

14 JUNE 1900

IN MEMORY
OF
FÉLIX HARMEL

VAL-DES-BOIS
3 MARCH 1857 — 14 JUNE 1899



GRANDE IMPRIMERIE DE BLOIS
2, Rue Haute, 2
EMMANUEL RIVIÈRE, Engineer of Arts and Manufactures

1900

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 1900 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 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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**IN MEMORY
OF
FÉLIX HARMEL**



FÉLIX HARMEL

3 March 1857 — Val-des-Bois — 14 June 1899

TERTIARY OF ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI

HONORARY CHAMBERLAIN OF CAPE AND SWORD TO H. H. LEO XIII

MAYOR OF WARMÉRIVILLE

GRAND OFFICER OF THE PONTIFICAL ORDER OF ST GREGORY

KNIGHT OF PIUS IX

LETTER FROM THE GOOD FATHER LÉON HARMEL TO THE MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY

Val-des-Bois, 14 June 1900.

My dear children, my dear friends,

Today it is a year since my beloved son Félix entered into his eternity. Let me ease my heart by speaking of him and of the examples he has left us.

Félix distinguished himself early on by his enthusiasm for noble causes. In his earliest childhood he heard talk at the family table of the grave events that followed the Italian war, of the betrayals that were to bring about the ruin of the temporal power of the Popes. His little child's heart was deeply moved by the heroism of the Papal Zouaves; his eyes lit up with the desire to imitate them.

On 7 April 1862, *Quasimodo* Sunday, the great cross that marks the threshold of the Val-des-Bois property was set up. Cardinal Gousset presided over the ceremony. The Municipal Council, the firemen and a great crowd of people escorted the cardinal. Félix was then five years old. He was talking with great animation in the middle of a group who were amused to hear him. He was voicing his indignation at the conduct of the Emperor Napoleon III towards Pius IX, whom he was betraying, and he did so with such violence that his tutor had to take him away for fear of getting into trouble.

At school he had been nicknamed Veuillot. He had his quarrels with the young rebels of the day; more than one fight followed, in which the boy defended the right with all the energy of his physical strength. During the holidays he read *L'Univers*, and the articles of Louis Veuillot filled him with enthusiasm. He recognised in him the "herald of truth". While still young, he had a clear conception of the role of the Sovereign Pontiff in the world; he venerated in Him the

living, incarnate Christ, to whom he joyfully devoted his life and his ardour.

To the end he remained a reader of *L'Univers*, which he always regarded as the best interpreter of the thoughts of the Vatican.

The pilgrimages to Rome answered the passions of his heart too well for him not to put all his energy and all his zest into them. The beginnings, in 1885, 1887 and 1889, were extremely laborious. People did not understand what we wanted. Every position had to be taken by storm, one after another. Now, in 1889 we had 15 different premises. It was he who, with his *furia francese*, won over the hesitant men and women and got them to hand over the dormitories and refectories for our dear workers. We did this work in January 1889, and during the pilgrimage (in October and November) we both spent our evenings seeing the pilgrims and speaking to them, to sustain their ardour and to make them understand the significance of the pilgrimage. He made three speeches an evening, which did not stop him from going to meet the trains, often in the middle of the night.

Everything seemed light to him because, in working for the Pope, he knew that he was working for Christ¹.

In the audiences that we had each year with Leo XIII, he listened with respectful eagerness to the words of the Sovereign Pontiff; they entered his soul and were engraved there in indelible lines. The Pope's ideas became his own thoughts.

1. Allow me to quote an incident from my dear Félix's life that shows his great good sense.

In September 1891, during the pilgrimage of the twenty thousand, whose splendour was beyond compare, the rumour went round Rome that I was to be made a Roman count by the Holy Father. The best-informed newspapers gave the news as final, and the most flattering letters and telegrams were already reaching us from France.

I was then confined to my room. Félix did not hesitate for a single moment. He told me of his wish to ask the Holy Father to withdraw his plan. For, Félix said to me, you must remain the Good Father. He then submitted to me the following letter, which I accepted. I give it to you in all its simplicity.

Letter from Mr FÉLIX HARMEL to Monsignor ANGELI, Privy Chaplain to His Holiness.

"Rome, 25 September 1891.

"Monsignor,

"Your great kindness towards us encourages us to appeal to your goodwill.

"For some days the newspapers have been publishing the report: 'Mr Léon Harmel has been made a Roman count by His Holiness.'

"His Holiness knows the special character of my father's mission, which is essentially to concern himself with the people and to mingle with them, and consequently the obligation to keep the plebeian character that our fathers have handed down to us.

"It is perhaps rash to speak of a favour that has never been offered to us. But we know the so tenderly paternal heart of our beloved Father, so mercifully good to our family, and we have reason to expect anything of his kindness.

"We beg your pardon for our boldness at this moment; but we wish to tell you what Your Excellency certainly understands: that it seems to us indispensable, if he is to continue his mission, that the Good Father should remain Léon Harmel, the father of the workers, and not enter the aristocracy, which would distance him from those to whom he has devoted his life.

"I am, with the deepest respect, Your Excellency's most humble servant.

"Signed: Félix HARMEL."

Recently, during Holy Week, I was struck by these words that Scripture repeats again and again: “Christ was glorified because of his obedience.” Félix understood this great truth, which sums up the whole Christian life. He knew that this obedience consists in serving as the master wishes to be served, and not as we fancy and according to our own interpretation, which is often self-interested.

We are, without knowing it, steeped in Gallicanism. The famous articles of 1682, by a kind of atavism, haunt the best minds. We cannot get used to accepting the intervention of the Pope’s authority in certain questions, as if it were for us to determine his domain, and as if, moreover, many political questions did not have their moral and religious side. Our indocility has delivered us up to the Freemasons and the Jews*, and we shall not recover our freedom until we return to filial obedience of the mind as well as of the heart. Félix was deeply convinced of this; and so he had a horror of ambiguities, of so-called softenings that are nothing but diminishments. The complete truth, in its dazzling light, delighted his mind and renewed his ardour. He could not bear anyone to argue in his presence about the teachings of the Sovereign Pontiff, even when they seemed to be no more than counsels.

I have made it my duty to devote myself to the triumph of the teachings of the Holy See, especially in the social field. To achieve this aim as far as my strength allowed, I travelled ceaselessly for more than fifteen years. In these struggles I drew upon myself the disapproval of very good Christians, even of some of my best friends.

These struggles, so painful to my heart, sometimes brought moments of discouragement. But Félix was there, he upheld me by the

* **NOTE** This letter of June 1900 links the Jews with the Freemasons among the adversaries of Catholics. Such language was then widespread in a large part of the French Catholic press and Catholic circles, in the years of the Dreyfus affair, which deeply divided France after the unjust conviction for treason of a Jewish officer, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, in 1894. We reproduce these lines out of fidelity to the document: they belong to their time, and this edition does not make them its own.

fearlessness of his faith. Always pressing forward, far from slowing my action or yielding to a false complaisance, he never ceased to spur me on. When I spoke on the beaches of Brittany or on the shores of the Mediterranean, I seemed to hear the echo of the people's acclaim in the heart of my dear Félix. I felt his generous soul stirred by the enthusiasm of my audiences of workers, so tenderly loved. What memories! Yes, I declare it, I could never have kept up such a life if I had not had the reserve of his ardour to renew my own.

During my last stay in Rome (February and March 1899) I wrote, at his request, a daily account of my journey, of my visits, of my audiences so thrilling with interest. He drank in these accounts with delight, and when, at the Congress of Blois (3 April 1899), I summed up my impressions of the journey in my speech *Republican, Democrat and Christian*, he sent me an enthusiastic telegram proclaiming his absolute agreement.

This programme answered his feelings of filial submission as much as his ardent love for his country. He believed with me that, if Catholics gave sincere support to the consolidation of the Republic, we would have a government respectful of the Church.

He was resolved to declare himself ever more loyally republican, sincerely democratic, that is to say in favour of the social rise of the working classes, and at the same time an ardent Catholic and a submissive son of the Church.

To glorify Jesus Christ in the family, to glorify him in the mill and in public life: such was his constant aim. He had promised himself never to make a toast without uttering the adorable name of the Redeemer, and in the most indifferent circles he did so with a tact and a conviction that charmed his listeners.

In our century of cowardice and compromise, people honour the soldier who is proud of his flag, the servant who glorifies his master; they salute with admiration the fine boldness that can face every kind

of mockery to affirm its faith. It is the mark of great souls. It was the particular character of Félix.

He summed up his life well when he said at the moment of dying: "All my life I have wanted to be a soldier of Jesus Christ." He added "in spite of my cowardice", for he knew how to acknowledge his weaknesses, and that is to his honour. It does not depend on us to be perfect, but it does depend on us to acknowledge our wretchedness and to humble ourselves for it.

Those are the examples he has left us. Treasure, my dear grandchildren, this heritage from your father. May faith penetrate your soul and, so to speak, your blood and your flesh, so that nothing can tear it from you. Faith, let us not forget, is obedience, and whoever does not obey the Pope does not obey God.

I do not wish to end without recalling the memory of my delightful grandson Robert, a soul as ardent as his papa's.

You will gladly reread the accounts of the last moments of our dear departed. I add to them the three letters of my seventieth year, written together with my dear Félix.

And now I ask for your prayers for my beloved one.

We believe in Purgatory. We are not among those who rid themselves of their dead by putting them straight into Paradise, for we know that we are all sinners. And I too, when I am gone, shall need your prayers, and I hope that you will have pity on me.

Receive, my dear children and my dear friends, my most tender embraces.

Léon HARMEL.

ACCOUNT OF THE LAST MOMENTS OF FÉLIX HARMEL

Val-des-Bois, Friday 16 June 1899.

My dear children,

You are waiting for me to give you some details of the last moments of my beloved son Félix; I do so willingly.

He left us at 4 o'clock in the morning on 14 June, the 17th anniversary of his marriage. Seventeen years of peace, of mutual love and of delightful intimacy, which the years constantly increased! Seven children, four boys and three girls, surrounded the family table. None had yet left the home, which had remained a sweet nest of love. What a collapse in such a setting, where the dear one, respected and loved, was the happiness and the pride of the little tribe!

He was the best and most tender of sons, the splendour of my fatherhood, both by the noble ardour of his devotedness to the causes that are dear to me, Jesus Christ, the Pope and the people, and by the care he took to develop in his children love of the family, filial piety towards me and noble passions.

He brightened the evening of my life with a dawn full of hope and of exquisite tenderness. It was an atmosphere of love and admiration like the one that shone around my venerated father.

The outburst of grief that showed itself among the working population revealed the strength of the affection and attachment he had been able to inspire around him.

His illness was short. It began on Wednesday 7 June. For some days his legs had been hurting, and on the Sunday of Corpus Christi he had followed the parish procession, which was very long and very tiring. It was pointed out to him later that this imprudence must have brought on his illness or at least hastened it. "It makes no difference

to me,” he replied, “I was determined to fulfil my duty as mayor by following the Blessed Sacrament; if it had to be done again, whatever the consequences, I would do it again.”

The doctor diagnosed articular rheumatism, which followed its usual course. A novena was being made to Our Lady of the Factory (Notre-Dame de l’Usine) and to St Anthony of Padua, and on Tuesday 13 June an improvement full of hope was observed. That same day, at about half past one, the rheumatism went to the heart and brought on a fainting fit that lasted half an hour. At 3 o’clock the mill doctor, Mr Brodier, said to us: “Mr Félix made me give him a formal undertaking to warn him when he was in danger of death. Now the moment has come to keep my promise.”

I thanked the doctor and took the task upon myself, knowing well that my dear Félix was able to receive this warning as a Christian. Indeed, as soon as I spoke to him, he asked to make a second confession, so as, he said, to be entirely in order. We suggested that he receive Communion at once as viaticum. He looked at me tenderly for some time, then he said:

“I obey; you are keeping watch beside me. You are my rampart.” And, turning to Marthe: “And you, my beloved little wife, you are my guardian angel. Whatever you wish, I do very willingly, but you must prepare me, for I am incapable of doing it.”

Then gently I suggested to him feelings of tenderness and love for the beloved Jesus who has heaped so many blessings upon us, and feelings of contrition for past faults. Then I asked him to offer his life generously and to make the sacrifice of it according to the will of God. He then said to me: “All my life I have wanted to be a soldier of Jesus Christ. In spite of my cowardice, this desire has always persisted in my heart. I have wanted to fight for Him. Today I declare that I love Him with all my soul. May His will be done. I want my children too to be valiant soldiers of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Father.”

At about 4 o'clock the priest came in with the adorable Eucharist. All the children were gathered. I expressed for them the thoughts of their father, who feared he could not do so firmly enough.

After Communion, the thanksgiving. He renewed his loving submission to the divine Master. "You love Jesus Christ very much?" — "Oh! do I love Him!" he replied, raising to heaven eyes wet with tears.

He gathered the workers who were present around his bed: "Vasserot, I take you as my witness. A little while ago I was anxious and troubled, and since I received Jesus Christ I am perfectly calm and full of joy. My sacrifice is made, I fear nothing any more."

He had his children brought to embrace them one after another with moving tenderness, saying a particular word to each. To the youngest, Léon, a child of 20 months: "He is the blessing, he is the child of the future."

Then he added: "I am in the hands of our King Jesus Christ. I regret nothing. Of course I wish to live, but entirely according to His will; it makes no difference to me."

Always full of concern for the workers who were nursing him, he was afraid of tiring them: "Ah! my poor friends, what a burden I am to you!" Several times he thanked them warmly for their services.

Evening came, then night, bringing a worsening with every hour. Our chaplain, the Rev. Fr Mammès, had wished to spend the night. At about one o'clock in the morning he gave him the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, which he received in full consciousness. But already his speech was becoming difficult. The doctor, Mr Brodier, chose to care for him to the end with great solicitude. At 3 o'clock in the morning the children and the whole family surrounded the sick man's bed. At 4 o'clock he entered into eternity, fortified with the last plenary indulgences.

He was clothed in the habit of the Tertiaries of St Francis that we had brought back from Rome. All that day and the two days follow-

ing, a stream of people in tears passed through the room where he lay.

Many Communion were made in the chapel for the dear departed. The clerks were keen to set the example.

That is the brief account I wanted to give you at once. We are crushed with grief, but our sorrow is not without consolation; we feel that our family is being formed again in heaven, and for my part, being on the eve of the decisive day, I ask God to let me end like my beloved Félix, in love and in submission.

In praying for your brother, do not forget his valiant companion and their dear children.

It is in tears that I end this letter, embracing you tenderly.

Léon HARMEL.

LETTER FROM THE GOOD FATHER LÉON HARMEL TO HIS GRANDCHILDREN

JEANNE, JACQUES-JOSEPH, FÉLIX-GABRIEL, MARCELLE,
MARTHA and LÉON HARMEL

Val-des-Bois, 16 October 1899.

My beloved ones,

Today it is twenty-nine years since your grandmother, Mrs Léon Harmel, entered into her eternity, and on this same day her grandson Robert is being buried beside her and beside his father, so deeply mourned. Both have gone to enlarge the family in heaven; up there the family of earth is being formed again; that is the end towards which we must all strive, that is the purpose of life.

Your brother Robert truly seems to have been called by his papa, whose travelling companion he had often been: four months were enough to consummate this second sacrifice.

Does it not seem to you, my beloved grandchildren, that your mother must be dearer to you still, and that you must draw closer than ever around the Christian woman who has shown herself equal to the great trials that the good Lord has laid upon her?

Robert was born on 4 November 1887, the first Friday of the month; he was baptised the next day, 5 November, and received the names Marie-Charles-Edmond-Robert. He was a fine child, of infectious cheerfulness, the life and soul of your gatherings. Early on he had an ardent soul.

One day, when he was not yet 5 years old, he heard his papa say that one goes straight to heaven if one commits no sins. He went back to his governess and said to her: “I have made up my mind; I shall never commit a sin, I want to go to heaven.”

He was much impressed by the reading of the acts of the martyrs that he was given to translate in his first Latin classes; he admired their heroism. One day his teacher said to him: “Unfortunately, such strength of soul would no longer be found.” His eyes lit up, and he exclaimed with energy: “Yes, it would still be found!”

In the toasts that you are accustomed to give at family gatherings, he put an ardour and an expression that struck his listeners. The firemen and the bandsmen still remember the impression made by the speech of the little man of 9 on St Barbara’s day.

When a member of the family was invited, Robert was always ready, at a sign from his papa, to stand up and graciously greet the guest of the household; he always found a few ideas to put forward.

For your papa’s return from Rome, on 20 October 1898, it was he who insisted on composing all by himself the toast that he recited with animation.

He made his First Communion on 16 April last, Good Shepherd Sunday. You remember his fervour. He showed the same feelings at each of his weekly Communions. His illness deepened his devotion to the adorable Eucharist. On 20 August he received Extreme Unction with great confidence. His illness dated from 11 July and had already been very cruel. From the beginning he showed a quite special devotion to the Holy Infant Jesus of Prague. He asked, as a great favour, that the little statue venerated in the chapel be brought into his room.

Several times a day he would say to his mother: “The prayer!” She would read him the prayer to the Infant Jesus. At each crisis he wanted to kiss the hand of the statuette; he found relief in it: calm returned, the moaning ceased. The first time he kissed the little hand, he prepared for it as carefully as for Communion, and he had his mother called so that she might witness it.

To encourage him to take the unpleasant medicines, he was given small coins for his own purse; he spent them all on having Masses said in honour of the Holy Infant.

Around 8 September there was an improvement marked enough to allow him to come downstairs and attend the family meals; he never came down without his precious statue. Soon a relapse revived his pains. When he was suffering, he gazed lovingly at the Infant Jesus, and from that sight he drew courage and resignation. He would then say: “My God, as You will and not as I will!”

He often turned over, unable to find a comfortable position, and each time he wanted his mother to change sides, holding the image of the Holy Infant before his eyes; he did not want to take his eyes off either the one or the other.

He insisted that his mother should rest, and when she came back, if she asked him: “Were you bored? — Oh no! Mamma,” he would answer, “when you are resting, I don’t even think of it.”

Meanwhile the illness was making constant progress. It was a painful sight to see in this child the violent struggle between life and death.

Several times we thought he was going to die: everyone crowded round him, and when the crisis had passed he recovered a relative improvement. On Wednesday 11 October the crisis was stronger than usual, and he then cried out: “Quick, send for the members of the family so that I may embrace them all and they may see me one last time.” Everyone came; the room was full. After embracing each one, he spoke of those who were missing (2 in Germany, 1 at school and several away travelling). When the two Sisters of the Holy Saviour who were nursing him came near in their turn, he expressed to them warmly his gratitude for their good care.

As soon as everyone had withdrawn, he said to his mother: “Perhaps papa wants me to go and keep him company. If it is the good Lord’s will, very gladly.”

A little later: — I have thought it over carefully; if the good Lord gives me back my life, I want to be a priest, I promise it. — But you cannot bind yourself without the consent of Father Chaplain. — The

chaplain, when called, accepted the promise, on condition that his director would pronounce on the vocation. — He said to his mother: — You can never imagine how I suffer. — Oh! my dear little one, I would like to take your pains upon myself. — Oh! no, dearest mother, never.

Another time: — I am suffering so much; pray that I may sleep, so as to die more gently. — My child, what you are saying is not Christian. The good Lord never gives us more suffering than we can bear. — Well then! may God's will be done and not mine! — He often repeated these words.

During the last days, in the silence he kept for almost the whole day, absorbed as he was by the work of pain, he would repeat in a low voice: "To heaven! To heaven!" As his poor mother could not hold back her tears, he said to her: "Dearest Mamma, don't cry, I beg you, don't cry! I shall never forget you; I shall pray that you may be happy."

— You will be the angel of the family.

— Oh! have no fear, I will do everything for you.

At last, after harrowing ups and downs that lasted three days and three nights, on Wednesday 13 October, at a quarter to five in the afternoon, the little patient held out his arms and, pressing his mother's head to his heart with infinite tenderness, said to her: "Save me! Goodbye! To heaven!" Then he fell back on the pillow and stopped breathing.

My beloved ones, here, one after the other, are great examples of human frailty. Do not, then, set your heart on what passes, but only on what endures. Be devout, tenderly affectionate and obedient towards your mother, kind to all those around you, humble towards yourselves. We are worth something only by our virtues.

Receive, my beloved ones, my most tender embraces.

Léon HARMEL.

DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS AT FUMAY

(Sunday 6 November 1898)

Here is the letter that Mr Félix sent to the Good Father Léon Harmel, who was attending the Democratic Congress of Fumay as honorary president:

Val-des-Bois, 5 November 1898.

My dear Good Father,

The days follow one another and add themselves to the days with the same regularity as the waves of the sea, whose ceaseless pursuit never slackens! And each morning brings a new burden, a new task, calling for a new effort.

And yet the memory of your kindnesses does not fade from my heart: it crowns and rules my existence as the faithful foaming crest crowns the wave, giving it its charm and its allure.

How could I forget the days in Rome? What hours, all of happiness and joy! I was there, at your side, close against you, my heart in your heart, while my soul and my mind, my whole being, was under your hand, under your impulse. I drank deep of consolation and contentment, and if being away from home was painful to me, it was nevertheless without bitterness; what fine enthusiasms, what splendours!

Generosity, love and devotedness flowed brimming over around us and within us!

How often I have thought of all these things, past and yet ever living and life-giving! and how deeply my soul has kept your mark.

I gather all these memories, all these sweet emotions in my heart, as a tonic, as a support and as an encouragement.

All the same, Good Father, I want to send you, in renewing them to you, all my thanks and all my gratitude.

What shall I add about my children, who were so deeply stirred on that magnificent journey, who were touched to the depths of their souls?

May Our King Jesus Christ preserve all these blessings for us; may He keep you in health and strength, and may our tender and filial affection always be able to show itself to our beloved Good Father, whom we embrace tenderly.

Félix.

(There follows a short note from Mrs Félix Harmel.)

REPLY OF THE GOOD FATHER

Fumay, Sunday 6 November 1898.

My beloved children,

This morning your joint letter reached me, full of feelings so sweet to my heart and at the same time so comforting.

For no work is closer to my heart than the continuation of my mission in my own descendants.

My beloved, all your life you have had an intuitive grasp of the noble passions that have guided mine. The good Lord has given you a companion worthy of you, who shares your enthusiasms, and you are bringing up your children in an atmosphere warm with love for Jesus Christ and with devotedness to those who toil and suffer.

And so it is a rest for my mind and my heart to think of your home, where my soul can expand freely, sure of finding affectionate echoes.

Carry on, my beloved children, and the blessing of God will be upon you.

The prosperity of the Mill (the first and chief of our works) is furthered not only by this blessing, but by a way of acting that assures you the confidence and love of the workers. The professional family: such is our dream, our aim at Val-des-Bois, under the gentle

gaze of Our Mother, Our Lady of the Factory. Work, by your direct contacts, by your practical compassion, by your simplicity in your dealings, to make our little people a happy people, because it will be confident in the future.

Receive, both of you, my most tender embraces for yourselves and for your dear children.

Léon HARMEL.

P. S. — Here I have found the warm and delightful welcome to which our beloved friends the democratic workers have accustomed me; Laurent and Robinet are outstanding men.

Abbé Gayraud will give the main speech. Everything promises us a fine and good day for the spreading of our ideas, which are none other than the ideas of Leo XIII and, as the great Pope says, an echo of the Gospel.

LETTERS FROM THE GOOD FATHER LÉON HARMEL ON THE OCCASION OF HIS SEVENTIETH YEAR

TO HIS FAMILY

Val-des-Bois, 17 February 1898.

My beloved children and grandchildren,

Today I enter my seventieth year.

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, but also in your prayers; you could not better show me your filial affection.

I thank our master and king Jesus Christ for having given me children docile to my teaching, who, already in my lifetime, are lovingly continuing my social mission. It is a consolation and a sweet peace for my soul.

My life has been absorbed by three great passions: the union and sanctification of the family, the happiness of the workers, and the service of Jesus Christ. I entrust this threefold legacy to future generations.

It is therefore to my grandchildren especially that I address myself today.

To preserve in the family the *union* that is its strength, and the Christian spirit that guarantees its endurance, apply yourselves, my dear grandchildren, to following our traditions. Some day I shall tell you about our family customs, so as to leave you my soul and my heart summed up in these precious practices, which will be for you the pledge of happiness.

You will live in an atmosphere of selfishness and individualism, which the modern world praises, if not as virtues, at least as useful things.

Know that selfishness and individualism are vices which, far from serving personal interest, bring about the collapse of fortunes and the destruction of families. They are the chief causes of the catastrophes we are witnessing. Here, as in every field, virtue is the necessary foundation of prosperity, and vice is the source of material ruin as well as of moral ruin.

The Harmel family has always been distinguished by its affectionate concern for the *happiness of the workers*. Your fathers will tell you what consolation one feels in loving and in feeling oneself loved. Remember that the workers are men, and for that reason respect their dignity; moreover, they are Christians and the privileged friends of Jesus Christ. Let your action upon them always be discreet and affectionate. Believe that the little ones are easily oppressed, and bring a particular delicacy to your dealings with them, so as to respect their legitimate pride and their freedom. Take care not to violate that freedom by wishing to increase their well-being against their will; that would be the time to say that the better is the enemy of the good. What is important is to encourage their personal initiative, to develop in them the sense of responsibility from the family, professional and Christian points of view. With your help, let them themselves be the makers of their emancipation and of their social uplift.

Do not be afraid of compromising your authority as employers in this action made of respect and love. The free consent of wills and hearts obtains results that constraint and force have never achieved.

Finally, be *soldiers of Jesus Christ!* Be the tenderly and blindly submissive sons of His Vicar. The blessing of God, even in your temporal affairs, will be the consequence of your filial submission to the great fatherhood of the old man in white in the Vatican, who is for us the prolongation of Jesus Christ on earth. Certainly, if the papacy in itself has a right to our respect and our love, what a right has Leo XIII, who has heaped so many blessings upon us! He is not only a tenderly loved father to us; he is also the genius who pierces the

future with his eagle eye to show the role of Christian democracy in the twentieth century. Leo XIII is, as Mr de Vogüé says, “this pope whose broad and daring gesture, sweeping aside three centuries of cabinet diplomacy, goes back to the origins to take up again the tradition of the great pontiffs who gathered crowds, emancipated peoples and gave social laws”.

It is by privilege that our family has received its great social and Christian mission in the world of labour. Your faithfulness to this mission will preserve you from the fearful catastrophes so common around you.

Persevere in it, and God, who never fails in His promises, will keep for you His love of predilection.

In closing, my beloved children and grandchildren, let me thank you for the affectionate tenderness and the delicate care with which you brighten the evening of my life. Receive all my most tender embraces.

Léon HARMEL.

TO THE VETERANS OF VAL-DES-BOIS

Val-des-Bois, 17 February 1898.

My beloved friends,

On entering my seventieth year, I feel the need to recollect myself, to cast a glance at the past and to consider the future.

The past is already far off; yet it lives in our memory and still makes our hearts thrill. Among the images it calls up, first of all I meet and greet your good and friendly faces, noble veterans of Val-des-Bois, my valiant companions in work. For half a century I have waged the industrial and social campaign with you.

When I strove to raise the dignity of the worker, by giving him back the sense of his responsibility as head of a family, as a worker and as a Christian, it was with you that I acted.

With you was organised that fruitful mutual apostolate, which has often gone as far as sacrifice, sometimes as far as heroism.

With you were founded those many councils which have placed you at the head of all the institutions and have taught you to govern your own affairs yourselves.

The order, the simplicity and the Christian spirit that have governed your lives have multiplied the fruits of your work, producing savings whose total has surpassed that of the most favoured factories.

Thanks to your good spirit and your confidence in your superiors, we were able to set up the factory councils, which unite the efforts of employers and workers for industrial prosperity, while at the same time giving you a real share in the government and discipline of the establishment.

On the distant journeys to which my social mission called me, it was the thought of you and your affection that sustained my courage. It was your example that allowed me to prove the practical possibility of institutions that so many employers believed impossible, because they had not appealed sufficiently to the generous initiative of their staff.

Yes, during this long run of years, I have loved you tenderly, and you have returned my affection. I can say today that you are my pride and my honour, and we have only to thank the good Lord for the past.

And the future?

The future will be short for me; it will be short for some of you. But for each of us it will be prolonged in our beloved family, for which we have worked and suffered, and to which we must devote all our care.

Your children and grandchildren must follow the traditions of honour they have received from you, in their three forms: *family*, *professional* and *Christian*.

Remind your children that the home is a sanctuary where peace and love must flourish. One can never make too many sacrifices to preserve the *union of the family*, the only oasis of happiness left to fallen humanity.

The lost earthly paradise has its reflection in the Christian home. When the worker comes home tired from the work he has joyfully borne for his family, he finds again his valiant companion, whose orderliness and tenderness lighten the sometimes heavy burdens of the humble household. They lean on each other in an affection that the years increase. They are surrounded by their children, whose respect and love make their hearts blossom and whose cheerfulness brightens their dwelling. From such a house there rises each day towards heaven a song of thanksgiving that gladdens the heart of God.

Professional honour is also a tradition of Val-des-Bois. The noble work of the hands is honoured there; the machine is loved there like a comrade. It is always with happiness that I walk through your great rooms lit up by your smiles; one breathes there an air of family and of joy. One feels that all these workers have the legitimate ambition of remaining at the head of the industry, and that they are jealous to keep for the firm the good name that their elders won for it.

Finally, you wish to perpetuate in your descendants *Christian honour*, the finest, the noblest, the one that fills the soul with the joyful fanfares of hope, even when it is bowed beneath the weight of trial. Your children will want to remain the proud soldiers of Jesus Christ. They will make it a point of honour to uphold everywhere His glory and His interests, which are ours. In this way they are sure to win, besides, the esteem of the working populations, who always salute with respect courage, frankness and loyalty in one's convictions.

It is to pursuing this great undertaking that you will devote the last ardour of your lives, the energies of your souls and, if need be, the blood of your hearts.

Thus you will usefully complete your careers, sown with work and courage.

And then we shall all love one another to the end, shall we not, my beloved friends?

Allow me, in these sentiments, to renew to you the testimony of my deep affection.

Léon HARMEL.

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCILS OF THE
VAL-DES-BOIS CORPORATION

Val-des-Bois, 17 February 1898.

My dear friends,

To you too I wish to address a word of affection and encouragement on this day, which marks my entry into my seventieth year.

The councils at Val-des-Bois have such considerable influence that they are truly the chief agents of all the good that is done among our little people.

That is why I have a particular affection for you and a very legitimate gratitude for the generosity and devotedness with which you carry out your duties.

You know that the smooth running of the association or institution you govern depends on you. On this point I cannot recommend you too strongly to identify yourselves with it, to regard it as your own affair, as your second family. Think often of possible improvements and, when you are in session, set out the fruit of your reflections; speak boldly, knowing that you are among family and that your comrades will be grateful to you for the spirit you bring to the meetings. The life of the councils consists precisely in this exchange of ideas carried on with simplicity and firmness.

You have, in addition, a general duty of apostolate; for even in economic and recreational meetings, a man brings his soul as well as his

body, his heart as well as his mind. That is why, without darkening the games with austere thoughts, without ceasing to talk of material interests at an economic meeting, one must know how to perfume everything with the supernatural.

All good comes from above, in the order of nature as in that of grace. From the sky falls the dew that refreshes the plant; from the sun come down the rays that clothe the flower in brilliant colours. Jesus Christ will always remain the wonderful inspirer of love of one's neighbour.

Is He not the divine charmer of souls, and can He not impart an exquisite kindness to human relations which, without Him, often become difficult and painful?

If your apostolate is supernatural, it will easily be active: through good example, so powerful in drawing others; through sacrifice, which overturns every obstacle — our brothers of the Inner Association have experienced this many times —; through gentle compassion for the sorrows and joys of your brothers; and finally through services rendered. A thousand opportunities are offered to us in daily life: as the drop of water falling on the same spot ends by piercing the rock, so the small everyday services, when they are repeated, end by winning us the most closed hearts. These are the victories of mutual love that gladden the angels and leave a precious memory in souls.

Finally, what delights me in your action is that it is affectionately discreet. I am so afraid of oppression, wherever it comes from, that I congratulate you on having no disciplinary power and on considering yourselves bound always to be agreeable, even while you are useful.

Carry on, my beloved friends, persevere in your courage; he who does good to his brother performs the noblest act that can be asked of a man; he performs a divine act.

Do not weary of beginning again. God has always been the great beginner-again, and for eighteen centuries the arms of Jesus on the

cross have not fallen from weariness, so that mankind may always hope and love.

Sow smiles and joys around you, and Val-des-Bois will remain the fatherland of mutual love, lit by the beautiful sun of Christian hope.

Receive, my dear friends, the expression of my warmest affection.

Léon HARMEL.

