

J A C Q U E S - E R N E S T H A R M E L

**Extracts from the Will of Mr Jacques-
Ernest Harmel, born at Rethel
(Ardennes) on 30 April 1830,
returned to God on Monday 28
September 1885**

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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 1886 edition. It has been typeset in the spirit of the original: title pages and headings follow the layout of the book; the illustration has been cut out of the digitised document and restored.

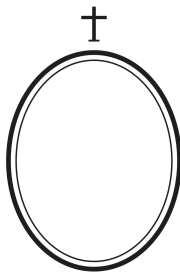
Léon Harmel, le Bon Père du Val-des-Bois

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EXTRACTS FROM THE WILL
OF MR
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* (*Notre-Dame de l'Usine*). 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 wish, as I have already said, that my body should rest beside that of my mother, near my children Charles and Jeanne, among my own, in the family vault.

.....

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?

It must be acknowledged: our God is a God of love; all that He does is good and salutary for us; His will alone, not that of men, imposes on us the wonderful work of suffering; afflictions, and death itself, are heavenly messengers sent by His infinite mercy. At the thought that I must soon leave this earth, I have only one regret: that I have not suffered more, and above all that I have not better understood the priceless blessing of suffering.

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 courage.

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 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 Children”, in which darts bound together resist the efforts of the young 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; by its confidence it furthers their prosperity without having to make any sacrifice. I could even prove, by examples, that such investments offer more security than those made outside. But these 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 live 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, whether out of ill will or 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.