparently because he feared to call in vain upon his oratorical talent before a Community gathered together, which he hoped to influence more easily by speaking with each member in private.

He entered the house, but did not call the Brothers together by having the bell rung. He stopped them wherever he happened to find one, as though without any preconceived design, and tried to win from them in these informal talks what he would not have been able to obtain from them in a public encounter. He spoke to the ones he met, he conversed with one or two; then he joined a couple of others to the former ones; he went somewhere else and got three or four more together. Thus, moving about the house, he met with all the Brothers and spoke to them all, telling them either the same things, or something different, as prudence suggested. In these conversations where minds and hearts could meet and dialogue with less constraint and circumspection, he showed himself even more eloquent than he was in the pulpit.

He made a simple and natural use of every rhetorical device, every trick of the orator's trade. Now he deplored what had happened to De La Salle; now he grew compassionate over his lot and that of the Brothers. To some he depicted in somber colors the terrible consequences of their refusal to submit entirely; to others he offered wise advice on how to protect themselves from the impending storm. With some he commiserated over the afflictions of their father and admitted that his removal from office would cause serious

dislocations. With others he had recourse to remonstrances; he made them realize that their duty should take precedence over their attachment to De La Salle. To all he stressed the veneration due to episcopal authority. By describing the power of the prelate whom they had braved, he sought to inspire them with fear of his displeasure; and by portraying him, in conclusion, as a mild and gentle person, he made them hope for all sorts of favors, if they complied with his directions. Finally, he pictured the ruin of their Institute and the lamentable fate awaiting their Founder, if they obstinately insisted on keeping him for their Superior against the Cardinal's orders.

At 11 o'clock, after all these private conversations, Madot found that he had not made much headway. He had not yet said Mass and he had to hurry if he wished to do so. So finally, annoyed but not discouraged, he seemed to wish to conclude the business by proposing to have his offers discussed publicly. The Brothers' silence and lack of reaction made him understand that he had to sing a different tune, or at least to modify what he had said up to then, by proposing conditions or offering promises which would reassure them about their situation, let them keep their Rules safe from all innovation, and leave the Superior in his rightful position.

This was his last card, and he reserved it for the end, after having played all the others in vain. Madot, who had kept this proposal hidden up to then, and wisely so, finally came out with it, as though offhand. "But, Brothers," he said, "De La Salle will not be taken away from you. It is only to protect you that you are asked to receive the new superior, so that you can honor the order you have received, and show due respect to the legitimate authority which sends him to you. Moreover, this new superior will be such in name only and will not exercise the functions of that office. He will come here only once a month. What have you to fear from such rare visits, by a man who will leave behind in the house when he enters and when he leaves, no vestige of his passing? Nobody will touch either your regulations or your Community practices. Bricot will respect everything that is established, will leave everything just as he found it, and De La Salle will remain undisturbed in his place."

This promise, which seemed to have escaped from the lips of the prudent Abbé, who had calculated his words well and had kept this proposal as his last resource, ready to use it or not as the occasion might warrant, had the effect that he hoped it would. This was, so to speak, his secret weapon which he did not want to call upon in case of necessity. And even so, to make it effective, he had to keep it hidden until the proper moment. He succeeded in doing this with great skill, so that the stroke went straight to its target and apparently solved the problem. "Why didn't anybody tell us this?" asked one of the Brothers with a simplicity as natural as Madot's had been calculated and adroit. "Why was this not made plain when they brought this Abbé here? And why did you yourself, Monsieur, take so long to get to the point in telling us?"

The fact was that His Eminence, as we mentioned before, had not approved of the tactics used by his Vicar General. To him they seemed rather overbearing and lacking in due measure, more apt to irritate than to win submission. "You went about it in the wrong way," he had said. "You should not have tried to

prevail by main force; attempting to dominate people only embitters them. When one wishes to bring men under a new yoke, persuasion must be used, not commands. The human heart instinctively tends to fight back when anyone seeks to constrain it. At all times, mildness has won what could not be conquered by force. Authority becomes odious when it is carried too far, and one compromises it when one uses it in an extreme manner. This you have discovered through your recent experience."

Madot felt that he was gaining ground and that the Brothers' hearts were beginning to yield. Like the clever man he was, he took advantage of the opening he had found in order to insinuate his project into their minds. First he won over two or three; then these persuaded others; finally he had convinced 12 of them. The others refused to give in, fearing some sort of trick. They were afraid of agreeing to anything which might later on turn to the prejudice of their Institute and serve as a key for Bricot to take over their house and expel De La Salle from it. But Madot thought that with the dozen he had convinced he was in a sufficiently strong position; he would present them as the representatives of the others to the Vicar General, and thus seem to bring him the consent of the whole Community. So, in order not to give them time to reconsider, he hastened to have them leave the house and come along with him to Pirot at the Sorbonne, where they would offer him humble amends and make a declaration of their perfect submission.

"Come with me," he told them, "and offer your excuses to the Vicar General. He was shocked when you refused to listen to his orders and has a right to some satisfaction on your part. He would be scandalized if you delayed in asking his pardon. And do not do things by halves. Dissipate the reasons he has for being displeased with you by showing him your entire submission. Thus you will recover his good graces, you will appease the archbishop, and you will incline him to leave De La Salle in his position and your house in peace."

He had already entered his carriage with De La Salle and one of the Brothers who could not walk, and was ready to lead these men like captives in triumph to the feet of the Vicar General, when one of the Brothers, a little more mistrustful than the rest, began to reflect that they were about to give up all they had claimed without having received anything positive in return. So he called them all back to reconsider the matter. "What are you about to do?" he asked them. "You are about to oblige yourselves....but to what? We need to know. What have you been offered? We need to present our demands, and to make sure that these promises we just heard are set down in writing in the same act that spells out the concessions you are about to make. And let it all be signed."

Madot thus saw himself once more at the point which he had so cleverly avoided, and from which he had so skillfully distracted the attention of the Brothers who had at first wished to pin him down to it. Without growing disconcerted, and with that frank and open air which wins the confidence of simple people of good faith, he begged them to count on his word and to trust him. No doubt, if he had spoken in this way when he first came in, instead of getting to this point by degrees, like a man obliged to come down little by

little towards those whom he cannot bring up to where he stands, he would have succeeded more easily with men who do not begin to grow suspicious until one begins to deal with them in a somewhat less than straightforward manner.

But the Brothers noticed that Madot had offered these promises only after he had tried for four hours all other means of convincing them, of bringing them to submit purely and simply; so they remained on their guard and showed their mistrust of the proposals he made them. In order not to be the dupes of their own simplicity, they all agreed that, before leaving, a statement should be drawn up and signed, spelling out the conditions they meant to attach to their submission. The clever negotiator found himself once more in difficulties; and all his willingness was unable to get him out of the impasse without agreeing to their demands. Seeing that they put no trust in words which fly away, and that they wanted something in writing to guarantee what was being agreed on, he was forced to give in, otherwise his mission would have failed entirely.

With this sort of "insurance policy," the Brothers hastened to go to the Vicar General's and arrived there almost as soon as the carriage in which the commissioner rode. They were prepared to offer any kind of satisfaction to a superior authority which they had always deeply respected, and to beg pardon for a fault which they felt themselves before God to be completely innocent. There was no sort of humiliation, excuse, reparation to injured honor, which they were unwilling to offer, provided nothing should be modified in their regulations, and provided they could keep their Superior. On these two points they remained adamant; and the most virtuous among them considered it a sacred duty not to give in on these points. We must not hold this against them, because they were community men. The more such men are attached to their Rules, the more their conscience will protest against the slightest relaxations. The more virtuous they are, the firmer they show themselves in preserving the first fervor of their vocation. Yes, these children deserve pardon for the unusual efforts they made to keep their father. It was only because they feared to see innovations brought in among them with the new superior, to see fervor depart with their holy Founder, that they took so many precautions and showed such innocent obstinacy.

Madot wished to inform the Vicar General about what he had achieved and what the latter needed to do; so he took him aside and gave him an account of his negotiations. This report pleased the Vicar General, who was sorry for having pursued the demotion of De La Salle with so much vindictiveness, thereby introducing trouble into such a peaceful Community; but he was quite surprised to learn that the Brothers were attaching conditions to their obedience. Here the resourceful mind of the mediator once again came to the rescue. He told the Brothers to kneel down before Pirot and apologize to him. Answering the question that the Vicar General put to him as to whether the four articles of the document that had been signed were conditions, Madot hastened to reply that these concessions were requested as favors.

Most of the Brothers kept silence on hearing this. Actually, they cared little about the terms used, provided their desires were met. They were concerned about the reality of things, not about words; to these men, determined to preserve their own manner of living, it made no difference if

they used the most obsequious terms, provided that they remained in possession of their Rules and their rightful Superior. The most respectful and humble expressions were no doubt the most proper for them to employ in addressing superior authority; but these terms concealed a certain ambiguity which could give rise to new trouble. For a favor can be refused, whereas a condition cannot, without nullifying the contract based on it. Therefore, the more alert among the Brothers, perceiving the difference in the terms used and the danger that their demands might be jeopardized thereby, declared bluntly and in a voice loud enough to be heard, that the articles in question were indeed conditions attached to their submission, and that if these remained unfulfilled, their obedience would be compromised. But Pirot's wisdom made him deaf to all this, and he seemed not to hear them.

Madot, delighted over his success, inquired whether His Eminence could give them audience, and whether he would allow the Brothers to go to prostrate themselves at his feet to recognize his authority. When the Vicar General replied that His Eminence was not available, they all went home, congratulating themselves on the victories they had won. The Brothers exulted because they remained in peaceful possession of their Rules and their Founder. The mediator rejoiced, since he had made peace, and had managed to conciliate the respect due to the archbishop's jurisdiction with the Brothers' right to keep their way of life and their internal arrangements undisturbed.

The following Sunday, Pirot brought Bricot to the novitiate for the second time and addressed those of the Brothers whom he found there, for the majority of those employed in the schools were absent. Then the entire Community went to the chapel; the Vicar General intoned the Te Deum, which the others continued chanting in the usual way. All this was done to save face and to pay due respect to episcopal authority; but it was enough to dissipate the tempest which had occasioned so much gossip. The new Superior showed his face in the house one more time, three months later, then disappeared for good. His visit was a formality which was deemed necessary. However, he performed no act of jurisdiction and never gave anyone an opportunity of challenging his right to a title which he made no use of. Since his role left him much leisure, His Eminence found something else for him to do elsewhere. Thus, his place with the Brothers remained empty, and so the persecutor did not fail to have him replaced by another ecclesiastic entirely devoted to him, whom he intended to use in order to stir up more trouble.

De La Salle, feeling that he had everything to fear from a former friend who had turned against him, and from a simulated peace, took all possible precautions so as not to give him any pretexts for interfering, and to shelter his own management against his criticism. He put an end to all the penances which his two indiscreet disciples had exaggerated the use of. Although realizing the harm this would do to the Brothers' piety, he preferred to see their fervor diminish rather than have it disappear entirely as a result of the attacks which were being prepared against him. He was convinced of the truth of the maxim which affirms that the best is sometimes the enemy of the good; in other words, that in matters pertaining to virtue, one must be satisfied with securing from others what they can give, and that by insisting imprudently on the most perfect, one may fail to achieve the good. So, he yielded to the advice of wise friends who counselled him to do away with the public use of the

discipline and even to suppress it in private for some time, and in general to moderate all the other types of mortification which gave rise to wild tales and provided his enemies with a pretext to accuse him of thoughtlessness.

These friends based their advice on the characters of those who, on leaving his house, were usually disgruntled and tried to justify their departure or their desertion by spreading malicious reports and odious "horror stories." They told him that either such individuals had entered the Community led by a spirit other than the Spirit of God, and hence could not remain; or that they were unfaithful to their vocation; or finally that they lacked good judgment, were ruled by passion and other defects, and saw everything as painted by their dominant inclinations. Wisdom requires, they said, that you deprive all these evil-intentioned eyes and these poisoned and venomous tongues of all subjects which they can twist into slander.

The ecclesiastical authorities seconded these counsels and asked the Servant of God to lighten a yoke which really appeared too heavy. "Your disciples' vocation," they told him, "is the sanctification of youth; their Institute is extremely useful to the faithful. The Brothers must not seek in unrestrained penance the shortest path to a better life. Their earthly pilgrimage may be lengthened, but it will thereby become more salutary. As they walk in it, they must bring along with them the children entrusted to their care. They must not present themselves at the gates of Heaven alone, but accompanied by a large number of children, if they hope to be welcomed there. This numerous escort, which must lead them as if in triumph to the home of glory, must be made up of the youths whom they have instructed and helped to sanctify themselves. The penance the Brothers practice must therefore leave them both the time and the means of carrying out their task; it should be tailored to fit their vocation so as not to shorten their lives and not to diminish their reward. While regarding themselves as victims destined for sacrifice some day, they must in the meantime maintain themselves in good condition so that they may go to the altar of sacrifice as presentable offerings. Anyhow, since their work is part of their penance, they must not do anything which would make them incapable of fulfilling their duties. So, try to conciliate their health with their penances; let your Brothers make a long life a laborious one and put the finishing touches on it by their fervor. Temper their austerities so that these may serve to mortify their bodies, not destroy them. Penance is like salt: too much ulcerates the flesh and consumes it, while a reasonable amount preserves and seasons it."

Such were some of the remarks made to De La Salle who, without undertaking a critique of all these arguments, humbly gave in to the advice of wiser heads and obediently listened to the remonstrances of his superiors. He collected all the disciplines and limited the practice of all the other types of mortification in use in the Community. In this connection he issued regulations for those placed in charge of others, and forbade them to overstep the limits these wise advisers had suggested and which superiors had enjoined. The Brothers, who were greatly devoted to their penitential practices, were not a little put out over these new regulations; no more painful mortification could have been asked of them than taking away from them the instruments of penance they used. They needed all their virtue to submit to an order which

threatened their fervor. They would have found it difficult to show to anyone other than De La Salle such blind obedience on this point, for they feared lest the spirit might suffer from the mitigations granted to the flesh.

But it was their father who issued this order; the confidence they felt in him and the conviction they had concerning his virtue kept them submissive and did not permit them to imagine that they could go wrong by following his guidance. Besides, they realized that this great lover of penance must have had higher reasons for giving them commands so contrary to his own bent and to what he himself practiced. They could readily grasp that he was not acting on his own initiative, but under external influences, and that he was the first to practice the obedience he was requiring of them. Indeed, when one of the Brothers asked him why he now forbade them to indulge in so many kinds of penance, so well calculated to arouse and maintain their fervor, his only reply was: "God has made me understand that now we should not continue them."

God, no doubt, arranged this so that the customs established at this time could remain in force as time went on, and so that the Brothers might develop a lifestyle more in harmony with human weakness and with what their state of life demanded. For it must be acknowledged that among them the rigor of austerity reached such heights that the health of more than one would have given way in time. Penance, while making martyrs in the new Institute, would have shortened the lives of many who pursued it with such ardor. Their manner of living was even poorer than that found in La Trappe; it was neither less crucifying nor less frightful to nature. So it was indeed an admirable thing to see, not in some desert place but at the very gates of the greatest city in France, a revival of the penitential life of the hermits in the Thebaid. It is no less astonishing that many Brothers, some of whom are still living, did not fall victims to this life of penance; and that leading a life as austere as that of La Trappe, there were not many more of them who died.

It was certainly necessary to mitigate a degree of austerity which human beings could not endure for long without succumbing, and which, while increasing the number of great penitents, might have diminished that of holy schoolmasters, so badly needed by the Christian community. All the same, it must be admitted that this great spirit of penance had lit a huge bonfire of piety and devotion in this poor house, and that when the one was restricted the other too suffered a diminution. Nothing is truer than what the incomparable St. Teresa says: "Where there is less nature, there is more grace."

The more we do for God, the more we receive from God. Great penances, when authorized by obedience, are followed by Heaven's most abundant favors. Men of great courage take heart in this path and race onwards toward perfection with the help of austerities which, like favorable winds, sweep them onward and help them progress. The flesh itself, made spiritual through macerations and privations, becomes light in a way, and lets the soul soar freely and rise up to unite itself with God, without being dragged back to earth by its own weight.

It was, then, no slight cause of sorrow to one of the great penitents of our century to see himself obliged to restrain his disciples' ardor for penance, and to put out (at least to some extent) this fire which he himself

had enkindled even more by his example than by his words. He learned from experience, and with a deep measure of sadness, that it is practically impossible to relax one's practice of mortification without seeing the spirit of mortification suffer too. It seldom happens that fervor of spirit survives indulgence of the flesh, because grace, which is measured by the violence that a soul does to itself, grows less when one relaxes this severity in one way or another.

However, on this occasion, De La Salle, who abandoned himself in all things to the guidance of Divine Providence, and who did not wish to be wise in his own eyes, made the sacrifice of his own inclinations, his own views and his own experience, and sought in blind obedience a security which cannot be found even in the most austere penance, when the latter is neither prescribed nor controlled by obedience. This sacrifice of his did not calm the tempest as it should have, since the penitential practices which his enemy had made an excuse of to stir up all the trouble had now been done away with. Although he realized that his intrigue had failed, he did not grow discouraged. If he no longer attacked the Servant of God directly, he did so in an oblique manner, as we shall see in the following Chapter.

Chapter XXI

Dissatisfaction and Criticism That De La Salle's Enemy Tried to Sow in His Community by Means of His Agent.

The persecution seemed to have died away but it continued just the same. Its author, seeing the failure of his first attack, undertook another which succeeded much better, and which caused new alarm for De La Salle by exposing his Institute to new perils. We mentioned previously that the clever enemy of the Servant of God had managed to put into Bricot's place another ecclesiastic entirely devoted to himself, and who, without carrying out any of the Superior's functions in the Community, went about sowing the seeds of discord in its ranks.

This Abbé, full of the same spirit which animated the one who sent him, came to the novitiate house from time to time, to examine what was going on, to sound out the Brothers and their dispositions, and to prepare the way for a change of government. The intriguer's plan was to use clever wiles in order to get rid of the man whom he had not been able to have removed by superior authority; and in order to drive him away he sought to make use of the very Brothers who had shown themselves so determined to keep him in his position. To attain this end, it was necessary to find a way to hoodwink the Brothers, to inspire them with disaffection for their state, to destroy the union between them and their Superior, and to cause indifference to take the place of attachment in their souls, dissimulation to replace confidence, and silence to succeed openness of heart.

The man who set out to accomplish this did not give up the hope of leading the Brothers who might listen to him to the point where he wished to bring

them. He thought that by harping on the poverty of their house, the poor quality of their food, the sorry clothes they wore, and the supposed harshness with which they were governed, he could succeed in making them feel disgruntled. Those who listened to him heard him bewailing their sad lot and growing eloquent over their miserable life.

"What," their charitable visitor exclaimed, "will you always be as you now are? Will you always be so poor, dressed in rags, dirty, half-naked, or with patched and repatched habits? Does not De La Salle have the wherewithal to supply your needs, even the most urgent ones? Why does he accept so many candidates and fill the house with more men than he can feed? After all, the salaries of the Brothers in the schools are paid to him punctually; would not these sums suffice for the Brothers who teach there? Is it not right that these men should live on what their labor produced? Is it fair that they should be robbed of what they earn?"

Such suggestions were followed by an account of the money paid the Brothers in the schools; and after this meticulous inquiry the Jeremiah who was deploring the wretched circumstances in which the Brothers lived, would add in a plaintive tone: "Where does all this money go? Why is it not spent to provide for the needs of those who earn it? Why should they lack everything, when by right they should want for nothing? What is your Superior thinking of? Where is his charity, his humanity? He refuses the necessities of life to the workers he employs. What a house this is! Its inmates are more wretchedly fed than those of the poorhouse! Would the inhabitants of La Salpêtrière be willing to change places with you? Does Bicêtre* treat its dwellers any worse than you are treated? Those who are shut up there against their will would not be willing to leave to come to stay with you. Whom can I compare you with, if not with prisoners who after losing their liberty are weighed down by a hard and galling yoke, and who after having spent the whole day in toil moisten the black bread given to them with nothing but their tears, and have only a little straw to rest on during the night? In this portrait do you not recognize yourselves? Will you always be seen in a habit as ridiculous as it is outlandish, which makes you the butt of public scorn and invites the people's ridicule? If they insist on hiding you under such huge hats, and on wrapping you up in a sack of black cloth, at least they should provide you with new clothes when you need them."

He stressed the fact that they drank only water, and his pity was followed by promises: that wine would not be wanting, if they had sense enough to accept a superior who would give them the example of drinking it! One of the Brothers, as tired of all this sermonizing as he was shocked at the promise, answered him one day: "But water is good for you; it keeps one's complexion fresh. If you see us looking so healthy in spite of our fasting and penances, we owe it to the drink that comes from the river."

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*La Salpêtrière: poorhouse and later insane asylum for women in Paris, founded in 1636. Bicêtre was a town then near Paris which also contained a mental hospital.

After hearing this, the ecclesiastic stopped criticizing the Servant of God in such gross terms. He tailored his remarks better to the circumstances of the moment and adapted them to the dispositions of those with whom he spoke. In a word, he made use of every means to win a favorable hearing, and in the grim portrait he painted of the Brothers' mortified life he sought a way to incite them against a man who preached nothing but penance and whose life was a model of it. Sometimes he described to them a sort of earthly Paradise, and tried to make them desire a different kind of government under a less demanding leader; at other times he tried to win certain ones over by suggesting that they take things a bit easier; others he approached by making them imagine that the difficulties of their state were worse than they really were; he flattered these by inspiring them with rosy hopes; he intimidated others by making them fear a future which would contain nothing but sacrifices for them. To all he promised an easier and happier life.

Sometimes, raking over old coals, he tried to bring them to admit that they had been wrong in refusing the new Superior whom God Himself had sent them through His representative, the archbishop. He reproached them with having set up their own Superior, one whom they had chosen, but who was not necessarily the one God wanted. Hence he would not have the grace to guide them. Sometimes he tried to make them regret their so-called blind obstinacy in making a superior for themselves of their own authority, and sought to bring them to desire and ask for another. "What advantages," he said, "would you not have found in perfect submission to the new Superior whom Heaven destined for you? You would have enjoyed greater liberty, and all your needs would have been provided for. Now that you have preferred to remain in this blind alley, where can you find the resources needed to relieve your poverty? All your Founder's friends are abandoning him. De La Chétardye himself, your great benefactor, is growing disillusioned with him. Oh, if you would only cast away the yoke which overburdens you, what enjoyment you would find in a new form of government! You have become accustomed to bending your necks and to bearing the burden without complaining. But we weep for you, we feel so sorry for you, since you do not pity yourselves; and we are offering you a friendly hand to rid you of your burdens, if you will only consent to let your chains be broken.

"How strange," he added, "that many do not wish to profit by the offer made to you and prefer to follow De La Salle in chains rather than to be freed from this captivity! Do they love him? But how can one love so austere a Superior and be so attached to a man who gives no quarter to nature? No doubt it is because they fear him; that is why they remain faithful to him. But what can De La Salle do for them if they remain attached to him? He will continue to make them miserable. What have they to fear from him if they refuse to live under his bondage? What can he do to them? He can't do anything, either for good or for evil. His influence is nil. Thus, those who do not dare to break their own bonds are condemning themselves to drag out the rest of their days in a painful and hopeless manner."

All this man's words were not uttered as bluntly as we have set them down here; but we wished to give the reader an idea of what he was trying to get across. His purpose was to make the conduct of De La Salle seem odious in the Brothers' eyes. We should only weary our readers if we were to add all the

details of the dangerous conversations held by this visiting ecclesiastic. He did not preach from the housetops, but went about whispering in one ear and then in another his beautiful doctrine for the Brothers to meditate on. One would not have thought that he acted with a predetermined plan in mind; he seemed rather to speak at random and dropped remarks about this or that. He chose the right moments, watched for favorable occasions, and always measured his hearers' dispositions.

Sometimes it was just one word, sometimes another; to this one he addressed a wink and a sneer, to that one a meaningful hint. Everything seemed to issue from his mouth at random; yet everything he said was premeditated. In a word this priest, who worked so painstakingly for the persecutor, came to the house in the spirit of Absalom when he went to David's palace intending to spread discontent with his father's government, to steal away the hearts of the children of Israel, to cause them to defect, and to arm them against their king. However, the emissary's intrigues did not meet with the same success as those of this traitorous son of the holiest king of Israel. Either the Abbé spoke without being listened to, or he was heard without being believed; or if he was believed by a few, this did not turn against De La Salle personally.

If his ill-intentioned conduct produced any effects at all, it was only indirectly that these managed to wound the Servant of God. Usually, the Brothers kept out of the way of this dangerous hypocrite. They avoided meeting him. In vain did he keep an eye open for what was going on, and waited for the Brothers as they passed by. Those whom he stopped hastened to cut the conversation short and managed to get away from him. As for De La Salle, he always went out to greet him and paid him due honor, and spoke to him most respectfully. But we must admit that this doctrine of relaxation, preached so artfully and in secret at a time when the severity of the Community's penitential practices had been reduced, did not contribute to increasing the fervor found in the house. It even became a trap for the tepid; some of them fell into it and found their spiritual doom in it. This was another cause of sorrow for a man who loved his disciples as a father loves his children, and who wept over their loss as a tender mother laments over an only son.

All that the Servant of God wanted was to sanctify those whom God had given him; and his Community, although his life's work, held no interest for him except insofar as he knew that God was generously served in it and that the spirit of Jesus Christ reigned there. To see its fervor growing cool was the bitterest martyrdom his soul could have endured; and he would have willingly accepted the destructon of his Institute. Nay, he would have been the first to abandon it, if those who belonged to it had degenerated from their early virtue. What torment his heart suffered when he saw some of them belying their early fervor and turning back on that highroad where one should always march forward! This was the interior cross which replaced the exterior ones that we have been speaking about. The defection of several of the holy priest's principal disciples was the bitter fruit produced by the frequent visits of this ecclesiastic who had been sent to spy on everything that was going on in the Grande Maison, and to be on the watch so as to seize every occasion of stirring up discontent and dissatisfaction with the Superior.

The first one who listened to these perfidious suggestions and resolved to abandon his vocation was a Brother whom De La Salle considered as his right-hand man. Once he had grown sour, he got another Brother to share his discontent; and once he had made an accomplice of him, the two of them set out for a place where the parish priest was expecting some Brothers. This was a new foundation which had been arranged with the Servant of God. This traitorous disciple knew about this, and made use of his knowledge to leave the house, thinking he could thus secure for himself a good position and enough to live on comfortably for the rest of his life. Commissioned by no one but himself, and without the Founder's knowledge, he went with his companion to take over, or rather to steal, this school. He was still wearing his Brothers' habit and presented himself as having come through obedience. This deceived the parish priest. But his triumph was short-lived.

After he and his companion had been welcomed with all sorts of tokens of esteem and kindness as children of De La Salle, they were driven out ignominiously as soon as their hypocrisy and desertion became known to the ecclesiastical authorities. The parish priest was told by the Vicars General to expel from his parish these impudent interlopers who had intruded themselves into this position, not having been sent either by the authorities or by their holy Founder. The wretched fugitives immediately came back to the house which they had dishonored and scandalized by their surreptitious departure, but the Community closed its doors to them and begged their common father not to let himself be moved by the pleas of these two sons of Belial, since it was necessary to punish their crime and to make an example of them.

The second who, in his turn, wounded his father's heart was the master of novices, the indiscreet and pitiless taskmaster who had made his novices groan under the heavy yoke of his direction. By yielding to the suggestions of a spirit of penance mostly inspired by a naturally harsh and unfeeling temperament, he had drawn down, not on his own head but on that of the Servant of God, the ruthless persecution which we have described above and which led to all the rest that followed. This fanatical devotee of penance who had made several of the young men entrusted to his care grow discouraged with their vocation and with perfection itself, thanks to his abuse of the authority entrusted to him, finally grew dissatisfied with his vocation. A pity he had not done so some years earlier; he would have spared his holy Founder some heavy crosses, and would have prevented the ravages in his Institute which we shall relate farther on.

So, no longer at ease in his functions, he asked to be relieved of them and to be sent to a school where he fancied he would do better. This De La Salle refused to consent to, for reasons we do not know. So, the Brother allowed himself to be led astray by a will-o'-the-wisp; he wanted to leave one house where strict penance was practiced to go to another like it; but there he found the door shut. He went to La Trappe, wishing to enter the monastery. The way he chose to carry out this decision showed that it had not been inspired by our heavenly Father. This man, impelled by passion rather than by the Holy Spirit, instead of informing his Superior of his project had kept it entirely secret, and confided it only to one other Brother whom he chose as his companion in his flight.

How and when did they run away? The most natural way would have been to leave by the door. If he wished to keep his departure secret, he could have chosen the time when the doors were opened in the morning, or when they were shut at night. "Whoever does not enter or leave by the door," says Jesus Christ, "is a thief"---at least imitates the wiliness of the thief. Our Lord says again, "Whoever does evil hates the light." He seeks to carry out his evil actions under cover of darkness. This poor Brother who chose to depart at night by climbing over the wall might have realized, if he had reflected for a moment, that he was doing a deed of darkness and was being led astray by a lying spirit.

The two deserters reached La Trappe still wearing the habit of their Community. But they found the doors shut against them, for the abbot who had succeeded De Rancé, and who knew the Servant of God very well, refused to admit them until he found out how and why they had left their own Community. He was even kind enough to write to De La Salle to find out from him whether these two Brothers had come to La Trappe with his consent. John Baptist received this letter at a time when the departure of these two Brothers had placed him in a very awkward situation, because he did not have any others who could replace them at the moment. Hope of getting them back assuaged his sorrow. After thanking the abbot for the information which had allayed his anxiety when he learned that the two Brothers had reached La Trappe safely, he begged him to send them back to him, and not to admit any others in the future without his assent. This was done.

This novice master, whose indiscreet and harsh behavior had caused so much trouble, died three years later at Chartres, of a strange and violent malady; he would not open his mouth save to utter horrible cries, which he continued almost to the point of death. The other Brother left the Society definitely not long afterwards. Two terrible examples of God's vengeance on those who govern themselves solely by their own lights, or who are unfaithful to their vocation. This melancholy story shows the difference between true and false virtue; it illustrates the truth that only when virtue is founded on perfect abnegation of one's own spirit, natural inclinations and the like, is it truly pure.

After these two, the ones who added to the Founder's trials were the two Brothers employed in the Sunday school, which we mentioned above. De La Salle had spared neither pains nor expense to have them learn drawing, geometry and mathematics. Endowed with aptitudes for these studies, they had become excellent teachers, thanks to their efforts and to their natural ability; and they taught with marked success. Some of their students made them believe that they could earn a good deal of money, if they were willing to use for their own benefit the time and efforts they spent in teaching gratuitously.

They listened to these siren words suggested to them by the Old Serpent. Once this temptation took root in their hearts, it caused great ravages in them and enkindled a blaze which consumed what little virtue they still possessed, and which secret vanity and self-complacency had already seriously undermined. Disenchanted with a state of life which they had embraced in answer to God's call, and which had seemed a happy one to them so long as they did not know any more than the other Brothers, and led astray by the hope of improving their fortune, they themselves came and informed De La Salle that they had decided to

leave. They asked him to open for them the doors of a house which offered them, as the reward for their learned teaching, only intangible benefits and recompenses in the next life.

Of course, a strong chain restrained them from leaving the house: a chain they themselves had forged when they made perpetual vows of stability and obedience. But this bond, even though indissoluble for a soul which has not lost all fear of God, is not strong enough to hold back souls which have grown tepid and lost their first fervor.

In vain the Servant of God, surprised, distressed and scandalized at the resolve taken by the two Brothers, tried by remonstrances and gentle reproaches to hold them back by appealing to the sense of duty in their consciences which, alas, had become deaf and blind. He reminded them of the money he had spent to enable them to acquire this knowledge which they were using to jeopardize their souls; he sought to make them realize what a crime they were about to commit, and the punishment they must expect for it from Divine Justice. He spoke to prodigal children who had made up their minds and who could not abide in their father's house any longer.

With hardened hearts, they heard the Servant of God describe for them the unpleasant situation they were going to create for him by their desertion. You know, he told them, how much store De La Chétardye sets on the Sunday school and on the subjects taught in it. If you go, the school will have to close. How will I ever explain this to the parish priest of St. Sulpice, so deeply interested in this institution which he devised and set up, and which he has seen producing such good results? What are you going to do, by forcing the Sunday school to close, except compromise all the others and completely alienate from me the man who is our support and the greatest protector and benefactor of the Institute? All these evil consequences which will follow your departure affect not only you, but also the body of which you are members. Is all this not capable of making you change your minds? If you are fully determined and have lost all concern for the interests of your soul and the souls of your neighbors, at least put off the execution of this sudden decision and give me time to have two other Brothers prepared to take your places. Is it possible that you want to see the fires of persecution in this house, which are not entirely quenched, flare up again, even after you withstood it with me? Can you have any doubt that your desertion will arouse the indignation of the parish priest against me and will completely indispose this man whom the Institute needs most? That you will be helping to put an end to the great zeal he has hitherto shown for its development?

But the good Superior spoke in vain to these men who had made themselves deaf to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Their departure was something already decided upon; avarice and ambition had joined forces in bringing them to this decision. So, they carried it out, to the great distress of the Servant of God and in spite of his unwavering opposition. Overcome by his impatience, the one most eager to leave ran away. De La Salle replaced him as best he could. The other one, after delaying his departure for a few months with great reluctance, finally imitated his companion's unfortunate example. This scandal put the finishing touches on the man of God's sorrow and threw him into extreme difficulties. Not surprisingly, God did not delay in avenging him, for He made

the first of these cowardly deserters suffer the penalty for his crime. Disappointed at seeing all his fine projects go up in smoke, and at finding only penury where he had hoped to secure fortune, he died without the sacraments in the parish of St. Roch at Paris in 1709. His death was caused by the extreme poverty in which he lived, and which had overtaken him, instead of the lucrative situation he had expected to obtain, thanks to his sin.

De La Salle never grew discouraged; a continual succession of crosses and disappointments had taught him patience. So he chose the one among his disciples whom he considered the best fitted to learn the subjects which De La Chétardye wanted taught and which added so much to the reputation of the Sunday school. However, De La Salle was much taken by surprise by the opposition he found; this Brother was extremely reluctant to undertake these studies. This hesitation had its source in his virtue. It was neither a lack of interest in his vocation, nor pure whim, nor self-will, nor laziness which made him wary of undertaking these brilliant studies, but rather love for his vocation and a desire to persevere in it. The example of the two deserters impressed him strongly, and he was afraid that he, too, might meet with disaster in a role which had given rise to their desertion.

Full of prudent mistrust of self and resolved to avoid their unfortunate fate, he wished to remain in the lowly state proper to his profession, and thus he shut his heart against vanity, ambition and avarice. For these reasons he objected to preparing himself for a task the dangers of which frightened him, and which he looked upon with apprehension as an occasion of infidelity, as it had proved for the other two. He even took the liberty of telling his Superior that the defection of these two Brothers, whose hearts had been puffed up with their learning, was a sign God was giving to the others to limit themselves to the simple functions of gratuitous schoolmasters: reading, writing, arithmetic, catechism, and instructions on Christian living.

In addition, this Brother, so dismayed over the misfortune of the two deserters, communicated his apprehensions to all the others, and by leading them to share his views he made them reluctant to undertake further studies which would almost inevitably constitute for them a snare where the most robust virtue would meet with shipwreck. All of them, sharing his ideas on the subject, came to De La Salle, begging him to leave them as they were and not to oblige them to risk their salvation in the pursuit of learning which was really foreign to their profession.

Seriously embarrassed by this unanimous protest of his disciples against an institution which certainly was useful, De La Salle simply replied that without going into the question of the reasons which might justify their reluctance, they should, out of concern for superior motives, make the sacrifice of this hesitancy. He told them that obedience, self-mistrust and a pure intention would provide safeguards against the reef where their lack of virtue had caused the first two geometry teachers to run aground. He insisted that they had to keep open the Sunday school where so much good was obviously being done, and that they would surely have to close it if the subjects in question were no longer offered. Finally, he explained that he was really not free in the matter, for as they well knew, the parish priest of St. Sulpice on whom they all depended and whose help was essential for them, was vitally interested in

the Sunday school. It was much to be feared that he might punish their opposition on this point by becoming indifferent to them and abandoning them entirely. Thus, of two dangers, it was necessary to choose the lesser, which was not to annoy their benefactor and protector.

These arguments were serious ones and should have brought the Brothers to overcome their aversion, however well founded, for pursuing the study of these sciences which had already proved fatal to two of their companions, and which remained dangerous for all of them. If they had allowed themselves to be persuaded, they would have spared their Superior a host of new troubles; for it was always he who was considered to be at fault, and who had to bear the punishment for the faults of his disciples. These Brothers, biased by principles rooted in piety and concern for their salvation, refused to give up their resolution; and to show that this was not due to a spirit of disobedience but to a salutary fear of succumbing where others had already met with disaster, they drew up a Memorandum which was presented to De La Salle by its author. In it they objected so strenuously to the study of the subjects in question that they felt sure De La Salle would come around to their point of view, if he had the goodness to read it. The Servant of God did read it and did not answer a word. Perhaps, in fact, he felt that there was nothing to reply; or perhaps he knew that any reply would have been useless.

If we may judge of what he himself thought by what he later did, he seems to have been convinced by the cogency of the arguments offered by his disciples and espoused their point of view. For he went to De La Chétardye to see if he could win his approval and his consent to discontinue these subjects in the school. Unfortunately, the parish priest of St. Sulpice was already deeply prejudiced against the Servant of God. Filled with these preconceived notions (a failing which even the greatest men are not always successful in avoiding in this world) and although he was still very interested in the gratuitous schools, he was very cold towards the holy Founder. Of this, of course, De La Salle was well aware; he still entertained a great deal of respect for De La Chétardye's outstanding merits, and deep gratitude for all his past favors. He was not a little distressed over having lost such a good friend and powerful protector. What consoled him was that the parish priest did not let the indifference he felt towards John Baptist's person extend to his work as well. For this reason, out of a sense of duty as much as from concern for his own interests, he tried by taking all possible precautions to preserve in the virtuous pastor a vestige of his zeal for the Institute and of kindness towards the Brothers. This was the main reason why he had wanted to have some Brothers study the subjects needed to continue the Sunday school. But all his efforts and his conciliatory gestures remained without effect. The parish priest of St. Sulpice blamed John Baptist for the Brothers' refusal; thinking that the Founder himself had drawn up the Memorandum presented to him, he received him very rudely.

As one prejudice leads to another, De La Chétardye, who of course was aware of the departure of the other two Brothers, also blamed this on De La Salle and reproached him with it in an outrageous manner. The holy priest listened to him with a patience, mildness and calm which, while demonstrating his innocence of the charges, also revealed the joy his soul experienced in the midst of ignominy. Days of humiliation were for him feast days; and after having

received such greetings and such insults from one of the greatest men then living in Paris, he came back home with jubilation in his heart. A few days later the holy Founder, who still felt deep regret on seeing the parish priest of St. Sulpice so bitterly antagonistic towards him, and thinking himself obliged to do all he could to undeceive him, brought him the Memorandum that the Brother had written; he wished to give De La Chétardye a proof that it was not he but his disciples who felt an invincible distaste for undertaking the study of these subjects which they feared might prove their undoing.

God's designs on His servants are indeed incomprehensible; and He often permits that what constitutes their justification should serve for their condemnation. In such straightforward conduct, the parish priest could see nothing but duplicity; he convinced himself that the one presenting the Memorandum was its true author. When he read it, his suspicion that De La Salle had contributed to its composition only grew stronger; so he reproached him in a highly emotional fashion, saying that in this document he recognized the latter's character and spirit, and that if it was not written by him at least it had been ordered by him.

In vain, the humble priest tried to convince the parish priest that he had nothing to do with the text; that it had been drawn up without his knowledge. He was not believed. De La Chétardye forgot himself to the point of calling John Baptist a liar. God permitted this to further purify the virtue of His servant, and allowed him to be thus grossly insulted by a peevish sally of a man generally known for his moderation---all this to exercise the patience of the innocent man thus accused. This insult, which pierces every upright and candid soul more keenly than any other, did not reach the heart of a man who by now had grown accustomed to scorn and affronts. It even inspired him with a significant rejoinder: "Sir," he answered very respectfully, "it is with this lie on my lips that I am going to say Mass." And, in fact, he went over to the parish church to celebrate the holy Sacrifice.

However, the Servant of God did not get off quite so easily as this. His destiny seems to have been to bear the consequences of faults for which he was not responsible, and to expiate both the real faults his disciples committed, and the imaginary ones which were blamed on him. De La Chétardye punished the Brothers for discontinuing the drawing lessons by cutting down on their salaries. This measure, which caused much privation in the poorest Community in Paris, was felt by the Superior even more keenly than the insult he himself had received. But both these things made him suffer less than the failure of the Sunday school. The closing down of this excellent enterprise, which occurred when the subjects which had attracted most of the students were discontinued, justified the firmness with which De La Salle had opposed the Brothers' resolution. He was doubly pained over the ruin of such a good work, and over the justifiable irritation felt by the parish priest.

However, the Sunday school did not close down all at once. Its final demise came about gradually. The first step followed the desertion of the two excellent teachers, as we have mentioned. The second ensued after the refusal of the Brothers to undertake studies they considered dangerous for themselves. However, one of the Brothers, pitying the deep perplexity into which this refusal had plunged their Superior, and the extreme penury of the house which

had resulted from it, offered to study drawing. He learned it in a short time, so the Sunday school could reopen; more than 200 students filled the classes as usual. The remarkable thing is that these young men never got bored at the Brothers' school, where they devoted nearly the entire afternoon to exercises of piety, to reading, writing, arithmetic and other subjects. The greatest benefit they derived from this was that, whereas such young men are as a rule very prone to licentiousness, they forgot the way to the cabarets and other dangerous spots; they learned how to sanctify Sundays and feasts by prayer, and to acquire both the benefits of Heaven and the advantages of earth. Several of them changed their conduct considerably and began living like true Christians, frequenting the sacraments and attending church, after having made up for the evil lives they had led by a good general confession.

When the Sunday school reopened, so did the parish priest's purse; he had shut it only to let hunger impress the minds of the Brothers more forcibly than his words had been able to do. The teaching of drawing was also revived in the ordinary schools, because the parish priest wanted it taught to the children there. Thus this respite continued for a while. Later, the Sunday school was transferred to the parish of St. Anthony, and there it finally had to be abandoned, as we shall soon mention. This third step in the destruction of this project was the final one. Still, to this day, all those who were acquainted with its operation in Paris long to see it reestablished and often beg the Brothers to open another Sunday school.

All the misfortunes we have just related were followed by the disgraceful trickery of the Brother in charge of the seminary for country schoolmasters in the parish of St. Hippolyte, by his departure from the Society, and by the complete collapse of this excellent institution, all of which we have related above.

The final blow that grieved the Founder very deeply was the departure of another Brother who left his school, went to live with a certain citizen of Paris, and put aside his religious garb. As soon as the good shepherd heard of this, he went after the lost sheep and brought him back to the fold. But how did he succeed in doing this? By going down on his knees before him, by using pleas instead of reproaches, and supplications instead of threats. This prodigal son did not deserve that his good father should thus go seeking him or take such pains to get him to come back.

Some ten years later this unworthy member was expelled from the house by orders of the diocesan Officialis in Rouen. But at the time we are speaking of, his talents made him very necessary; and his leaving, after all the others we have mentioned, left an empty place that nobody could fill. This Brother was an excellent penman; nothing was wanting to him to succeed in his vocation, except piety. Perhaps we should say that he lacked everything since he lacked piety. Without it, the most varied talents are useless in a state which has for its end the sanctification of youth. Piety can make up for the lack of great ability, but great ability can never make up for the absence of piety.

To make matters even worse, as we shall relate at greater length in the next Book, John Baptist's enemy took advantage of this particular moment to stir up the schoolmasters once more against the Brothers who do not sell their

services, as the former do. Up to this time, the influence of the parish priest of St. Sulpice had protected the Brothers from the vexations of the schoolmasters and had brought the latter's intrigues to nothing. They did not dare to challenge openly these men whom he loved and whose defense he resolutely undertook. Once this protection was withdrawn, the schoolmasters felt that they could make short work of men who were remarkable only by their poverty and by the slight esteem they enjoyed in the world.

The fact was that De La Chétardye, once a firm friend of the Institute, seemed to have lost all his concern for it and no longer took any interest in its progress. His indifference grew, along with his bias; this led to irritation, and then to abandonment. So the moment was ripe for the Brothers' rivals, and they made the most of it. They began another attack against the Brothers who (they said) were practicing charity at their expense; the attack was so furious that they seemed about to triumph; and their victory came close to destroying the gratuitous schools entirely.

It must be admitted that most of these difficulties were a consequence of the relaxation in the spirit of penance which had reigned in the Community, and which nourished the Brothers' fervor. De La Salle had been obliged to mitigate its practice out of deference for the advice of wise friends, and out of obedience to the wishes his superiors had expressed; but he foresaw very clearly what would follow. It can be said that on this occasion obedience demanded of him the greatest sacrifice that his piety could ever have offered to God. It was precisely during this time of mitigation that the agent of his enemy came around, preaching relaxation and sowing complaints against the austerity of which John Baptist showed a continual example. It seemed that God was presenting to the eyes of a city, which can be called the world in miniature, these living examples of old-time penance. He wished to show to the most incredulous and the most cowardly that weak human nature, when fortified by grace, can even in these last centuries of the Church repeat what it did in the first; and that we must seek the real cause for the disappearance of Christian austerity in our natural cowardice, not in the progressive weakening of the human body.

It is true that the Grande Maison, where the Brothers lived, was better furnished than the smaller house at Vaugirard had been. Madame Voisin, at the request of the parish priest of St. Sulpice, had provided beds, the essential kitchen utensils, and even tin plates for the refectory---really magnificent equipment in a Community which had never used anything but earthenware of the commonest and cheapest kind. But otherwise the poverty, austerity and rigorous mortification practiced in the Vaugirard novitiate had been transported to the Grande Maison, and had even been augmented with the number of novices. The habits they wore were so poor, so threadbare, so patched that they were finally put aside only when they could no longer be repaired. Fresh water from the well was the only drink found in this penitential house; wine was never brought in except for use in the holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

It is true that in 1700 or 1701, 15 or 16 demi-muids of wine arrived at the house.* This gift allowed each of the Brothers a demi-setier of wine at noon and in the evening. But the Brothers could not recognize the new drink they were served by its taste, but only by its color; and this change did not last for very long in such a numerous Community. When they drank this wine, they could have said that they did not drink it, so little did they consume. There was only enough to redden the water that they mixed with it, according to the Rule** and following the example of their Superior.

The meals, like the drink, included only the most ordinary foodstuffs. This coarse fare, which could not arouse the appetite save when it was whetted by hunger, made the common people give the Brothers unflattering nicknames, such as "eaters of oxen's feet." At this time, they no longer received the leftovers from the Community of St. Sulpice, which had provided them with real delicacies now and then. However long and rigorous the winters might be, the Brothers protected themselves from the cold only by waiting for the sun to return, or by using the discipline frequently. This maceration of the flesh, which was a daily practice inspired by lively piety and an insatiable desire for suffering, did not replace other austerities; each one was resorted to in turn. There was no kind of humiliation or mortification which had not become common in a house where De La Salle gave the example.

Yet the Brothers did not complain under this accumulation of sacrifices. Fervor, which made their burdens light, tempered the hardship by the unction of grace. The delights of the spirit compensated for the immolation of the flesh; and their hearts, which sought this greater satisfaction, were quite willing to purchase the delights afforded by grace at the cost of nature's satisfaction. The most mortified among the Brothers were the happiest; and by merely looking at them one could not have told, by the way they appeared, that they were making use of instruments of penance. In this house no one murmured about the strict life they led or the extreme poverty which reigned. If the imprudence of the two Brothers already mentioned had not drawn from two or three novices the complaints they made, more against the harsh way they had been treated than against the mortifications themselves, these latter would still exist there in all their rigor; and the world would know nothing about it.

As a great spirit of penance never says enough, many of the disciples of this new St. John the Baptist wished to measure up to him and even rival him on this point, if such had been allowed. As insipid as their food was, they felt

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*A muid was an old measure of capacity, both dry and liquid; it varied from place to place; in Paris it was about 270 liters. The gift amounted to about 500 gallons. A demi-setier was about one-quarter of a pint.

**Blain is guilty of an anachronism here. The Rule he is thinking of is the one in force at the time he was writing (1732-33), i.e., the Rule as modified by the Chapter of 1725. It was this Chapter which inserted in the chapter on Chastity the injunction to dilute one's wine with water. The Rule of 1718, the last one revised by the Saint, had no such provision!

that they were too well treated, and deprived themselves of most of what was served at table. On beholding their master, the disciples felt that they were doing nothing. His example, which they could not equal, did not make them despair, but rather spurred them on without ceasing to undertake new efforts at overcoming themselves and to reach that perfect death to nature which they admired so much in him. For, in fact, whether because he had grown accustomed to mortification and no longer felt its sting, or whether the victory he had won over his natural squeamishness had merited for him the grace of finding tasty the viands which formerly inspired him with disgust, they could see him eating with apparent relish everything that was most unappetizing and poorly prepared.

Such was the life led in the Grande Maison when the new Superior was brought in; and it was through fear of seeing this strict lifestyle relaxed by the new master, under pretext of mitigating its excessive rigor, that the Brothers remained so attached to their old Superior. If these penitents had been as revolted by such a crucified life as the persecutor imagined, they would have been delighted to exchange it for an easier one, and would have willingly gone over to a government more considerate of human frailty. But the fact was that they themselves were giving proof of their virtue by trying to defend that of their holy Founder. This refusal to accept a more accommodating superior for fear of condescending to nature's inclinations under him, this unwillingness to mitigate an extraordinarily poor and penitential life by accepting a more benign type of government, is something quite unusual. If it was a fault, we cannot find many examples like it save in the lives of the Saints. When a new superior was offered to this Community, the promise was made that abundance and all the commodities of life would enter along with him. The victims of the most rigid penance and of the direst poverty were told that they would be delivered from this unbearable yoke, and that they would recover some of nature's rights; and it was this very promise which indisposed them. Once again, if that motive was defective, we must at least admit that it is a very rare one, and one very spiritually inspired.

If De La Salle had so fascinated the Brothers, if he had, so to speak, bound their souls to his, as Holy Scripture expresses it in speaking of the strong attachment between David and Jonathan, we may ask how he had accomplished this. Merely by the attraction exercised by his virtue, by the impression made by his example. The ties that bound them to him were entirely supernatural, since the desire for perfection and the fear of not measuring up to it constituted the links in the chain. On the other hand, considering how many things De La Salle had done which deserved all the esteem and affection of his disciples, was it not right for them to remain inviolably attached to him? They did indeed remain faithful and submissive to him; and they gave him the most obvious proof of their confidence and submission when they consented to cut down, as he asked them to, on the great number of practices of humiliation and penance which had taken root in the Institute.

To maintain these very things, they had rejected the interloper from whom they feared mitigation; but they renounced them when their father proposed it to them and asked them to conform. No doubt they knew that in this the holy priest was acting less from his own convictions than out of deference to the persons whom he had consulted, or who had a right to command him. In addition,

they realized that by doing away with a good many external penances, De La Salle was trying to promote interior mortification; and that by sacrificing his own judgment and his supernatural inclinations, he was offering his homage to perfect obedience and to perfect humility.

In fact, his regret at losing these great means of sanctification was obvious on his countenance when he took away from his disciples their instruments of penance. He showed his sorrow by his signs; and to the protests of the Brothers he replied that "God would no longer be pleased with sacrifices which were not approved by the Superiors."

Penance had become so deeply rooted in the hearts of the holy Founder's disciples that the adversary's agent, who so often came prowling around their house to make them leave it and who thought that, by his promises of an easier and more comfortable life, he could get them disgusted with the yoke they were carrying and with the one who had laid it on them, was wasting his time and efforts. All he gained as a result of the services he rendered to the one who had sent him, was the confusion and the displeasure of seeing De La Salle and the Brothers go to live elsewhere.

Never was there a more sincere and generous attachment than that which bound these good children to their father, since rather than separate from him, they preferred to undergo all sorts of persecutions, share his poverty and his trials, withstand attacks on all sides, overcome the difficulties and obstacles which were daily multiplied, and finally turn their backs on the rosy prospects dangled before their eyes, if they had been willing to break with him. Yet after all, their fidelity to him was not unreasoning. Gratitude and justice made it a duty for them. They owed this to the one who was their father in Jesus Christ. Grace, which loosens even the bonds of nature, had united them with him; and in addition they had imposed on themselves an obligation of not submitting to a stranger as their superior when they had vowed not to accept any superior who was not a member of their Society. This vow, made and signed by them in 1694, which we mentioned previously, certainly justifies their constant refusal to recognize Bricot as their superior. Their conscience was bound by this vow; they would have felt they were violating it, if they had consented to this proposal. Divine Providence had provided for the safeguarding of their Institute by inspiring them to make this vow at a time when neither they nor De La Salle could foresee what was going to happen.

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END OF VOLUME I

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