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Léon Harmel and Val-des-Bois: Three Articles

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Léon Harmel, le Bon Père du Val-des-Bois

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AN OBJECT LESSON IN CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY

The Fortnightly Review, January 1896, pp. 58-71

From out the labyrinth of programme and pamphlet, of congress and conference, by means of which men of every party attempt to contribute their quota of light towards the elucidation of social problems, it seems sometimes an almost impossible task to disentangle and follow up any one consecutive school of thought. Points of difference are rendered more apparent by controversy than principles of union, and personal rivalries serve to obscure fundamental points of contact. For Catholics, happily, the Herculean task of seeking for guiding principles amongst the tangled web of rival panaceas presented to the bewildered gaze of the social student, has been once for all enormously simplified by the issue of the Papal Encyclical (May, 1891) on the condition of the working classes. The voice of the Church never out-distances by very far the general consensus of Catholic feeling and religious tendency. Her special *rôle* is not to initiate a new policy, but to gather together, unify and crystallize all the nascent germs of social and religious activity, and direct them into a well-defined channel. So it has been with the existing labour questions. Cardinal Gibbons in America, Cardinal Manning in England, Bishop Ketteler in Rhenish Prussia, had all taken their stand on a Christian democratic platform many years before the appearance of the Encyclical “*Rerum Novarum*”; and the lines along which the Catholic democratic movement is advancing to-day had been laid down both in Europe and in America long before the Pope thought fit to commit himself and his successors to any definite expression of sympathy. The ground being thus prepared, Leo XIII. issued his now

celebrated Encyclical with the full knowledge that his sowing would not fall on barren or untilled soil. His wise foresight has been amply vindicated, and on the Continent, far more than in England, it becomes evident to the social student that for the last four and a half years the Papal Encyclical has acted at once as a rallying ground and a point of departure for all the Christian and democratic tendencies disseminated amongst Catholic nations. The Holy Father has skilfully held all the threads of the movement in his own hands, and has kept in close personal touch with the popular leaders. By speech and by private audience, by letters to the Comte de Mun, to the Abbé Naudet, to Monsignor Doutreloux, to M. Decurtins, to the Abbé Pottier, he has imparted month by month encouragement and advice, and has, generally speaking, kept the Catholic democratic movement within the lines laid down in his Encyclical. It need hardly be said that this has proved an enormous source of strength to the Catholic party, and that while, on the one hand, Socialists and Anarchists have been torn in two over the choice not only of leaders and of tactics, but even of principles, there has been evolved on the other a recognised school of Christian Democracy, with representatives in various nations, with intercommunication between its various branches, and above all, with a certain fund of universally accepted principles, the binding force of which not even national antagonisms and personal rivalries have been strong enough to destroy.

But the Catholic democratic party in France has had a further advantage over the anti-Catholic Socialist schools. It can point not only to principles, but to facts, not only to dreams for the future, but to accomplishments in the present, not only to what might be, but to what, in one spot at least, really is. While many men have talked and written and agitated, one man has devoted a lifetime to putting into practice at his own expense the principles which received the imprimatur of the Pope in the labour Encyclical. This man is Leon Harmel, the owner and the organizer of a certain wool-spinning factory at Val-

des-Bois, near Reims, which offers to the world that object lesson in Christian Democracy, the main features of which I hope to describe in the present article. After Comte Albert de Mun, his friend and fellow-worker, Harmel is the foremost Catholic layman of his country. He is a veritable nineteenth-century apostle of the working man. It was he who organized the first French workmen's pilgrimages to Rome, and who, though neither an orator by nature, nor a politician by training, has spoken and lectured all over France, and far beyond her boundaries, on the rights of the working man and the duties of the capitalist, and above all on Christian Faith as the sole basis of human progress and welfare. A fine, strong, simple nature is Harmel's, uniting as he does at once keen business capacity with unlimited kindness of heart, irreproachable moral rectitude with unusual intellectual power, the possession of considerable wealth with a truly Franciscan simplicity of living. His unaffected humility in the midst of his remarkable economic and industrial successes is, perhaps, his most pleasing trait, and can only be accounted for by the fact that his whole career has been dominated by a single-hearted desire to serve God and the Catholic Church, which to him is the one and only possible exponent of the Divine Will. To Harmel Leo XIII. has extended both a paternal approbation and a brotherly friendship, and year by year the French manufacturer is received in private audience at the Vatican, bringing with him a store of up-to-date information on the practical minutiae of all those questions that lie nearest to the heart of the aged Pontiff; while as late as May of the present year Leo XIII. gave a final seal to his many expressions of satisfaction by the cordial words, "I approve, Harmel, of all you have done in the past, all you are doing to-day, and all you intend to do."

For it is emphatically in "doing" that Leon Harmel's great strength lies, and no one can judge fully either of the man or of his work without a visit to Warméville in the Val-des-Bois, the pleasant little wooded valley watered by the Suippe where the Harmel wool-

spinning factory has stood for over half a century. From Reims and its great cathedral, with its incomparable thirteenth-century glass, its marvellous tapestries, and its reminiscences of every French king, from Clovis to Charles X., a short half hour in the train across the treeless plains of Champagne brings one to this little oasis of industrial peace in the desert of universal class antagonisms and commercial warfare. The smoke from the great chimneys does not apparently affect the vegetation, and the factory buildings, the homes of Leon Harmel and his married sons and relations, the schools of the children and the cottages of the workmen, are all clustered round the church in the midst of green trees and pleasant shrubberies, most restful to the eye and brain. It was at the little wayside station, one broiling morning last August, that I first made acquaintance with Harmel—a strongly-built, broad-shouldered, elderly man, whose plain clean-shaven face was noteworthy at the very first glance for its expression of quiet strength and imperturbable resolve. From the very outset of our long talk I realised how entirely his whole life is absorbed by the work he has set himself to do, how completely he lives for his workmen alone and for the principles he holds dear. “Le bon père” is the name by which Harmel is known not only in his own domestic family, but by all the members, men, women, and children, of that wider industrial family of 1,200 souls towards whom his Christian principles have inspired him to act a father’s part. Rich as he is, it would be as impossible for “Le bon père” to live in some luxurious mansion—like ninety-nine out of every hundred successful manufacturers—well away from the scene of his money-making labours, as for an affectionate mother to establish her nursery at a distance from her own home. He is as utterly devoid of social ambitions as of petty vanity, and, most wonderful of all, he has successfully indoctrinated his children, both sons and daughters, with interests and enthusiasms identical with his own.

To describe Val-des-Bois, and in any way to ignore, or even to slur over, the broad religious basis upon which the whole work is founded, would be to convey a totally false impression of the place. The whole establishment is as frankly and confessedly Catholic as any monastery, with the one important proviso that there is no compulsion in any form; and it is solely and entirely to their essentially Christian character that Harmel himself attributes the vast measure of social and economic success by which his various schemes have been crowned. It was thoroughly characteristic of the man that he should have led me first of all to the chapel—a little simple country structure dedicated to the Sacred Heart and to “Notre Dame de l’Usine,” special protectress of factories, and adorned with statues of St. Francis, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Vincent of Paul, the faithful friends of the poor and the humble. Here there is no sumptuous ecclesiastical display; all is simple and reverent, even with a certain air of austere poverty about it, in harmony with the lives of those who frequent it. Congregational singing is much encouraged at all the services, and indeed the whole musical part, whether choral or instrumental, of the religious functions and open-air processions is entrusted to the people themselves. This church, be it understood, is not the parish church, but the private chapel of the factory. The expenses are entirely borne by the Harmel firm, together with those of the three priests who minister to the wants of the factory hands, of the Christian Brothers who teach in the boys’ school, and of the active community of nuns who have charge of the education of the girls, and exercise a beneficent influence over every household in the village.

But before entering into details concerning some of the practical institutions that lend to Val-des-Bois its unique interest, it will be better to give some outline of the general principles upon which Harmel has uniformly acted. According to the Christian Democratic School the duties of an employer towards his workpeople are as clearly defined and as all-embracing as those of a constitutional mon-

arch towards his subjects. The duties, indeed, far outnumber the privileges; capital becomes the handmaiden of labour and the employer the servant of the employed. In Leon Harmel's "Catéchisme du Patron," a most valuable little book that might profitably be translated into English, he lays down in simple language, cast into catechetical form, the fundamental principles which should govern the conduct of all large employers of labour, and it is only fair to say that he himself faithfully acts up to his own teaching. Harmel starts with the assumption that all large conglomerations of workers for industrial purposes carry with them certain inherent dangers, both social and moral, against which it is the special duty of the employer to guard. This can only be done through the re-constitution of the "famille ouvrière," consisting of both employer and employed, on a Christian basis. Whereas the whole modern industrial system of Europe and America is based on the avowed assumption of a fundamental antagonism between capital and labour, which it may or may not be possible to bridge over by human contrivances, Harmel urges their perfect identity of interests. Like Le Play, with whose ideals he has much in common, he aims at a general strengthening of family ties—even now stronger in France than they are with us—with an increase of parental authority; and, in return for services rendered, he is prepared to entrust the employer with a far larger measure of moral authority than he usually enjoys at present. "To organize with wisdom and prudence, to govern with justice and charity" are the words in which he sums up the duties of the "patron." The moral, religious and educational welfare of his workpeople fall as strictly within this sphere as their actual industrial labour. The "patron" has only fulfilled a portion of his duty when he has paid fair wages for work done, has provided sanitary workshops, has made provision against accidents, and abolished, as far as may be, night labour. It is further his bounden duty to allow his people every reasonable facility for the fulfilment of their religious duties, to shield them from im-

moral influences, to disseminate wholesome and Christian literature among them, to provide them with well-built cottages, garden-plots, and the means of healthy recreation, to superintend the training of his apprentices, to actively encourage thrift, and, generally speaking, to come to the practical assistance of his work-people in all cases of illness, accident, or misfortune. Should neither church nor Christian schools be situated within easy reach of his factory hands, the wealthy employer is bound to provide both the one and the other from his own resources. It is distinctly laid down that he has no right to beat down wages to the lowest market rate, for “the labour of man is not an object of barter, but a human act,” and is consequently subject to moral laws. Amongst the means by which the “patron” may hope to beneficially influence his “hands,” Harmel specially recommends workmen’s associations, which, as we shall see, play such an important *rôle* in the life of Val-des-Bois. But he adds the important proviso that they should be governed autonomously by the members themselves, “otherwise it would resolve itself into a patronage without initiative or action, and, as regards the workmen themselves, without result.” By degrees these associations will serve to build up a corporation somewhat on the model of the mediæval guilds with combined economic and recreative objects, whose re-establishment in modern form it is the Utopian dream of Harmel to bring about.

Such are the general outlines of the principles on which Leon Harmel has acted in building up his work of moral and economic reform at Warmériville. At the Harmel factories the visitor is at first positively bewildered by the number and the seeming intricacy of the organizations. But on a little further acquaintance the feeling is changed into one of unstinted admiration before the harmonious completeness of the scheme, which embraces within its sphere every single class of individuals. At the present time the institutions amount to over thirty, each governed by a committee elected by the members themselves, and meeting at frequent intervals. For conveni-

ence' sake these various institutions, which together form the corporation or mixed syndicate of Val-des-Bois, legally constituted and registered, according to the French law, in August, 1885, are classified as follows under four heads:—

I. Fundamental Associations.

II. Corporative and Economic Institutions.

III. Societies for Moral Preservation.

IV. Works of Piety.

The first class comprehends, within the sphere of its seven sections, the vast majority of the men, women, and children connected with the factory. All the sections are established on a purely religious basis and are intended to serve as a religious bond uniting all the workers; each observes a special feast-day in the year, and the members meet together on Sunday afternoons for devotional purposes, otherwise the conditions of membership require nothing further than what is expected of an ordinary practising Catholic. The men's association, open to all men over eighteen, and possessing a membership of over 300, constitutes for all practical purposes a Catholic workmen's club. The members have the use of a large airy club-room provided with six billiard tables, besides a lending library, a stock of games, and a refreshment bar, all under their own control, the room being open every evening of the week and all day on Sundays. Here conferences are given, debates carried on, and the monthly meetings of all the members held, at which social and economic questions are largely discussed.

For the boys from thirteen to sixteen there exists the "petit cercle," and for those still at school the Association of St. Louis Gonzaga, which, apart from religious objects, are mostly occupied in organizing games, country walks, and amusements of all sorts, besides cultivating in the children a spirit of "camaraderie" and mutual help, a point on which Harmel lays great stress.

The women and girls are organised in sections on similar lines, and are under the supervision of the Sacred Heart nuns who teach in the school. With the married women is associated a little band of “Dames Patronesses,” and together they occupy themselves with many domestic and maternal questions, simple lectures being given at the monthly meetings on domestic economy and hygiene, besides explanations of any scheme that the firm wishes to promote, or any changes in contemplation. For it is one of Harmel’s theories that the mothers of families have a right to be consulted on any scheme affecting the moral or economic well-being of the family, and his experience has taught him that without the good-will of the “*mère de famille*,” so potent a personality in the French social system, it is almost impossible to carry any plan to a successful issue.

Turning to the Corporative and Economic Sections, it should first be mentioned that the whole industrial colony of Val-des-Bois is governed by a Central Committee, consisting of the members of the firm —no less than seven members of the Harmel family figure on the list —the resident priests, and certain directors and managers, the committee acting as the ultimate arbiter in all matters under dispute. A more strictly consultative body, but entrusted also with large powers of supervision, is the Conseil Syndical on which the employers and employed are equally represented. Hence the title of Mixed Syndicate of Val-des-Bois. All workmen over eighteen years of age have a vote for the Conseil Syndical, and any man is eligible who, being a Frenchman, has worked three years in the factory. No step of any sort is taken, no fresh development is initiated, before it has been exhaustively discussed by the Conseil Syndical, and the opinion of every member ascertained. The Conseil is indeed the very backbone of the whole industrial edifice; its meetings are held monthly, and twice a year there is a general meeting of all the members of the Syndicate.

The Professional Committee is, again, a separate body, to which all the various classes of labour employed in the factory elect a deleg-

ate, and which takes cognizance of all questions concerning internal discipline, the training of apprentices, the prevention of accidents, and so on. Very limited authority is bestowed on the overseers and foremen, although for the most part they are selected from amongst the workers themselves; it is only within their power to inflict very small fines for infraction of the rules, and all serious offences must be brought under the immediate notice of the firm. As regards fines it is worth noting that with over six hundred workers employed, the fines for the last year barely amounted to 20 francs. Special care is taken that the apprentices, both male and female, should have the necessary technical training for the due mastery of their craft. As far as possible fathers are entrusted with the apprenticeship of their sons, an arrangement rendered possible by the fact that whole families are employed in the factory, and that long service is the rule and not the exception. Quite recently a Company of Veterans was formed of all workers who have been in the employ of the firm for over a quarter of a century, and it already numbers over fifty members of both sexes, whilst one hundred more have worked for periods of over ten years.

In going round the factory, as I had the pleasure of doing in the company of M. Harmel, it did not require the eye of an expert to discover the many excellent features which distinguish the place. Nothing was more apparent than that a splendid business capacity lay at the back of the whole concern. Everything was in the most perfect order; silently, quickly, and steadily every hand was at work. The great building—or rather series of buildings—is but one storey high, allowing of the rooms to be thoroughly well lit and ventilated from the roof. Everything was clean, airy, and cheerful, and even on a hot summer's day there were absolutely no impure odours to be detected. In the winter months hot-air pipes maintain the temperature at a suitable level. The most rigid precautions are taken for the prevention of accidents, and, as a matter of fact, no serious accident has occurred for some years. A double system of signals announces the

starting of any machinery, and it is strictly forbidden to do any cleaning or repairing while the machines are in motion.

I must confess that what interested me most in the factory was the sight of the girl workers, of whom there are some two hundred employed. It was almost impossible to realise that these neat, smooth-haired maidens, with placid innocent faces, dressed in simple and convenient cotton skirts and blouses, and nearly all wearing, as their sole adornment, the much-coveted blue ribbon of the “*enfant de Marie*,” belonged really to the same class as the factory girl, as we know her in the East End of London, with her flashy clothes, her preposterous hat, her terrible fringe. The contrast was positively startling. At Val-des-Bois the girls work in quite separate “*ateliers*” from the men, the latter being engaged in the dyeing and spinning departments, while to the former is entrusted the charge of the winding machines. As these are all of the most recent and improved patterns, they require comparatively few hands to serve them, and the work, which demands nothing beyond attention and neat-handedness, is eminently suitable for female labour. Thus, although the French law admits children into factories at the age of thirteen, there were no signs of anæmia or physical lassitude among the workers, some of whom looked mere children. This, of course, is largely due to the hygienic conditions under which the work is carried on, and to the fact that Val-des-Bois is really situated in the open country, and that even from the factory windows pleasant glimpses of green foliage may be obtained.

But the very marked superiority of these girls is the result quite as much of their moral as of their physical conditions. Up to the age of seventeen every girl is compelled to devote one hour a day, deducted from her working hours, to self-improvement, her time being mostly spent in the *école ménagère* attached to the convent, while one hour a week is given to religious instruction. Inside the workshop their moral character and their general well-being are safeguarded by an

organization for which M. Harmel undoubtedly deserves the greatest credit, which I should much like to see introduced into England, and which obviates the most common objections to factory-labour for young women. Though the girls work apart from the men, it is obvious that with endless lengths of whirling machinery, the work must be closely supervised by male engineers and male foremen. How to protect the girls from the caprices, the possible tyranny, the familiarity, or worse, of these men, some of whom are necessarily chosen more for their mechanical skill than for their moral character, was a problem which gave *le bon père* much anxious thought. His remedy is as simple as it is effective. The girls elect from among themselves a certain number of *conseillères d'ateliers*, or monitors, three for each of the large *ateliers*. It is the duty of these *conseillères*, while attending to their own machines, to keep a friendly watch over the needs of their neighbours and to render them any little help that may be required. They are emphatically the servants and not the overseers of their companions. Each is possessed of a little metal token, and should any girl, for any reason of health, or any valid reason whatsoever, wish to leave the factory during working hours, she applies, not to the foreman, but to the nearest *conseillère*, and once provided with the token she may pass out without hindrance. It can be seen at a glance what a protection such a system affords to young and innocent girls. Moreover, in any case of attempted familiarity on the part of a foreman towards any of his hands, the *conseillère* is ready not only with a word of kindly advice to the recipient, but also of warning to the originator of the misplaced attentions. At Val-des-Bois the permission to leave the factory is mainly used by the girls who wish to go to confession, for Harmel rightly holds that to condemn men and women to spend perhaps hours on a Saturday evening, or the eve of a Feast, waiting their turn at the confessional after work hours, would be a distinct discouragement to regularity in their religious duties. But apart from this point, it is obvious that a girl might rightly wish

to leave her work for reasons which it would be an insult to her modesty to expect her to confide in a foreman, and Harmel assured me that he had no reason to suppose the system was ever abused. The girls always select the *conseillères* for their high moral character, and once a month these meet together to draw up a report for the central committee, incorporating any complaints their companions may wish to make, together with their own suggestions, and these, when possible, are always acted upon. The whole system is, as I have said, so simple and so effective, so educational in the highest sense, and so calculated to develop the best side of a girl's nature, that I hope very much the idea may be taken up by some of our women workers, and adapted to English requirements. Of all Harmel's many schemes for cheating the devil, this one for the protection of his workgirls is that which affords him the most unqualified satisfaction.

The Eight Hours movement has not as yet made much progress in France, and at the Harmel factory the hands work from a quarter to six in the morning till six in the evening, with two intervals, one of a quarter of an hour, and one of an hour's duration, during the day. As a set-off to such long hours it must be remembered that all the important Feast-days of the Church are, like Sundays, regularly observed, so that, as I gathered from a return extending over three months, the working days are only on an average eleven to the fortnight. Moreover, as all the workers live in the immediate vicinity of the factory, no time is lost in going to and from their work. A sensible regulation, and one, I believe, frequently to be met with on the Continent, provides that all the married women, of whom the number is not large, and all the girls who may be responsible for the family dinner, shall leave the factory half an hour before the mid-day rest.

The oldest of the economic institutions of Val-des-Bois is the Society for Mutual Help, of which every male and female worker is *ipso facto* a member, but in so far as it simply fulfils all the ordinary

and well-known functions of a sick club, I need enter into no details concerning it.

As a more direct inducement to habits of thrift, a savings-bank has been organized in connection with the firm, and it is open to every workman to leave a portion, however small, of his wages on the fortnightly pay day in the hands of the cashier, the firm undertaking to pay five per cent. interest on all such sums up to 1,000 francs. Even the little children at school are encouraged by their teachers to put by their halfpence to be added to the same fund. As regards the girl-workers, Harmel discovered that saving presented peculiar difficulties for them, as the parents laid claim to the major portion of their earnings. To obviate this hardship the firm undertakes to present every girl on her marriage with a sum equal to that which she has been able to lay by, up to 100 francs, an arrangement which, needless to say, has proved highly popular and eminently successful.

Even more important in their economic and moral results are the co-operative stores, possessed of a capital of 20,000 francs, and entirely managed by the workmen themselves. They include a very flourishing bakery and a "petit magasin," or general store, ready money payments being, of course, an absolute rule at both establishments, which practically monopolize all the custom of the working class community. After paying 6 per cent. interest to shareholders, the society distributes its net profits between the shareholders and the purchasers, one-eighth to the former and seven-eighths to the latter, a sum usually amounting to 5 per cent. on all purchases. Purchasers enjoy the further advantage of a "boni corporatif," a bonus derived from a sum of 5 per cent. reserved on all purchases made at the stores. This sum, which brings in interest at the rate of 5 per cent., is placed in the savings-bank in the name of the holder, and thus creates without, so to speak, any effort on the part of the holder, a little reserve fund, which can only be drawn out (1) when the owner has reached the age of fifty, (2) when he leaves the factory for

good, (3) when he dies. With all these means at his disposal, with his “boni corporatif,” his share in the profits of the stores, and the sum that he himself may have put by at high interest in the savings-bank, together with the numerous advantages to be derived from the Mutual Help Society, from the system of ready-money payments, and from the practical certainty that his daughter will be provided with a *dot* and he himself with a life-pension in case of permanent disablement from accident, the workman at the Harmel factory undoubtedly enjoys very solid economic advantages. The yearly sum saved by all these different means is calculated at more than 80,000 francs, and is steadily on the increase. Moreover the workman incurs no travelling expenses, for he is lodged on the spot in a sanitary, well-built, four-roomed cottage, for which he pays a strictly moderate rent, and to which is invariably attached an ample strip of garden ground. His old age is provided for by light work as long as he is fit for any sort of labour, and by a pension granted by the firm to supplement his savings for his last years of lingering decrepitude. But even this does not exhaust the list of the benefactions to which he may lay claim. It may yet happen, in spite of all these advantages, that a workman in receipt of full wages according to the accepted wage tariff may be in a chronic state of poverty bordering on want, owing to the fact of his wife’s ill-health or the size of his young family. In such cases the firm comes to his direct assistance. Harmel has calculated that the indispensable minimum on which a family can live in decent comfort is 4.50 francs per head per week. If from unavoidable causes the combined family earnings do not amount to this sum, the firm supplies what is lacking until such time as the children’s earnings come to supplement the parent’s wages. This forms, of course, a direct charge on the firm which may amount to 30 francs or 40 francs per week, and one which from the ordinary point of view would be entirely beyond anything that could rightly be demanded of it. But Harmel’s Christian conscience would be outraged as long as a single workman

in his employ could not maintain himself and his family in decent comfort. Finally, I must mention that a special committee is responsible for the purchase of the wine and spirits required for the bar in the men's club. Total abstinence is not a virtue which is ever practised in France, but any tendency to drunkenness at the club is kept in check, first by public opinion, and secondly by the adoption of what is practically the Gothenburg system. The goods are all purchased by a committee of the club members, and the sale is entrusted to the care of a salaried clerk who has no possible interest in encouraging the consumption of drink. No alcohol is allowed to be sold anywhere within the factory precincts, except at the club, and as a matter of fact the "drink-fiend" is not one of the crying social evils with which Harmel has to cope.

I have left myself but little space to speak of the Societies for Moral Preservation and the Works of Piety. The former have in view the healthy recreation of the people, and include, amongst others, a "Société de Jeunesse" for young men, which organizes Sunday *fêtes* and dramatic entertainments, athletic and reading societies, and, most important of all, a choral society and two bands—one for brass and one for string instruments. The musicians occupy a prominent position in both the religious and social life of the place, for not only do they provide all the music for the religious services, but the brass band plays every Sunday afternoon in the grounds of the factory, the string band is called upon to give two or three concerts every year, and the Choral Society takes an active part in every form of *fête* and festivity. A large room with a stage has been built where the young people of both sexes can spend the evening, and where every sort of harmless entertainment takes place. On Sundays all the spacious yards and shrubberies are thrown open to the workpeople, who also have the use of an excellent bowling-green.

Of the religious confraternities it will be enough to say here that they are all designed with the object of bringing religion more vividly

home to the members, of sanctifying family life, and above all, of spreading a missionary spirit amongst the people, for experience has taught Harmel that neither by his own efforts as head of the firm, nor yet by those of the priests whose services he has secured, can a religious spirit be diffused through the community without the active co-operation of the members themselves. And so a zealous though discreet apostolate is ceaselessly carried on by numbers of the men amongst their factory companions, by the girls amongst themselves, even by the little children at their games and lessons. The example of a companion is found to be far more potent than the preaching of a superior, and in the preliminary work of persuading a man or woman to join in the church services the priest is easily out-distanced by the fellow-worker. As I have already stated, no religious compulsion of any sort is employed by the firm, and all the economic advantages are enjoyed by the workers as a right, and have absolutely no connection with absence from or presence at Sunday Mass; but the moral suasion brought to bear on all absentees is undoubtedly very strong, and can be exercised all the more freely from the fact that in France there is practically no question of proselytism from one form of Christian faith to another. The whole religious battle lies between Catholicism on the one side and freethought and religious indifference on the other. Indeed, in the majority of cases, it is more a question of morals than of faith, so that dogma does not as a rule play a large part in the work of conversion. There is, however, always a certain percentage of men and women who, either from principle or from indifference, absent themselves from the religious services—these, it is naturally a satisfaction to M. Harmel to know, grow every year fewer in number, and are mostly to be found among the new-comers.

To sum up, two ideals, the one religious, the other economic, underlie all the work that is carried on by the Harmel family. The first object is to make of the average workman a good Christian; the second to train him into an independent, self-supporting, self-respect-

ing citizen. In Harmel's opinion it is absolutely indispensable that the religious motive should precede that which is social. Step by step the people have been prepared both morally and socially to take their share in the free community life of Val-des-Bois, and as a result they have fully responded to the trust that has been reposed in them. Harmel assured me that an ever-increasing number of his men realised to the full his social and religious ideals, and devoted all their energies to living up to them and to spreading them among their fellow-workmen. It is not, he maintains, the material advantages which excite their enthusiasm, but the religious spirit. He preaches to them incessantly the doctrines of altruism and mutual service, and he can testify personally to innumerable acts of touching devotion and service amongst his men. All the recreative institutions are accepted primarily as a means of giving amusement to others, and in this way the religious ideal has come to permeate the simplest things of life in the minds of the people.

In Harmel's opinion the mixed syndicate is the highest practical expression that modern industrial enterprise can adopt. He does not believe in any form of profit-sharing as between employer and employed, for to make the employed suffer in any way for the business failures of the firm, appears to him unjust and impracticable, and to allow them to profit by the successes without taking the risks of the losses, he regards as an undesirable form of charity. Nor does Harmel rely on the efficacy of factory legislation, but rather on the moral force of custom as established by the practice of model factories. In this he shows himself a disciple of Le Play, though to custom and the Ten Commandments which the French economist regarded as the true and necessary basis of industrial peace and stability, Harmel would add an active love of God, manifested in a sense of social obligations. With Le Play he is, needless to add, a bitter antagonist of the Manchester school of political economy, whose principles of supply and demand, carried to their logical conclusion, have helped to turn

the industrial area into a market where human labour is purchased at the lowest price to which competition can drive it. At Val-des-Bois such a thing as a strike—that brutal remedy for fundamentally immoral conditions of labour—is absolutely unknown. There can occur no violent clash between interests which are regarded on both sides as strictly identical. In his views on authority, Leon Harmel is singularly broad-minded. He has long realised that the secondary authority of the men strengthens, rather than weakens, the ultimate authority of the master, and hence he feels no hesitation in delegating a portion of his powers to his factory hands.

It is not for a moment assumed—Harmel himself would be the last person to put forward any such claim—that the institutions of Val-des-Bois are all of original growth. Many of them, in an isolated condition, may be found in industrial centres, both in England and on the Continent. But no factory, I venture to think, can boast so complete an organization as Val-des-Bois, and nowhere is the altruistic spirit so strongly developed. The practical question is how much of it all would bear transplantation to English and Protestant soil? The mixed council, the institutions for the encouragement of thrift, the “*conseillères d’atelier*” could be organized without difficulty by any English manufacturer who set to work in the right way. But I venture to think that the French, as a nation, will submit to a far larger measure of social organization than we in England should ever be prepared to swallow, and that the very comprehensiveness of the Harmel scheme would constitute one of its greatest drawbacks from the point of view of the British working man, who is, above all, an individualist. Our young people would never accept the amount of parental control that Harmel advocates, and his paternal interest on the subject of the literature and the newspapers indulged in by his workmen, would be regarded by English mechanics as intolerable supervision. Social problems can never be treated by any cut and dried system, yet all, I think, will be agreed that a diffusion amongst

English capitalists of the spirit which inspires the “Catéchisme du Patron,” would do more for the industrial conditions of our labouring classes than a whole session of beneficent legislation.

That Harmel exercises to-day a far-reaching influence over his countrymen there can be no shadow of doubt. In England we are too prone to assume that the fight in France between Catholicism and Freethought has already been fought and lost by the Church. In reality, the struggle is being carried strenuously forward in every diocese of the land, even if at times against fearful odds, and it is in a great measure to laymen such as Harmel that the Church is indebted for the hold that she still maintains over a portion of the French nation. With Le Maistre and Ozanam, with Montalembert and the Comte de Mun, he can claim the credit of fighting the battles of Christianity on social and educational, rather than on dogmatic lines, and with them he will be classed by his fellow-countrymen among the great Catholic laymen of the nineteenth century.

VIRGINIA M. CRAWFORD.

LÉON HARMEL: A PIONEER OF INDUSTRIAL PEACE

The Month, July 1928, pp. 9-14

An historical period can, we know, often be best visualized by grouping events around some central outstanding figure. What is lost in sense of proportion—for some loss by this method is inevitable—is more than made up for by vividness of presentment. Hitherto the attractive soldier figure of Count Albert de Mun has been allowed to dominate that renaissance of religion on social lines which from 1871 onwards was the inspiring feature of French Catholic life. Père Guitton is right in assuming, however, that the Catholic honours of that formative period must be shared by a second figure, and in his two weighty volumes devoted to Léon Harmel¹ he has conclusively shown that it was the industrial, rather than the aristocratic, leader who bore the burden and heat of the day. No two individualities could well have differed more profoundly—indeed, their first meeting in public almost produced a clash—although each made an essential contribution to the religious life of his country, but it is surely true to say, in view of the special needs of our time, that it was Harmel who had the wider vision of the two. To Albert de Mun, a scion of an exceptionally gifted and spiritual family, there came as a result of his terrible experiences during the Paris Commune, the noble ambition of bringing practical Christianity as a gift from the upper to the lower classes of society, an ideal to which he was ready to devote his life and his fortune. Léon Harmel, sprung from sturdy artisan stock of Northern France, came to see that the whole relationship of employer

1. “Léon Harmel” (1829—1915), by G. Guitton, S.J. 2 vols. Price, 15 fr. and 20fr. Action Populaire, “Editions Spes,” Paris.

and employed in our modern capitalistic organization was based on a non-Christian conception of our social obligations, and he resolved to bring his policy as an employer into closest harmony with the teachings of the Gospel which all Christians profess to accept. De Mun's conception required personal devotion and he gave it without stint, hoping for a general appeasement of class hatred through the diffusion of a more Christian spirit. Harmel's conception, in so far as it could succeed, would have revolutionized the whole industrial life of the country. That it did succeed, fully and absolutely, at Val-des-Bois, and that it put before priests and laity alike a new ideal of how to evangelize the democracy of France, was the great achievement which caused Leo XIII. to hail the *Bon Père* as one of those who had given him the fullest consolation during his pontificate.

Père Guittou's Life reveals to his readers more clearly than was perhaps realized by some who have had the privilege of personal acquaintance with Léon Harmel, the supernatural basis on which all his practical work was built up. Never was busy layman more consistently and completely a man of prayer. Edifying as Harmel's younger years had undoubtedly been, it is noteworthy that it is only on the death of his wife after eighteen years of felicitous marriage and the closing of his intimate conjugal life, that his real public career begins. He was then (1870) in his 42nd year, in the prime of his strength, and the biography reveals how, in his earliest days of mourning, when his earthly paradise had crumbled, he resolved to build up around him a home in which "not only shall God be present, but He shall reign there alone," as he wrote to a priest friend. And it was from then that dated his ceaseless application to prayer and self-discipline in order that nothing should interfere with that constant spiritual converse with our Lord which, as years passed, was the true source of his strength. It is interesting for us to note that his favourite book of spiritual reading at this period was Father Faber's "All for Jesus." It was in these years too that there was developed in and

around Val-des-Bois that “Association intime,” a fraternity of the sick pledged to offer their sufferings for the conversion of the working-classes, to the diffusion of which Harmel devoted much personal effort and on whose prayers he laid great store.

It was all this no doubt that gave to Harmel that quiet dignity of bearing, with an entire absence of self-assertiveness, and that equanimity of temper which are admitted on all sides to have been among his marked characteristics. He emphatically possessed his soul in peace in the midst, not only of trials and sorrows, but—what is far more remarkable—amid the endless harassing duties and worries of an exceptionally active public and industrial life. Humanly speaking he was desperately overworked for at least forty years—and in his younger days recuperative visits to Vichy had been deemed essential—but to the very end he was sustained physically by the intensity of his spiritual life, so that even in old age he was wont to dismay overworked secretaries by the remark that he did not know what fatigue meant.

On the material side it is perfectly true to say that very much of what Harmel introduced in his spinning mills has become to-day the commonplace of all Welfare work and of all up-to-date industrial establishments. But the merit of being—certainly as far as France was concerned—the originator of these beneficent arrangements, is none the less his. Moreover *allocations familiales*, which we have come to know as Family Endowment, and which several millions of married workers in France are in receipt of to-day, had their birth at Val-des-Bois, not as a requirement of strict justice, but, in Harmel’s view, as the only practical method of keeping up the necessary standard of life in large families.

Where Harmel differed from far-sighted and philanthropic employers on this side of the Channel was in the frankly religious motive that inspired all that he undertook. And it is one of the merits of Père Guitton’s volumes to have made this abundantly plain. His confessed

aim was the evangelization of the worker led astray by the false doctrines of the Revolution. He saw clearly that purely religious missionary effort was of small avail. Religion in France had come to be widely regarded as the appanage of the upper classes, and class antagonism was one of the contributory causes of the irreligion of the industrial worker. Hence the burden of responsibility that lay on the Catholic employer. It was for him to come forward and organize his works on lines at once Christian and democratic. Harmel saw that industrial organization in some form of Trade Unionism was a necessity of the time and was bound to come, and if Catholic employers failed to recognize and redress the just grievances of their men, the organizations would be carried out without them and against them. "If nothing is done by us," he declared boldly at a Congress as early as 1877, "the Corporations [*i.e.*, Trade Unions] will be established all the same, but then they will be directed against the Church. . . If you wait only a few years longer all the factory hands will be enrolled in federations of non-religious unions and the effort which appears difficult for us to-day, will be impossible to-morrow; we shall have arrived too late" (p. 109).

What in brief Harmel aimed at was, "an association of employers within any industry and a parallel association of the workers, having as their basis Christian faith and practice, united to form a single body discussing together their professional interests, thus constituting a corporation which might be accepted as the type of a Christian labour organization" (p. 108).

This came to be known as the "mixed" association, in contradistinction to the organization of the workers in their own separate unions as is the rule in this country and in the Socialist unions abroad. It is interesting to note how closely parallel Harmel's conception was in its practical construction to our own Whitley Councils which, on the whole, have had an encouraging success wherever they have been given a fair trial. For them, as for Harmel's scheme, the es-

essential preliminary is a conciliatory spirit on both sides, and on this Harmel could safely rely at Val-des-Bois, where employers and employed lived and worked in close and harmonious proximity. But he was broad-minded enough to see that under other circumstances, where the abyss between capital and labour was already deep, separate organizations might offer the only basis for fruitful negotiation. Never did he question the right of the worker to organize for his own protection.

It must be conceded that the Harmel firm has carried on its factory for over eighty years under almost ideal natural conditions. Val-des-Bois is a garden city on a small scale a few miles out of Reims. The mills stand by a winding stream, and trees, open spaces and gardens divide the factory buildings from the scattered cottages of the workers. The church, the schools, the convents of the Sisters and of the Christian Brothers, and above all the simple but spacious family mansion of the Harmels are grouped around. Many of the workers today belong to the second or third generation in the family employ and have been brought up from babyhood in the Harmel traditions. Amid such surroundings, clear away from the sordidness and vice of most manufacturing towns, it was a comparatively easy task to develop the religious and educational influences which prepared the workers for that effective participation in the responsibilities of management which has been steadily developed. None the less the merit of having in the first instance deliberately selected a rural site capable of being turned to so good account, lay with Léon's father, the first *Bon Père* of Val-des-Bois, and above all is due to them the merit of having never been tempted away by wealth and success to live at a distance from the factory. Much can be done, and is done in England by expensive welfare work under a paid organizer, by the provision of playing-fields and the encouragement of sports of all kinds to counteract the depression and evil surroundings of factory life, but nothing can of course make up for the actual presence of the kindly employer,

living among his people, attending the same church and knowing personally every man, woman and child in the place. To-day such conditions are practically non-existent in England, but the fact that where such conditions do prevail, industrial peace and prosperity and well-being for the workers are co-existent, is at least a demonstration that industrial troubles arise mainly from preventable causes for which employers must be held primarily responsible.

Needless to say very many employers in France, even among Catholics, were far from willing to re-model their factories on the Val-des-Bois plan; Harmel's motives were misrepresented, his results derided and he himself frequently abused and calumniated. Père Guittton felt bound to devote considerable space to the somewhat bitter controversies that divided French Catholics at this period, and that even the appearance of *Rerum Novarum* failed to appease. They have little interest for us to-day. Every attempted reform excites animosity, and circumstances made it impossible in this instance to keep the Catholic democratic movement free from political bias. And of this Harmel's enemies were quick to take advantage. Yet, thanks largely to him, a great Christianizing movement was set on foot throughout industrial France, especially in the North and East, where the influence of Val-des-Bois was more immediately felt, while in Harmel himself Leo XIII. found a simply invaluable exponent of the social teachings in the labour Encyclicals as well as a staunch supporter of his policy of "rallying to the Republic." Père Guittton refers again and again to the quite exceptional marks of papal favour and affection of which Harmel was repeatedly the recipient.

Nothing perhaps displayed at once Harmel's sense of vision, combined with his strong business capacity, more than his successful staging of the popular pilgrimages to Rome which in his day were a startling novelty. He realized that to expect an intense personal loyalty and devotion—such as he himself felt—to a Pope who, to the average working man, was a distant and semi-mythical figure, was to

ask for the impossible. So he conceived the design of showing Rome and the Pope to as many working people as possible, in order that they might realize, not only the greatness of Rome, but the paternal solicitude of Leo XIII. for each one of them. As is well-known, the success of the venture was immediate and the effect on the whole entourage of the Vatican scarcely less marked than on the enthusiastic pilgrims themselves. But the labour involved was prodigious. After the second pilgrimage, the Pope, having in an audience expressed the hope that more working men might visit him, Harmel replied impetuously: "Holy Father, we will bring you 10,000." This he regarded as a sacred promise, and in the autumn of 1889 seventeen train-loads of pilgrims were directed towards Rome and were welcomed by the Holy Father with every mark of his favour. To all this the aged Cardinal Vincent Vannutelli testifies in the striking letter which he contributes as a preface to Père Guitton's volumes.

Two more traits of the *Bon Père* deserve mention to enable us to appreciate the strong sanctified personality that lay behind the homely exterior. All his adult life Harmel was a zealous tertiary of St. Francis, and shortly before his death he confessed that of all the innumerable graces with which God had blessed him the one which had had the most determining influence on his life had been the Third Order. It was, he added, from his "Franciscan mentality" that he had acquired his "imperturbable optimism." Finally, he was to the end proud of being a man of his day. He was wont to declare that he would rather have lived when he did than at any other period—never could life have been so well worth living. Death came to this wonderful old man in the midst of the Great War, and found him patient, resigned and ready for the call.

V. M. CRAWFORD.

THE CENTENARY OF LÉON HARMEL

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Born February 17, 1829. Died November 25, 1915

BY VIRGINIA M. CRAWFORD

All Catholics interested in social problems know something of the life of Léon Harmel, the devoted Catholic layman of France who organised the great workmen's pilgrimages to Rome in the days of Leo XIII., who controlled the model spinning-mills at Val-des-Bois, and who preached and practised what in his own day was a wholly new conception of patronal duty and responsibility. Those of us whose memories go back some thirty to forty years will recall how prominent a personality in French Catholic life was this plain-featured, broad-shouldered, elderly man, with an imperturbable dignity of manner that impressed one from the first. All over France his was a familiar figure on platforms, in workmen's clubs, in conferences and congresses of every complexion. He was an indefatigable propagandist, even, in spite of his age, right up to the outbreak of the War, and everywhere he preached his doctrine of industrial peace, of co-operation between employer and employed, and outlined his dream of capital and labour working hand in hand.

That he had many opponents goes without saying. His theories were misinterpreted, his motives traduced, even his integrity and loyalty as a Catholic questioned. The very success of his innovations in factory management was often made an excuse for doubting the purity of his motives, whereas any material failure in his business would have been hailed at once by those same critics as proof positive of the quixotism of his theories. But if his fellow-employers looked

askance at him, he was the idol of the Catholic workingmen of France. They loved and respected him and they trusted him wholeheartedly, and far beyond the confines of Val-des-Bois he was to them *le bon père*, one on whom they could implicitly rely.

To-day the controversies, once so bitter, connected with his name have died down, and Catholic France is celebrating with due ceremony the centenary of his birth. In honour of the event, Père Guitton, S.J., the author of the two fat volumes of the official biography published last year, has brought out a little book, “Léon Harmel et l’Initiative Ouvrière,”² giving the pith of Harmel’s social and industrial teaching. For the point of interest to-day in Harmel’s career is surely the extent to which he both foresaw and forestalled all the acute industrial evils from which Europe—and England especially—is suffering. This is precisely what Père Guitton’s little book makes clear.

Many visitors from all parts of Europe and even from the United States were drawn to Val-des-Bois during the later decades of last century to see for themselves what this far-famed model factory could offer. A few miles outside Reims it stands in pleasant wooded surroundings by a winding stream, and factory, church, schools, convent and so forth are all grouped together, with the houses of the Harmel family and the cottages of the employees scattered round with all the attractive characteristics of a garden-village. It was the father of Léon, the first *bon père*, who judiciously selected this ideal spot in 1841 for his wool spinning mills. Here he, his wife and their eight children established themselves in a very humble way, Léon being then eleven years old; but steadily the business grew and prospered, and fifty years later it employed over 600 workers and was fitted with all the most modern machinery. Family circumstances placed Léon practically at the head of affairs when he was only twenty-five, and thus, from an early age, he was in a position to put into effect, with

2. Action Populaire, Editions Spes. 1929. 4 frs.

the encouragement of his father, his first tentative schemes for the evangelisation of his factory hands.

It was, however, not until after the death of his wife, amid the tragic experiences of 1870, that his true vocation as a leader of men revealed itself. For a time he was crushed by his grief and contemplated becoming a priest. But on the advice of confessors and of his friend Mgr. de Ségur, he turned back resolutely to his duties as an employer of labour, his character strengthened and his spiritual life deepened by the crisis he had passed through. From that time forward his whole life was dedicated to a lay apostolate which worked itself out on wholly original lines.

To appreciate Harmel's boldness of conception we have to remember that he began his labours at a time when the economic doctrines of the Manchester school still maintained their authority almost unquestioned over men's minds, and when no one—save perhaps Bishop Ketteler of Mainz—had seriously attempted to reconcile the prevailing conditions of competitive industrialism with Christian teaching. Sharing as he did to a great extent the daily life of his factory workers, there grew up in his mind a clear-cut conception of what he was driving at. This was no less than the educating and training of the workers up to the point when he could definitely entrust them with a share in the management and responsibilities of the factory. Convinced that the aims of capital and labour, rightly understood, were strictly identical, he not only saw no reason to fear any violent clash between them—in point of fact strikes never occurred at Val-des-Bois—but he was perfectly ready to delegate a portion at least of his authority to his work-people, confident that it would not be misused. The preparatory work began in the saving-banks that he established for the children in his schools, and in the choral, athletic and other recreative societies which developed the social spirit and co-operative understanding of the young people, and it led up through skilfully graded organisations within the factory to the “workmen's council”

which, at Val-des-Bois, met the employers month by month to discuss, on terms of equality, many of the conditions affecting the internal discipline and administration of the establishment. And it was at these meetings that *le bon père* was wont to put frankly before his men matters financial and other which employers, as a rule, keep jealously secret from them, so that they might be in a position to appraise the difficulties of the situation.

Such was the germ of those “mixed syndicates” which it was Harmel’s dream to see functioning in every factory in France and which, grouped together, would have constituted a great “Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens.” That his dream never took shape was the fault, in the main, not of the workers, who were keen to follow his lead, but of his fellow-employers, held back by every sort of timid and ignorant prejudice.

“Harmel saw clearly,” writes Père Guitton (p. 18), “that the modern workingman, having acquired his rights of citizenship, would be less and less ready to tolerate a system of labour the conditions of which he had never been allowed even to discuss, and that it would be his ambition to act in future not as an irresponsible minor who submits, but as a conscious adult who accepts. If Catholics did not come forward in favour of these legitimate aspirations, Harmel foresaw sorrowfully that they would irremediably lose the respect and confidence of the working classes. And that was why he made such ardent appeals to all those who were in a position to exercise social influence.”

No one with anything less than the sturdy strength that came to him from his Flemish peasant ancestry, could have laboured as ceaselessly for well nigh half a century as Léon Harmel, lecturing, debating, organising, travelling, yet all the while closely directing his great factory. The imposing workmen’s pilgrimages to Rome—one of his most brilliant and successful conceptions and one that gave very special pleasure to Leo XIII.—demanded an enormous amount of prepar-

ation in days when Travel Associations were almost non-existent. None the less all through his life Harmel retained the precious gift of never appearing hurried. On the occasion of the present writer's visit to Val-des-Bois, it was Harmel himself who awaited her at the little way-side station just outside the factory gates and devoted several hours to conducting her round the works. The whole place was beautifully clean, airy and hygienic, men and women working in quite separate workshops, and nothing was more attractive than the sight of the long rows of girl-workers at the winding-machines, neat, smooth-haired damsels in simple cotton frocks, with the blue ribbon and medal of the *enfant de Marie* as their only ornament. Every girl up to the age of seventeen, one learnt, was bound to spend one hour per day, taken from her working hours, at the *école ménagère*, and though the Saturday half-holiday was at that time an unknown institution in French industrial life, all the women workers were let off early on Saturday afternoon.

Yet from an English point of view perhaps the most surprising feature of all was to find the rambling family house of the Harmels, that habitually harboured innumerable children and grandchildren, in immediate proximity to the factory. But indeed Harmel would as soon have thought of removing himself to the elegant seclusion of a country mansion commensurate with his wealth, as an affectionate mother would dream of establishing her nursery at a distance from herself. Moreover it was in this close daily intercourse with his workmen and their families that he learnt much that was invaluable to him in his apostolate.

As early as 1877, at a congress of social workers, Harmel had warned his hearers that, with or without their concurrence, labour syndicates were bound to come into existence, and that if they held aloof they would see in a few years all the factory workers enrolled in a vast network of godless syndicates, a prediction which has unhappily proved itself only too well-founded. He saw clearly that what

might, with good will, be accomplished at an early stage would become unattainable later on.

How difficult it is to bring together powerful associations of men and employers which have been founded and developed in a spirit of antagonism to one another, has been amply demonstrated in England during the last few months when what is known as the Mond-Turner Conference, initiated by Lord Melchett, has been groping about for some basis for a common understanding between the National Confederation of Employers' Organisations and the Federation of British Industries on the one side, and the Council of the Trades Union Congress on the other, with a view to establishing a National Industrial Council. Either some such understanding, ushering in a new policy of co-operation and mutual trust between Capital and Labour must be arrived at, or the present policy of antagonism will be pursued to the bitter end. And it is evident that however complicated and difficult the material problems of such an understanding may be, the most formidable obstacle by far that has to be surmounted is the deep-rooted suspicion with which all parties to the proposed understanding regard each other. Hence, in spite of some journalistic trumpet-blowing, the extremely small progress that has been made as yet.

To Harmel the fundamental cause of the existing deadlock would have been only too plain: God has been left outside the council chamber. However great his belief in the efficacy of his own methods, both industrial and educational, he would have counted them as nought if they had not been built up on the firm basis of Catholic truth. Nor was the mere acceptance of Christian dogma sufficient; a man's whole life must be impregnated with an active love of God, manifested in a sense of social obligations. To *le bon père* love of God was like the oil that kept the machinery running smoothly—without it the social machine could not function, however skilfully devised, and social peace and stability could never be attained. Mere intelligent efficiency, based on a purely material conception of life, such as it is the aim of

the Ford Company to develop, would have filled him with misgiving. From first to last Harmel was an idealist. It was in the fullness of the religious life at Val-des-Bois in which the whole community participated, in the Sunday Mass heard in common, in the numerous feasts of the Church duly commemorated from which he was never absent, that he found not only his own greatest happiness, but the most potent means of establishing those fraternal relations with the men, women and children of his village on which he set such store. His own intimate religious life was, we know, both true and deep, built up on prayer and self-discipline, and it is worth recording that all through his adult life he was a zealous Tertiary of St. Francis, and that in his extreme old age he declared solemnly that of all the innumerable graces with which God had enriched him, the most potent of all had been the spirit of the Third Order, that "Franciscan mentality" to which he attributed his unquenchable optimism and enthusiasm.

The tragedy of the Great War fell with special intensity on Val-des-Bois. Situated on the open plains of Champagne, it was occupied at a very early date by German troops; everything of value to the invaders was requisitioned and the population evacuated. Harmel himself had no less than seven grandsons and twenty-eight nephews in the French army, while two of his sons were sent prisoners to Germany. Later, during the bombardment of Reims, the buildings were practically razed to the ground, but it is comforting to know that, like many other factories in Northern France, it was quickly rebuilt and re-started when once peace was restored.

Le Bon Père, however, died far from his beloved home. On the outbreak of hostilities he was hurried away to Nice, and there, in faith and serenity and confidence in God, he passed to his reward in November, 1915, with some at least of his numerous descendants around him.

It is because Harmel's industrial enterprise presupposed a population in which the Christian faith is still a reality, albeit needing much strengthening and guidance, that the experiment of Val-des-Bois should be of vital interest to Catholic countries.

V. M. CRAWFORD.