

A Family Remembrance

LÉON HARMEL

“The Good Father”

OF VAL-DES-BOIS

Returned to God on 25 November 1915



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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 1915 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. The notes marked with an asterisk * have been added for this edition, to shed light on the historical context.

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

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A Family Remembrance



Remembrance

To my beloved children and grandchildren

My most ardent desire is that you should nourish your souls with the liturgical prayers, which will be for your hearts the source of a wonderful unction and of a continual renewal of piety.

The *Année liturgique* of Dom Guéranger is the most perfect work you could use for your devotions, and particularly for attending the offices. I commend to you the following thoughts of the author:

“The prayer of the Church is the most pleasing to the ear and to the heart of God, and therefore the most powerful... The whole of the liturgical cycle, whose plan is traced by Holy Church herself, provides the most sublime drama that could be offered to human admiration. The intervention of God for the salvation and sanctification of men, the reconciliation of justice with mercy, the humiliations, the sufferings and the glories of the Man-God, the coming and the workings of the Holy Spirit in humanity and in the faithful soul, the mission and the action of the Church: everything is expressed there in the most vivid and striking manner, everything comes in its place through the sublime sequence of the anniversaries...”

(Extract from the general preface of Dom Guéranger).

Letter from Mr Léon Harmel (the Good Father) on the Last
Moments of Mrs Léon Harmel (Jeanne-Gabrielle Harmel)

Born at Rethel on 7 April 1833, married at Rethel on 1 September 1852, died at Val-des-Bois on Sunday 16 October 1870.

This letter is addressed to Rev. Fr Gaultier, Lazarist missionary at Reims¹.

Val-des-Bois, 25 October 1870.

My very dear Father,

In the bitter grief into which I am plunged, your friendship has been precious to me. Your sympathy is effective, since it takes the form of prayers for the saint who has left us and for those she has left behind. And these prayers are ardent. You knew her, and you appreciated the qualities that made her, as it were, an accomplished model of the Christian woman. God had given her to me, and with her all sorrows seemed light to me. In my home she was the example of the most sublime virtues, easy to recommend but difficult to put into practice. An obscure and hidden life on earth, which will be made manifest on the great day when God gathers his elect to glorify them.

Frequent small illnesses and her many children had for several years made her life a succession of sacrifices. But she never lost her calm or her resignation. Duty always found her at the post of devotedness, hiding her sufferings beneath a smile, wholly given to others, ever forgetful of herself. Beneath a charming simplicity she

1. Mr Gaultier, attached first to the Residence of Châlons-sur-Marne, then to that of Reims, began to concern himself with the works of Val-des-Bois as early as 1864. A great kindness, mixed with a certain jovial bluntness, opened hearts to him; he converted many of our first members; it was truly he who prepared and began our Men's Association. He also founded the Association of Christian Mothers in February 1868 and never ceased to look after these two works until his death (1875). He came every month to hear the confessions of his flock and to gather them together.

The members of our family and the workers keep a deeply grateful memory of him.

hid treasures of faith, generosity and wisdom. Her faith was so lively that she would rather have died than willingly offend the good Lord. Full of attentions for everyone, she asked for nothing in return, and the satisfaction of others was enough for her happiness. Lastly, her judgement, free of the petty passions that blind so many excellent people, had a sureness that made her the counsellor of all who knew her.

Her short illness will be for you, my very dear Father, a faithful mirror of her whole life. You will find in it the two great duties of the Christian woman, the duties of wife and mother. The Sacred Heart of Jesus, which she loved so ardently, had changed these two duties for her into two passions; she left this earth a willing victim for her husband and for her children.

One of our children had already gone ahead to wait for her in heaven; eight remained to us when my sister died on 6 December last; my wife had not hesitated to adopt the two sons, Ernest and Henri Collard. Now all these children are deprived of a mother's affection! As for me, I dare not think of the extent of my misfortune! We spent eighteen years together and, ever since my marriage, I loved her more each day. I nursed her day and night in this last illness, and it seemed to me that my love was doubled. And now I am alone! Here I am like a plant violently uprooted, lying on the ground and waiting for an autumn wind to carry it away with the dry leaves of the woods.

My wife had left during the night of 23 to 24 August for Belgium, where her little children were². The journey was to last only three or four days; but the stopping of the railway at Charleville made her return impossible. Every day she heard the most sinister news told about the invaded regions; to crown it all, she learnt that I was unwell. Then she was consumed with anxiety and sought every means of coming home, but in vain, until at last the Blessed Virgin, touched by her tears, sent her an opportunity on 8 September, the feast of the Nativity³. What rapture for us both to find ourselves together again!

She was fairly well until Thursday the 29th, the day she began to suffer. On Friday the 30th, after making her weekly Communion at the Sacred Heart, and having made sure that the candle she had burnt every Friday before the venerated statue had been put in place, my wife took to her bed, suffering greatly from dysentery⁴.

2. The German invasion of 1870 spread terror among the people, who were fleeing in every direction. We ourselves had sent our venerable patriarch, the Good Father, to Belgium with our children, the youngest of whom, Alphonse, was not yet a year old. Jules, his wife and their children and the Reimbeau family had likewise left, with the ladies of our family from Reims. At Val-des-Bois there remained Ernest, Albert and myself, with our three eldest: Alexandre, Maurice and Félix. My wife wished to share our lot, and her departure on 23 August had no other purpose than to see how all her people were settled.

3. This opportunity was that of my brother-in-law, Mr Georges Bureau, who lived in Reims and had managed, after a great many applications, to obtain a carriage and a safe-conduct. He took pity on Gabrielle and arranged to bring her back with his own family. They set out on Thursday 8 September, the feast of the Nativity, spent the night at Lalobbe, at Tranchart's, and reached the Val the next day towards noon.

4. This illness was widespread in our part of the country, after the violent emotions of the invasion. But it did not seem alarming, having claimed no victims.

My brother Ernest was ill in Reims⁵; I sent Albert there on the Saturday and went myself in a cart on the Sunday, at ten o'clock in the morning. Mother, Mrs Hubert Harmel, knowing that her daughter was ill, decided to come to the Val; but I had only a cart to offer her⁶, in which one is badly jolted. Everyone tried to dissuade her from risking such a journey. But a mother does not stop at such considerations. Mother did not answer a word to all the objections, and at four o'clock, as I was getting into the cart, she got in with me. On our return we learnt that Gabrielle had suffered a great deal in the afternoon.

It was the third day of her illness, and from the very beginning she had seemed deeply affected by it. During these three days a violent struggle went on within her between nature and her heroic resolve.

On Monday she called me and said to me: "My beloved, I have something to tell you that costs me, but I must tell you. — For three years now I have offered my life every day to the good Lord so that

5. For several months my brother Ernest had been living with us at Val-des-Bois when, on Sunday 4 September, early in the morning, Bertrand came to tell him to return at once to his house in Reims. The municipality had made it known that the town had been abandoned by the French troops and was under threat of the German invasion. Setting off at once in the hunting carriage, with a worker who had not taken the time to dress, Ernest ran into a Prussian column at Lavannes, which took him prisoner. He was taken for a senior French officer in disguise, and they wanted to shoot him. They searched everything, his clothes and the box of the carriage, which was broken open. Having found nothing, they decided to suspend the execution. From nine o'clock in the morning until six o'clock in the evening he was guarded by horsemen who kept their carbines aimed at him, threatening him with death at the slightest resistance offered at Reims. He owed his life only to an officer who took pity on him and who, on reaching the square of the Hôtel-de-Ville, helped him to escape down a side street. The shock of that day was such that Ernest had to take to his bed with a very high fever. Later he saw this officer again, who told him that he owed his life to the rosary that had fallen out of his pocket while he was being searched. This rosary had made the German officers think that they were mistaken.

6. Our carriages had been requisitioned or were gone, and we could use nothing but two-wheeled carts.

he would not take yours⁷. I believe that the good Lord has heard me.” She was weeping: “If I weep, it is not that I have any regret, quite the contrary, but I cannot help being sad when I think of my little children.” From that moment, courageous and resigned, she prepared herself bravely to appear before the good Lord. I helped her in this with all my power, without suspecting for an instant that it could happen, but in the conviction that an illness borne with these thoughts is far more precious for the sanctification of the soul.

The pains were cruel; she complained constantly of her bowels; her moans were interspersed with invocations such as:

“Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on me.

“My God, I offer you my sufferings in union with the sufferings that you bore for us on earth. My God, I offer you my life in expiation of my sins and of the sins of my little children.”

7. I had a stomach complaint that seemed to grow worse every year. When spring came round, I had to take a thousand precautions, sometimes going to sleep at Reims in the evening for a change of air, so as to reach the month of May, which I spent at Vichy. The rest of the time I followed a regimen: a walk of an hour in the morning; in the evening, very little food, which did not prevent me from being thin and sickly. After the death of my dear Gabrielle my health returned very gradually. I went to Vichy for the last time in 1874, and it really seems that I have found a new life.

She also very often recited the act of confidence in God of Father de la Colombière⁸, a favourite prayer which she had long known by heart, and which kindled in her the love of God and that filial confidence which makes saints.

The nights were very tiring; I slept near her and often got up; she did not sleep and suffered a great deal. We spent the hours of respite talking in low voices, and our hearts poured themselves into each other like two vessels whose liquors are mingled. As the war gave me leisure, I was able to devote it to my beloved invalid, and this is now a consolation in my bitter sadness.

8. Prayer of Father de la Colombière.

Act of Confidence in God

My God, I am so convinced that you watch over all who hope in you, and that one can lack nothing when one awaits all things from you, that I have resolved to live henceforth without any care and to cast all my anxieties upon you. *In pace in idipsum, dormiam et requiescam, quoniam tu, Domine, singulariter in spe constituisti me.* Men may strip me both of my goods and of my honour; illnesses may take from me my strength and the means of serving you; I may even lose your grace by sin; but I shall not lose my hope, I shall keep it until the last moment of my life, and all the demons of hell will strive in vain to tear it from me. *In pace in idipsum, dormiam et requiescam.* Others may look for their happiness either from their riches or from their talents; they may lean either on the innocence of their life, or on the rigour of their penance, or on the number of their good works, or on the fervour of their prayers: as for me, Lord, all my confidence is my confidence itself. *Quoniam tu, Domine, singulariter in spe constituisti me.* This confidence never deceived anyone: *Nullus speravit in Domino, et confusus est.* I am therefore certain that I shall be eternally happy, because I firmly hope to be so, and because it is from you, O my God, that I hope for it. *In te, Domine, speravi, non confundar in æternum.* I know, alas, I know only too well, that I am frail and changeable; I know what temptations can do against the most firmly established virtues; I have seen the stars of heaven and the pillars of the firmament fall; but none of this can frighten me. As long as I hope, I am sheltered from all misfortunes, and I am certain of always hoping, because I hope also for this unchanging hope. Lastly, I cannot have less than what I shall have hoped for from you. So I hope that you will hold me on the steepest slopes, that you will sustain me against the most furious assaults, and that you will make my weakness triumph over my most fearsome enemies. I hope that you will always love me, and that I too shall love you unceasingly; and to carry my hope at once as far as it can go, I hope for you yourself from you yourself, O my Creator, both for time and for eternity.

Amen.

What beautiful dreams through this life mingled with joyful hopes and piercing anxieties!

I saw for my wife and for myself the dawn of a new life; I followed the swift transformation that was taking place in that Christian heart under the breath of God. Her faith was becoming like the faith of the apostles; in my eyes this illness was the starting point of a wholly holy life, a life in which God alone would have appeared. How much better my children and I were going to become! How our whole little world of the Val was going to be sanctified!

A little later, dark thoughts would gain the upper hand. I had to witness sufferings without being able to relieve them. Her cries awoke in me a resounding echo which made something like an ocean of grief rise in my heart.

And yet I wanted my voice to be as steady as hope, and I had forbidden my eyes to betray me. Those were terrible moments; I needed to take refuge in the Heart of Jesus. A little later I would recover; the illness was not serious, according to the doctor, who saw no danger, and besides, such a departure could not enter into the designs of God.

My wife had asked for Abbé Cerf⁹; he came on Monday 10 October. All the day before, and on the day itself during the morning, Gabrielle prepared for the last confession of her life, as we said together, without my suspecting for a single instant that it might be true. For several years already she had worn the cord of St Francis; she had told me of her desire to be bound more closely to the Franciscan family. She eagerly asked Abbé Cerf to admit her to the Third Order: she seemed in haste to provide herself for the long journey she was about to undertake. She became a tertiary that day, 10 October, under the name of Sister Joséphine.

9. Abbé Cerf had agreed as early as 1861 to come every month to Val-des-Bois, especially to hear our children's confessions. We took advantage of it, as did a number of good people. This holy priest did a great deal of good at Val-des-Bois.

Gabrielle was anxious to receive Communion on the Friday; she feared she would have to receive it as Viaticum, and consequently would not be able to receive it several times in succession; so she waited, preparing herself through fresh sufferings endured for Our Lord.

The night of the 12th to the 13th was extremely painful; the mill doctor, Mr Brodier, declared on the morning of Thursday the 13th that the situation was complicated by an appearance of peritonitis; the word made me shudder; I sent at once to Reims for Dr Galliet; he came that very evening.

Mrs Lamarche had sat up during the night of the 12th to the 13th; Sister Angélique took that of the 13th to the 14th. — At one o'clock in the morning, the invalid, feeling relatively well, asked for Communion so as not to receive it as Viaticum. I woke the Abbé¹⁰, Albert and all our children. The night was dark and silent; the silence was broken only by the words of the invalid, making in a low voice her preparation to receive the good Lord. What magnificent prayers she could draw from her heart! I was carried away with admiration and joy as I listened to her! I told myself that my Gabrielle was becoming ever more holy, ever more necessary to the family and to the Val. It was the last Communion of her life! She had invited to it, in touching words, the Blessed Virgin, St Joseph, the holy Patrons of the family and the choirs of the Angels. And all had answered her call. Paradise had come into that room: one could see a reflection of it on the face of the invalid. The little altar had been set up the day before as a precaution. At last, through the window, I saw the lights: "Here is Our Lord coming," I said to Gabrielle, and her heart poured itself out in words burning with the desire to receive her Beloved.

O my God, how good you are! You go before us with your love, and if we can no longer go to you, it is you who come into our dwellings to

10. Abbé Legrand, our children's tutor.

give strength to the poor sick one.

And courage is so necessary! Although she had offered her life to the good Lord with generosity, and before there was any human fear, yet my dear Gabrielle more than once felt the struggle in her heart. Human nature remains to the very end, and if God did not come to our help, who could overcome nature in its depths? That very day, Friday 14 October, we began a novena to the Holy Face with the oil of Mr Dupont of Tours; we had every confidence in it. It seemed to us that if the danger grew worse, it was because God, to crown so beautiful an illness, wished to work the cure alone. And yet, must I say it? When I prayed for her health and, alone before God, commended my wife to him, I caught myself thinking:

“Death is necessary, it will soon come for each of us; my dear invalid is so admirably disposed! Certainly, if I ask for her cure, it is not out of love for her but out of love for myself.”

Did God wish by such thoughts to prepare my mind for the blow that awaited me? I do not know. But I vigorously pushed away these secret warnings, and I went on counting on an early recovery.

The day was fairly quiet, as was the following night; but her weakness kept increasing and, although the invalid had fewer attacks, her condition worried us. On Saturday 15 October she asked to get up; it was very difficult. She could no longer bear the light and wanted her shutters closed all day; she continued to be admirably resigned, making her invocations to the Sacred Heart at every moment, offering her life to the good Lord. In the evening she seemed better: Albert had come to talk to her about our children and about the house being built beside the Brothers’¹¹. Instead of tiring her, this conversation pleased her; she took part in it, giving her opinion.

11. As the colleges were closed because of the war, we were having a little boarding school built for our children next to the Brothers. Brother Armand was its Superior. The fitting out of this house greatly interested the invalid.

That day we were expecting the arrival of Jules, of the Good Father and of all our little children. During the night from Thursday to Friday I had sent a man on horseback, who was to reach Belgium that same evening. I had decided on this on the Thursday, when Mr Brodier had spoken to me of peritonitis. Later I had regretted this hasty measure. Then I had congratulated myself on it. Thus my heart, within a single hour, passed through all the most contrary phases. At last Jules and Euphémie arrived with their children and Julien towards seven o'clock in the evening; my wife was very glad to see them. They told us that the Good Father could not be there before Sunday (the next day).

At eight o'clock in the evening Dr Galliet came and examined the invalid at length. As he left he told us that the situation had not grown worse, and he allowed Jules and his wife to leave for Boulton that same evening. Between nine and ten o'clock in the evening, all of a sudden Gabrielle felt violent pains about her waist that made her utter heart-rending cries. She who had been so weak, so utterly prostrate all day, suddenly found her former energy in her moans. She still offered her sufferings to the good Lord, but at times she cried out in the excess of her pain: "My God, the suffering is beyond my strength; it would be better to die than to go on suffering like this."

Towards ten o'clock there came a little rest, then all of a sudden the pains returned in all their intensity. This terrible crisis lasted until one o'clock in the morning. For me it was a dreadful sight. The suffering brought on a heavy sweat; her whole body was like a fire. And I was there, kissing her hands, trying to relieve her; but, powerless, I could calm her only by showing her the Holy Face, God who suffered so much for us, and by making her kiss the Cross and a relic of the true Cross. And she would stop complaining and repeat her words of love to the Sacred Heart of Jesus: "Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on me. My God, I offer you my sufferings in union with the sufferings that you bore for us on earth. My God, I offer you my

life in expiation of my sins and of the sins of my children.” I was broken; and yet I did not want my Gabrielle to suspect my tears, nor my voice to betray my feelings.

At last, towards one o’clock in the morning, the pain seemed to stop, and a half-sleep came on, attributed to the opium we had been giving her every half-hour during her crisis. I was exhausted; I stayed another half-hour; then, as her calm continued, I left her, after placing her in the hands of the good Lord; Sister Vincent was watching over her.

Towards half past two: “Sister,” said the invalid, “I am afraid.”

— “Why, Madam? You know very well that you have taken refuge in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and that only a little while ago you were telling Mr Léon that you offered everything to God, even your life.”

— “Yes, Sister, but nature is there.”

Towards half past three in the morning, Sister Vincent called my wife, who did not answer. Yet she did not seem to be asleep; her eyes were open; the room was in a darkness relieved only by a veiled night light, because for several nights the invalid had been unable to bear any light. The Sister took fright. She lit a candle and saw with dismay that the invalid’s face was greatly changed. She called me; I ran in, terrified; we went up to the bed; but the change was progressing alarmingly, death was approaching with great strides. The Sister, distraught, rang violently to bring everyone. No one came: I ran to wake the children and Albert, while that bell, still ringing, froze me with dread. We all reached the room in despair, seized with the most violent terror.

She breathed for a few moments more; this breathing had nothing in common with the ordinary death rattle..... then silence, the dreadful silence!!... Her pale face showed no contraction; she seemed to be resting; the burning sweat of the night bathed her whole body. I

thought it was a fainting fit; the Sister dissuaded me. A terrible moment, the mere memory of which frightens me.

What are your designs, then, O my God, in taking my Gabrielle from me!... Since you will it, I consent to die to the world, but my children!!... My first thought was for Mother, who had nursed her daughter as only a mother can: her health is delicate, and I was afraid. I persuaded her, not without resistance, to return to Reims immediately after our morning Mass.

I sent for Jules and his wife, who were at Boulton with poor Mr Petit (Mrs Petit had been buried on 13 October): it was a thunderbolt for them.

Euphémie was as saddened by the death of Gabrielle as by the death of her mother!

Ernest, my beloved brother, came to us at half past two, in spite of his condition and the doctor's orders.

The Good Father stepped down from the carriage towards six o'clock in the evening with Maria, Gabrielle, Léon and the governess. Alas! it was too late! We took them to Ernest's room, where the body of my beloved had been carried... She lay there, her hands joined, holding the Crucifix, her rosaries and her cherished books.

All through Sunday and Monday we stayed beside the body of our Gabrielle, tasting the bitter sweetness of gazing on features that were soon to be hidden from us for ever.

At last the body was laid in the coffin and carried to that dear little chapel where she had so often and so well prayed. I followed it there, and still found a consolation in spending my hours near her and near the good Lord. The Sacred Heart stood above her coffin and showed the source of all consolation to those who saw at its feet the bitter source of their grief.

On Tuesday morning you said Mass, as did our chaplain and the parish priest of Isles, beside the body of our saint. Many Christian Mothers wished to receive Communion that day for their President;

their piety touched me deeply, and I am sure that their prayers will have carried great weight with the good Lord.

At last the body was lowered into the vault. I understood then that it is a fresh grief to part from these remains, which seem to leave us a certain presence of those we mourn.

My brothers had given orders so that at two o'clock I might still say a last farewell to my Gabrielle. Kneeling on the flagstone, bending over the stone that was to cover her, my hand on the tomb that still seemed to me warm from her body, I tasted, thanks to their affectionate forethought, a last sweetness for which I thank them.

My God, how many things I have learnt in these days of sorrow!

We had built our nest on earth as though we were to dwell there for ever. Love and union had made Val-des-Bois a true paradise from which God had not been banished — oh no! But there were other affections in it, deep and sweet to my heart. God breathed upon these dwellings that we thought solid, and it turned out that the dry leaf of the woods is not lighter: paradise has flown away.

Blessed be the will of God!

With the help of your good prayers, my very dear Father, and of the prayers of all who have some affection for us, we shall try to build another dwelling: but this time not only will God be there, but He will be there alone, and everything else will be there in Him and for Him. My dear children, the Good Father, my whole family, so affectionate towards me, and our great workers' family: all will be loved there in Jesus and for Jesus, while Jesus will be loved there for Himself alone. Such are the plans and the desires that the terrible trial God has sent me has brought to birth in my heart.

As you pray for her who has left us, ask the good Lord ardently to give me courage and virtue, so that our plans and our desires may become realities.

For God alone is a support.

God alone is a faithful friend.

Among our other friends, several forget us when they no longer need us; others betray us.

Those who remain to us: are they our consolation, do we lean on them?

Death comes; what we had taken for an oak was only a reed broken by the slightest wind!

We cannot live without friends!

Let Jesus, then, be our first friend.

Let us love him for Himself, let us love in Him and for Him our friends and our enemies.

Believe, my very dear Father, in the most affectionate sentiments of your wholly devoted

Léon Harmel.

Letter from the Good Father Léon Harmel to His Children on the
Last Moments of Marie-Joseph-Julie-Gabrielle Harmel

Born at Val-des-Bois on 22 January 1865, married on 10 September 1887 to Mr Gabriel Ardant, returned to God on 23 July 1888, preceded by her daughter, Marie-Marcelle.

Val-des-Bois, 2 August 1888.

Feast of the Portiuncula, St Alphonsus Liguori.

My dearly beloved Children,

You are expecting from your father a few lines on the last moments of your sister Gabrielle.

It is a sweet consolation for me to answer your wishes. To speak of her is to satisfy my heart. I can still hear her so tender words; I can still see her beautiful dark eyes, like those which were for so long, as it were, the sun of my life, the eyes of my beloved mother.

As often happens before great catastrophes, divine Providence had preceded this week of anguish with two months of happiness. My children had arrived at the Val on 4 May; as my house was full of sick people, they had received at Félix's the most affectionate, the most perfectly brotherly hospitality that could be imagined. Gabrielle was happy to be back in her native place, to breathe in the shade of our gardens, and her heart rejoiced at once in her delightful husband and in the family.

G. Ardant travelled in the neighbourhood on business and often came back. From 26 May to 10 June he went to do his thirteen days of service, as a reserve officer, at Limoges; then he stayed here with his wife until 19 July.

What fine plans the young couple made on their long walks together! How the little angel they were expecting filled their hearts and their imaginations! They were preparing for it not only the welcome of love but also that of grace. Christian parents want the little

child to find in its cradle the divine treasures, surer and more precious than those of the earth. With this aim, our two Gabriels often received Holy Communion in our little chapel, and one could feel in Gabrielle an ascent towards God, as though she had a presentiment that she must lay in a store of supernatural strength for the days that were coming.

On Monday morning, 16 July, her husband left on a short journey (Chaumont and Langres). I drove him to the station and came back to console my dear Gabrielle, for whom even the shortest separations were very painful. We talked of the absent one, and together we expressed our gratitude to Our Lady of the Factory (Notre-Dame de l'Usine): "My dear husband has fulfilled my ideal; I love him more and more, I am proud of him. What a privilege to have such a father for my children!" And we talked together of the little home in Paris, that hearth where my heart found, with the love of my beloved children, a faithfulness to the traditions that had formed, as it were, a second Val-des-Bois, a second paradise. Is not paradise wherever people love one another under the gaze of God?

But on Tuesday a telegram had to be sent to Chaumont; our dear traveller could not get back until the night of Tuesday to Wednesday. One may say that the illness which carried off my daughter began on that first day; the fever came and never left her again.

Félix and Marthe had given up their bedroom and the room next to it, withdrawing to cramped quarters close by after sending their children to Maurice's. This generous decision, entirely spontaneous, greatly touched the young couple, and allowed us very ample arrangements, which events made most useful. For my part, I thank God, who gave several of you the opportunity of being of service to your sister. For, as you all feel, do you not, my beloved ones? it is better to give than to receive, and the sacrifices into which the love of family draws us are, for those who make them, treasures of blessings and sources of rewards, even temporal ones.

You do not expect from me a detailed account of those nights and days of anguish which I had the consolation of spending beside my dear Gabrielle with her husband. Her tenderness for us both found delightful names for us, which the sound of her voice made more touching still. Our Lady of the Factory, constantly invoked, visibly came to her help, to give her ever new courage. When she dozed off, her hand was in mine or in her husband's, and when she woke, her gaze spoke a language beyond translation.

I have told you how little Marie-Marcelle, after giving us the joys of hope, flew away to Paradise on the Thursday at half past six in the morning, fortified with the sacrament of baptism. I have described to you the child's funeral, which had something like a reflection of the

procession of the angels¹². The young mother, so happy at last to have the treasure of love she had so longed for, often asked to see her daughter. She had to be deceived by a thousand ruses. She was only half reassured, and for a long time I shall see her large dark eyes passing over each of us with a questioning gaze that pierced the soul. Several times she was on the point of discovering everything.

Meanwhile the hours and the days went by, bringing fresh anxieties in turn. We had to appear smiling during that week, so long, so long that the clock seemed to linger on purpose, as if to make us savour our sorrows. On the Saturday we had sent for a celebrated specialist from Paris; a highly esteemed doctor from Reims came

12. *Val-des-Bois, 19 July 1888.*

My beloved Friends,

This morning our dear Gabrielle gave us a child, *Marie Marcelle*. But alas! arriving at one o'clock in the morning, she was already leaving us at half past six. She has gone to heaven without having been able to receive her mother's kisses, but at least fortified with the sacrament of Baptism. Her body, laid out in Félix's drawing room from the moment of her death, was visited by the family and by many of our workers; it was so beautiful on its little bed, its lovely little mouth half open, reproducing at once the features of her mama and those of her papa, whose black hair it had.

At five o'clock the body left the chapel for the church and the cemetery. A procession was organised by our Sisters, with children holding banners and little girls crowned with flowers who carried the body or walked around it; everything blended with the chants of the Church to give this sadness a reflection of heaven. — Meanwhile the lovely little soul has flown away to God. The choirs of the Angels have sung the glories of her baptism and welcomed her with joyful alleluias.

The poor father is very grieved; the mother knows nothing, her condition not allowing us to tell her anything. This is a great sadness for nature, which is wonderfully illuminated by faith. To found a family is the great human work; to lay its first foundations in heaven, is that not to be assured of a sensible divine protection? And will not this little angel always be there beside her papa and her mama to protect them, and later beside her brothers and sisters, to guide them to the splendid abode which she entered without having contracted any stain of the earth?

Pray for the young parents, that they may both find in their so lively faith the easing of their sadness.

All here join me in sending you our fondest embraces,

Léon Harmel.

every morning, and the mill doctor, Mr Brodier, who never ceased to show active solicitude for our patient, came two and three times a day. These gentlemen always gave us hope, and foresaw only a distant danger.

Sister Henriette (of the Maternity Hospital of Lille, who had been there since the end of June) was alone in being always alarmed, and made us observe the progress of the illness, which never receded.

We owe a great debt of gratitude to this Sister, not only for the delicate care and tireless devotedness with which she surrounded our dear patient, but above all for her intelligent foresight, which allowed Gabrielle to prepare herself for death, and all of us to have the consolation of being present at her last moments.

In the calm hours we talked of the good Lord, of Our Lady of the Factory, and of my mother. For I was struck by the astonishing likeness of Gabrielle's eyes to those I had loved so much, and I said to her: My mother's eyes have always remained for me the emblem of divine goodness. For a smile from those eyes I would have gone through water and fire without asking for any other reward. The good Lord, who is a mother more tender still than the best of mothers, the good Lord became Man so that our sacrifices might be rewarded by the smile of his eyes and the quickened beating of his heart. Let us thank Him, then, for our sufferings, let us offer them in union with his, and let us rejoice in the joy that our love gives Him. — And my dear Gabrielle, in a voice full of ardour, united her sufferings with those of Our Lord Jesus Christ, offering them through the motherly hands of Our Lady of the Factory.

At every hour of the day and night we applied to the body of our dear patient napkins that had been touched to the statue of Our Lady of the Factory.

Quite recently two young women belonging to the workers' family, who were very gravely ill, had been cured by this means. Several times your sister felt real and immediate relief from it; she would then

say: “Our Lady of the Factory, my family will belong to you, we wish to devote our lives to glorifying you.” — We recited the Litanies, adding to each invocation: “Our Lady of the Factory, complete your work.” We did not know what we were asking, for today, through our tears, we feel that the Blessed Virgin has heard us: she has completed her work by perfecting that beautiful soul and by carrying off this treasure into the courts of glory and happiness.

A novena began on Friday 20 July at half past six in the evening; the mill chapel was too small to hold the crowd of men and women workers who came to beg for grace from Our Lady of the Factory; on the Saturday evening there was the same crowd.

On the Sunday, as the illness continued to grow worse, we decided to have our dear Gabrielle receive Viaticum. She accepted our request with the simplicity, the greatness of soul and the spirit of abandonment that were the particular character of this short illness. She was worthy to bear the name of her mother, of her who left us, you know with what sentiments of heroic generosity. Yes, she was truly Gabrielle. To the end she kept her presence of mind; never a murmur, always an admirable faith, an elevation of soul that made her accept the greatest sacrifices, like the greatest sufferings, with a naturalness that hid the effort. And yet how attached she was to life! Everything smiled on her: her little household was a paradise; she met in her new family and among her husband’s friends the same affection as among her own; motherhood was for her the summit of happiness. She had to tear her heart away from all these hopes, from all these joys, to cast it wholly into the heart of Our Lord. She did not hesitate for a single instant, and when Our Lord Jesus Christ came in towards half past four, she gave him everything, sacrificed everything to him, without shedding a tear of regret.

I had her make her preparation, then her thanksgiving, and she often repeated of her own accord: “Yes, I make my sacrifice willingly. My God, I am yours, I am going to you, I love you with all my heart.”

Towards seven o'clock in the evening, on the Sunday, Sister Henriette sent for us. Gabrielle was having a crisis that might be fatal. The whole family present at Val-des-Bois was soon gathered in the room, where the Father Chaplain administered Extreme Unction.

We then witnessed the most touching scene, in which supernatural consolations mingled with the piercing griefs that filled our hearts.

After a struggle of a few moments between nature and grace, Gabrielle resolutely made up her mind and prepared herself frankly for death. She asked forgiveness of each one, loudly condemning anything she might have said or thought contrary to charity, and consequently to family union; each one kissed her, weeping, and assured her of his forgiveness and his love. — Yes, she said, you forgive me, but it is God who must forgive. She asked for the confessor, whispered in his ear what troubled her delicate conscience, then asked for absolution. For some time she remained under the sway of terror of God's judgement. She was frightened above all by the slanders and the unkind words about her neighbour that she might have allowed herself. — I have committed many sins. — But you are sorry for them? — Yes, I repent, but I do not have perfect contrition; it is not out of love of God, it is the fear of death. — That is enough with absolution.

— Shall I go to heaven?

— Yes, you will.

— Do you believe so?

— I am sure of it.

— Well, I cannot believe it.

— But you have the will to believe, have you not?

— Yes, but I cannot.

— You love your papa very much, don't you?

— Oh yes, my dear little papa.

— Well then! you must have much more confidence in the good Jesus, who loves you even more than I love you. Say after me: My

God, I believe in you, I hope in you, I love you with all my heart.

You are going to see our Jesus, that beloved Jesus who came into your breast a little while ago and who is now in your heart. You are going to see your little girl; she has gone up to heaven to wait for you.

— Ah! she is dead, you had not told me. What happiness to find her again! — And her face lit up! You are going to see your mother, who will come to meet you with Our Lady of the Factory. It is the Blessed Virgin who will present you to the good Lord.

And we followed the work of grace in her soul; the terrors of judgement gave way to the sweetness of love:

“My sacrifice is very hard! I was so happy! but I make it with all my heart.”

At last she cried out with rapture: “Our Lady of the Factory, come and fetch me, I am waiting for you.” Turning to her husband, she expressed to him in touching words her deep love; she thanked him for the happiness he had given her, a happiness so short! Then, addressing me and her brothers:

“Good Father, I entrust my husband to you, he will be your son; Félix and Maurice, he will be your brother! And you, my darling, be very devout, receive Communion often, so that we may meet again in heaven. I shall watch over you, Gabriel; do not cry like that; see how calm I am now. Have many Masses said for me.”

Her farewells to the family made, Gabrielle concentrated all her thoughts on heaven. “My God, I offer you my life in expiation of my sins, of those of my husband and of my family, for the salvation of the workers and for the Church. — Our Lady of the Factory, as you will. — My God, I believe in you, I hope in you, I love you with all my heart.

“Our Lady of the Factory, cure me if you will; if you will not, come and fetch me.

“My dear papa, go on talking to me; do not stop, you do me so much good! And all of you, keep praying, so that I may hear your

prayers!" Everyone recited the *Rosary*.

The open windows let us be heard on the road beyond the garden, for we were speaking very loudly; it was nine o'clock in the evening; a large group of workers knelt down on the road and prayed with us. The chapel had been full since nightfall; the girls were praying for their former President. They had asked to spend the night before the Tabernacle; they did not leave the chapel until eleven o'clock at night.

The Sisters of the mill (Sister Servants of the Heart of Jesus of Saint-Quentin, in charge of the schools and of visiting the sick) took turns in the chapel all day long, so that the supplications to the Sacred Heart should not cease.

No doubt your mother was present from on high at this touching scene, and the angels were in that room so full of grief and at the same time of consolation. Gabrielle remained wholly taken up with the joy of seeing her God and with the raptures of willing sacrifice. At last, towards half past ten in the evening, the crisis ceased; the Sister said to the invalid: "The crisis is over, you are going to rest, we shall leave you; you must ask for your cure, since I feel that you are going to get better." Then Gabrielle, raising to heaven eyes that seemed to me truly inspired, cried out: "What a pity! one is so happy with Jesus!"

Mr Brodier arrived and kindly stayed with us all night. The weakness continued; the invalid did not want us to leave her: "My dear little papa, do not go away, you would not be there when I die."

The chaplain, the doctor, the Sister, Gabriel and I spent the night beside her.

Towards eleven o'clock at night, feeling faint, she cried out:

— Sister, I am dying, it is over.

— But, Madam, you must not have such thoughts.

— Forgive me, Sister; after all, I am ready, as the good Lord wills.

As they urged her to ask for her cure: “Our Lady of the Factory, if you wish to cure me, I am willing; or if you wish me to die, thank you again; it is all the same to me, it is as you will.”

Towards nine o'clock in the morning she said to Mrs Félix: “Marthe, I have many things to tell you, but I cannot;” and she put her hand on her heart, looking at her with a smile of love. A little later: “Marthe, I should like to carry you off to heaven with me!”

To Félix, towards eleven o'clock:

— Why don't you come? don't you know that I am going to die?

— But no, my darling, you must have confidence in Our Lady of the Factory.

— No, it is over and I am ready.

And it was not imagination; she pointed out to us one after another the signs of death taking hold of her body little by little: her extremities growing cold, her chest becoming congested, the hiccups beginning. She spoke of it with a perfect abandonment that kept from her any show of sadness and made her say gently to her husband: “My darling, do not cry, you are taking away my courage.” She looked death in the face and, in her recommendations, she foresaw everything, settled everything. Several times she repeated: “When I breathe my last, let me be given a last absolution.”

Towards two o'clock she said to the Sister: “Sister, I shall pray the good Lord for you, I shall ask him to give you a death as sweet as mine. — Sister, I have been here as in paradise.”

Towards half past three the Sister had everyone called, judging that the moment had come. Gabrielle had expressly asked not to be left to die without her brothers and her family.

She said to her husband: “My little darling, it is over, I am dying, I have loved you very much; I love you very much, I shall pray for you.” To her brothers: “I die in peace; be very devout, all of you, so that we may meet again together! May the will of God be done; I thank him for the death He sends me.”

Then, as her weakness increased, her speech became unintelligible and soon ceased; but her gaze and her lips showed that she was joining in the prayers of those present and in the exhortations addressed to her. At last, at twenty past four, the priest raised his hand to give her the last absolution, and she passed away gently, without a struggle.

One after another we came to kiss that face still bathed in the sweat of death, but whose serenity expressed the peace of the elect; then we went to ask God for the strength to bear our trial. At half past six in the evening the workers attended the Vespers of the Dead in the chapel, then came to pray beside the body, which remained laid out in Félix's drawing room, transformed into a chapel of rest. On Tuesday evening the coffin was carried in procession to the chapel. Above it was a picture on which stood out the words so often repeated by our dear Gabrielle: "Our Lady of the Factory, come and fetch me, I am waiting for you."

The next day the Mass of St James, my father's patron saint, was celebrated; nearly 300 men and women workers received Communion with the family for the departed.

On Thursday there was the Mass of St Anne, my mother's patron saint, then the funeral at the parish church before a great gathering. At the cemetery the workers' President delivered the following address:

"Dearly mourned Madam,

"In the name of the members of the Christian Corporation of Val-des-Bois, whom you loved so much, I come to bid you a last farewell.

"The days of sadness and mourning have followed one another with frightening speed. When, a week ago, we accompanied your dear Marcelle to this same grave, we little thought that she was going to prepare a place for you in the midst of the angels, her brothers. You have found her again in that beautiful heaven for which you had been formed by the deeply Christian upbringing you received and by

the admirable examples of faith of our beloved Good Father, whose words sustained you with indomitable energy until your last breath.

“It was with anguish that the workers’ family followed the progress of this terrible illness. On Sunday evening a great many of us, gathered around the house where you lay on your bed of suffering, joined in the prayers and united themselves with the wishes and entreaties of your weeping relatives.

“These spontaneous demonstrations were only the echo of the sentiments of love and Christian brotherhood which, in the great family of Val-des-Bois, make sorrows and joys common to all.

“What memories are those of the heroism and self-denial of your last moments, Madam! Your almost extinguished eyes turned with solicitude towards your family at prayer; your lips murmured only words of resignation and of love of God: ‘Our Lady of the Factory, come and fetch me, I am waiting for you; I offer my life for the salvation of the workers.’

“We shall faithfully retain such teachings, and they will bear among us abundant fruits of resignation and Christian generosity. They will remain the consolation of your husband.

“Our Master, Jesus Christ, has treated you, dear Mr Ardant, as He treated our Good Father. He sends you the greatest and the most painful of trials. But you will draw from your faith the strength needed to bear it in a Christian way. You will find some comfort in the affection of your brothers, in the admiration and, I may say, in the halo of holiness that surrounds this grave.

“At the moment of death, Mrs Ardant kept repeating: ‘I am so happy with Jesus!’ It is this last word that I address to you, Madam, with an invincible hope and as a last farewell:

“One is so happy with Jesus!”

.....
.....

And now, my beloved children, what remains for me to say to you?

We shall ask her for her prayers, so that we may have a death like hers. She has given us a great example of generosity. Death took her by surprise at the moment of her life when all joys, all affections and all hopes were gathered in her heart. And yet, without hesitation, with a simplicity that enhances the heroic character of her resolve, she sacrificed everything, gave up everything, not only without a murmur, but even without showing any regret.

Your mother, in another way, also gave you a similar example, and when, each year, as a family, we reread the account of her last moments, we feel loftier and more generous feelings springing up within us.

Reread this letter too from time to time, and, as you pray for her whom we mourn, ask her to obtain that you may belong wholly to the good Lord.

Receive, my beloved children, my most tender embraces.

Léon Harmel.

Testament of the Good Father Jacques-Joseph Harmel

Born on 23 May 1795, piously fallen asleep in the Lord on Monday 3 March 1884, at five o'clock in the evening, at Val-des-Bois, surrounded by his Children, Grandchildren and Great-Grandchildren. He died as he had lived, in peace, in faith and in love of his neighbour.

My dear and beloved Children and Grandchildren,

I wish to die in the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Faith. I offer my death in atonement for my past faults, and I pray Our Lord Jesus Christ to bless you as I myself bless you with love.

When you read these lines, I shall no longer be among you. You know how much I have loved you; I lived only for you and through you, and all my earthly happiness lay in the love with which you surrounded me.

The last thought of my life will still be for you, and I want this testament to be its last expression for you all.

Engrave, then, in your hearts the last wishes of your father, and may the remembrance of them never fade from your memory.

When I am gone, your first care will be to pray and to have prayers said for me. The God before whom I shall have appeared, when you read these lines, is an infinitely holy God, for whom the slightest defilement is a stain. I desire that for three months you have at least three Masses said for me each day. During the two years that follow, you will have one Mass said each day for the same intention.

In praying for me, I want prayers to be said at the same time for your mother, who may still have need of them. The memory of your father and of your mother must never be separated in your thoughts. Remember also my parents and those of your mother, and if God, in his merciful justice, has left them something still to atone for, may your prayers complete their deliverance.

Often remind your children that my fathers handed down to me an unblemished name: may they in their turn hand it down in its integrity to their descendants. May the most scrupulous honesty always govern your dealings: it is better to lose honestly than to gain by compromising with one's conscience.

Help one another; support with your counsel any one of you who might be on a wrong path, and with your fortune any one of you who might fall on hard times.

Treasure the heritage of simplicity that I have left you. Luxury ruins families, often divides them, and offends God. Do not, therefore, take as your example people of the world, for whom success is the beginning of a life of ostentation, in which their vanity seeks an empty satisfaction. Let the style of your household and of your habits be simple, and always well below your station. Let a certain austerity, which better becomes Christians, reign in your life and in your furnishings. I cannot insist too strongly on this point: by acting thus, *you will accustom your children to that simple life which is the safeguard of good morals and of prosperity*. Children imitate everything they see, and if their parents live simply, they imitate them.

In our time, luxury is a slope that carries us down, even without our knowing it. It is a current of ideas, an atmosphere one breathes, with which one becomes imbued little by little. Everything in the world preaches luxury to us and draws us towards it; it has almost been made into a virtue. And so, my dear children, I want you to stand firm against this baneful current; you will have the measure of your simplicity if the world finds that you are too simple.

By acting thus, you will always be comfortably off, *your children will acquire better habits*, and you will not forget the poor.

Work energetically and prudently to preserve and increase the patrimony that I had so much trouble in acquiring. Remember that when one is in business, one must give oneself to it entirely and not by halves. Do not undertake anything beyond your strength; your es-

tablishment is already very large; success sometimes leads to rash ventures that weigh on the family for a long time and can ruin it. Great establishments suffer great losses when there are difficult times or a little slackness in supervision. Keep, then, within proper bounds, and work courageously to make what you have bear fruit.

But at the same time, never forget that salvation is your chief business, the only one whose success is necessary. The goods of this world are mere nothingness; the possession of God is the only good that does not deceive. Place, then, all your industrial and commercial affairs under the protection of our Father who is in heaven; do everything in your power, and expect everything from his hand. It is He who makes labour fruitful, as it is He also who sends reverses and sufferings.

If He makes your labour fruitful, do not become vain about it, and let your thoughts and your words not be puffed up by it; for pride is the source of every fall, even on this earth; it is the great cause of the frequent vicissitudes that mark our time. If, on the contrary, despite your work and your thrift, He sends you reverses, accept his holy will without murmuring, for his will is always a will of love. If He grants you success, it is so that you may make Him known around you by your good works. If He sends you reverses, it is so that you may bless Him in misfortune. Lastly, if He sends you afflictions, it is so that you may unite your sufferings with the sufferings of his Passion, and thus acquire inestimable treasures.

For to God, who is eternal, what is our life? And what does it matter whether it has been happy or unhappy, if we win heaven for eternity? Even in the eyes of men, my dear children, how short life is! I have lived more days than many others, and yet my life has passed like a shadow. On the threshold of eternity, I have only one regret: that I did not suffer more for Jesus Christ.

Whatever your position may be, love the poor. If your fortune increases, give back a part of what has been given to you. If you are

less fortunate, give less. But, fortunate or unfortunate, give yourselves to your suffering brethren. The gift of money is nothing if you do not give your heart. Charity will be a powerful advocate before the God of charity, and He will not allow those who have practised it to fall into the abysses of hell.

Let your heart never be poisoned by hatred or envy. Forgive your enemies, certain beforehand that you will always forgive far less than God has forgiven you yourselves.

But if it were your brother who had offended you, let that be a reason for you to be more affectionate, more tender towards him. Woe to him who bears a grudge against his brother.

May the children of my children be brothers to one another, and may unity and affection prevail in all their relations.

Carefully maintain the unity of the family; never regret the sacrifices you make to that end. In the family alone can true affection be found. Remember the value that your mother and I always set on this unity.

Return to all those who loved me the affection they gave me.

Love our dear workers; they were my children; you will take up my paternity; you will continue to lead them towards God and to do them good.

Such, my dear children and grandchildren, are my last recommendations; your love is a pledge to me that they will not be in vain for you. You will reread them from time to time; in rereading them, you will think that your father and your mother are waiting for you in another fatherland, and that their arms are open to receive in turn their children, their grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

May the heavenly Father always look upon you with favour. May Jesus Christ, coming down often into your souls, establish piety and purity there. May the Holy Spirit set your hearts aflame with love for God. I beseech the most Holy Trinity to bless you as I bless you once again.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

HARMEL-TRANCHART.

Extracts from the Will of Jacques-Ernest Harmel

Born at Rethel (Ardennes), on 30 April 1830

Returned to God on Monday 28 September 1885.

In the name of the Most Holy Trinity, of the Father, of the Son, of the Holy Spirit. Today, the fifteenth day of the month of December, eighteen hundred and eighty-three, knowing well that God may call me to Himself without my knowing the hour He has chosen, I declare in His presence my last wishes.

I address myself today to my beloved family and to each of its members in particular, excluding none of them from my thoughts. I think it needless to name them one by one; they all know that I love them tenderly, from my venerated Good Father down to the youngest of my nephews.

I declare that I die in the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Faith, and that I am absolutely submissive in mind and heart, not only to all that Holy Church obliges us to believe, but also to all that she may counsel through the mouth of the infallible Vicar of Jesus Christ.

The Most Holy Virgin, Mother of God, deigned to grant my family and our dear workers a striking proof of her protection. After the fire at our mill, which broke out on Sunday 13 September 1874, a statue of the Blessed Virgin, standing on a modest wooden base, was found intact, together with the frail paper lace that surrounded her humble pedestal. The fire had stopped there, sparing the adjoining buildings that housed the preparatory machines. This allowed us to keep the greater part of our workers, by employing the women and girls in the preparatory work, while the men worked on frames rented in a spinning mill a few leagues away.

This providential blessing filled us with deep gratitude, and on 28 August 1875 the pious and venerable Archbishop of Reims, Mgr Langénieux, yielding to the prayers of my dearly loved brother Léon,

solemnly blessed, in the courtyard of Val-des-Bois, the first statue of the Blessed Virgin under the title of *Our Lady of the Factory*. The ceremony took place in the presence of all the members of our family, of our workers, and of four hundred members of the Congress of Reims, priests and laymen invited to this memorable celebration. Shortly afterwards this new title was approved by the Roman Curia, and Our Holy Father Leo XIII confirmed it by instituting the Archconfraternity of Our Lady of the Factory, which he enriched with indulgences and extended to the whole world.

By this extraordinary favour, which will remain the most memorable event in the annals of Val-des-Bois, our beloved Mother wished not only to stir up our gratitude and that of our workers, but also to entrust to us, as far as our strength allows, the spreading of her cult as Queen of the Factory. Let us not be ungrateful; let us exalt our Queen by our wholly special devotion, let us proclaim her power, and let us obtain by our zeal that everywhere the worker may acknowledge her blessed sovereignty and be converted. For it is through Mary that the salvation of the world began, it is through Mary that it will be consummated, and it is through Our Lady of the Factory that the world of labour will be saved.

As for me, from this day I place my soul in the motherly hands of Our Lady of the Factory, and in the arms of St Joseph, protector of our family and patron saint of my venerated Good Father.

I ask pardon of God and of men for all my sins, for the scandals I have caused, for the pain I may have given to anyone at all. I wish, as far as possible, to make amends for the wrong I have done, and I offer to God from this moment all my sufferings and my life, in expiation of my sins, for the salvation of the members of my family and of our workers, and particularly in reparation for the sins of those whom I have had the misfortune to scandalise or to grieve.

And so that the Sovereign Judge may receive me mercifully, I declare that I have already forgiven, and that I forgive completely, from

the bottom of my heart, all those who have made me suffer in any way. If there are any who may think themselves guilty of injustice towards me, I wish them to know well that not only do I feel no ill will towards them, but that I thank them for having made me suffer. My conviction is that they were the instruments of magnanimous Providence; how then could I, without injustice, bear them any resentment?

I feel the liveliest gratitude towards the *Inner Association*. To it I owe the best, the most rapturous emotions of my soul! I can affirm it from experience: the most sorely wounded heart finds in this association a consoling balm, a deep peace and, I dare say, the ineffable joy of suffering. It is impossible for me to express all the happiness, all the enthusiasm, that the good Lord has put into this suffering, once unbearable, now asked for each day according to the divine will, and accepted with gratitude as the reward of a little love.

O my beloved friends! you who continue on earth your pilgrimage, at times so painful, if one day you feel crushed by trial, enter generously into the *Inner Association*. Then your tears will cease to be bitter, your road will be lit by the torch of divine charity, and, while men pity you, your hearts will be flooded with joy.

The *Inner Association* has had a wonderful influence on my life. More than once I have had occasion to spread it, and the experience of others has always confirmed my own. The most sensual, the most faint-hearted, cannot resist its beneficent action; they draw from it, without effort, a submission so joyful and so complete that those around them go so far as to credit them with heroic courage¹³.

Everyone wishes to leave behind a remembrance for those who are dear to him. For my part, my beloved, the remembrance I wish to leave you is summed up in these words: *the union of the family*.

Be united, all of you who are the descendants of the Good Father! May your number, as it grows, only draw your bonds tighter and

13. See below the notice on the *Inner Association*, page 60.

make them more intimate. The good Lord, who has given a special efficacy to the paternal blessing, has also granted incomparable privileges to the union of the family; among others, these: the power to resist attacks from outside, material prosperity, consolation in sorrow and, above all, sanctification.

1. You have all learned the fable “The Old Man and His Chil-

dren”¹⁴, in which darts bound together resist the efforts of the young

14. The Old Man and His Children

All power is weak unless it be united:

An old man, about to go where death was calling him:
My dear children, said he (it was his sons he addressed),
See whether you can break these darts bound together;
I will explain to you the knot that holds them as one.
The eldest took them and, having strained with all his might,
Handed them back, saying: I leave that to the strongest.
A second takes his place and set himself to the task;
But in vain. A younger one also tries his luck.
All wasted their time; the bundle held firm.
Of these darts joined together not a single one split.
Weaklings, said the father, I must show you
What my strength can do in such a case.
They thought he was joking; they smiled, but wrongly:
He separates the darts and breaks them without effort.
You see, he went on, the effect of concord:
Be joined, my children; let love keep you in accord.
As long as his illness lasted he spoke of nothing else.
At last, feeling himself near the end of his days:
My dear children, said he, I go where our fathers are;
Farewell; promise me that you will live as brothers,
Let me obtain this grace from you as I die.
Each of the three sons, weeping, gives him his word.
He takes all their hands; he dies. And the three brothers
Find a very great estate, but much entangled in business.
A creditor seizes, a neighbour goes to law;
At first our trio comes through with success.
Their friendship was as short as it was rare.
Blood had joined them, self-interest parts them:
Ambition, envy, together with the lawyers,
Enter into the inheritance at the same time;
They come to the sharing out, they dispute, they quibble:
The judge on a hundred points condemns them each in turn.
Creditors and neighbours return at once,
The former over an error, the latter over a default.
The disunited brothers are all of contrary minds;
One wants to come to terms, another will have none of it,
All lost their estate, and wished too late
To profit by those darts, united and taken apart.
Lafontaine.

men, while, once separated, the old man easily breaks them with his feeble hands. Applying this lesson, the old man urges his children to stay closely united, to live as brothers, so as always to be strong against adversity. And so it was, as long as the sons remained in agreement.

Here the fabulist neglected the most important point of his comparison, I mean the bond that held the darts together in a single bundle. What, then, was this bond of union for the young men? It was evidently paternal authority. Once that had disappeared, the father's counsels had effect only for a time; then the passions bred division, which soon brought about the ruin of all. For as soon as the members of a family leave the close union in which God has mercifully created them, they cannot remain neutral or indifferent, as with strangers; they always become adversaries, and sometimes even turn fiercely against their brothers.

Had the old man's sons understood authority and its benefits, they would have restored the vanished fatherhood by making one of their number, the one most liked by all, head of the family. He, by his protective action, would have prevented disunion and its disastrous consequences.

May God keep you, my beloved, from the improvidence of those young men! Do not forget that authority is not a yoke, but a blessing necessary to every society. Nothing less than this protective authority is needed to soften the clashes arising from our personal failings, to devote oneself to all and to each, and to cancel out the unfortunate influence of all outside advisers. The union of the family is a wonder so rare and so radiant that it dazzles like too bright a light; it is a mystery to curious or indiscreet minds, and the persistence of its rays inflicts strange wounds that are never admitted.

Those who proclaim themselves your best friends will not fail to point out: to this one, that he has a right to the first place and is wrong to accept the second; to that one, that he is the most able, that

he alone brings prosperity and that his merit goes unrecognised; to another, that his brother has this or that unbearable fault, and that it would be only fair not to tolerate it. How many remarks, affectionate in form, will aim only at troubling your hearts! How many devoted counsellors would be delighted to discover a cloud, and if need be to raise one, in the envied azure of your intimacy! I speak to you from experience; I underwent before you the temptations you will have to overcome. Rightly regard as an enemy anyone who seeks to divide you. If someone reports to you either an unkind remark or a wrong act of your brother, do not argue, and answer without hesitation: that is not true! If you are offered other witnesses to convince you, do not accept, and answer again: that is not true! Experience will always prove you right. The wicked are not the only ones liable to errors of the tongue; the best of men, when he speaks ill of another, lies without knowing it, without even suspecting it. You will do him a service by answering: that is not true; you will thus oblige him to reflect, and if he is in good faith he will recognise his error. Union is your most precious possession; give up this treasure to no one, and always defend it.

2. This union also ensures your *material prosperity*. I do not wish to dwell on the ease that the family can provide, through its financial support, to those who are in trade. For material advantages are quite secondary compared with the good name of the family, which is worth more than wealth.

Those who live as brothers, even when they have only limited capital, always inspire confidence. And rightly so. How many powerful houses have collapsed! How many ruins among the richest!... Go to the bottom of these disasters, and you will find that most of them must be attributed to three main causes, any one of which is enough to bring about ruin: misconduct, isolation, division, from which spring disorder, imprudence and weakness. The example of the Good

Father's generation and of our own shows clearly that the success of each comes solely from the good understanding of all.

3. Consider, moreover, the intimate blessings of the union of the family; I mean the consolations that the world, that even friends cannot give, and that are found only in the family.

Everyone has his troubles, his disappointments, his cares, his sorrows; no one is tempted to add to his own burden, already too heavy, by taking on a share of other people's. Nor do our successes and our happiness win us sympathy from outside; they make people envy us, and much jealousy hides beneath the warmest congratulations. Such is the law of general selfishness.

Whereas in the family united by love, joys and sorrows are shared, and each takes part in them naturally. For there is no success for one that is not an advantage for the others; none is visited by trial without the others being touched by it. Hence this harmony of shared feelings, in joy as in sadness, which brings about the increase of happiness or the relief of suffering. It is indeed the law of the human heart that our happiness is multiplied when it is shared, and that our sorrow is eased when others weep with us.

Do not deceive yourselves: God alone creates indestructible bonds. Those formed by men are always temporary and fragile by nature; in vain would you ask of them the strength, the permanence and the other prerogatives that God has granted only to the natural or spiritual family; however great your perseverance or your obstinacy, you would infallibly be disappointed. You will certainly meet with honourable and very sincere sympathies; but know this: you will find joy answering to your joy, sadness answering to your sadness, only among those whom God has united to you by bonds that He has created, and that you have been able to strengthen by your mutual love.

4. Finally, my very dear friends, the union of the family is a powerful means of sanctification for each of its members; and that is its most admirable and most precious privilege.

It is certain that one cannot truly love someone without desiring his happiness. Now happiness comes from ourselves and not from others; material advantages and outward goods are powerless to procure it for us; it is acquired only by the practice of virtue. The more virtuous a man is, whatever his station may be, the more perfectly happy he is. That is why, by virtue of its divine origin, the family, at every level of the social scale, leads us to the good, sustains our weakness, mourns over our errors, encourages our efforts and makes each of its members at once protectors and protected.

Such are the incomparable blessings of the union of the family. No one thinks of disputing them, and yet how few there are who value them at their true worth! With what levity most people, heeding only the passion of the moment, declare that there is no need to put oneself out for the family, and that one can live very happily far from it. What fine reasons for despising the work of God and the order He has established! Though we cannot do away with the immediate blessings the family is bound to bring us, it nonetheless keeps its protective and providential mission, and whoever disregards it will sooner or later lament his error.

As for you, my beloved, guard your union like the apple of your eye, which the smallest grain of sand painfully hurts, and do not allow your mind to entertain the slightest feeling of division.

If you have cause for complaint, do not nurse animosity in your heart, but explain yourselves simply. At the start of a disagreement, a settlement is always easy, provided nothing is demanded against justice. Most often, long enmities between brothers (they are the only ones that last) have no other source than slight and even trivial causes. Thus an imperceptible worm, having got into a fine fruit, grows there and soon spoils it completely.

I address myself to you who live at Val-des-Bois, where all is splendour in my thoughts, where my memory finds not a single cloud. You lived there as brothers, unshakeable in your union, and I admire

the constant serenity of your days flowing by in peace, in that peace which Jesus brought to men and which surpasses every good. Ah! I beseech you, cherish this little corner of the earth, and go on living in this blessed Val, where love and happiness reign. There everything binds you and draws you: your cradle, your trials, your business, our traditions, the venerated remains of those who await us in heaven!

And then, what endless charms in our delightful chapel! What a warm atmosphere! Consider, then, that our Beloved Saviour Jesus dwells in the Val with you, that He has shaped it with all the tenderness of His Heart, that He is its King, and that Our Lady of the Factory is its Queen! Can we be surprised that so many favours have brought our family in particular a great power of sanctification for each of its members?

But it must be acknowledged that it is above all at the Val that this power of sanctification works effectively. So much so that one can observe the cooling of those who keep aloof and cease to share in the life of the Val. Take care, then, you whom circumstances keep far from the family, not to separate yourselves from it, but to love it tenderly, so as to enjoy its blessings and to keep to its traditions of faith, piety and devotedness. Moreover, the pre-eminence of the Val does not constitute a privilege of superiority for those who live there; it is an increase of responsibility, which lays on them stricter duties of gentleness and charity towards their absent brothers.

May my dearly loved and venerated Good Father forgive me all that I may have done against him out of thoughtlessness. I declare that I honour him with all my soul, and that I love him with all my heart. The splendour of his fatherhood is one of the greatest joys of my life; it is a pledge of security for me when I appear before God.

I end my will here.

In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Done at my home, in Nice, rue Palermo, no. 5,
On the fifteenth of December, eighteen hundred and eighty-three.

Signed: E. HARMEL.

The Inner Association¹⁵

The salvation of the workers is, in our time, a work of capital importance for the glory of God. In so difficult an undertaking, it seemed necessary to join to the effort of persevering action the all-powerful help of suffering united with the sorrows of Our Lord Jesus Christ. This thought gave birth to *the Inner Association*.

The Inner Association is like a fraternity of voluntary victims, whose members, united in His divine Heart, are known to God alone. It is called *inner* because it shows itself outwardly by no visible sign.

The obligation consists in the daily recitation of a prayer that fixes the spirit and the scope of our undertakings. We desire that our sufferings should fill up in us, according to the word of St Paul, what is lacking in the Passion of Jesus Christ for the salvation of souls. The members of our families and the conversion of the workers: such is the twofold aim of our offering. We do not ask in particular for this or that suffering; everything is subordinated to the good pleasure of God.

There is therefore no rashness in it. We undertake to make the will of God so much our own that it becomes ours; we freely will whatever painful thing befalls us, so that our suffering is one with that of Our Lord, and we can say: it is no longer I who suffer, it is Jesus Christ who suffers in me. Can we wholly attain this result? By ourselves, never; but if we ask for it with perseverance, we shall obtain it, and the best way to become imbued with it is to put into words frequently the feelings that we wish to imprint on our hearts.

No doubt great trials do not come every day, but each day annoyances, humiliations and small vexations, which are like pinpricks to

15. It was in 1869, at Val-des-Bois, that this Association was inspired in Mr Léon Harmel by the generosity of the sick workers whom he visited.

the soul, come to remind us that our life is a combat and a succession of miseries. Our morning offering keeps us from being taken by surprise, and we hasten to thank God for what has befallen us.

The experience of a great number of our associates allows us to affirm that this practice might be called *the art of living perfectly happy and of dying in joy*.

It is above all the means of associating ourselves in practice with the work of Jesus Christ for the salvation of souls.

Daily Offering

“O my God, allow me to offer you my sufferings and my life for the salvation of souls, especially for the members of my family and for the conversion of the workers.

“With these intentions, I undertake to ask you every day to accept me as a voluntary victim, and to lead me according to your good pleasure, by the way of crosses and sufferings, in the footsteps of your divine Son.

“Agonising Heart of Jesus, Victim of love for us, deign to unite me to your holy dispositions, above all in the Garden of Olives and on the cross, and to offer me with you as a holocaust.

“Compassionate Heart of Mary, be gracious to me.”

(If one is in a hurry, it is enough to say: “My God, I make you my offering.”)

This promise must be made only with the permission of one’s confessor; it does not bind under pain of sin, not even venial sin. After several years of practice, with the same permission, it may be made in the form of a vow binding under pain of venial sin, never more.

Imprimatur:

Reims, 2 August 1892.

P.-L. PÉCHENARD,

Vic. gen.

General Holiday Reunion

Saturday 6 September 1913

43rd anniversary of the death of Mrs Léon Harmel. 85th year of the Good Father Léon Harmel.

Present on 6 September:

The Good Father Léon Harmel.

Mr and Mrs Maurice. — Mr and Mrs Alphonse Harmel and their children: Pierre, Maurice, Albert, Madeleine, Andrée, Anne-Marie, Suzanne, Marie, Françoise. — Mr Ernest Harmel (Mrs Ernest had had her sixth child on 29 August). — Mr and Mrs Joseph Harmel (Mr Hubert Harmel away on manoeuvres) — Mr and Mrs André Ziegler.

Mrs Paul Saucourt-Harmel, Mr Pierre Saucourt-Harmel (Mrs Pierre Saucourt-Harmel and the children at the wedding of Mr Maurice Terlez). — Mr Jean Saucourt, Mr and Mrs André Saucourt.

Mr Julien Harmel.

Mrs Félix Harmel. — Mr Jacques Harmel, his son Alain. Misses Marcelle and Martha, Léon-Félix

Mr and Mrs Paul Jauffret, Félix, Robert and Maurice Jauffret.

Mr and Mrs Léon Harmel, Marie, Thérèse, Agnès, Jean, Léon, Gonzague Harmel.

Mr and Mrs Paul Guillot, André, Hélène, Jehan, Pierre, Simonne and a priest from Argenteuil.

Mr and Mrs Alexandre Harmel.

Mr and Mrs Jenvrin, Claire and Louis Jenvrin.

Mr and Mrs Félix Harmel, of Boulzicourt,

Rev. Fr Bureau, rector of the College of Florennes (Belgium).

Mr and Mrs Auguste Reimbeau.

Mr Henri Wattringant.

Mr Emile Reimbeau.

Abbé Granereau, curate at Nérac, replacing Abbé Gaillard (on retreat).

In the morning at half past seven, Mass said by Rev. Fr Bureau, with general Communion for the departed of the family.

At eight o'clock, gathering in the Good Father's room, reading of the last moments of Mrs Léon (see page 7).

Then the Good Father continues in these words:

My dearly beloved Children,

Since our last holiday reunion, Our Lord Jesus Christ has gleaned from our tribe ears of corn ripe and full with love and virtue.

First of all there is our dear Félix-Gabriel, fallen on the field of honour, all fragrant with the adorable Eucharist, no doubt through the special protection of his father and of Robert. He thought only of the laurels of earth, and Our Lord gave him the laurels of Paradise.

Then there is good Father Charcosset, who died at Nice, in our arms, his eyes fixed on heaven.

There is Mrs Reimbeau, the mother of the poor, the most living image among us of the compassionate Heart of Our Lord.

Mrs Lépine, who departed with a smile on her lips in an ecstasy of love.

Four deaths of the predestined.

Let us gather within ourselves the feelings of faith. It teaches us first of all that we are in exile, in the valley of tears. We long for the Fatherland on High.

That is why the Church calls the day of the death of the Saints *Dies natalis*, Birthday. It is indeed a true birth into the life that will never end, into the life that will go on in transports of enthusiasm ever renewed and ever more delightful.

If the Church puts on mourning vestments for funerals, if she makes plaintive chants heard, it is because she wishes to stir our

compassion for the sufferings of Purgatory, through which we shall all pass.

Full of tenderness for those poor souls who can no longer do anything for themselves, she wishes to remind the living to pray for their brethren; that is why she strives to move hearts to an affectionate compassion.

But the Church celebrates the death of the just as a triumph; it is with gladness that she keeps the anniversaries of the death of the elect.

We are in communication with the saints through prayer; we know well that they are not present everywhere, as God alone can be, but they see us, hear us and speak to us in God. So that if we turn to St Joseph, for example, we are assured that he listens to us, each one in particular, and that he takes care of us as if we were alone on earth. It is the privilege of the saints to be able thus to multiply their solitude.

Now our relatives who are in Heaven enjoy the same privilege.

Our Lord said to his apostles: "I am going to leave you; it is expedient for you that I go away." The apostles did not understand; they were saddened and wondered what would become of them without the divine Master. But as soon as the good Saviour had died, what He had foretold came to pass: the apostles were filled with courage and fervour, they grew in will and in energy.

For during his life Our Lord was in only one place at a time, He could speak to only one person at a time, whereas from then on each one could turn to Him, certain of being heard.

So it is with our dear departed: they are not absent, they are only hidden from our eyes, and they take care of us.

Allow me to give you the example of Mrs Léon.

She died a victim of her devotedness to her husband and to her children, I might say for you alone, for if she wished to prolong my life, it was for your good. Now, what happened? — While she lived,

she lived at Val-des-Bois; she could not follow her children to Metz or elsewhere. Once she had entered her eternity, she was able to go to the side of each one of you; she watched over you, my beloved, when you were in Germany, in England, doing your military service; she was like your guardian angel, full of solicitude for you, keeping dangers away, inspiring you with good thoughts. It is to her, after God, that I attribute this incomparable miracle, that my five sons came back worthy of their mother. Was it not good for you, my children, that your mother should depart, since that departure was the ransom of your perseverance in virtue?

I could tell you of a lady of the family whose little child, who died in infancy, was seen constantly watching over her and keeping every danger away from her.

What wonders Mrs Albert, the saint who departed so early, has wrought! We shall know them only on High.

It is impossible for me, as you understand, to interpret God's designs for each of our dear departed, and it would be very rash of me to attempt it; but what I can affirm is that everything is done for the good of the elect. Therefore, if we have saints among us, it is to the advantage of the family itself that, at the hour fixed by the good Lord, they should depart for heaven and become the effective protectors of the whole tribe.

My dear children, often during my long sleepless nights at Nice, as I have told you, it seemed to me that I saw the souls of our beloved dead accompanying you everywhere and rendering you a thousand services of which you never thought.

I saw again my mother, whom I loved so passionately; I felt that her love for me was increased a hundredfold; I understood that her action had been all-powerful and that her death had been for me and for my descendants the source of many blessings.

That is why, while leaving nature its rights and weeping for those who have departed, let us beware of forgetting that we are Christi-

ans, that we have the faith, that the eternity won by those who went before us is the supreme goal of our trials here below, and that the influence of mothers over their children and of children over their mothers has become all-powerful on High.

We live under the protection of our dear departed; they surround us with solicitude, they remove the stones from our path, and we do not think of it enough!

O beloved relatives, on this day when we commemorate your departure, rekindle our faith, give us the courage to overcome our nature and to join our voices to yours, so that we may always repeat with you:

Glory to God in the highest! Glory to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the patron of Val-des-Bois and of the family. May He grant us all to be reunited one day in blessed eternity! Amen.

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At noon, family luncheon, at which Mr Léon Harmel proposed the following toast:

The old man who returns towards the first source
Enters the eternal days and leaves the changing days,
And one sees flame in the eyes of the young,
But in the old man's eye one sees light!
(V. Hugo.)

In these last two lines, the poet was not speaking of you, dear Good Father, for he puts on one side the qualities of youth and on the other those of old age.

Whereas in your person we salute every day this wonderful union: the ardent flame of youth that rushes into action, and the serene light that experience and faith give.

A visitor who came to Val-des-Bois last month wrote to me of the astonishment and admiration he had felt in your company: "It is the

first time in my life,” he told me, “that I have met an old man who does not regret the past, and who is enthusiastic about the present.”

These words sum up well your cast of mind, dear Good Father, the constant rejuvenation of your heart and the surprising mastery of your mind.

Indeed, for us who, in the mill, are engaged in the fierce battle of business, do we not observe every day, with growing admiration, your wonderful sense of industrial and commercial matters? When we are halted by difficulties that seem insurmountable to us, or when the paths cross and become entangled and we do not know which course to take, we call on your help, and you at once show us the way to follow; you make the long-sought solution appear to us in a bright light. At other times, when we strive to bring about some new progress in the methodical and rational organisation of business, we stop in amazement, finding that these new paths, which we believed we had discovered, you have already travelled, and that they lead precisely to the principles, and often even to the applications, that you have long taught us.

It is the same from the supernatural point of view: you make us see religion in an entirely new light; you are for us like a pillar of light going before us, bringing out of the shadow and making shine around us the countless blessings of God.

Ah! how life is worth living when we walk in your footsteps, what happiness to receive your teaching, what wonderful fruitfulness for action that seeks its direction from you!

And so, at this fine family reunion, we would like, dear Good Father, to proclaim to you more than ever our gratitude and our fidelity.

And when we send up to the Sacred Heart an ardent prayer that He may keep you long yet at our head, we beseech Him at the same time to open our hearts wide, so that the dew of your teaching may

fall on them abundantly and raise there, like a rich harvest, truth and justice, light and action.

I propose the health of the Good Father!

Reply of the Good Father.

My dearly beloved Children,

After last year's triumphant holiday reunion, of which you have the charming souvenir in the photograph of the seventy-one, illustrated with the names thanks to my dear Maurice, we have today a more modest reunion, but in a warm intimacy where one feels the outpourings of the Sacred Heart flowing among us.

I

Is this not the moment to tell you once more of my tender affection and to thank you for the joy with which you surround my old age?

Some of my friends complain of the loneliness and neglect in which the evening of their life is passing. As for me, I can only glorify God for being surrounded by many children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, all filled with the tenderest filial piety, who cradle my last days in the sweetness of love and in the gentle exchange of hearts.

Each year I see the union of the members of the family growing, as they bind themselves more and more closely to one another in a compact sheaf, through which flows the life-giving sap of charity, so strongly recommended by Our Lord. On the eve of His death He said: "A new commandment I give you: *Love one another as I have loved you.*"

And how has He loved us? — By giving His life for us and by renewing this sublime sacrifice every day on the holy Altar, not only for His friends, but even for His enemies.

II

How moved I am to see your little children approach the good Jesus with such tender piety!

Several began at six and a half, and one little girl even at five, the priest having judged her sufficiently instructed, and she is the most pious of all. It is wonderful that at such tender ages Jesus Christ can give Himself almost every day and make supernatural these little hearts thus consecrated to the good Saviour for ever.

Let us acclaim Pius X, who has rendered this immense service to mankind and who, by this blessed practice, has prepared the resurrection of the world, and of France in particular.

III

I cannot tell you enough how happy I am to find an echo of my guidance, of my thoughts and of my feelings in each one of you.

I feel that my soul is prolonged through the generations thanks to your excellent spirit and your generosity. You are willing to accept the advice of your old Good Father and to put it into practice; you are willing to sacrifice your own ideas and your own will to please me and for the common good.

How I thank you for it, and at the same time how I praise you for it; for filial piety has its rewards here below. The fourth commandment carries promises of material prosperity that the others do not. God will repay you in your children for the affectionate care and the tender solicitude you show me.

IV

I am soon going away for a long time: this absence is painful to my nature, for I would like to live with you always, never to leave you, to enjoy your affection and to drink in your tenderness.

But, on reflection, it seems to me that my absence is useful: it allows you to act more freely, and it allows me to see what will happen on the coming day when I am in my eternity.

I already see Maurice and Elisa at work, organising the Sunday gatherings, taking my place at the great feasts and striving to follow my traditions.

I see you all gathered around them in affectionate deference, together making up the bundle of arrows whose strength the old man in the fable showed.

My dearly beloved, remain united; remember that you will gladden my soul, up there, by your union. I shall be near you, my love will be a hundredfold greater, my solicitude will be far more effective than it is today. I shall help you all, great and small, to overcome the difficulties of life, so that the victorious *Alleluia* of the apostles of Christ may always resound in your soul, and that the Harmel tribe may carry everywhere the flame of service to the Church, to the people and to the fatherland.

These are the wishes I address to you, as I give you rendezvous for next year, on Sunday 9 August 1914.

Long live Jesus Christ the King for ever! May His reign spread throughout the whole world, especially at Val-des-Bois and in our beloved family.

Then the fable The Old Man and His Children¹⁶ is performed under the direction of Miss Madeleine and Miss Marie Harmel. The reunion was full of cordiality and high spirits. One felt confidence and warm affection flowing among all the guests.

Telegrams were read from Mr Hubert Harmel, from Mrs Pierre Saucourt-Harmel and her children, from Mr and Mrs Charles Harmel of Grasse, and from Mr and Mrs Grévin-Reimbeau. A great

16. Text by La Fontaine. See page 40.

many letters had been sent to the Good Father on the occasion of the family reunion.

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At half past two, a visit to the cemetery; at three o'clock, a gathering at Mr Maurice's, where Mrs Joseph Harmel and Miss Marcelle perform some works by Ernest Harmel.

Sunday 7 September

The next day, Sunday 7 September, Mr and Mrs Léon gathered the same people for luncheon.

After the toast of welcome by the master of the house, Rev. Fr Bureau rose and recalled, in moving terms, his stay at the Val, his departure in 1888, twenty-five years ago, and the Good Father's blessing. The Good Father then rose and proposed the health of the ladies of the family in these terms:

"I am happy, on this day, to salute the ladies of the family and to congratulate them publicly, for they are the honour of the tribe and we must all be proud of them.

They are *valiant*: they do not fear the fatigues of motherhood; they multiply the Redemption as far as God allows.

They are true *Christians*, striving from earliest childhood to instil the faith into the little souls that Providence has entrusted to them. They know how to awaken in these young hearts the sacred hunger for Jesus in the Host, and it is with an emotion that is always new that I see the Holy Table thronged by these delightful little ones.

They are *generous*: they accept everything for Jesus Christ; sacrifices, even the greatest, always find them ready, standing like the Virgin on Calvary, to accept with noble resignation the blows and trials of Providence.

They are *supernatural*: they know how to see Jesus Christ Himself through their neighbour; one of them said to me recently:

‘When I am to receive the family, I think beforehand that it is Our Lord Himself who is going to come to my home.’

We shall be treated at the judgement as we have treated our neighbour on earth; our ladies know it, remember it, and strive to bring their conduct into accord with this sublime doctrine.

Our Lord has fixed for each of us a *measure of love*; let us ask Him to let us reach it, let us have hearts as great as the world.

Hertzian waves cross thousands of kilometres to carry human thought from the Eiffel Tower to New York. If matter has so great a power of expansion, how great must be that of the spirit! The ardours of our desires go out like arrows across the world to carry salvation everywhere through the reign of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray for our *persecutors*: they have done us a great service, certainly without meaning to, but we owe them our gratitude none the less. May the flame of our charity reach their hearts, so that we may convert them to Our Lord.

Pius X has foretold to us that France will take up her apostolate throughout the world again; let us hope that the strayed sheep will be brought back to the fold by our generous and ardent intercession.

And you, dear ladies of the family, be always the guardian angels of our tribe; continue the example of your valour and your generosity, so that through you our social mission may grow and gladden the heart of Our Lord.

I give you the health of the Ladies of the family!”

Sunday 14 September

On Sunday 14 September, the Good Father received the family for the farewells:

At the end of the meal, he spoke as follows:

My dearly beloved Children,

I am leaving for Nice in a few days.

I am gathering you at my table for the last time before my departure. Let me give you a few pieces of advice.

We are the arbiters of our destiny; we weave our eternity with the warp of our will and the weft of our heart.

I draw your attention to two points:

1. *Confidence in God and in His Providence.*

We have a great devotion to the Prayer of Rev. Fr de la Colombe; I urge you to say it every day; it will give you the consolations it gave my beloved Gabrielle in her last moments.

It begins with these words, which sum up the whole doctrine:

My God, I am so convinced that You watch over all those who hope in You, and that one can want for nothing when one looks to

You for all things, that I have resolved to live from now on without any care and to cast all my anxieties upon You¹⁷.

It is a practical means of living happily even on this earth, and in any case of bearing with patience the trials that come to us.

2. Here is my *second recommendation*. — Always see Jesus Christ through your neighbour. Remember the Gospel in which Our Lord describes the last judgement:

Then the King will say to those who are on his right: “Come, you blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom that has been prepared for you from the beginning of the world.

17. Act of Confidence in God by the Reverend Father de la Colombière.

My God, I am so convinced that you watch over all those who hope in you, and that one can want for nothing when one looks to you for all things, that I have resolved to live from now on without any care and to cast all my anxieties upon you. *In pace in idipsum dormiam et requiescam quoniam tu, Domine, singulariter in spe constituisti me*. Men may strip me of both goods and honour; illnesses may take from me the strength and the means of serving you; I may even lose your grace through sin; but I shall not lose my hope; I shall keep it until the last moment of my life, and all the demons of hell will strive in vain to tear it from me. *In pace in idipsum dormiam et requiescam*.

Others may look for their happiness either from their riches or from their talents; they may lean either on the innocence of their life, or on the rigour of their penance, or on the number of their good works, or on the fervour of their prayers: as for me, Lord, all my confidence is my confidence itself. *Quoniam tu, Domine, singulariter in spe constituisti me*. This confidence has never deceived anyone: *Nullus speravit in Domino, et confusus est*.

I am therefore sure that I shall be eternally happy, because I firmly hope to be so and because it is from you, O my God, that I hope for it. *In te, Domine, speravi, non confundar in æternum*. I know, alas! I know only too well, that I am frail and changeable; I know what temptations can do against the most firmly established virtues: I have seen the stars of heaven and the pillars of the firmament fall: but none of that can frighten me. As long as I hope, I am sheltered from every misfortune, and I am sure of hoping always, because I hope also for this unchanging hope.

Finally, I cannot have less than what I shall have hoped for from you. So I hope that you will hold me up on the steepest slopes, that you will sustain me against the most furious assaults, and that you will make my weakness triumph over my most fearsome enemies.

I hope that you will love me always, and that I too shall love you unceasingly; and to carry my hope at a stroke as far as it can go, I hope for you yourself from yourself, O my Creator, both for time and for eternity. Amen.

“For I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger and you gave me hospitality.

“Naked, and you clothed me; sick, and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

Then the just will answer him: “Lord, when did we see you hungry and give you to eat, or thirsty and give you to drink?

“When did we see you a stranger and give you hospitality, or naked and clothe you?

“And when did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to visit you?”

And the King will answer: “Truly I tell you, as often as you did it to one of the least of my brethren, so often you did it to me.”

Let us not apply these words only to the poor, as is often done. Let us apply them to the family. — We shall be treated at the judgment as we have treated our brethren, that is to say our relatives and those close to us, *those with whom we live*.

Have we borne with their faults? Have we been the first to show them our affection? Have we drawn from those around us the exclamation of the pagans of old: “See how they love one another!” Then let us have confidence: we are on the way of salvation.

As a practical conclusion, let us look upon Jesus Christ through our neighbour as we look upon Him through the Host. Appearances count for nothing; they must not prevent our faith from perceiving, through forms more or less pleasant, and sometimes even painful, Jesus Christ Himself, who awaits proofs of our love, all the greater as we shall have made greater efforts.

How simple this law is, how easy and certain salvation becomes for each of us if we watch over ourselves on this point, the only one on which, according to Jesus Christ Himself, we shall be judged.

I sum up the wishes I form as I leave you for so long:

It is that your souls may remain in a filial and loving confidence in Our Lord, and that your hearts may always rejoice in your kind and cordial attentiveness to those close to you.

To whom could I better entrust these desires of your old Good Father than to our Ladies, whose heroic valour I celebrated last Sunday?

They are the guardian angels of the home; they will know how to imbue their daily relations with those around them with a generous and conquering affection.

What woman wills, God wills. No one outdoes them when they set out upon the supernatural paths.

That is why, as I drink the health of each one of you, it is to them most especially that I raise my glass.

Sunday 21 September 1913

Family luncheon at the home of Mrs Pierre Saucourt-Harmel (Mr Pierre having left for Buenos Aires two days before).

After a graceful toast to the Good Father by Paul Saucourt-Harmel, his great-grandson, the patriarch addresses a few words to the family.

My dearly beloved Children,

Today I want to say a word to you about your great social mission: the Christian Factory!

The learned professor Canon Pottier, of Liège, who through the esteem of Pius X has become a prelate of the Roman court, Mgr Pottier, has very often repeated to me that he regards the Christian Factory as the most important work of the century.

It is a fact that has the authority of experience and the eloquence of a life already long and still growing.

St Gregory the Great said of St Paul: “While the apostle, laden with chains, was being led to Rome, it was God, hidden in his breast

as in a tent, who was advancing to conquer the world.”

My illustrious friend affirms that the Christian Factory has come at its appointed hour to bring the industrial populations back to Jesus Christ; that is to say, more and more, human labour, which is being transformed entirely into vast concentrations and is perishing through its fratricidal struggles.

He affirms that if the Harmel family continues to be faithful to its mission, it is *God Himself* who, hidden in your breasts as in a tent, is advancing to conquer the world of labour.

Need it be said, such a result demands great efforts and long perseverance. Nothing is done without time. But the important thing is to be known and understood. Now today, as we know from Dr Jacques Bertillon, head of the municipal statistics service in Paris, the public does not yet believe in the reality of our organisation. The Doctor came to the Val with twelve members of his study circle. He recorded the fruit of his observations on the spot. He took his account to ten important newspapers, which refused to print it, saying that they were being brought a fable, an illusion, a mirage, instead of a scientifically demonstrated fact.

That is why you must receive with good grace the visits and even the investigations of sociologists of every school: *ignoti nulla cupido*. How can anyone wish to imitate an example he does not know, and which, through ignorance, is often even misrepresented? Do not fear the small disturbances caused by observers; on the contrary, encourage them, not to raise the edifice of your vainglory, which would be culpable, but to allow God to do His work through your hands.

Be filled with the importance of your mission; devote to it all the energy of your mind and all the ardour of your heart. Regard the sacrifices imposed on you for good understanding among yourselves, and the sustained and methodical efforts required of you, as an imperative duty, as a sacred obligation for which you will render an account.

He who has received ten talents is bound to more than he who has received only one talent.

Who will complain of being privileged and of having received much?

Lift up your hearts! Glory to God, who has entrusted our sublime mission to us.

Eternal gratitude to the Sacred Heart, who has deigned to choose us for this fruitful work!

Let us fear to fall short of our task; let us strive to be equal to it.

Long live labour! It is the cry of Joan of Arc, and it is ours too.

We want to devote our efforts, our energies, our whole lives to glorifying God through the Christian Factory!

Prayer of Reparation for the Works for Workers

Composed by Mr Léon Harmel (the Good Father)

Every day, O my God, sinners diminish, as far as lies in them, your accidental glory and happiness.

At the same time they do themselves a harm that would be irreparable if you did not come to their help.

By an admirable condescension of your infinite goodness, for which we shall praise you for all Eternity, you have been pleased to associate us with the great work of repairing this twofold harm.

We consecrate ourselves to it entirely.

By Communions of reparation we shall console you for the abandonment in which you languish; by attending Masses that are not of obligation we shall ask you for the conversion of those who through negligence do not attend Mass on Sunday; we shall pray to you during our work for those who do not pray to you; we shall offer you our sufferings for those who refuse you their hearts.

We know that our actions have no value in themselves: but we shall make them pass through your adorable Heart, O beloved Jesus. You will purify them, and they will acquire an infinite value through their union with your actions, your sufferings and your death, O Word incarnate, the one and necessary foundation of all reparation.

Forgive our infidelities and our ingratitude. Grant that, prostrate before you, we may make special amends to you for the scandals, the blasphemies and the crimes of every kind that are committed in the *workshops* where you are not known. Come to the help of our brothers, thrown by necessity into those vestibules of Hell where souls are so easily lost. Raise up apostles of the factory, so that your name may be known and respected there, and that the worker may find you again, and with you happiness, the joys of the family, and the remedy

for the many ills that have fallen upon him since he went away from you.

And so that this reparation may be more pleasing to you, we make it in union with Mary, your Holy Mother, who, by associating herself with your sufferings at the foot of the cross, became the restorer of her race and the Mother of Christians.

Amen.

Account of the Last Moments of the Good Father

who died at Nice on 23 November 1915*

On Sunday 14 November 1915 nothing gave any warning of the death of the Good Father.

At one o'clock in the afternoon, accompanied by his daughter, Mrs Paul Saucourt, the Good Father walked, without tiring and even very briskly (in spite of his 86 years), the long way between 83 Avenue de la Californie and 29 Boulevard Carabacel, to attend the opening of the retreat of the Tertiaries of St Francis.

The next morning he was seized with shivering and felt frozen; in the evening the illness grew worse; a violent attack of fever struck him down, and his daughter in alarm sent for the doctor, who did not succeed in breaking the fever, which had risen to 40 degrees.

On the morning of Tuesday the 16th, the condition of the venerable patient seemed to be improving, when in the evening the situation became worse. Father Donetta, his confessor, was sent for. The Bishop, on being informed, came on Wednesday the 17th at half past five in the evening.

An hour later Father Donetta came back to visit his saintly penitent.

The patient said to the Doctor: Here is the Abbé, who is to administer the last sacraments to me; would it not be fitting for him to administer them to me at once? The Doctor, somewhat surprised, did not dare to answer the question; he rose and, speaking aside to the Good Father's confessor, said to him: the case is serious, but I would not have dared to answer the question for fear of giving the patient a

* **NOTE** Léon Harmel died at Nice on 25 November 1915, the date given on the title page of this volume; the account that follows has him die in the night from Wednesday to Thursday, that is, on Thursday the 25th. "23" is a misprint.

shock; to which the Abbé replied, so as to be heard by the patient: you need not hide your opinion, for the Good Father, on learning that he may receive Extreme Unction, and in receiving it, will feel great joy. He would be far too grieved if through our negligence he were to be deprived of it. And the Good Father approved this reasoning, adding: "I am not afraid, since I am going to see the good Lord. It is life that is going to begin for me. I shall forget no one; for you especially, Father, I shall ask all kinds of protection and favours." Nevertheless, after the Doctor's opinion, the Father decided to put off the administration of the Sacrament of the Sick to a later date. He was well inspired, since the next day the Good Father, feeling better, had himself got up and placed in his armchair. He asked to be taken into his little oratory. In the evening, as the fever was rising and the doctor declared that the situation was serious, the family was informed by telegram.

From Quimper, from Châlons-sur-Marne, from Nancy, from Tours, from Cannes, from Grasse, from Menton, from Le Mans, from every corner of France, several of his children, grandchildren, sons-in-law and daughters-in-law hurried to their Good Father. Not all of them, alas! Two of his sons and several of his grandchildren are prisoners of the Germans, and others are working for the defence of the fatherland.

On the evening of Friday the 19th, in spite of his great weakness, he begged his daughter, Mrs Paul Saucourt, to dress him and carry him to the chapel adjoining his room. This was done. Before the Blessed Sacrament, which he had been granted a month and a half earlier as a reward for his fine Christian life, in the fullest and finest sense of the word, he made the sacrifice of his life and burst into tears, not because of his condition, but at the thought of the great grief his death was going to cause his daughter, who had nursed him with so much affection and devotedness for 34 years. Kneeling beside him, she tried to console him: "If I weep," he said, "it is not for

myself, but it pains me so much to leave you alone, and never to see the Val again, my beloved children who have stayed there and my dear workers. In spite of all that, I want absolutely to do the will of God; I submit to it entirely; I ask Him to do what He wills, without standing on ceremony with me.”

Then, after a few moments of calm, he offered his resignation to death to Jesus in the Host, whom he so often went to visit at the Carmel of Nice, at the chapel of the Sacred Heart (where he was the inspirer and the apostle of the Friday adoration); his chapel was then his Gethsemane.

Then he went back to his bed to begin there the ascent of Calvary, softened, it is true, by Holy Communion as viaticum, which he had the happiness of receiving during his nine days of illness. His daughter, wishing to do violence to Heaven and to hope against all hope, prayed and had others pray, and hastily called in other doctors. Alas! the Doctors could only confirm the fever, already eight days old, and the congestion of one lung.

Shortly afterwards bronchopneumonia set in: the situation was hopeless. Father Donetta, on being informed, hurried there at once on the morning of Sunday the 21st to confer Extreme Unction on the Good Father. The whole family present, kneeling around Léon Harmel's bed, recited the litany of the Saints, while the priest made the holy anointings on the patient, who had all his lucidity of mind (which he would keep to the end) and enjoyed a calm and a resignation that were quite remarkable. That same day, 21 November, at nightfall, Father Donetta came back to give Léon Harmel the absolution granted to Tertiaries at the point of death.

On Monday the fever did not go down; the doctor's only treatment consisted of injections, which were repeated several times a day. The family asked for another doctor on Tuesday morning. After examining the patient, he declared that he had one chance in a hundred of saving him, but refused to treat him, knowing that he was in the

hands of another doctor. In vain they begged him to give his care to the patient.

Obtaining nothing, they decided on a consultation for Wednesday evening. But it tired the patient greatly, and at seven o'clock he was much weaker. Abbé Donetta was called and all the children gathered round his bed. At half past seven in the evening, a fit of suffocation came on. From half past seven until two o'clock on Thursday morning his strength went on declining. When the first crisis had passed, the Good Father's children and his servants came to receive his last farewell, his blessing: "My dear Maurice, I bless you with your dear wife;

"My dear Anna, I bless you; Pierre, Gabrielle, Jean, I shall protect you;

"My dear Marthe, I bless you, and Jeanne, Paul and their children, Jacques and Hélène and their children; Marcelle, Martha and Léon.

"Julien, I bless you, and Charles, his wife, the children, Cécile and Antoine;

"My good little Laurence, I bless you with your good little André whom I love so much;

"My little Paul, I bless you; listen carefully to Granny; Fernande and Germaine, above all listen carefully to Granny. I bless all my family, all, all;

"I bless the Val, my dear workers. In heaven I shall forget no one, I shall protect you;

"I bless Léon, his wife, his children;

"I bless my dear Alphonse, a prisoner over there, Marguerite and their children."

Then they all knelt down, and the venerable patient raised both his hands towards heaven and said, in a loud and firm voice into which passed all the strength and all the sweetness of his father's heart: "May God bless you, all my dear children! In thought and in heart I gather you all together, present and absent." And he left to

all, as the spiritual bouquet of his apostle's life, the motto of his seal, which he spoke stressing each syllable: "Union, the work of life; division, the work of death. All through the Sacred Heart." This patriarchal and touching scene lasted about half an hour. Towards nine in the evening Father Donetta arrived to stay at the patient's bedside and to invite him to have great confidence in his beloved Jesus. He was to remain there until three in the morning, a moved witness of the faith, the hope and the charity of the Good Father.

The agony was painful, but so edifying for all who witnessed it. All of them told their beads for the dear dying man.

During the recitation of these many "Hail Marys", the Good Father gave a moved look, a kindly smile and an expressive gesture towards the Most Holy Virgin, whose picture hung on the wall facing his bed. He was then heard murmuring a prayer, without anyone quite making out what it could be; his daughter, Mrs Saucourt, caught these two words: *Mater misericordiæ*. Nothing more was needed for Father Donetta to understand the Good Father's thought, and leaning to the patient's ear, he repeated the prayer in full: *Maria mater gratiæ — mater misericordiæ — tu nos ab hoste protege — et mortis hora suscipe*. — The patient, who had for some time been somewhat restless, repeated this invocation word for word, and after these last words, *et mortis hora suscipe*, which he pronounced with greater force, he sank into a recollected calm until his last breath. Towards two o'clock his breathing became more jerky and his pulse grew weaker. The words of the *Ave Maria* could still be made out on the patient's lips. The Good Father very gently gave back his soul to God towards half past two in the morning, after a last absolution.

Address Delivered by the Bishop of Nice in the Church of Sainte-
Hélène, Nice, on 27 November 1915, at the Funeral of Mr Léon
Harmel

My Brethren,

This is not the hour for long speeches. The tragic events which call us to action and to struggle, and keep us there, each at our post, leave us no time to praise our dead — we scarcely have time to mourn them.

And yet I would feel I was failing in a duty if I let the mortal remains of the humble and great Christian whose funeral we are celebrating pass away without saluting him with our veneration and our gratitude, without recalling, to the honour of the Church and of France, the modest but glorious and fruitful work which will make his memory immortal among us.

The work of Léon Harmel is summed up in the name henceforth inseparable from his own: the *Good Father Harmel*. It is not only his 70 children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren (35 of whom are fighting on our battlefields, and several of whom have fallen there gloriously) who give him that name, with the accent that love, veneration, gratitude and filial pride know how to put into it, those three, those four generations (*usque ad tertiam et quartam generationem*) which the patriarchs of old gloried in blessing, as he himself blessed them in his last hour; — this name of Father had been bestowed on him by those workers of Val-des-Bois of whom he was able to make a second and vast family: to widen the intimate circle of the Christian family, to extend it from the hearth to the mill, to carry it over from the private order to the social order, that is his glorious and fruitful work.

Brought early face to face with the social question by the very demands of his profession, he did not try, like so many others, to deny

it, or to evade it, or to take no interest in it. Ready for all the labours and all the sacrifices that it ordinarily imposes on those who devote themselves to it, he considered and tackled this formidable question of our times with all the more loyalty and resolution because, looking into his soul, he found there, in his Christian faith and in the teachings of the Church, in the light and grace that go with them, the resources needed to solve it. He was always convinced that from the day when the rich and the proletarians, employers and workers, were Christian enough to make these divine teachings prevail in their mutual relations, agreement and peace would not be slow to come about between them in justice and charity.

I say in justice and charity, for unlike certain timid and short-sighted minds, he never believed that charity alone would be enough to pacify a society in which, on more than one point, the rights of the little and the weak have been and still are disregarded; but he was convinced that, on their behalf, the sense of justice had to be reawakened in Christian consciences themselves.

Yet he was no less convinced that justice would remain a virtue without compassion and too often barren, so long as it was not made fruitful by charity, which alone is capable, in the conflicts that divide the classes, of inspiring in the workers the patience and resignation, and in the rich the self-denial and disinterestedness, that are needed so that, in even the most prosperous and the best legally organised society, the rights of the one and the other may be mutually guaranteed in an unshakeable union.

Hence the place that the *Good Father Harmel* won and kept in that illustrious group of social Catholics, beside Mr de Mun and several others. But his glorious distinction lies in this: in the setting where Providence had placed him, he carried out his social and Christian ideal, or at least made, in order to carry it out, the most generous and most fruitful effort that has been attempted so far.

In that vast manufacturing region whose industries are driven by the active waters of the Suippe, Mr Léon Harmel and his brother had founded as early as 1846^{*} a large spinning establishment. Hundreds of workers, most of them without religion and steeped in socialist utopias, as nearly all of them then were, worked there. As soon as he had come to know them and love them (and for him that was one and the same thing), Léon Harmel felt that he had a providential mission among them; and without stopping at the difficulties of the undertaking, he resolved to transform this mass of workers into a family of which he would be the father. Thanks to action as energetic as it was discreet, but intelligent and persevering, he succeeded.

After rekindling, in these hostile or indifferent souls, the faith and charity which were to unite them in religious associations, he grafted onto these associations the most modern economic institutions, intended to provide for their temporal needs. He called them to put forward their claims there, to defend and manage their interests; he invited them, the first to do so, to share in the profits; and it is thus that he brought into being, in the industrial world, that great Christian family whose ideal his faith had revealed to him. His opponents said: A chimera! Indeed it was not without provoking criticism that he brought these things about, and more than once it came to him from the very people who, it would seem, ought to have applauded his designs and his efforts. Several were astonished, almost scandalised, to see him combine with his so faithfully traditional faith some bold initiatives, and they did not seem to suspect that it was precisely in the understanding of that faith that he had found their inspiration. Yes, he had found that inspiration in the study and meditation of the Gospel and of its most authoritative commentators. He knew that our old theologians of the Middle Ages, in their claims for the rights of

*** NOTE** The Val-des-Bois spinning mill was founded by Léon Harmel's father, Jacques-Joseph Harmel, who bought the land in 1840; the mill started up in 1841. Léon Harmel entered it young and took over its management in 1854.

the weak and the little, more than once anticipated and went beyond our modern innovators, who, in their best moments, have been no more than their unconscious and belated echoes.

Moreover, to reassure him and confirm him in his convictions and his undertakings, the “Good Father” had the highest, the most divine authority there is here below. The eyes of Leo XIII were upon him. Attentive as he was to the distress and the aspirations of modern society, the great Pope, as soon as he had met him, had not been slow to discern in Mr Harmel an intelligent, docile and wonderfully active co-operator. In their conversations he had found in the words of Léon Harmel something like an echo of his own thought, of his personal concerns, of his pastoral solicitude; and from then on he never ceased to follow him, to encourage him, to bless him, and when need be to reassure him, to spur him on, to hold him up as an example. And never perhaps did the soul of the old Pontiff pour itself out more eloquently than on that memorable day when Mr Harmel presented to him, beneath the astonished vaults of the Vatican, where they were welcomed as princes were received there, as princes were not received there, those workers to whom, in faith, humility and Christian charity, he had restored, together with the awareness of their duties, the sense of their rights and of their dignity.

And so, when a few months later there appeared that immortal Encyclical *Rerum novarum* on the condition of the workers, destined amid the confusion of systems, through so many reefs and contradictions, to serve as a beacon to our modern societies to lead them towards the achievement of social peace, the *Good Father* Harmel could, without presumption, recognise in it the doctrines he had always defended and, on more than one page, the echo of his private conversations with Leo XIII.

These events are already distant. Soon seventy years have passed over the great family of Val-des-Bois without changing its spirit or loosening its bonds; and therein lies the pledge of a powerful vitality

in days when so many short-lived institutions have seen their ruin hastened. The famous mill is today undergoing the ordeal common to so many great institutions: the desecrating flood of the barbarians has overrun it and perhaps destroyed it. It was the supreme grief of the *Good Father* Harmel to be separated from it in these last days of his life and to die far away from it. But the children of Val-des-Bois have remained faithful to their “Good Father”. Scattered for the most part over our battlefields, where several have already paid their glorious and bloody debt to the fatherland, they turned to him and, in admirable letters, asked for his advice and encouragement. The last lines he wrote, vibrant with Christian and patriotic faith and with indomitable confidence in the destiny of Catholic France, were for them, to sustain or revive in their souls that Christian courage which, for fifteen months now, has never ceased to give France so many heroes, almost martyrs.

It is thus that he died, consoled and strengthened in his last hour by the tender blessing of Benedict XV, in whom he had found again the friendly and fatherly heart of Leo XIII; he passed away like the patriarchs of the old Law, keeping to his last breath, with the serene activity of his intelligence, the gentle radiance of his heart and of his soul upon all those who surrounded him and came to him, blessing, in the persons of the children and grandchildren whom insurmountable obstacles did not keep far from him, that whole great and fine family, to which he bequeathed, and which has faithfully received, the unimpaired inheritance of his faith, his charity and his works. Thus he died, with a prayer on his lips, pointing us to heaven, carrying towards the God who welcomed him in His mercy the first fruits of our souls.

Is that, then, to die? No, for such dead are more alive than we are. They remain with those who mourn them, they remain with their works, invisible but present, loving and active, helpful and powerful as they never were, even in the most fruitful days of their earthly life.

And that is why it is most often when they have gone that the seed sown and tended by them in sweat and tears, amid obstacles and contradictions, suddenly takes on an unhopd-for growth and flowering.

This will be seen once more when, on the morrow of victory and deliverance, Val-des-Bois rises from its ruins to shelter a new generation of Christian employers and workers. Many of those who will then have at heart to work for our national regeneration will turn towards this oasis, to find there, together with a generous and fruitful inspiration, the model and already the seed of a France that is greater, better and stronger, because it will be truly fraternal and Christian.

It is then too that our gratitude will inscribe indelibly, in the history of the laborious, sorrowful and tragic days we shall have lived through, among the best children of the Church and of France, the for ever blessed name of the *Good Father Harmel*.

Amen!

Extract from the *Semaine Religieuse de Nice*.



Last Recommendations of the Good Father Léon Harmel to His Children and Grandchildren

23 August 1914 — 86th Year

(Recorded on a Pathe phonograph)

My dearly beloved Children,

I think of my eternity, which is drawing near, and of the account I shall have to render to God; I hope in His mercy and I ask for your prayers: you could not better show me your filial affection.

My life has been absorbed by three great passions:

The union and the sanctification of the family.

The happiness of the worker.

The service of Jesus Christ.

I entrust this threefold inheritance to future generations.

God wills the union of the family: your interest requires it, your happiness demands it.

Is not the only true happiness of man on earth to love and to be loved?

That is the highest good of mankind, the source of the uplifting passions: joy, kindness, confidence, enthusiasm, and health into the bargain.

The contrary feelings give rise to the depressing passions: selfishness, sadness, ill humour, jealousy, and the sufferings that darken life and form such favourable ground for illness.

The union of the family is your most precious possession; defend it vigorously. To do so, reject out of hand and without examination any disparaging remarks — with these simple words: “You are surely mistaken, you have been misinformed!” And if you insist, you will find that you are always right, for the wicked are not the only ones exposed to the errors of the tongue: the best of men, when he speaks ill

of his neighbour, is mistaken without knowing it. — Trust my experience.

Shun evil tongues and those who sow division; Our Lord holds them in horror.

Put yourselves out for the family luncheons; they are in a way the sacrament of union. Remember Our Lord's last recommendation when He gave us His testament of love: "Love one another as I have loved you. What you do to the least of your brethren, you do to me."

Let us apply these teachings to the family: we shall be treated and judged as we have treated and judged our neighbour, especially those with whom we live.

Have we borne with their faults?

Have we been the first to show them our affection?

Have we drawn from those around us the exclamation of the pagans:

"See how they love one another."

Then let us have confidence: we are on the way of salvation.

As a practical conclusion, let us look upon Jesus Christ through those close to us as through the Host. — Appearances are nothing; our faith must perceive, through the least pleasant and even the most painful forms, Jesus Christ Himself, who awaits proofs of our love, all the greater as we shall have made greater efforts to overcome ourselves.

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The happiness of our workers will be the object of your solicitude; you know how much I have loved them; you will take up my fatherhood; you will be always and above all educators, to form elites.

You will develop in them the sense of responsibility.

You will encourage the growth of their free initiatives, and accustom them to look after their own interests themselves.

You will thus fulfil the sublime mission of raising souls, remembering my axiom: the good of the worker by the worker and with him, never without him, and still less ever in spite of him.

The sense of duty raises a man, together with the sense of responsibility. — Confidence answers confidence — dignity rises, not to oppose authority, but to work more closely with it.

Take care to perfume your social action with the supernatural, remembering that no moral reform can be accomplished without the thought of God, which is all-powerful over minds and hearts.

Finally, be soldiers of Jesus Christ.

Let us ask ourselves each evening what we have done for the interests of Jesus, our gentle and much-loved Master.

We can never have too much submission to His vicar, nor too much confidence in his directions, for he is the way, the truth and the life, and the prolongation of Christ living, teaching and governing through His representative.

Pius X, by insisting on the frequent Communion of little children, has prepared the salvation of our society.

Enter the Third Order of St Francis, the great sanctifier of families, the school of humility and love.

Continue our workers' associations with their councils and the mutual apostolate; you will thus work for the spread of the reign of God in our much-loved country. — Have confidence: she is still the Eldest Daughter of the Church, and by one of those sudden recoveries to which she is accustomed, she will one day take up again her traditions as an apostle in the world.

Foster the priestly and religious vocations of which the Val is a nursery.

Pay your tribute generously to the Church, remembering that the Master will know how to reward you for your sacrifices. — It is He who multiplies the bread.

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Allow me, in closing, to lift our eyes on high: is it not in Heaven that our hopes lie?

I invite you to place your persons, your affairs and your families under the protection of Our Lady of the Factory, our much-loved Queen and Mother.

Do not forget the Sacred Heart and His promises; then walk on in confidence, continuing through a second cycle of centuries to lead our family and our house in the ways of progress and honour.

From the eternal courts we shall await you, we shall sustain you, we shall applaud you.

May the Harmel family in the future, faithful to its traditions, have recourse to the Sacred Heart, faithful to His promises.

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