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Action Populaire

SOCIAL SERIES

Joseph DASSONVILLE

AN ACHIEVEMENT

The “Workers’ Family”

of Val-des-Bois

An ideal of popular education

An effort of realisation

A cluster of institutions

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Victor LECOFFRE

90, rue Bonaparte, 90.

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THIS EDITION

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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 illustrations have 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

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Foreword

On returning from a visit to Val-des-Bois, a very prominent sociologist not long ago summed up his observations in a perfectly objective article. The author’s name alone would no doubt, on any other occasion, have seemed to offer every desirable guarantee of accuracy; on this one his authority was disputed. His account of the facts was charged with exaggeration, almost with daydreaming.

Rejected again and again, the article ended up in a second-rate *magazine*.

L’Action Populaire has no such prejudices against facts. It is willing to record *achievements*, even if they are almost miraculous. Being optimistic, it knows that a persevering human will can work wonders, and even miracles, when God adds the collaboration of his grace.

Miracle or not, Val-des-Bois is a *fact* that cannot be ignored. It is this fact that the following pages will try to describe, avoiding as far as possible two pitfalls: the sterile discussions that divide, and the idle theories that delay the moment for action.

Perhaps they will win a few imitators for the man of faith and will who has devoted his long life to the material well-being and the education of his dearly loved brothers, the workers.

God grant it!

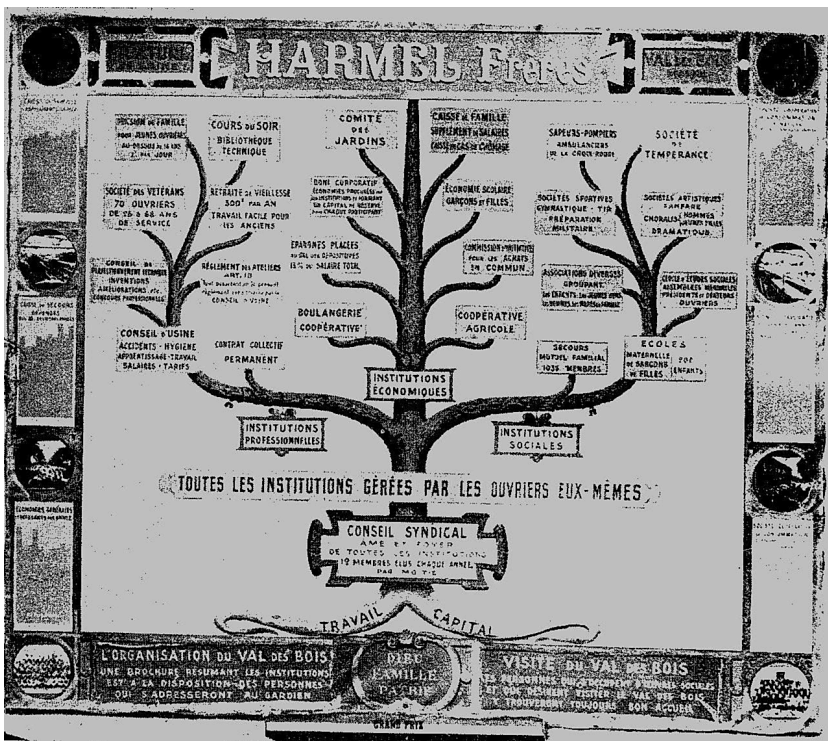
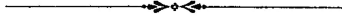


Tableau des Institutions ouvrières du VAL DES BOIS (Exposition de Roubaix 1911.)

The Workers’ Family of Val-des-Bois



Once past the bridge over the river and the level crossing of the Suipe railway, national road no. 51 climbs, in the direction of Rethel, towards cultivated slopes, cut into everywhere by patches of heathland and crowned with fir plantations.

It is from up there, a little above the iron cross that stands on the right of the road, that one should cast a glance back over this Champagne landscape.

On the horizon, the Montagne de Reims outlines its low silhouette, at whose foot the long plains come to rest in their flight: this is Champagne. The vineyards lie over there; here is farming country as far as the eye can see. To the right, to the west, and towards the north, behind us, dark fir plantations frame the sun-scorched expanses.

The characteristic feature of the landscape, for us at least, lies elsewhere. It is in that continuous green sash, dense and broad, that stretches, barely undulating, across the countryside. At each of its ends, very far towards the east and very far towards the setting sun, it bends round and disappears behind a rise in the ground. The river is there: it is the Suipe, gliding towards the Aisne between wooded banks, its emerald waters long filtered through chalk hills. The purity of these waters is not such, however, that one cannot guess at certain less pure contributions, and their peaceful course has more than once already been broken on the blades of the turbines.

Indeed the whole valley is given over to industry, and, kilometre after kilometre, factory chimneys emerge from the greenery.

From time immemorial Reims has been a centre of the wool industry and, very early on as well, the villages of the Suippe were associated with this industrial prosperity. This parched countryside, where a hard, strong grass grew, lent itself wonderfully, in recent centuries, to the acclimatisation and improvement of a large flock of merino sheep. The river, for its part, gave the force of its current to the small workshops along its banks, such as the Moulin-du-Bas, a “fulling mill” at Warméreville, which was already turning before 1630 on the site of the modern Val-des-Bois.

Colbert *protected* this industry, which reminded him of his father’s shop, the *Long-Vêtu*; a protection that led to more than one conflict, in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, between the manufacturers of Reims and those of the valley. The rural workshops prospered none the less¹, and the valley was ready, on the day when machinery transformed industry, to adopt the new inventions and make use of them for a new expansion.

From Bazancourt to Bétheniville, mills and villages are strung out along the river, which established and long maintained an economic union among them. The more modern link has been provided, since 1872, by a railway line. Created and at first operated by private initiative, the Suippe line was bought back, in full activity, by the Compagnie de l’Est, on which strategic necessities later imposed considerable improvements.

Such as it is, this line, indispensable to large-scale industry, has rendered the greatest services to agriculture. It is the line that brings to the spot the fertilisers needed by these arid plains of Champagne, while also ensuring easy communications and numerous outlets.

All the villages of the valley indeed have this double character: industrial and agricultural. Such is Warméreville, where the Val-des-Bois mill stands.

1. In 1784 there were, in the Suippe valley, 517 manufacturers owning 946 looms. Annual production was 12,764 pieces, worth 1,429,340 livres.

The very ancient presence of human settlements on the banks of the Suippe is attested by the prehistoric finds of the Motelle, or *tumulus*, of Warméreville; for the historical period, we are informed about the growth of this commune. In 1234 Warméreville counted 100 heads of family, or about 350 inhabitants; 138 households and 483 inhabitants in 1629; 250 *communicants* and 328 inhabitants in 1714; 665 inhabitants in 1789; 1,134 in 1836; 2,044 in 1885; 2,146 in 1912.

Industrial development above all explains this growth. As often happens, souls profited little from this expansion, and the prosperity that multiplied the temptations of materialism proved fatal to this working population, which had grown too quickly.

And it was in the face of this growing population, clustered round a mill and ready, as elsewhere, to follow any ringleaders who might dare to enlist it, that one day an employer took it upon himself to play the part of educator. He took souls in hand, in order to calm them, to bring them peace and to secure for them all the blessings that peace and Truth procure.

We shall see whether he succeeded. But it cannot be stressed too much, if this object lesson is to have its full force of proof: Val-des-Bois is anything but an industrial oasis deep in a desert; it is a living mill within a large and long-established community, and this circumstance condemns in advance all the excuses behind which a determination not to imitate might wish to take refuge.

Chapter I

A dynasty of employers.

Social authorities, everywhere and always, have been strengthened by residence; they do not long withstand the dissolving action of absenteeism. The *settlement*, which is a more penetrating form of residence, represents the maximum of this power.

Properly considered, Val-des-Bois is nothing other than a complete *settlement*: a fitting interpenetration of the employers’ element and the workers’ element; full use, for the good of the proletariat, of the confidence and ascendancy won by the industrialists in a practice that multiplies daily contacts.

For a hundred and fifteen years the honourable Harmel family, a true dynasty of employers, has seen five generations take part, successively or simultaneously, in the management of the mills of the Ardennes and, since 1840, of Val-des-Bois. In the gallery of Jacques Harmel’s descendants, the figure of his grandson, the *Good Father* Léon Harmel, stands out in singular relief; in the course of his long career, which was, and still is, a magnificent effort of action and apostolate, it was he who defined the methods of popular education, and who created the institutions in which the theory took flesh.

A. — The Great Idea.

Mgr Freppel wrote to Mr Léon Harmel in 1879: “We must start from this principle, that Christianity came to restore and regenerate all things, man in society as well as man as an individual: *Instaurare omnia in Christo...*”

To restore all things in Christ: the individual man, the social man, the man as worker, society, the mill. Such was the great idea of this conquering apostolate of an employer.

The employer’s conscience.

A Christian idea, wholly so, inspired by the purest Franciscan spirit. It was within the *fraternities* of the Third Order that the Good Father Léon Harmel became fully aware of his vocation and his responsibilities. “The employer,” he writes, “is above all responsible to God...; he may then be responsible, on various grounds, to the Church and to society².”

Responsibilities, duties: this conception of the employer’s office is certainly austere; who would dare to say that it is not true? Professional duties, social duties: the detail would be endless. This is not the place to draw up the list again; the encyclicals have insisted on it, and the employer’s catechism, three years before the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, had made a meticulous inventory of it.

The whole characteristic effort of Val-des-Bois seems to have developed under the command of a principle, or better, of a more general duty: respect for the human person, out of regard for its origin and its destiny.

The employer has duties towards *human labour*; if he is a Christian, and to the extent that he is a believer, he accepts these responsibilities. The employers of Val-des-Bois tried to follow these consequences through to the end. It would have been too little, to their mind, to reduce the humble collaborators in their industrial effort to a mechanical function and a purely material causality. They agreed to fulfil the mission of educator with which they felt themselves invested.

2. *Catéchisme du Patron*, drawn up with the help of a large number of theologians, published by Léon Harmel, 1889.

Popular education.

Other generous souls have understood this *duty* and brought great self-denial to a task that is often arduous. The Christian employers of the North have worked wonders; the Association of Circles, closely related to Val-des-Bois, represents an admirable sum of devoted efforts. The methods differ, but the aim is the same, and so is the generosity.

What characterises the method of Val-des-Bois is the concern to help and stimulate the rise of the working class, to call human causality into play, to make it act, so that it may grow and improve.

In certain respects the labour question joins the school question; it is a question of human culture. But with age the educational disciplines have changed; the workshop replaces the school, arithmetic gives way to the trade. It is a man who is formed by responsibilities; it was a child who practised reasoning through sums.

B. — The meeting ground: the trade.

Educational value.

Between the employer as educator and the worker, the meeting, if it can take place, will happen on the common ground of the trade, where everything invites them to draw closer, and first of all their interest. Now nothing is more favourable to the aim pursued.

Of itself, the exercise of a trade is morally improving: improving like all work and all effort, no doubt, but, better than that, improving and a principle of uplift because it awakens the conscience and bestows responsibilities.

Some years ago, Dr J. Bertillon was asked by Messrs Harmel to help them recruit workers with large families; wishing to have serious workers with a sense of their responsibility, the employers expected to find these qualities in fathers of families. The calculation was

sound, and the work of popular education was to be made all the easier by it.

The professional employer.

On the professional ground where they meet, workers and employers occupy different positions, but these are not necessarily, whatever people may say, positions of combat.

The conditions of patronage have changed profoundly over a century. From the small family workshop, where a few workers worked alongside the employer, to the vast modern mills, the difference is great. From the cordial intimacy of the employers of old to the anonymity of modern industrialism, the evolution is disconcerting. Will anyone say, however, that these transformations, accidental after all, have reached the sources of duty by relieving the heads of large-scale industry of their moral obligations?

The evolution now continuing is certainly not tending to simplify the problem. The worldwide extension of markets, the universal competition that eliminates small units and drives towards the concentration of economic forces, tend to make commercial power prevail over productive power. Willingly or by force, industry must, in order to live, submit to the grip of the *integration* of firms.

In any state of affairs the moral obligations remain; they have even become more serious and more pressing.

Now, to be in a position to fulfil them, since every other foundation of authority has become suspect to the working masses, it is on the basis of indisputable professional worth that the employer must rest the authority he needs as an educator.

The professional worker.

Facing the professional employer, the professional worker is not, and cannot be, the enemy. Their cause and their interests are identical, and everything done to maintain contacts on the ground of the trade will serve the cause of peace. What is there in the world less *professional* than the revolutionary unions?

What is healthier than the pride of a good worker who has overcome a technical difficulty, who has adjusted a delicate mechanism, achieved an improvement or an increase in production? All the human faculties strained for this effort are exercised and developed: “human causality” has full play: such work on oneself is educational.

It is for the employer to stimulate this effort: his interest is at stake. But he can also, through the trade and while remaining within the sphere of professional matters, raise his ideal as an educator by several degrees; his disciples (I mean his workers) are ready to follow him.

The “Workers’ Family”.

That is the experiment that was attempted at Val-des-Bois.

Certainly, the aim in view was not commercial profit; it was not even the fulfilment of a humanitarian dream of uplifting the humble that was being pursued. By exalting the worker’s personality, the intention was to serve the supernatural interests of his soul, the noblest and best element of that personality.

Under the influence of this fixed resolve, henceforth understood as a duty, a new conception of social relations was being worked out: a gradual and progressive working out, both slow and sure, like the decisive transformations that change worlds.

This society of the employer and the workers, “brought together by the necessity of the business, united by the practice of the reciprocal duties of justice and charity”, has a name: it is the *workers’*

family. As owner and responsible manager, the employer is the head of this family, and the worker who signs the contract of employment thereby recognises this superiority and submits to it³.

A provisional submission, readily rebellious, in most modern mills, where there is no workers’ family properly so called; a trusting, affectionate submission at the Val, where the head is at the same time the *Good Father*.

The Good Father.

His workers had spontaneously given this name to Mr Harmel-Tranchart, and he himself wrote for his sons in his will: “Love your dear workers, they were my children. You will take up my fatherhood, you will continue to bear them towards God and to do them good.”

The inheritance of these responsibilities was valiantly accepted by Mr Léon Harmel, and the whole workers’ family acknowledged him with this title of *Good Father*, for which he was able to win universal renown and recognition.

At a time when, everywhere, for the last 60 years, the workers have been drawing further and further away from the employers, is it not admirable, this hold of a dynasty of employers over a working population which, all things considered, was neither better in itself nor worse than many others, which was also affected by religious indifference, and which mixed in frequent contacts with neighbouring communities stirred by the spirit of revolt?

This one word, the *Good Father*, explains the marvel.

With a somewhat different intonation, no doubt, but with a similar feeling of dependence, people there say “Good Father”, as they used to say “Sire”. It is the recognition of an authority loved and accepted by a whole population that knows it to be protective and beneficent.

3. Cf. *Catéchisme du Patron*. Preliminaries, § III.

And the Good Father himself would take care never to betray this trust and this family sovereignty.

In September 1891, during the pilgrimage of the *twenty thousand* to Rome, the rumour spread that the Good Father was going to be made a Roman count by Leo XIII. At once his son, Mr Félix Harmel, encouraged by his father’s approval, begged the Holy Father to abandon the plan, fearing this entry into the aristocracy “which would distance those to whom the Good Father had devoted his life”.

This thought of disinterestedness was understood by the Sovereign Pontiff; the Good Father, whom Leo XIII honoured with his intimacy, was able to remain faithful to his family magistracy and to the high educational mission he had taken on.

Chapter II

A social effort.

Everyone knows that Val-des-Bois is today a large wool-spinning mill. Let us set down a few dates in its history:

In 1797, foundation of the firm of Harmel: hand spinning of wool;
1817, first mechanised mill; 1822, a second, larger mill at Boulzicourt (Ardennes).

1840, mill at Val-des-Bois (Marne).

It was this mill that a violent fire almost completely destroyed in 1874. The four storeys were not rebuilt, but from then on the workshops spread out on the ground floor, covering with spacious, light workrooms, where the air circulates freely, an area of more than two and a half hectares.

Such is the mill where a magnificent effort of popular education is about to be attempted.

The ideal is a fine one: to set the morally improving and socially beneficent mill against the morally harmful mill, destructive of the family, of faith and of morals. The Good Father sums up the social and moral programme of Val-des-Bois thus: “To tighten the bonds of the home, to make the fulfilment of duties easier through a prudent, attentive organisation, careful to preserve the freedom to do good and to encourage the mutual apostolate that is so natural to working people”.

The work calls for the collaboration of the whole *workers’ family*.

A. — The educational work.

The employer as educator.

First of all, the employer is concerned. He knows it and deliberately accepts the obligations of his fatherly ministry. He himself defines them: "The intellectual, professional and economic rise of the workers through their own efforts: that is my ideal."

The Good Father readily insists on the "democratic" character of the institutions characteristic of the Val. The word matters little; indeed it may be interpreted in a very broad sense which, as has been said, "may have nothing political about it, but rather reveals an educational concern."

It is indeed a new social pedagogy that is being inaugurated at Val-des-Bois. The educator, the employer, has there made his own the ideas of Le Play: the upper class is the whole body of those who devote themselves. That is the function of every educator, and no other effective means of *raising* souls has yet been invented. It takes devotedness, and a great deal of it, to play this part of leader, in which an educational mission is summed up.

It will be needed first to arouse the effort and to stimulate it, and in certain regions (Champagne seems to be one of them) the inertia will be heavy to set in motion. It will be needed to defend the beginnings against fatigue and weariness. It will be needed to sustain the impetus given, to make it progress, that is to say, to make it last, for the two are one and the same when it is a matter of movement.

This persevering devotedness explains the work accomplished at Val-des-Bois. If anyone protests that this is merely shifting the mystery and that this devotedness is itself something of a wonder, we shall agree. But let us hasten to say that a deep awareness of the employer's responsibilities and an absolute confidence in the funda-

mental virtues of the working class will allow anyone at all to multiply these wonders.

Need we add that this effort gives the employer’s office its noblest meaning? There is something here better than a merely equitable employer’s magistracy, better than a charitable benevolence that strives to be a providence; there is that sublime thing, an employer who has become the soul, the living soul of his workers’ family, and who shapes it in his own image.

Through ideas.

This is the fundamental idea of the institutions of the Val: “To develop in the workers the sense of responsibility, to call forth their free initiatives, to accustom them to look after their own interests themselves.” This presupposes a serious intellectual culture, adapted to the particular needs of a working population.

The Good Father Léon Harmel said one day, at Blois: “A work without an idea is the corpse of a work.” The working class needs ideas for the same reason that the so-called liberal classes need a literary culture: because they *humanise*. Ideas are also needed to answer the socialist propaganda that prides itself on being intellectual and scientific.

The *study circles*, provided they are resolutely denominational and clearly professional, will supply this instruction. This is an institution particularly dear to the Good Father, but whose high significance those concerned do not seem to have understood, for their zeal often needs stimulating. As early as 1893, however, a first Workers’ Congress, followed by many others, bore witness at Reims to the vitality of the Val-des-Bois study circle, which promoted these meetings. Seventy-four Catholic workers’ groups were represented at the Congress of 1894; most of them were affiliated to the Association of Circles, which had begun its penetration of industrial circles with the Val.

Alongside the study circles, and able if need be to stand in for them to a certain extent, the various councils of which we shall have to speak are an excellent school in which elites are formed.

Finally, among the means of intellectual formation much used at Val-des-Bois, mention must be made of frequent contacts with awakeners of ideas who come from outside and, in return, the sending of delegates from the Val to study meetings from which they have much to gain. In both kinds, let us cite participation in the union days of the A. P. of Reims in 1911 and 1912, and those fourteen *social weeks* held at Val-des-Bois (1888-1901), where the daily contact of the seminarians attending the weeks with the workers, their hosts, left a deep impression on both sides.

— Not everyone is open to this influence of ideas; it does not matter. To the elite, the illumination of ideas; to the mass, the radiance of the elite; to the worker, the apostolate of the worker, “like acting upon like”.

B. — The stages.

Carrying out such an undertaking called for faith and will; it required time: God granted it. The rise was slow; it had to be. In such matters above all, it is not good to skip stages, and half a century was not too much to restore a whole working population to the fullness of its dignity.

The St Joseph Association.

When the Good Father Jacques-Joseph Harmel retired from business in 1862, many institutions already existed, several of which were innovations for the time. From then on, however, the foundations were to multiply and, still more, to be organised for a better religious and social yield.

Mr Léon Harmel said at Lyon: “Without association we shall do nothing...” Associations were needed to protect individuals against

evil influences, and to create a setting favourable to the development of the best seeds. They exist today, “grouping by free membership”, for the greater benefit of the mutual apostolate, people of the same age and the same category, from the children’s confraternities to the veterans.

The year 1861 had seen two religious preach a month-long mission, and three Sisters of St Vincent de Paul settle at Val-des-Bois.

After the mission two workers agreed to be apostles; in two years of individual work they had won a few members.

The first elements of the men’s group were there. It was not until 28 April 1867, however, that the association was set up in the form of a circle, under the patronage of St Joseph. In 1873, following the pilgrimage of the *Association of Circles* to Liesse, where Mr Harmel and Count Albert de Mun met, Val-des-Bois adopted the rules of the Paris Association.

That was the first stage. Until then the action had been exclusively *religious*.

In this form the association achieved what was expected of it; it was preparing a broader action.

The mixed union.

We are in 1875, and we see a *religious* and *economic* association founded at the Val, grouping the families of the employers and of the workers. It is the *Christian Corporation of Val-des-Bois*.

There remained the *professional* side of the institutions to be secured: the *Factory Council* provided for it in 1883.

It was the Christian Corporation that Count A. de Mun had seen at work. He himself has told, in *Ma vocation sociale*, how important this experience was for the development of his own ideas: “From then on, my ideas became clearer year by year, and it was the fruit of this long labour that I brought in 1883 to the tribune of the Chamber, in my first speech on professional unions.”

The history of the law of 1884 is well known. Val-des-Bois, which had inspired the arguments of the great Catholic *leader*, was among the first to benefit from the new law.

On 2 August 1885, the existing institutions of the Val received their legal sanction through the approval of the statutes of the *mixed union of Val-des-Bois*.

The workers’ union.

It was in keeping with the logic of the method adopted by the Good Father not to stop there, and it could be foreseen that one day a still greater share of responsibility would be handed over to the workers.

Meanwhile the work of education went on. It was at last judged complete, and, at Christmas 1903, the employers having withdrawn of their own accord, the union became exclusively a workers’ union.

An interesting feature of the statutes is this: the very modest workers’ subscription (0.25 fr. a month) is paid not by the individual but by the family, whatever the number of its members belonging to the union. Meetings are frequent: every week for the officers of the Union Chamber. Finally, for we wish to be brief, the union’s resources come from the workers’ subscriptions, from employers’ grants (amounting to about 1,900 fr. a year⁴) and from the profits of the union refreshment bar.

Employers’ grants are part of the practice of Val-des-Bois; we shall meet further proofs of this. The premises themselves, the *Union House*, are placed free of charge at the union’s disposal by the management of the mill.

4. Two foundations must be added: one by Mr Jacques Harmel, an annual income of 1,200 fr. to be applied to old-age pensions (1883); the other by Mr Léon Harmel, an annual income of 1,500 fr. to help the large families among the union members (1911).

C. — The Christian Corporation.

Thanks to a long effort of eleven years, from 1861 to 1872, the whole family had at last been reached by appropriate associations. The first instrument of uplift, like its final aim, was to be religious.

Economic and professional institutions had multiplied the points of contact between the employers' group and the workers' group. Finally, the last phase of this evolution had replaced patronage with *association* based on mutual trust.

Confraternities and institutions, workers' organisations and employers' group: a harmonious whole that constitutes the *Christian Corporation of Val-des-Bois*. The more modern name of union has changed nothing in substance, even though the strictly religious organisations have had to disappear from the provisions of the statutes.

In 1879, Mr Léon Harmel wrote in the *Manuel d'une corporation chrétienne*: "The association will be powerful in proportion as its foundations are more solid and its roots go deeper into the human heart. Now faith, the family and the trade are the three strongest bonds for bringing men together, and our circles will find in these three forces a fruitfulness that they would seek in vain from artificial means and amusements."

The trade seems at first sight to prevail over the family and religion; we shall soon see that this is only an appearance.

The Customary of Val-des-Bois: the councils.

One must look through the little monthly bulletin, the *Echos du Val-des-Bois*, to realise the intense life that flows through the members of this vast body. Each issue gives the schedule of the councils for the following month⁵. Not a day goes by without at least one council meeting; some indeed, like the Factory Council, meet practically every week.

If one has not lost sight of the educational aim of the institutions of the Val, one will understand the importance attached to these councils, in which those concerned themselves study the often vital questions placed on the agenda.

The sense of duty develops with the sense of responsibility; trust answers trust; dignity is heightened, not in order to oppose authority, but to collaborate more closely with it. Initiated into the running of the mill, the councillors become cooperators; their devotedness grows accordingly, and this elite, which must raise the mass like a good leaven, is confirmed in its role and perfects itself in it day by day.

The Good Father Léon Harmel wrote to the members of the councils on 17 February 1898, on the occasion of his 70th birthday: "You also have a general duty of *apostolate*; for, even in economic and recreational meetings, a man brings his soul as well as his body, his heart as well as his mind. That is why, without darkening games

5. The councils in operation are the following:

MEN'S COUNCILS. — a) *Professional*: 1. Union Council. — 2. Factory Council. — 3. Veterans. — 4. Improvement Council. — 5. Technical Committee.

b) *Economic*: 6. Mutual Aid Council. — 7. Cooperative. — 8. Initiative Committee. — 9. Consumer Society. — 10. Gardens Committee.

c) *Social*: 11. Youth. — 12. Young Workers. — 13. Little Circle. — 14. Schoolboys. — 15. Brass Band. — 16. Gymnastics. — 17. Rifle Club. — 18. Fire Brigade. — 19. Conference of St Vincent de Paul. — 20. Temperance. — 21. Large Families.

WOMEN'S COUNCILS. — 1. Workshop Council. (Women workers' factory council.) — 2. Mothers' Council. — 3. Girls' Council. — 4. — Singers' Council. — 5. Schoolgirls' Council. — 6. Ladies' Conference.

with austere thoughts, without ceasing to speak of material interests in an economic meeting, one must know how to perfume everything with the supernatural.”

Such is the watchword. It is clear that we are indeed dealing here with *Christian* corporations.

The Factory Council.

Addressing the Veterans of Val-des-Bois on the same date, the Good Father paid them this tribute: “Thanks to your good spirit and your confidence in your heads, we have been able to establish the factory councils, which pool the efforts of employers and workers for industrial prosperity, while at the same time giving you a *real share in the government and the discipline* of the establishment.”

One has only to read in the *Echos* the reports presented to the general assemblies by the various councils to realise how this “good spirit” has persisted, and to see that this collaboration brings the managers all the assistance that Mr Léon Harmel expected of it in 1879.

Among all the others, the Factory Council holds an important place⁶.

It is through it, and not through the union officers, that the unionised staff of the mill take part in its government. The members of the Council are “ordinary workers representing the different trades of the mill...; they are elected by the union members”.

In parallel, “the women workers appoint from among themselves delegates representing the various trades... who form the women workers’ factory council.

6. Article 3 of the statutes of the *workers’ union* sets out the relations of the union, in practice of the union officers, with the other councils. “The sole object of the union is the study and defence of the interests of the workers by those concerned. To this end *it organises its own institutions*: Factory Council... It gives active support to the general institutions of the mill: schools...”

“Each Council meets every fortnight with an employer, but without any foreman or clerk being present.” (Internal Regulations, art. 5.)

The reason for this last provision is understood without any need to insist on it: it ensures the independence of the councillors. The moral ascendancy of the foremen has lost nothing by it.

Let us list, leaving it to return to them later, the council’s proper functions: accidents, hygiene, apprenticeship, work, wages, complaints.

A word will suffice here concerning accidents.

It falls within the functions of the Factory Council to ensure the application of the preventive measures laid down by the regulations, and, after an accident (a very rare event at the Val as a result of this close supervision), to appoint a *guardian-adviser* who will help the injured man obtain proper compensation. This guardian thus takes the place of the employer, whom the law forbids to take in hand the interests of the victim of an accident.

Let us also note this last article: “Every union member has the right to make complaints, of whatever kind, to a member of the Factory Councils; the latter is bound to bring them to the next meeting.” (Rules, art. 5.)

Social peace.

This provision of the rules answers a concern that is more and more topical in the world of labour, split, against the nature of things, into two enemy camps: *social peace*.

Among the various efforts that have been attempted in this direction (councils of arbitration, joint committees, arbitration tribunals, etc.), the factory council holds a place apart. As has been very rightly observed, its working presupposes certain conditions of environment and, on the part of the employer who uses it, a quite particular skill and tact. Let us observe in our turn that while Mr Léon Harmel

proved himself a master in the leading of men, the environment favourable to the good working of the Factory Council was formed slowly, that is, to put it plainly, from 1861, the date of the mission at the Val, to 1883, the founding of the council.

As can be seen, nothing was less improvised than this creation; neither wonder nor spontaneous generation, but long perseverance and the progressive development of the seed that had been sown.

Wishing to characterise the spirit of the Factory Council, the Good Father one day drew up this classification of methods: the parliamentary method and the family method. “The one,” he said, “acts through laws. It is inspired by the mistrust that drives adversaries. It assumes everywhere opposing interests that must be defended with equal means... — The other method, which we call the family method, is based on custom. No doubt perseverance is needed to restore it where it no longer exists... The family method presupposes interests that are distinct but bound up with one another. It seeks first to establish mutual trust, the source of all agreement...” And he concludes with a fresh affirmation of his faith in the *workers’ family*.

The workers’ family, once constituted, is the proper form and the guarantee of the social peace achieved at Val-des-Bois.

Let us add, for the realists who demand facts, that strikes and the industrial tribunals are utterly unknown at the Val, and, for the faint-hearted who are always troubled by the uncertainties of the future, that article 18 of the General Rules rules out any possibility of conflict. It reads as follows: “Any disagreement over the present rules shall be settled by the Factory Council.” And this charter bears the signature and assent of the three main constituted bodies: the Factory Council, the Union Chamber, and the Council of the Mutual Aid Society.

Chapter III

Institutions and customs.

In 1911, at Roubaix, the firm of Harmel frères exhibited a most curious family tree in which the various professional, economic and social institutions of Val-des-Bois are grouped symbolically. The employers of Roubaix who sat on the jury made it a point of honour to award a Grand Prix to this magnificent whole: a tribute paid to the method even more than to the results.

— The results are a whole mill raised to a moral life, a whole working population socially elevated and ennobled; they are these twenty-eight councils and living organisations, a wonderful whole no doubt, but one whose detail would be endless, and which we cannot attempt to describe in a few pages.

— The method is the whole of that social pedagogy whose origin and application we have tried to relate. There is no need to dwell on it.

Nevertheless, a few guiding principles of this pedagogy will gain from being brought to light, and a few well-chosen applications in detail will help to give a more accurate idea of the scope and excellence of the method.

A. — The employer’s action: Guiding principles.

Freedom and human dignity.

There is no need to return to the apostolic zeal that is the burning hearth of all the employers’ initiatives at Val-des-Bois.

We also know how personal effort, the only kind that is truly effective and educational, is required of the worker, and how it is stimulated. This principle was recalled in a cartouche that occupies the

centre of the Roubaix chart: All the institutions are run by the workers themselves. One might have added that they are left the greatest freedom to take part or not in the benefits of the various associations of the Val.

Mr Léon Harmel wrote in 1879: “Our associations are not assemblies of inferiors; they are gatherings of free men in which every rung of the social ladder meets.” (Manuel, p. 305).

At that time the *Christian Corporation* had already been born.

Another, more recent formula, very dear to the Good Father, is more explicit: the good of the worker, by the worker and with him, never without him and, still less, never in spite of him. Here one recognises the educational method we have set out: rising through personal effort, stimulated, subsidised if need be, but always free and spontaneous. New institutions are not imposed on the staff by the will of the employers, nor is enrolment in the existing groups imposed on individuals. And, let it be noted, the number of those who stay out is large enough that no one can allege some sort of moral constraint.

Freedom is complete, except with regard to the *Mutual Aid Society*, because of its character, and to workers’ pensions, because of the law; it is complete also with regard to the schools and to religious practice.

A veteran who has been employed at the Val for more than twenty-five years, to give just one example, has never attended religious services. A small minority stays outside all practice, and the state schools count among their pupils more than one member of the “workers’ family”, children of workers at the mill.

These facts had to be mentioned to forestall a common objection, even at the risk of provoking, on the other side, the pharisaical protests of prejudice and bad faith⁷.

7. The many associations we have mentioned, for example, form an admirable undertaking, and a very effective one, of mutual *apostolate*.

The family.

The concern to strengthen, on the foundation of mutual trust, the edifice of the *Workers' Family* as we have described it does not lose sight of the primitive group, the natural family; to tighten its bonds, to consolidate it, to help it, is, together with the concern for religious progress, the dominant feature of the customs and institutions of the Val.

Let us list them: easy access to housing in large, spacious workers' houses, let at the ordinary rent of smaller houses; a so-called "family" wage, or grants to large families; the interest shown by the employer's family, which reserves to itself the privilege of providing a godfather and godmother for the tenth child when one is born into a family: so much for the *large* family. Collective pay handed to the father or the mother, separation of the sexes and respect for women, mutual assistance of the *veterans*, for whom a few easy jobs suited to their strength are reserved, if they wish: so much for the family *united in respect and subordination*.

Let us note further that the family acts as a unit for the payment of the union subscription, and that all its members share in the benefits of the Mutual Aid Society.

B. — Professional institutions.

Discipline in the mill.

The work of popular education, as it is understood at the Val, involves a certain participation of the workers in the management of the mill. This participation has nothing anarchic about it. Besides being willed and called forth by the employers, it stops respectfully before the rights of private property; everything commercial, for example, lies outside its competence.

Another impression strikes the visitor to Val-des-Bois: the impression of the immense moral authority, the unique ascendancy, of that venerated patriarch, the Good Father. It was this beloved and fatherly authority alone that he sought; one of the means that established it most effectively is perhaps the ease of *direct appeal* to the employer.

Every penalty imposed by a foreman is subject to the employer’s approval, but it is not to excessive indulgence that the rarity of fines must be attributed⁸. The good spirit reduces the use of disciplinary measures to a minimum, and the foremen themselves benefit from this apparent restriction of their right, which safeguards their moral authority by keeping them from hateful favouritism.

It is article 9 of the General Rules that establishes the principle of direct appeal to the employer. It also reserves to him the hiring and dismissal of workers; it should be noted, moreover, that periods of notice are imposed on the worker who terminates the contract, so as to prevent the consequences of a step taken *ab irato*.

Professional work.

The staff are naturally recruited from the workers’ families; sons join their fathers at the mill. It must be added that the customs of the Val recognise a genuine *right to work* for every child whose parents, father or mother, are employed at the mill. And this is yet another way of consolidating the family.

At Val-des-Bois *apprenticeship* of these new recruits is regarded as carrying a heavy responsibility for the employer. As the apprentice is, so will the worker be: a whole professional life is being prepared in the school of the trade. And so the apprentice is followed very closely.

First of all, his preferences and tastes, if he has any, are consulted so as to favour them; then quarterly bonuses of five and ten francs

8. In ten years (1896-1905), the total of the fines paid to the Mutual Aid Society came to 164.70 fr. The annual average has been about 12 fr. since then.

come to encourage him, and competitions to spur him on. These half-yearly competitions are one of the interesting institutions of the Val; the Factory Council plays a part in them. Twice a day, for a full month, the councillors, the foremen and the head worker, the employers’ delegate, give the competitors their marks. Cash rewards and entry on the promotion list give the competitions real weight. Only after proving his *general training* can an apprentice be admitted to the specialised work on the so-called fancy articles.

Esteem for the trade can only grow in the souls of the young workers when they see one of their future employers submit to apprenticeship and win that title only “by right of conquest”.

The employers’ apprenticeship, subject to the workers’ scrutiny and crowned by the solemn presentation of diplomas, includes a series of tests lasting from a fortnight to a month for obtaining the worker’s and the foreman’s certificates.

The example of the employers⁹ also spurs the search for *improvements*; a workers’ council exists for no other purpose, and the management of the mill, which bears the cost of the experiments, rewards discoveries with bonuses whose annual total reaches 800 or 900 fr.

This concern for improvements and betterment showed itself in practice on the occasion of the successive reductions in working hours. Diligence and activity making up for the length of time, production was kept at the same level, and it is again in this form that the problem of applying the English week, now under study, has come before the councils: by what practical means can production be ensured? It is a problem of improving the work.

9. Several patents for inventions have been taken out by Messrs Harmel.

C. — Economic and social institutions.

Wages and saving.

Under such conditions, one understands that maintaining wages in full, despite the reductions in the working day, presented no difficulty.

Concern for the family in the matter of wages gave rise to one of the Good Father's most characteristic initiatives: the *Family Fund*. Collective pay already serves the family, as we have seen; let us add that this pay is made on Thursday, market day, and not on Saturday... the eve of Sunday! There is no need to say more.

The *Family Fund* answers another concern: to ensure the subsistence of the worker's whole family. This foundation dates from 1891; that date alone is enough to underline the influence of the Encyclical and of the words of Leo XIII to the participants in the pilgrimage of the twenty thousand.

In *Ouvriers européens*, Le Play considers two parts in the wage: "The one, the wage properly so called, proportionate to the worker's efforts; the other, the grants, proportionate to the needs of his family." The Family Fund provides these grants, which always keep their character of acts of generosity by the employer.

It is indeed the employers, and they alone, who supply this fund, but its administration is left entirely to the Factory Council.

Careful inquiries have made it possible to estimate the cost of living at the Val, for families with children, at 0.60 fr. a day per head: that is, 4.20 fr. a week. Now this is a minimum not always reached by families in which no child works, nor by widows; it is then for the Council to examine the insufficient wages and to fix the grants that the treasurer pays to those concerned.

It is not out of place to observe that these grants together amount to a total of 1,800 to 2,000 fr. a year¹⁰. This sum will perhaps not be

thought excessive if one considers that it covers a paid staff of more than five hundred people, and above all if one considers that, in the order of charity, the worker is, in the most urgent sense of the word, the *neighbour* of the Christian employer.

10. By way of example, let us quote the following figures:

4 August 1906:	8 families	25 fr.
11 —	9 —	25.50 fr.
18 —	9 —	23 »
25 —	8 —	22 »
Total for the month.		95.50 fr.
28 June 1913:	6 families	76.15 fr.
12 July —	5 —	71.50 »
26 July —	5 —	97.15 »
Total.		244.80 fr.

From 1 October 1907 to 30 September 1908, the Family Fund cost 1,680.50 fr., divided by quarter as follows:

4th quarter 1907.	249.15 fr.
1st quarter 1908.	394.75 fr.
2nd quarter 1908.	489.60 fr.
3rd quarter 1908.	547.00 fr.

Saving is held in honour at Val-des-Bois. Remunerative wages make it possible, an interest rate of 4% encourages it, and everyone takes part: children (school savings bank) and adults¹¹.

11. In the last decade, 1900-1909, deposits as a whole came to 809,126.55 fr., representing 18.35% of the wages paid, and a total of 503 depositors: namely 158 adults, 210 children (school savings bank), 135 families (corporate bonus). For 30 years (1880-1909): 2,165,125.40 fr.

The amount of the investments made through the Savings Fund represents, for about 180 families, a total of 1,200,000 francs invested outside the mill in land, houses and lottery bonds.

Cooperation and assistance.

The *corporative bonus*, one of the most original of the Good Father's creations, is yet another form of saving.

The *Cooperative Society*, reserved for members of the union, distributes 1/20 of the profits to the shareholders and 19/20 to the co-operators. But only cooperators aged 50 and over have the right to draw this bonus. For all the others, the rebate is paid as of right into the Savings Fund, where it earns 4%. This small capital, repayable at 50 or on leaving the mill, can be neither seized nor transferred. It serves as security for the cash advances that the Workers' Council may grant free of charge to the cooperators.

In extreme cases, the employers' charity takes a new form, under the name of *Interest-free Loan Funds*, but it is for the Union Chamber to authorise recourse to this generosity, which is secured solely on future wages.

Finally, for the families most painfully tried, charity, organised in a workers' Conference of St Vincent de Paul and in a ladies' Charity Conference, offers a last and very effective resource.

In exceptional cases, illness, death, even births, the *Mutual Aid Society* steps in to help its members, that is, every clerk and worker of Val-des-Bois, with material and moral assistance, chiefly by helping them make the fullest possible use of the social and charitable institutions of the Val.

D. — Moral and religious institutions.

Schools and continuation classes.

The Mutual Aid Society has certain higher moral functions: in a certain way, the independent schools of Val-des-Bois come under it. It is responsible for school supplies and, on that account, it is for the Society to inquire through its commissioners into the pupils' regular attendance. School attendance is thus subject to an effective and real check.

The employer's family also shows its solicitude for the school in a thousand ways: visits, inspections, encouragement... For years the Good Father reserved to himself the teaching of history to the boys. Finally, the *Echos* form a regular periodical prize list of the month's tests.

So attentive a solicitude could not abandon its charges once they reached the end of their schooling. For the young men, continuation teaching is divided into two sections: from 13 to 15 years; over fifteen. This teaching, backed up by a technical library, has real professional value; it has, moreover, its equivalent for the girls, who are admitted to the classes of the *Housekeeping School*.

Feasts and rest.

The use of leisure: a serious question for moralists and sociologists. It is a problem whose solution is singularly eased at Val-des-Bois by the many institutions whose working uses an appreciable part of leisure time to the greatest profit of all¹².

Let us list the artistic and sporting societies: brass band, gymnastics, young men's choral society, girls' choral society, dramatic society, rifle club, military training. Let us add the drills of the Fire

12. A section of the Temperance Society, which nineteen young men among others have joined, and a section of the Red Cross are also active at Val-des-Bois.

Brigade. It can be seen that there is no lack of means to multiply wholesome joy.

Christian life.

But the best and finest of the feasts are undoubtedly the religious feasts. They are also the most moving: such as the Good Father’s patronal feast, on the day of the Patronage of St Joseph, or the Rogation feast in the mill.

The whole work of uplift attempted and achieved at the Val has, moreover, no other foundation than religion; the Good Father’s entire work is that of an apostle.

Many years ago he was already setting out the theory of “the Chapel in the mill”: a necessary creation as the hearth of the associations, necessary to the worker, who learns piety there, and to the employer, whom the nearby presence of the Host makes better and invites to frequent the sacraments assiduously, his support and his strength.

Since 1862 Val-des-Bois has had its oratory, enlarged several times and then replaced by a spacious chapel, served since 1870 by a chaplain. It is there that the associations and the Third Order have their centre, there that missions and retreats are given¹³, that the feasts and the adorations are celebrated. There too is the cradle of two professional confraternities, Our Lady of the Factory (Notre-Dame de l’Usine), who preserved part of the workshops during the fire of 1874, and Our Lady of the Fields, associations whose influence has spread far and wide¹⁴.

And if proofs of the Christian vitality of Val-des-Bois are needed, let us cite the 474 Communions of the last feast of the Assumption

13. A certain number of clerks and of men and women workers also make the *closed retreats* of Cormontreuil (Marne) or of Rethel.

14. It is well known that the magnificent movement of workers’ pilgrimages to Rome (1887) is due to the initiative of Mr Léon Harmel, encouraged by Leo XIII.

and the 2,000 Communions a month; let us also cite thirty-one priestly vocations since 1871, and twenty-nine vocations of nuns since the same date.

— Let us mention, to finish, a touching detail of the organic statutes of Val-des-Bois.

At each half-yearly inventory, the distributable profit is divided by the number of general partners, plus one. This share, the share known as “of Our Lady of the Factory”, is allotted to the economic, moral and religious institutions of the Val. In the event of a loss, Our Lady of the Factory would be kept out of the sharing.

Conclusion: An example.

Mgr Pottier, professor of sociology at the Belgian College in Rome, wrote not long ago to the Good Father: “As I have explained in the course I give to my students in Rome, I regard the whole of the economic and professional organisations of Val-des-Bois as the most complete and most successful effort that private initiative brought forth in the course of the 19th century.”

The effort will be reproached for being too “complete”, too fine; people will deny, they have denied, that Val-des-Bois was an example that could be imitated. And yet it has had imitators, more or less faithful, more or less bold, or rather trusting. Mention must be made of the most perfect application of the methods of the Val, the mill of Camaragibe, near Pernambuco, in Brazil, whose workers “respect and honour the name of the Good Father” and declare their corporation “a daughter of that of the Val¹⁵”.

Elsewhere, alas! real revolutionary plots and systematic strikes have brought about the ruin of institutions inspired by Val-des-Bois.

15. Let us mention here the important *Agricultural Union of Champagne*, which has its seat at Val-des-Bois.

The fomenters of disorder proclaimed in their own way, through hatred, the excellence of these methods and the effectiveness of the factory council, among others, as a means of pacification. It displeased them to see common security and mutual trust established within the “workers’ family”. Envy warned them that the employer would benefit from it at the same time as his workers, and that their ambitious calculations, resting on the poverty and discontent of the working classes, would be thwarted; they ruined the work of peace and Christian charity.

We have sketched the present face of Val-des-Bois and described, though incompletely, its powerful *workers’ family* and its radiant *social peace*. Let us call up other memories:

“Our workers are like all those of whom nothing is to be hoped. Many have lived in the industrial towns; in the village there is still a dance on Sundays, and the Catholic associations have never ceased to be the target of petty harassment there. A second mill stands in the same commune, a third two kilometres away; there are sixteen within a radius of three leagues. Among the workers of the district, some are relatives of our workers, others their comrades; many have worked with them. A local railway lets them visit one another easily and puts them half an hour from Reims. Our valley has all the miseries bred by estrangement from God in working-class communities. Sunday dances and frequent worldly festivities everywhere draw the young towards debauchery; no disorder of the great cities is unknown there, made worse by the lack of legal supervision.

“As can be seen, if it is not the town, neither is it the true countryside. We had to overcome obstacles of every kind, within and without; and we had to use many means to restore Christian social life.”

It was Mr Léon Harmel who spoke thus after twenty years of intense labour.

And yet, from *this* came *that*.

God worked no miracle. He blessed ardent efforts and a truly apostolic zeal; he helped the man who “willed to hope”. His arm is not shortened; he will sustain anyone who, with a like faith and as great a patience, will undertake the work of regeneration and strive towards the goal to which he himself led the Good Father.

Appendix

Mr Léon Harmel himself summed up, in a special pamphlet of the highest interest on *Le Conseil d’usine du Val-des-Bois*, the fundamental principles, the practice, and some of the results of his action.

We reproduce here a few extracts from this important document.

Fundamental principle.

All the works of Val-des-Bois have tended towards this higher goal: *The good of the worker by the worker, and with him, never without him, still less ever in spite of him: such is our motto.*

From the moral point of view, autonomous and free associations have been formed, with their own internal and independent government by elected councils meeting periodically.

The action of like upon like seemed to us the most fruitful. There is in the soul of the people a spirit of altruism, generosity and propaganda that leads easily to the apostolate. The worker has therefore become the agent of good around him. He has created a milieu, an atmosphere of solidarity and mutual help, a source of prosperity and joy among our little people. Taine demonstrated, in historical transformations, the power of the lowliest, just as Pasteur observed the marvellous results of the action of the infinitely small in nature. How many times, in his private audiences, did Leo XIII repeat to me, with the expressive gesture of his long arms: “My dear Harmel, it is from below that we must begin, with the little ones, with the workers!”

The happy transformations of Val-des-Bois are due to this action of the humble, often unconscious, but absolutely all-powerful.

From the economic point of view, special societies contribute to well-

being and comfort, while being at the same time, for the members of the councils, an excellent practical school that trains them to manage their own affairs.

We had to apply the same methods in the professional sphere.

That is what we sought to do in 1885 by instituting the *Factory Council*. By bringing together a few men delegated by their peers, we could open our hearts to them, make them understand our thoughts, initiate them into the business and the running of the mill so as to interest them in it, in a word, make them true cooperators. They, for their part, could carry among their fellow workers the good spirit that animated them, and the trust we had managed to inspire in them. Such was the guiding thought of this foundation. (p. 6, 7.)

Practice.

Personal relations began with the works, by means of the councils, which held regular meetings at which employers and workers exchanged their thoughts with a wholly familial openness. This practice of the councils has already formed us ourselves. We have seen with what tact and discretion the employer must act when he wishes to encourage the workers’ initiative, and how easily he could diminish it, without meaning to, if he did not, so to speak, set aside his authority. Experience had likewise shown us with what delicacy the workers’ councils act when they feel in the employer’s heart the heart of a friend. (p. 9.)

.....

The Factory Council has strengthened *discipline*, because it has made relations easier and more cordial. By respecting the dignity of the workers and developing in them the spirit of responsibility, we have brought about a voluntary adherence a thousand times preferable to the result of constraint.

It seemed to several industrialists that we were diminishing the employer’s authority by making our workers true cooperators, by encour-

aging their initiative and calling forth their responsibility. The contrary has happened. The more share in our authority we have given them, the more trust and devotedness they have returned to us. Everything at Val-des-Bois is organised, conducted and presided over by the workers' councillors. In their assemblies and in the union premises, the employers are the guests, and they are surrounded with attentions in which affection has a larger part than respect. (p. 6.)

The *Family Fund*: minimum wage.

Whatever the rate of wages, it is impossible for families to be wholly sheltered from a pressing need, at least a temporary one, without an institution that makes it possible to get past what is, as it were, the dead centre of existence...

It was in this spirit of foresight that our fathers had organised certain collective properties, common lands and the like. Our less wise generation has destroyed these reserves, and poverty, which was unknown in the countryside, has no longer had any counterweight.

The critical passages for the labouring class are, first of all, the time when the children come in numbers, without any of them being old enough to work. Debts are then unavoidable. They weigh heavily on the future and bring with them an almost irremediable discouragement. Since saving now seems impossible, people sometimes let themselves go without any restraint, and disorder and poverty settle in as masters of the home. There is also death, the departure of the head of the family, which leaves the mother struggling with harrowing anxieties.

Finally, there is lack of ability, whether temporary or absolute, which may prevent a worker from rising above a mediocre wage. Now, in 1891, the great voice of Leo XIII resounded throughout the whole world to proclaim the duty of employers regarding wages.

He places the *law of natural justice* above the *free will of the parties*, and declares that the wage must not be insufficient to support the sober and

honest worker. (Encyclical on the condition of the workers, 15 May 1891.)

To ease our conscience, as much as to satisfy our heart, we founded the *Family Fund* as early as 1891. (p. 21, 22.)

Hygiene.

Ventilation by apparatus removing 10,000 cubic metres of air an hour. Apparatus for cooling in summer and heating in winter. Drinking water in the workrooms.

Lavatories within reach of the workrooms, but outside, with water and very well aired.

Very large workrooms, with a height of 4.20 m under the beams, 6 m under the ceiling, on the ground floor. Each worker has 260 to 340 cubic metres of air.

No night work; — electric lighting (neither smell nor smoke).

As a consequence of good hygiene, we will cite the results of the medical board for our young men. Whereas statistics give about 20% of conscripts rejected for France as a whole, at Val-des-Bois we do not exceed 7 to 8%.

We can also speak of longevity.

Out of 295 men at the mill, we have 80 in the company of the Veterans. This company is made up of those who have worked at least 25 years in our mill; some already have as many as 57 years of service.

Four of our pensioners are aged from 80 to 90. Thirteen workers, nine of whom are still working, are from 71 to 80. Twelve, aged from 63 to 69, still bear the daily toil cheerfully.

Our families are large... (13-14)

Joseph Dassonville.

