No. 31

L'ÉCOLE SOCIALE POPULAIRE

MONTHLY PUBLICATION

DOMBRAY-SCHMITT

VAL-DES-BOIS

Its professional, economic and social organisation

MONTREAL:
SECRETARIAT OF THE ÉCOLE SOCIALE POPULAIRE,
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1914
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THIS EDITION

This is an English translation of the original French text, made for the website leonharmel.com in 2026. It follows the original sentence by sentence, without cuts or additions.

The text is given in full, translated from the 1914 edition. It has been typeset in the spirit of the original: title pages and headings follow the layout of the book; the illustration has been cut out of the digitised document and restored.

The table of contents refers to the pages of this edition; each entry is a link.

The numbered notes are those of the original work; here they are numbered continuously from beginning to end.

Léon Harmel, le Bon Père du Val-des-Bois
leonharmel.com

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Foreword[1]

For more than twenty years I have followed the development of the *Corporation of Val-des-Bois*.

Its elements have been brought together and shaped by the practice of mutual devotedness. The work is complete.

Val-des-Bois is a fact that men of goodwill can study at their leisure.

The *collective contract* of labour exists there, and its enforcement is entrusted to the Workers' Council itself. It is the triumph of faith in the soul of the people. The people's answer was not long in coming: confidence has sprung from confidence; a sense of justice, carried to the point of scruple, has been born in the worker from respect for his dignity as a man and as a cooperator.

Professional life there is intense, thanks to the spirit of initiative that constantly makes it fruitful.

The figure of the annual savings bears witness to the general prosperity.

Paternal authority and unity in the family have flourished there again under the Christian spirit.

Several pamphlets have already spoken of all this.[2] It seemed to me that a short summary, easy to read, would be well received. That is the task I set myself in offering this little booklet to the public.

May it serve to spread methods that have proved their worth, and that would transform modern industry if they were applied.

1. The École Sociale Populaire must here thank Mr Dombray-Schmitt, who has allowed it to publish, free of charge, his interesting study of Val-des-Bois.

2. The École Sociale Populaire offers for sale two of these pamphlets, published by the Action Populaire of Reims, which are of a kind to complete Mr Dombray-Schmitt's work. These pamphlets sell for six sous each, postage extra.

DOMBRAY-SCHMITT,
Editor of the "Travailleur Libre" (11th year),
Founder and Lecturer of the Professional Union
of the Miners of the Nord and Pas-de-Calais.

Douai, 17 February 1911.

Val-des-Bois

The Mill

GENERAL INFORMATION

The firm of Harmel Frères was founded in 1797; it has therefore now been in existence for a hundred and thirteen years. Its first Establishments were set up in the Ardennes. In 1840 it came to settle at Val-des-Bois, near Reims.

The Mill stands in the valley of the Suippe, an important industrial centre, where a large number of Spinning Mills and Weaving Mills are gathered together.

It comprises dyeing, the spinning of carded wool and of combed wool, twisting and fancy yarn.

The products are sold for the most part Abroad; this is what led, in 1892, to the founding of a combed-wool spinning mill at Sabadell, in Spain, in order to keep a clientele that could no longer be served because of customs duties[3].

The industrial buildings, all on the ground floor, cover two and a half hectares. They are surrounded by open spaces pleasantly shaded with trees, beyond which, over an area of 20 hectares, stretch the employers' residences and the many houses with gardens where the working-class families live and where the trades and small retail

3. The director of the Sabadell mill is Mr Jean Saucourt-Harmel; the annual output is 200,000 kilogrammes; sales amount to nearly 2 million francs.

shops needed by an important industrial centre are carried on. Nothing is more pleasant or more healthy than such surroundings.

VISIT

A good half-day is barely enough for the visitor to form a summary idea of the various departments of the Mill.

1. Offices.

The management is organised by the head of the firm according to the scientific method of the Anglo-Saxons, which consists in obtaining the maximum of results with the minimum of effort and expense, in the minimum of time. Clear filing and up-to-date documentation make it possible to run the business instead of being run by it.

The *correspondence*, using shorthand and typewriting, is carried on in the language of the countries with which the firm trades: Germany, the Scandinavian countries, England and Spain.

Purchases and sales. — Wool is bought as raw wool, either in London or by direct import through an Agency set up in Buenos Aires. It is also bought as combed wool.

Sales are of equal importance in France and Abroad; they amount, on average, to *five and a half million* a year.

Complementary undertakings. — The Sabadell spinning mill. Auxiliary firms to give flexibility to production and so avoid stoppages at the Val.

Services. — Telegraph. Telephone. — Technical and social library.

Council Room, where the workers meet, when they come out in the evening, for the government of their institutions.

2. Motive power

Two sets of steam engines and a turbine. Together: 750 horsepower. The boilers have 1,450 metres of heating surface. The drives that distribute the power measure 1,124 metres in length.

Electric lighting is provided by dynamos developing a power of 180,340 watts, or 2,830 lamps of 16 candle-power.

3. Mechanical dye works

with the latest patented machinery, French and foreign. Output: 600,000 kilogrammes.

4. Carded-wool spinning mill

Self-acting mules. Output: 200,000 kilogrammes.

5. Combed-wool spinning mill

Self-acting mules and continuous frames. Output: 900,000 kilogrammes.

6. Twisting

with doubling; all on continuous frames. Output: 250,000 kilogrammes.

7. Fancy yarns

Complex yarns, produced by the most ingenious mechanical means to obtain spotted yarns, knop yarns, loop yarns, yarns with intermittent effects, with a harmonious combination of coloured threads. This kind was invented by Mr Jules Harmel, who took out several patents for it.

Output is very variable, because it depends entirely on fashion.

8. Repair workshops (with machine tools)

An engineer's office for drawings and for the study of new machines: every year one of the employers and the engineer visit the engineering works of Mulhouse, Germany and England, to keep abreast of the most recent improvements.

9. Warehouses

Very large warehouses stand in the inner courtyards. It is in one of them that the main annual banquet of the *Agricultural Union of Champagne* is held, bringing together eight to nine hundred guests.

10. Patents

Various patents have been taken out, owing to the initiative of: Jules Harmel, for fancy yarns; Albert Harmel, for dyeing; Félix Harmel, for the mechanical removal of burrs from wool. This last patent brought about a real transformation in the combing of burry wools.

STAFF

Good Father. — Nothing is more touching than this name, which the workers first bestowed on the founder of the Mill, Mr Jacques-Joseph Harmel, who died in 1884 at the age of 89. His son, Léon Harmel, has inherited this fine name, which his devotedness to the workers' cause has earned him. This year he entered his 83rd year, and the visitor is touched by the charming familiarity with which the little children treat him, and by the affectionate confidence that everyone shows him.

The *foremen* and the clerks are chosen, as far as possible, from the families of the old workers, who thus have before them the prospect of real professional advancement.

The authority of the foremen is limited. They can neither hire nor dismiss, and the fines they impose become final only after *the signature of one of the employers.*

Remonstrances seem preferable; they do not have the odious side of a deduction from wages. And so the total of the fines paid each year into the Mutual Aid Society hardly exceeds twenty francs for the whole staff.

The right of appeal to the employer is kept for all without distinction.

Because their power is limited, are the foremen obeyed less? Experience has shown the contrary. They more easily obtain the submission of the will, since their authority is no longer checked by accusations of arbitrariness and the irritation that follows from them.

The *population* numbers 254 families, that is, a thousand to eleven hundred people, about half of whom are employed at the mill. Large families are common: forty-five have from 4 to 6 children, twelve from 7 to 9, and three have 10 and 11.

The *workers' housing estates* are spacious, well ventilated and surrounded by gardens. The rent is very moderate.

METHOD ADOPTED

In studying the aspirations of their workers, the employers soon realised the powerlessness of patronage. Experience showed them that this kind of action reaches only the surface, does not go to the depths of souls, and therefore does not move the will. They understood that the action of *like upon like* alone has decisive power, because it alone answers the legitimate aspirations towards the conquest of personal dignity and freedom.

So they set to work courageously, pursuing the application of the democratic doctrine: "*The good of the worker through the worker and with him, never without him; all the more so, never in spite of him.*"

This method takes longer, it demands more patience and requires a solid social education, but it gives more lasting results.

The most valuable of all have been the creation, in 1885, of the "*Factory Council*" and the replacement, in 1903, of the mixed union by the "*Workers' Union*".

Experience has shown that the more loyally and disinterestedly one exalts the dignity of the worker, the better one knows how to set

beside the notion of duty that of imprescriptible right, the more one wins his confidence, and, it is fair to say, the more one deserves it.

Participation in management develops the sense of responsibility and the sense of industrial realities; the result has been a spirit of concord and peace, strengthened every day by mutual affection.

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The Workers' Organisation

IMPORTANCE OF THE COUNCILS

The *Corporation of Val-des-Bois* is formed, first, of all the workers' associations directed by the Union Council; secondly, of the employers' group. These two authorities come to an agreement on the conditions of work and on the questions that concern them.

We shall summarise its manifold organisation: professional, social and economic.

The life of the Corporation depends on the activity of the Councils that govern the associations.

The *Echos du Val-des-Bois* (the monthly organ of the corporation) give the list of the councils for the following month.

The reader can see that there is at least one a day. It is thanks to this multiplicity of councils, whose regular holding the Union Chamber is responsible for maintaining, that élites are formed, that the spirit of devotedness and sacrifice develops, and that social life flows to overflowing in this little people sparkling with initiative and activity.

FUNDAMENTAL ASSOCIATIONS

The distress of the worker has been told often enough, in saying that God has been taken away from him. At one stroke, indeed, he has been robbed of his moral dignity, the hopes of his heart, the happiness of his home and the best source of temporal prosperity.

It is this supreme misery, first of all, that Mr Léon Harmel tried to remedy by creating the so-called fundamental associations, whose aim is to organise the *apostolate of like upon like*. Here, as in every other field, nothing was improvised. Everything was done with time, by persuasion, with patience. It took eleven years (1861-1872) to reach the family at every level.

Associations. — It was thought that one could not begin too early to train children in the spirit of initiative and the practice of devotedness. That is why an association for the youngest brings together the children from 7 to 13: the schoolboys under the patronage of St Aloysius Gonzaga, the schoolgirls under that of St Philomena. The second degree, for children from 13 to 16, gathers the boys in the Little Circle and the girls under the patronage of the Holy Angels. Next, the Youth Society takes the young men from the age of 16 up to marriage, while the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin receives the girls over 16. Lastly come the Men's Association and that of the Mothers of Families. Each of these associations has its elected Council, its periodic meetings in special premises, and its solemn feasts. One joins and leaves them freely.

All this organisation has been carried out with the most absolute respect for *freedom*, which sometimes shows itself in contradictions that may arise without great drawback, and which on the other hand has the advantage of making voluntary membership more serious.

CHAPEL

Founded in 1863 at the inspiration of Cardinal Gousset, a very modest oratory was replaced in 1871 by the present chapel, which was enlarged in 1895. Everything in it is specially arranged for popular instruction: catechism, conferences, instructions, retreats; for the life of the associations: special Masses, solemn receptions, etc.; and for the sanctification of homes: honours paid to newly married couples, presentation of little children, etc.

The material well-being and the morality of the working population have felt keenly the effect of its Christian life and habits. Numerous priestly and religious vocations have flowered on this soil steeped in the supernatural[4].

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The Professional Organisation

1. Workers' union.

The workers' union replaced, in 1903, the mixed union founded in 1884. It now has 727 members. From it proceed the professional, social and economic groups of the corporation, of which it is the centre. It gives active support to the institutions; it subsidises several of them. Its funds come from a subscription of 0.25 fr. a month per household (whatever the number of union members in each home) and from a contribution by the mill.

The *Union Chamber*, made up of fifteen elected syndics, holds its plenary meeting every month and a meeting of its officers every

4. Twenty-six priests or men religious, thirty nuns. In addition, at present, seven students at the major or minor seminary.

week. It deals with all the questions that concern the corporation; it encourages the progress of the institutions and the regular holding of the councils.

The Union Chamber negotiates with the employers, who recognise its right effectively to represent the whole working population.

The *Union House* comprises: an Assembly Hall, with a theatre, which can seat 800 spectators; a large Union hall on the first floor, with six billiard tables, a refreshment bar and fittings. Beside it, a large council room used especially by the Youth Society. The Union House is managed exclusively by the syndics. It is surrounded by courtyards and gardens, in which are the Band's square, the premises of the Little Circle and those of the Gymnastics society.

2. Factory Council.

The aim of the Factory Council is to give the workers real participation in the government of the mill. It is made up of ordinary elected workers, representing the various workrooms and the various trades. It meets every fortnight with one of the employers, but without any foreman or clerk being present.

Its functions are as follows:

a) *Accidents.* — Preventive measures: warning before the engines are started; instant stopping in case of danger; precautions for cleaning the engines, the machines, etc.; a whole series of measures borrowed from the mills of Mulhouse.

After an accident: establishing the causes, appointment of a guardian-adviser who helps the injured man to obtain reasonable compensation. In case of temporary incapacity, the relief society adds its allowance to that of the insurance company, which gives almost the full wage for earnings below 4 francs.

b) *Hygiene in the Mill.* — Drinking water in all the workrooms. — Ventilation at the carding engines by powerful fans; in the preparing and spinning rooms, by apparatus bringing in air from outside. As for

temperature, apparatus maintains a suitable warmth in winter and a healthy coolness in summer.

c) *Apprenticeship.* — The Factory Council gives particular care to apprenticeship, which it considers very important.

The *young workers*, during their first two years of work in the workshop, receive every fortnight a mark from the factory councillor and a mark from the foreman; these marks are posted up in the spinners' large workroom. Bonuses of 10 francs and 5 francs are given at the end of the quarter, at a general assembly, before the whole population.

Every six months *competitions* are organised for the apprentices. They last a month; marks are given twice a day by the workers' councillor, man or woman, by the foreman and by a delegate of the employers. The marks of the workers' council have a coefficient of 10, against 4 for the others. The results are posted up and serve for promotion. Substantial rewards are given to the first.

Apprenticeship of the future employers. — The children of the employer's family, after attending the vocational schools, go through the course of apprenticeship in the mill they are to govern. After the prescribed tests they receive in turn their worker's diploma, signed by the councillors, the instructing worker and the foreman; and the foreman's diploma (they must hold the post alone for a month), likewise signed by the Workers' Council and by the foremen called upon to check the work.

It seems to me that the authority of the young employer gains by this professional education among the workers he is to command. They will readily recognise in him a superior whose theoretical instruction has been completed by manual practice. The employer, for his part, having lived the professional life in practice, will keep from his apprenticeship valuable knowledge and above all the sense of justice.

d) *Work.* — The Council studies the best means of making the work easier, increasing production and making the perfection of the yarn possible.

e) *Wages, rates.* — No rate is adopted, no wage is fixed, without prior agreement between the employers and the Factory Council. The *collective contract* results from this and is the law of the parties.

Fixed wages are combined with substantial *bonuses* that give the workers, the foremen and the clerks an interest in production, in the perfection of the products and in sales. It is a kind of profit-sharing without risk.

f) *General Rules of the Workshops of Messrs Harmel Frères.* — The new Rules, drawn up and discussed between the employers and the Factory Council representing the Workers' Union, were established by common agreement between the parties, who mutually undertake to respect them and have them carried out. They have been applied since September 1909. The main articles concern: stricter observance of the separation of the sexes, recognition of the Workers' Union as a contracting party, the prohibition of foremen from keeping a drink shop or a store, the workers' initiative, and the right of appeal to the employer.

Article 18 reads as follows:

Any disagreement over the present Rules shall be settled by the Factory Council.

This is, in short, the acceptance of the arbitration of the Factory Council.

g) *Complaints.* — Every worker has the right to make his complaints to the employer, either directly or through a member of the Factory Council.

3. Workshop Council.

This Council, made up of women workers appointed by their companions, has the same functions as the Factory Council: it deals especially with the women workers.

4. The family's wages.

The earnings of those who live in the same home are itemised on one pay slip, totalled and handed to the head of the family or to his delegate. This measure has the advantage of maintaining the subordination of the children, while allowing each one to know what he earns. It makes saving easier, which is made difficult by the splitting up of wages and the usual deductions from each of them. Pay is given on Thursday morning, market day.

5. The worker's initiative.

It is invited for two purposes: the improvement of the equipment and the correction of defects.

If a worker discovers some means of making the work easier or the product more perfect, the employers willingly bear the cost of a trial, under the supervision of the Factory Council. If the improvement is found good and practical, a gratuity is given to the inventor, in proportion to the value of the invention.

The worker is also asked to point out the defects he notices in the working of his machine. If his remark is not acted upon, the factory councillor raises it again at the fortnightly meeting.

6. Improvement Council.

The Improvement Council, made up of the most skilful workers, studies with the employers the best way of running the machines. This Council meets every month.

7. Technical Committee.

The Technical Committee brings together the chief heads of department with the employers every fortnight.

This threefold concerted action (5, 6, 7) gives great activity to industrial life, which is thus kept constantly on its mettle, while at the same time it develops the sense of responsibility from the top to the bottom of the social ladder.

8. Family boarding house.

This boarding house, at the very moderate price of 1 franc a day, takes in girls over 14 entrusted to it by their parents or guardians. The boarders take turns at the cooking, the washing and the mending.

9. Family Fund based on a minimum per head.

A large family is a source of wealth when the children are working; but until then, what privations for the parents, often obliged to run into debts that weigh on their lives for a long time!

It is to meet this hardship that the Family Fund has been in existence since 1891.

The minimum fixed (8.40 fr. per fortnight per head) is not high, but one must take into account the advantages of the countryside, the modest rents, the yield of the gardens and private relief. It is real help, especially for widows burdened with children.

An example: a spinner died recently, leaving his wife with seven children, only one of whom, still young, was earning 2 francs a day. The family, made up of eight persons, was entitled to 66.20 fr. per fortnight; it therefore receives 42.20 fr. as a supplement at each pay (that is: 66.20 fr. — 24 fr.).

The democratic method is applied in fixing and distributing this supplement, which are left entirely to the Workers' Council, without

any intervention by the employers.

The record of the last twenty years shows an average annual expenditure of 1,800 francs, provided exclusively by the employers' fund. The sacrifice seems slight in comparison with the great service rendered.

10. Veterans' Society.

This society is made up of the workers with more than 25 years of service. It now has 70 members, of whom 27 have from 40 to 68 years of service; 35 have been awarded the ministerial medal.

11. Work for the elderly. — Pension.

Easy jobs, suited to their technical knowledge, are reserved for the old workers, to allow them to keep a wage as long as possible.

When they can no longer work, a pension of 300 francs is granted to them on the nomination of the Veterans' Council. It is paid by the employers, without any contribution from the workers.

12. Combating unemployment.

During my visit to Val-des-Bois, I asked the employers whether they had organised anything to remedy the consequences of unemployment. This was the answer I received:

"Our main objective, from the industrial point of view, the one that dominates all our concerns, is to avoid unemployment. With this aim we have founded auxiliary undertakings to help in difficult times. But if, in spite of everything, there is sometimes partial unemployment, supplementary work is created to occupy those who are out of work."

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The Social Organisation

1. Mutual Aid Society.

A mutual aid society, specially for the staff of the mill, was founded on 21 January 1846. It now has 1,038 members. Its administration is entrusted to councillors elected by their comrades.

It has been a family society since its origin, that is to say, it has always admitted children too young to work, married women and the old. Elderly parents, even those who have never worked at the mill, are admitted for a very small subscription, with no condition of age or health, to the benefit of the doctor's care, medicines and free burial.

Its part in the schools. — The mill schools are paid for by the employers, but school supplies are borne by the Mutual Aid Society. On this account the Council takes an interest in the schools, attends the end-of-year examinations, watches over regular attendance and, if need be, summons parents who show indifference to their children's education.

Shower baths. Hygiene. — In addition, the Council deals with preventive measures against illness. It is on its initiative that the following are due: the setting up of the *shower baths*, the home visits to the sick by *a nurse*, and by two if need be, the doctor's *daily consultations* on the mill premises, the *lectures on Hygiene* given every year to the population, and the practice of physical training in the schools.

Union and Federation. — The Mutual Aid Society of Val-des-Bois belongs to the Departmental Union and to the Federation of the East. Its Council sends delegates to the general meetings held every year.

2. Schools.

The mill schools have 205 children in all, namely: 62 in the nursery school, 65 in the boys' classes, 78 in the girls' classes; for the girls, sewing and housekeeping instruction have an important place. In all of them vocal music is taught, and every day exercises are done to develop physical strength (breathing and Swedish gymnastics).

Every year school certificates are obtained. Mr Léon Harmel himself gives the boys their weekly marks. The ladies of the employer's family take a caring interest in the nursery school and the girls' schools.

In addition, until the age of sixteen, the young men and girls who work have one compulsory class a week, during working hours.

Lastly, optional *evening classes* are given twice a week.

3. Union Library.

It is housed next to the boys' school: it holds more than a thousand volumes, plus a subscription to a large circulating library, which makes it possible to renew the books constantly.

254 readers, men and women, have read 1,125 volumes in one year.

4. "Echos du Val-des-Bois."

A very interesting periodical review of 16 to 32 pages, entitled *Echos du Val-des-Bois*, the organ of the corporation, is distributed free every month to the working-class families. It gives an account of the social life and the family life of the Val. The workers read in it with keen interest everything that concerns their children and the events of their lives.

5. Study Circle.

For those who wish to learn about current questions and bills concerning the workers' interests.

6. Study Tour.

Every year excursions of a few days abroad are organised under the leadership of experienced guides, to complete the education of the young men.

7. General Assemblies.

Fortnightly, organised and presided over by the Workers' Council of the Association, whose reports must be presented there, and at which the workers take the floor.

During my visit to Val-des-Bois I observed that these great union meetings, while developing collective principles, bring personalities into prominence and give them the opportunity to assert themselves and to grow.

8. Artistic and Sporting Societies.

a) A brass band, founded in 1847, whose members have been renewed many times since, is at present made up of 44 players, most of them young, plus 15 pupils.

The honorary members, 53 in number, encourage the society by their subscriptions and by their presence when it goes out. The brass band gives brilliance and liveliness to the feasts of Val-des-Bois. Every year it takes part, with success, in one or more competitions.

b) The *gymnastics society*, which proudly bears the name of *Young Republican Guard of Val-des-Bois*, has 45 members, 25 of them juniors. It wins applause in competitions for the skill and suppleness of its movements.

c) The young men's *choral society* (30 singers) has a more modest bearing: it is content to be heard in the chapel and at winter evening entertainments.

d) The *girls' choral society*, made up of 45 members, adds great charm to the services in the chapel.

e) *Dramatic societies.* — Two societies, one of young men and one of girls, give performances in turn during the winter. Every two years the Passion play is performed in succession at the Val, in several neighbouring villages, and sometimes even at Reims.

f) The *rifle club* has its range, its practices, its competitions and its prizes.

g) The *military preparation society* has helped several of its pupils to obtain the stripes of non-commissioned officers and, recently, one of them the epaulette of a reserve officer.

9. Temperance Society.

The Temperance Society of Reims has its section at Val-des-Bois, which gathers a zealous and intrepid élite.

10. Feasts.

A happy coincidence allowed me to attend the Veterans' feast. The solemn High Mass left a deep impression on me. The banquet brought together 150 people. It was followed by a concert by the Brass Band, enlivened by gymnastic displays. I learned that one of the chief concerns of the corporation is to keep joy alive in the families by means of feasts spaced out all through the year.

The various societies make their contribution in turn; their successes are celebrated and their progress admired by a population doubly sympathetic, since it is applauding its own children.

From time to time speakers from outside are heard. Every year a great *concert* is organised by the Brass Band, with the help of performers from outside.

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The Economic Organisation

1. Cooperative.

The Cooperative Society has its statutes, its Council and its administration. Under the terms of articles 10 and 17, no one can be a shareholder or a cooperator unless he belongs to the *Union of Val-des-Bois*.

Over the last thirty years the turnover has amounted to 2,004,326 francs, which have given a total profit of 156,102.55. The shareholders receive 1/20th and the cooperators 19/20ths. In addition, if the head of a family falls ill, the society supplies him free of charge, for twelve weeks, with a third of his usual consumption. The rebate is paid every six months, under the name of *corporative bonus*, in cash to the cooperators who are over 50, and into the Savings Fund, to the credit of those who have not reached that age. (See the article on the Savings Funds.)

The average bonus over the last ten years is 4,322 francs.

The Board of Directors meets every month. It takes the advice of the *Cooperators' Committee*, made up of the largest consumers. It has as an auxiliary the *Initiative Committee*, which studies the best operations to undertake.

Direct Purchasing is an organisation for instantaneous purchases and sales, without bookkeeping and without the risk of stock. An example: when there is a demand for 10,000 kilogrammes of coal, a wagon is ordered, shared out on the very day of its arrival and paid to the deliverer. The same is done for vegetables, fresh fish, clothing, etc. The average saving made by the buyer is 20 per cent, that is, 5,000 francs a year on the average purchases of 25,000 francs.

Adding this saving to the corporative bonus, one finds more than nine thousand francs of profit a year.

2. Saving.

Convinced that the well-being of a population is measured by its savings, the employers have set themselves to make saving as easy as possible. Three funds have been set up for this purpose; all three give an interest of 4 per cent a year.

a) The *General Savings Fund*, whose deposits are used every year, as the depositors wish, for the purchase of houses or land, most often of lottery bonds. In this way 177 families each own a more or less considerable capital, but its amount cannot be stated, since the investments are made outside the mill.

b) The *Corporative Bonus Fund*. The payments into this Fund are made directly by the Cooperative Society and represent the rebate due to the cooperators under 50. This capital cannot be transferred or seized; it is handed over to those concerned only when they are over 50 or when they leave the mill.

I admired this ingenious means of securing a valuable reserve for every family. I learned that, in this way, several badly managed households had appreciable savings, sometimes amounting to several hundred francs.

In case of urgent need, one can borrow from the Cooperative on one's bonus passbook, but then the favourable opinion of the Workers' Council is necessary. The advance is made free of charge.

At present, 144 cooperators under 50 have between them 26,619.10 fr., 5 of them more than 1,000 francs and 10 from 500 to 900 francs.

c) *School savings*. — This Fund receives the deposits of the schoolchildren and of the young men and girls under 18.

For the schools, rewards are given publicly every year to the schoolboys and schoolgirls who have faithfully paid in some sum,

however small, every fortnight, were it only 5 centimes. The report of 28 August 1910 shows 75 depositors under 13, 22 of whom are not yet 6.

At present the school savings bank holds 17,206 francs for 207 passbooks belonging to 88 boys and 119 girls.

Summary. — The deposits made in these three funds amount on average, each year, to about 80,000 francs, that is, 13 per cent of the total wages.

3. Honour Loan Fund.

To encourage paying cash, and to avoid the debts that are the ruin of families, an interest-free Loan Fund has been organised; it is run by the Union Council.

4. Gardens Committee.

Besides the garden attached to each dwelling, the workers can rent, at very low prices, as much land as they can cultivate. In large families they thus manage to grow their vegetables for the year. A committee studies the joint purchase of seeds, fertilisers, etc.; makes known the best methods of cultivation and organises a competition to encourage the use of the most favourable methods.

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Various Societies

1. Conference of St Vincent de Paul

founded in 1877. Weekly meetings.

2. Ladies' Conference,

ladies of the employer's family and women workers, to help young mothers.

3. Fire Brigade.

We admired the discipline and the precision of movement of this picked company, equipped with two very powerful pumps and excellent equipment. 46 members.

4. Red Cross.

A section of stretcher-bearers with complete equipment.

5. Agricultural Union of Champagne,

founded in 1894 on the initiative of Mr Léon Harmel, honorary president. Acting president, Mr de Boham. Several general meetings every year at Val-des-Bois. 4,200 farmers, spread over 388 communes. The workers of the Val can enjoy the economic advantages of the Union for the modest subscription of 1 fr. a year.

⁂

STATEMENT OF THE EMPLOYERS

Messrs Harmel frères told me that their financial burdens, apart from the expenses of the chapel and the schools, are limited to the Family Fund and to a contribution of the same value to the corporation.

They assured me, moreover, that the permanent and active contact of the workers with the employers, through the working of the institutions, far from harming their authority, has only strengthened it, by spreading the spirit of confidence and by awakening the initiatives that make the workers true collaborators.

⁂

Conclusion

This short account will be enough, we hope, to make Val-des-Bois understood, with its ideal and its realisation.

It must not be thought, however, that anyone rests there. Everyone is on the lookout for progress. The workers' delegates take an active part in the mutualist and other meetings of the region; one of them attended the Semaine sociale (Social Week) of Rouen (September 1910). They report on their mission and set out before their comrades the new ideas they have gathered on their travels.

In addition, workers from outside are invited to bring a good word to the Val, and so it was that, last year, the president and the secretary of our miners' union of the Nord and Pas-de-Calais set out there, to the applause of all, our work and its results, especially our study circles.

The employers, for their part, do not believe they have done everything. They are constantly seeking the best means of production and strive to maintain the prosperity of the firm and the permanence of work through integration, that is to say, through holdings that secure purchasing and sales.

Mr Léon Harmel junior, who was not afraid to spend a year and a half of his youth as a worker and foreman in the mills of Bradford, recently chose to spend three months in America to study the new methods there, which he then applied at the Val.

The professional education of the young men is completed by long stays in Germany and England.

They keep abreast of the social movement by reading the most authoritative reviews, but above all by visiting the most important centres of the movement and by keeping company with the learned

authorities and practitioners of the question, whom they take care to invite to the Val.

May this modest work bring my humble and cordial contribution to the wonderful flowering of ideas and works of which Val-des-Bois is the source!

DOMBRAY-SCHMITT.

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