

For Social Collaboration

LÉON HARMEL

**The three great loves
of a great social life:
THE WORKER
THE POPE
CHRIST**

Address delivered in the Basilica of Montmartre
for the centenary of the Good Father Léon HARMEL
on 3 January 1929

BY

His Lordship Mgr TISSIER

Bishop of Châlons



COMMITTEE

for the Centenary of
LÉON HARMEL

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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 1929 edition. It has been typeset in the spirit of the original: title pages and headings follow the layout of the book; the illustration has been cut out of the digitised document and restored.

The 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

leonharmel.com

Translated from the transcription of a digitised copy.

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Your Excellency,¹

My Lord,²

My Brethren,

We are gathered to celebrate the centenary^{*} of a man prodigious in works, in virtues and in words, who, without ever having held public office or occupied any seat in Parliaments or Academies, too much a stranger perhaps, I mean unknown, to the world of human thought, from the depths of his distant Champagne exercised over the world of labour an influence and a hold that no other man of his century has equalled. Although in his lifetime the beneficent novelty of his marvels at Val-des-Bois carried his name to the furthest corners of the country, and although he himself lent his ardent voice to every Catholic initiative, the Great War, which destroyed his mill and drowned everything at that time in the sole roar of the cannon, let him pass away simply and saintly as he had wished to live, without the crowd of his own people, nor the crowd of the workers and of the admirers of his incomparable achievements, being able to render him the homage he deserved on so many grounds.

For the hundredth anniversary of this inspired leader of the most generous and most fruitful social and Christian movement ever attempted until now, the delicate thought was conceived of choosing, under your beloved presidency, Your Excellency, this basilica of Montmartre where he dreamed so much of his ideal and prayed so much, as the meeting place of all the devotees of his memory, and of all the friends of working people, of the Papacy and of the Sacred Heart. Nothing could give him more joy in the abode of his eternity

1. His Excellency Mgr Maglione, Apostolic Nuncio.

2. His Lordship Mgr Crépin, Bishop of Tralles.

^{*} **NOTE** The cover and the title page date this address “3 Janvier 1929”. The centenary of the birth of Léon Harmel (17 February 1829) was celebrated at Montmartre on Sunday 3 February 1929, the date given by the record of the Bibliothèque nationale de France: “Janvier” is no doubt a misprint.

than this meeting here, at this hearth of divine love, of his ever-living thought and your ever-active one, so true is it, as was said of him as of the Master, that “everything Harmel touched is fire”, a fire that is never quenched.

Having had the honour of seeing the Good Father only once, at Warmeriville, a few months before the war, at the annual feast of the Agricultural Union of Champagne, I do not owe to personal memories the perilous mission of presenting the synthesis of his history in your presence; but it was thought that the Bishop of the Marne, more imbued than others with the nearer emanations of his action, would tell it to you with a more filial accent of the soil. Without further ado, sure of your indulgence thus forewarned, I accepted. But since I could then reason about the facts only as books do (something Léon Harmel did not like), and since, nevertheless, with this funeral eulogy in view, I read some very complete and very fine ones, raised not long ago like two grandiose steles upon his tomb, I shall necessarily divide by classical divisions the hero of whom a painter-orator would doubtless have made a single magnificent picture. May at least mine, though somewhat scattered, appear in the end to those of you who knew him a fair likeness, through the rejoined panels of the triptych I propose to compose to his glory, presenting to you in turn the man to whom popular speech gave a name of unforgettable fatherhood, as the *man of the workers*, the *man of the Pope*, and the *man of Christ!* After all, are not these three great loves indeed the summary, in its various phases, of his great social life, and the very reason for the interest you take in this solemn celebration?

I

I could, my brethren, have shown in the Good Father the man of the family as well; but I did not think I should cross the reserved threshold of that domestic sanctuary. Besides, his family is here in its entirety: an immense patriarchate whose Catholic traditions, piously preserved like a treasure, are the most eloquent of panegyrics. In the respectful word with which I content myself to greet its presence, I place the moved homage of this whole crowd; and, obliged to leave out many details of so vast a history, I begin by saying at once that, placed from his 25th year at the head of his father's spinning mill, Léon Harmel revealed himself there first, already in full maturity, as the *man of the workers*.

First of all, he has the understanding, indispensable to anyone who wishes to do them good, of their state of soul: and that state is one of almost complete dechristianization and of a consequent immorality that lends itself to every bitterness and to every claim of hatred. Has he not learnt, by frequenting the mill himself, where the mere absence of God leads in working-class circles? And having become an employer by right of conquest, as he will later require of his sons, that is to say by handling among the apprentices, on leaving school, the craftsman's tool with his own rough hands, he soon realised, in addition, their suffering and their misery, often undeserved, as Leo XIII will one day say.

Then he raises around him this cry, which will not be only a cry of compassion, but will become a cry of resurrection: Where are those responsible? Would it not be those who have not understood the needs of the people, who have not taught them, who have not tried to reach them and raise them up, who have done nothing to prevent civilisation without God from imposing itself and laying down the law

in the modern economic system, and who have not been able to show the crowd that whoever blasphemes Christ oppresses it.

Full of these redeeming thoughts, Léon Harmel will stake everything, — even to having a *catéchisme du patron* composed — first to stir the consciences of the industrialists, his fellows, and to win them over to his deep conviction that the social question is not only “a question of subsistence and of the stomach” — although a minimum of well-being is necessary to virtue, — but a question of dignity and of the rise of the people, as well as a question of the heart and of love...

In the painful state of inferiority in which attempts at emancipation from outside have always left the workers, whether they were inspired by mere philanthropy or even by charity, he has in fact grasped their pauperism and the needs of their souls, their impatience with constraint, their legitimate aspirations, their will to see their rights recognised at last, and their instinct to raise their condition. The employer’s office as practised until now, however generous it may be, does not answer to these ferments of liberty and elevation that stir the crowd inwardly, more eager to be raised morally than even to have high wages, more sensitive perhaps to honour than moved by the insecurity of their families.

What then is to be done to improve the lot of the workers, to accomplish through their transfiguration what seems the great social work and what would be the national salvation of tomorrow?

Faced with the problem thus set, it is less a matter for Léon Harmel of relieving them (which he will never fail to do through a whole vast network of economic institutions that have provided for every distress and every encouragement) than of enlightening them, of forming them, of removing for them every appearance of tyranny, above all of treating them as men, of awakening their initiative, of giving them a sense of their responsibilities, of bringing out their worth, of developing their abilities, of making them act, of teaching

them to react against individualism and to become the artisans of their own uplifting, of obliging them to break themselves in to business through their own experience, and of accustoming the elite thus formed to hold out a hand to the others so as to make them rise behind it.

But to create in this way men who, after their own rise, will contribute to the elevation of their comrades: this is a whole revolution that Harmel attempts and will carry through. I venture to say that there is almost genius in the originality of his method. When he sets it out for the first time at Nantes, at a resounding Congress, together with the achievements already won at Val-des-Bois, it will be called a discovery: the discovery of Léon Harmel. Others will call it, smiling a little perhaps, an event: it was to be one full of social fruitfulness.

Its principle and starting point was the autonomy of the worker, substituted in his mill for the system of mechanism and servility, and its means was the introduction into the government of the workers of the *Factory Council*, that is to say, in short, the participation in the employer's authority of secondary authorities risen from the ranks. Nothing raised the worker so much as this freely granted access to the running of his house; nothing encouraged him better to bring all his personal efforts to it, and nothing bound him to it more surely, once he knew that the employer's success would be his own. As long as he was asked only for blind output, and was driven only towards an end he did not understand, an unknown and often grating cog in the immense machine, he lost interest in the business with bitterness and awaited his weekly pay with ingratitude. But once he became a participant (I do not say in the profits, which is another problem) in the management, through a choice of his comrades prompted by his worth; once he felt truly *at home* in his workshop and at his loom, as a worker threatened with dismissal proudly said one day to a newly arrived foreman, while accepting his just reproaches; free at last to submit to the employer his thoughts, his claims, his suggestive obser-

vations, his finds: how another man he will appear, with his own distinguished standing and his initiatives listened to; and how, with such men, the face of the mill will be transfigured. Such was Harmel's discovery.

It first required, among the elite at least, a skilful and strong education of minds, a careful and broadly human vocational training. The Good Father provided for it first by creating many study circles, where, away from the abstractions too often customary in such gatherings and always ruinous to such undertakings, ever more concrete achievements were prepared on all the practical questions of work. The best workers threw themselves into them with passion, like that Robert, a socialist converted only the day before, who was the magnificent artisan and the unrivalled orator of the first workers' Congresses; and the mass of the others, wrapped in an atmosphere of universal confidence, and no longer merely resigned to their lot, but seeing that in the community of thoughts and efforts it improves every day, begins to form an immense family in which, for fifty years, the very thought of a strike was never born. Its head is the Good Father; and he gains in authority by it, because, giving the impression that by sharing it he truly watches over the interests of all for the best, he is obeyed more willingly by those to whom he has thus made his kindly thoughts understood, and because, better informed in his turn, he sees his enlightened orders carried out with all the more eagerness as they have been affectionately agreed to beforehand.

But it must be said here that what matters above all, and extremely, is the personality that commands, and Harmel's has every happy influence, because he has every manner, every power and every delicacy of loving. How could one not lend oneself wholly to his action as employer, as a master of responsibilities, an awakener of initiative, a promoter of abilities, a forerunner of the rise of the people, when, unlike those who, while willing to act upon the people,

do not act for them, the Good Father visibly seeks “the good of the worker only through him, with him and never without him”.

This sincere esteem for the worker, which made him say the profound words that “all that is not popular does not seem to deserve our efforts” — is essential, but it is conquering. In Harmel’s heart it had risen to the heights of affection. For he had not studied its necessity in books, but in souls; and there he had recognised that without this love there is neither education nor fruitful collaboration. And so he loved his staff intensely, with a kind of passion, making it a duty and a pleasure to live near them, no doubt to give them the example of every virtue, in the simplicity and austerity of a patriarchal life, far from the luxury that frightens the humble; but above all to be ready, in every circumstance, to show them his devotedness rather than his authority, and always disposed, in the intimacy of an almost common existence, not so much to settle conflicts (which was a speciality of his) as to prevent them.

Sprung from the people, he used to say, he wished to remain on their side, sin excepted, happy to press piously, in his daily encounters, the calloused hands of the workers, his peers and his children, so as to find in them the glorious stigmata of labour that the carpenter’s tools had left in the hands of Jesus, to the great scandal one day of Élise Veuillot, who, forgetting that her father had been a cooper, pictured the Master only as coming down from Tabor.

This exceptional and prodigious love of Harmel for his workers — which made him tirelessly take part in their councils, of which he presided over as many as forty sessions a month when needed, as in their union festivities, where he was good humour incarnate, as in their trials and their bereavements, in which he was the attentive confidant and the born consoler, was inspired in him by a feeling of gratitude and of justice. Besides the services he received from them, was he not responsible for them before God, who had entrusted to him their bodies and consequently their souls, equally in need of daily

bread; responsible also before society, which the factory has breached, by breaking up the goods of the family through excessive work, by taking from children the protection of father and mother, and by creating public demoralisation through all the promiscuity of the workshop? There was a twofold injustice to make good. Harmel will remedy both by restoring in his mill the *ancient Christian corporation*, without which, in spite of its material advantages, the mill would remain the centre of every danger to faith and the hearth of every temptation to morals. Meanwhile, for his own part, if he treated his workers so paternally, if in spite of rebuffs and humiliations he lavished on them the most delicate attentions, if he received them in turn at his table, if it hurt him when people did not speak well of them, if he could not think of them without feeling an emotion of love (these are his own words), it was because he meant, in a spirit of reparation, to be the father of a great city of souls, whose value, before all gains, was his religious concern.

And to this affection of justice for his men, as he called them, he joined a singularly far-sighted feeling of patriotism. Were not his workers, in our modern times, the principal element of the nation? To save it, then, one had to win the soul of the workers, at once trump card and stake, who hold the destinies of the country in their hands through the ballot. This apostolate, which in a way renewed the original enterprise of Francis of Assisi, founding his Third Order in the Middle Ages to wrest the people of his time from the grip of feudalism, was Harmel's passion all his life, and he will say in his last years that for it he has "shed all the blood of his soul".

Yes, it was for it that, after raising his workers to the awareness of responsibilities, to moral worth, to autonomy and to professional authority, through a whole set of social organisations impossible to list here (mutual societies, unions, pension and accident funds, family allowances, the English week), which at Val-des-Bois anticipated the encyclicals, customs and laws, convinced that without the Gospel the

best of craftsmen are incapable of governing their affairs, and that the country, which can be saved only with the support of the crowd, will be saved only when God reigns in it, he wished to permeate each of his institutions with the Christian spirit, as with the only leaven needed to raise the whole mass.

Human initiatives and virtues are indeed insufficient for the resurrection of peoples. They sometimes bring valuable palliatives to the ills observed, but not complete remedies. Total healing is in Christ alone: *non est in alio aliquo salus*. Without him, social façades of deceptive appearance are put up, but made of a cement that does not hold. And it is in vain that one tries to build cities beside him. Always precarious, they collapse at the first ill wind: *Nisi Dominus ædificaverit domum, in vanum laboraverunt*.

That is why Léon Harmel, who loves his workers and his country, means to place at the foundation of all he achieves, to make it stable and fruitful, both the teaching of Christ and his pure spirit. That is why the chapel of his mill dominates the workshops. That is why the cult of Our Lady and devotion to the Sacred Heart hold the first place there. That is why all the economic Associations there turn into confraternities. That is why, in the absolute freedom to do good, Christian Eucharistic practices become the common habit. And that is how, without obligation of any kind, but in the ease of a religion that carries people along, the splendid Christian Corporation of Val-des-Bois takes shape, outside every political party, and that is how Christian democracy is baptised there, silently but effectively, before the Pope had asked for it.

From the depths of Champagne it shines far and wide, with all its achievements and its attractions. Moreover Léon Harmel carries its transfiguring idea everywhere, to the Congresses and even into the seminaries and the cloisters. He is its national apostle; he has been called the tireless sower, and the figure is apt: for, under his sun, abundant harvests of similar works spring up.

From the great cities to the humble villages, there is, under his warm impulse, a flowering of at least the most generous attempts. The episcopate of France and of other countries becomes attentive to his method, which Cardinal Gibbons borrows and brings to America, while it receives the approval of the Pope. And in the respites left him by the labour of his apostolate, he welcomes at the Val the most varied visitors, who come to draw inspiration from it. Sympathetic above all to all the priests devoted to the people, who flock there, he delights in training the elite of the young clerics himself in the practice of his initiatives, in unforgettable study weeks.

From all this support and all these efforts will one day be born, without lessening in any way the progressive successes of Warmeriville, the best and most fruitful thing that Catholic social science has created in practice: I mean, in our region, the *Agricultural Union of Champagne*, and in France, the *Fraternal Union of Commerce and Industry*, which became the *French Federation of Professions*, until the *French Confederation of Christian Workers* in its turn arises from the same inspirations.

Such, in brief, without speaking of the *Semaines sociales* (Social Weeks) he foresaw, is the glorious record of the greatest promoter of social vocations and creations in the past century, of the admirable man before whom all those who have made love of the workers their sacred ideal must step aside as before their prince.

And its merit would grow singularly in your eyes if, having promised myself to bring here no word of division, I could tell you at the price of what difficulties, of what slanderous contradictions, of what misunderstandings, of what heroic resistance, of what weariness of every kind, of what friendships put to the test, the marvellous achievements I have just simply listed were accomplished.

For a quarter of a century he had to struggle, without overcoming them, against the respectable social conceptions of other employers, absolutely contrary to his methods. For years he worked in vain for a

better social orientation, and for what he called the reform of a popular organisation, popular in name as his own was, but insufficiently democratic to his liking, of which he was president and which he loved almost as a father, I mean the great *Association of Catholic Circles*.

Others sometimes bitterly reproached him with organising the people against society through his institutions, and so favouring socialism. Those men did not realise that, since popular organisation was henceforth in the instincts of the crowd, it would inevitably be made against Catholics if it were made without them...

Harmel could not want that. He held firm to the end, without anger, in these conflicts of ideas, tolerant of others, but faithful to his own. If, however, he was seen to combat with as much ardour as frankness the social psychology of his best friends, such as de Mun and La Tour du Pin, he remained untiringly devoted to them personally, and that is a great example. It is at the same time a supreme honour for him to have made the first love that characterises him survive every attack: the love of the workers.

II

As he was in the first place their man, my brethren, he was in the second place the *man of the Pope*, and in contemplating him today, in your presence, Your Excellency, in this filial attitude, there are, have no doubt of it, even without their being expressed, great lessons to be gathered, while a great homage will be loudly affirmed.

Out of a delicate regard for the eminent Pontiff Leo XII, his father and mother had given the one who was above all to be called the Good Father the Christian name of Léon. It was an attachment from the start, towards which he inclined by family tradition and by the bent of his upbringing. His first masters at the college of Senlis had strongly instilled in him devotedness to Roman ideas; and already haunted by the service of the people that was to be his destiny, uniting moreover in advance the two great loves of democracy and the Papacy, he was ready to subscribe at once to the words of Ozanam on the insurgents of 1848, carrying back in triumph to Saint-Roch a crucifix picked up in the ruins of the Tuileries: “Let us sacrifice our repugnance and our resentment and turn to this democracy, to this people that does not know us: let us go over to the Barbarians and follow Pius IX.”

Matters of health in the family were soon to bring Léon and his father to the very feet of that Pontiff. This first contact could only increase their devotion: for “we were all ultramontanes at the Val, and everything from Rome interested us.” Before this journey, indeed, the cash books of the mill already recorded for the Pope an annual share of five hundred francs taken from the profits; and a sum of five thousand francs, joyfully paid at that time into the papal loan, seemed to the family hardly enough...

The stay in Rome was an enchantment for them: “We follow the Pope everywhere,” Léon relates, “each time he goes in procession,

whether to St Peter's, or to the Lateran, or to St Agnes"; and they take a childlike pleasure in placing themselves on his way when, in those distant days of liberty, he goes for his walk in the city. "And so this journey had a decisive influence on my life," the Good Father will write forty-five years later; "and it was this that led me afterwards to organise the pilgrimages of France to Rome."

If these pilgrimages were, in the judgement of Leo XIII, the best days of his Pontificate, and if through them Léon Harmel was the man in France who gave him the most pleasure, they were also, in the history of the Good Father, a high point of his life... They deserve a devout remembrance.

Pius IX, who six months before his death had blessed the *Manuel d'une corporation chrétienne*, had been to the end the object of a filial cult among the workers of the Val. But guessing the emotions that must grip the soul of the new Pontiff as he ascended in his turn the Chair of Peter at so anxious an hour, Léon Harmel, the very day after the election of Leo XIII, sent him this telegram: "Respect, love and submission of your children of Val-des-Bois"; and the same evening there left for the Vatican, covered with four hundred signatures, a promise of absolute devotedness.

But the man of the Pope that he already was soon understands that there was better to be done; and seeing him a captive in his palace, despite the most solemn protests, he dreams of his deliverance. More or less in thrall to Freemasonry, the governments, that is certain, will do nothing for it. The way to move them is to stir up among the masses a powerful agitation in favour of the imprescriptible rights of the Holy See; it is consequently to bring into the Christian people, through the pilgrimages, a more real knowledge of the Pope's situation, and so to win him a more effective sympathy.

A second motive inspires Harmel. By leading workers and their employers to Rome, he hopes, along with a drawing together of the world of labour and the Sovereign Pontiff, for authoritative directives

to remedy the upheavals brought into the economic system by pagan liberalism.

Is not the Pope the true doctor who can throw light on the moral domain in which the labour question moves? “He alone,” he wrote, “can indicate the much-disputed limits of justice and charity to the men of good will that Christian employers are, though brought up in blind Manchesterian doctrines.” “If I could lead them to Rome with their workers, to receive there the teachings and encouragement of the Pope, the realisation of the Christian factory would have taken a great step.”

There is more, he thought. In the midst of the universal discouragement that has seized the masses, so often deceived, the people feel within themselves a vague aspiration towards an authority they do not yet know, and which will give them the reign of justice. What authority on earth was more predestined than the Papacy to fill this role? Why, once better understood by the people, should it not be acclaimed one day as the keystone of the social order, as the incarnation of justice and mercy in humanity? Why should the Pope not be recognised as the redeemer of the world of labour?

Such are the lofty and supernatural thoughts that made Léon Harmel the missionary of working-class France to Rome, and from which were born the pilgrimages and the whole Roman movement, whose reasons remain as timely as yesterday. And thus the Good Father — as he will himself ask at a solemn international congress of the Franciscan Third Orders, held at Sant’Andrea della Valle in 1900 — showed himself the man of the Pope first by his intelligence, making himself the apostle of his thought; then by his will, declaring himself in advance the born disciple of his directives: and finally by his works, being ready always to direct them in the sole pontifical sense.

We need not retrace here the very varied and sometimes eventful history of these pilgrimages, inaugurated in 1885. But what Harmel

had foreseen became clearer and stronger with each of them: namely, on the side of the pilgrims, the social act of faith that was to turn away the curse weighing for years upon industry, and the growing confidence of the people in the Vatican; and, on the side of Rome, the manifest concern of the Catholic Church for the public welfare, the Pope's visible sympathy for corporative institutions, the very clear separation from State socialism and from absolute liberalism, and a social teaching more and more in keeping with the achievements of Val-des-Bois.

That is what was witnessed in 1890, amid an enthusiasm that had spread to the whole of Rome, by the 10,000 workers and employers whom Harmel had promised to bring to the feet of Leo XIII. The Good Father came back from it proclaimed "honorary coachman" by the Roman *vetturini*, to whom he had given his preference over the transport agencies... It was only the fraternal thanks of proletarians to a sincere friend.

But the great Pope, for his part, had gained a personal knowledge of all the practical things that Val-des-Bois, without philosophising, had long since achieved to improve the condition of the workers in every field of labour. And rising in one sweep of the wing, — to approve it and, as it were, to codify it — to the summits of the social question, on 15 May 1891 he cast upon the world of labour, which he at once defended and raised up, his immortal encyclical "*Rerum novarum*" like a Kiss of Christ to his poor. It was the pontifical reward for Harmel's pilgrimages. What an august consecration!

On the part of France an immense movement of gratitude was needed. 20,000 French pilgrims hastened to Rome in September 1891. Surrounded in the courtyards of the Vatican by 80,000 on-lookers, they gave a grandiose spectacle. Freemasonry took alarm at it, and over the slightest of incidents turned the triumph into a riot. The pilgrimage was broken up and dispersed in silence... The Pope, until then a prisoner, became perhaps a hostage... No matter. The

homage had been paid, and an old Breton bard could, before leaving, sing to Leo XIII, in a refrain taken up by the whole ardent crowd: “O Vicar of Christ, France loves thee still.”

The Pope, forgetting the ordeal, nonetheless showed Harmel to the very end, in an intimacy of relations and thoughts renewed at every meeting, the most delicate attentions of esteem and the most exquisite words of gratitude. Confirmed by a brief, they remain in the family like a charter of blessing and nobility. What could be refused to one who in so many ways already had been the man of the Pope?

The occasion to reveal himself once more as an ever-faithful disciple of the Holy See was not, moreover, long in coming. The famous Algiers toast having raised the question of the Ralliement, it was necessary that the Pope, who in his earlier teachings and consistorial allocutions had defined civic duty and social duty, should define political duty too. Having recalled in the first days of 1890, in the encyclical **Sapientiæ Christianæ**, that the Church is opposed to no form of government, he had the true meaning of Lavigerie’s toast given to the bishops of France, at the end of the year, by Cardinal Rampolla; and eighteen months later, in an Encyclical to the French, he himself traced out his directives for them, in which, while carefully distinguishing between the regime and the legislation, he clearly asked for a loyal acceptance of the established power.

As once before, on another occasion, there was an outcry, with covert or open opposition, which was to go on for a long time.

Léon Harmel then understood the suffering hearts and troubled consciences, but, submitting without reserve to the teachings of the Pope, he declares that “for him, even his counsels would be orders.” “What, then,” he adds, “is our little theology beside that of the prince of doctrine? Whatever happens, I am an uncompromising papist”, and he will not believe in the salvation of France except in the full accomplishment of the three duties, civic, social and political, as Leo

XIII had just proclaimed them in masterly pages that link up with and complete one another.

Fairly long years were to pass after that for the Good Father, in a discreet fidelity that kept him wholly engaged with his social works, and busy putting into practice, as he used to say, the lessons of the Encyclical “*Rerum Novarum*.”

But Leo XIII having expressed, in 1897, the wish that the pilgrimages should be resumed, the man of the Pope will find himself again with his supreme activities. To the resistance he meets, he replies with the impressions of enthusiasm felt on going to the Vatican and kept by all those he calls the Romans. “If Rome has not made apostles of all those it has touched,” he says, “it has at least transformed many of them into heroes of our works. Besides, the workers’ pilgrimages mark a historic date, as well as a social stage of the Church. They have been like a new consecration of the people’s rights by the Papacy. Superior minds regard them as great factors of social resurrection. They will be started again.”

To tell the truth, under an appearance of political difficulties, the objections came above all from the conservatives who, determined to remain deaf to the directives of Leo XIII, had no wish to see the occasions of receiving his fatherly counsels multiply. Harmel, who for his part desired only to know the Pope’s intentions better, did the impossible to bring about a new pilgrimage.

It was the time when the Sovereign Pontiff wished to define, in the midst of endless disputes, the true role of Christian democracy. He had given adequate definitions of it, which you have in mind and which I shall not set out. But as, in the eyes of the crowd, a doctrine is never so clear as when it can be shown to them embodied in a man, the Holy Father had wished that at the solemn audience of 8 October 1898, at which he was to state all his thought on democracy, Harmel should be prominently placed in the midst of the pontifical court; and so that no mistake should be possible about the democracy he ap-

proved and of which he had just spoken, he added to the pilgrims: “Ah! may France see more and more employers multiply who resemble yours, and in particular that good Father, Mr Harmel, who for years has made it his happiness to lead you to Our feet.”

Strengthened by this approval, which consecrates the whole direction of his social life and which the Encyclical “**Graves de Communi**”, more explicit still, will soon confirm, he will thus be able to ask without fear, on Easter Monday 1899, of the members of the Blois congress, that they be frankly republicans and democrats, on condition of being openly Christian.

Because they had left Catholics divided over this attitude to be taken, the elections of May 1928 had just been frankly bad... And it will always be so, as long as it has not been understood that opposition to the Pope is the first of our social ills, and that on the contrary the criterion of orthodoxy, like the condition of religious and national salvation, is confidence in him, made of and full of filial love.

Harmel overflowed with it, always uniting in his tertiary’s soul the two passions of Francis of Assisi, the people and the Pope, and he had original and spontaneous words to express them: “Whoever raises a doubt and disputes the words of the Pope must be avoided like a plague.” He himself lived on them, and to hear them more closely and follow them better, he spent several weeks in Rome every year, unable to help feeling its attraction, and proclaiming that he never felt the impression of the divine better than at the feet of the Pope and in contact with his word. “Ah! my children,” he used to say to his own, “put in yourselves the love of the Holy Father that I feel in me like a flame, so much so that I would gladly die for him.”

And it was not the favours of Leo XIII, to whom he had all free access, that prompted these effusions. It is to my lord St Peter, prolonged in each Pope who succeeds, that he is thus devoted; for he does not set pontiff against pontiff; and he will renew to Pius X the oaths of fidelity and the proofs of good service that he had made and

given to his predecessors. He will lead the France du Travail (Labour France) to him to the very end, whether to unite, at the 50th anniversary of the Immaculate Conception, with his will to restore all things in Christ, or to protest, in 1905, against the law of separation, or to celebrate, in 1914, the 25th anniversary of the first workers' pilgrimage.

Like Leo XIII, Pius X appears to him, amid terrible doctrinal and political difficulties, as the providential man of our time; and when the war has come, whose grief carried the Pope away, and Benedict XV has ascended the throne, and French voices shamefully accuse him of having protested neither against the violation of treaties nor against the abuse of force over right, Harmel, still standing as the man of the Pope, will take up his defence openly and will write to his children: "My well-beloved, never take part in the quarrels of certain Catholics against the Sovereign Pontiff. Benedict XV is in our midst as the living incarnation of Christ Jesus. Let us beware of judging his acts and his words. I have a thousand personal reasons to love and venerate Benedict XV and to expect great things of him. I am sure that Benedict XV will do wonders in France and for France, if we are willing to be docile, and if French Catholics do not persist in setting their petty and narrow ideas against the inspired conceptions given by God himself to his vicars."

III

No one will be surprised that, after the signs of such a love for the workers and for the Pope, I should point to a third love as their source and their hearth, one which in Léon Harmel was neither less fruitful nor less ardent. You have named it: **the love of Christ**, and the love that encloses it while making it more precise, the love of the Sacred Heart.

It was there that this great social life had its ever-working motor, ever renewing its strength. The Good Father accomplished such marvellous works for the people and for the Church, and was so magnificently their man, only because he was first the man of his Lord, his inspirer and guide, Jesus. I would take good care not to leave out this principal side of him, standing out in such strong relief, which better than anything else marks his original features.

Man of Christ, gentlemen: what a name, tell me! And what a task to bear, and at the same time what a divine likeness to reproduce! Harmel, in our century which is perishing because it no longer serves, no longer loves and no longer knows the Master, did not fall short of it.

First, he had from Him what so many of us lack, we who have only human thoughts and confine ourselves to profane means, which are always powerless: a supernatural sense so particularly sharpened that it seemed exclusive. Some of his words, says one of his historians, and I was about to correct it: each of his words made one see everything in God. Did he not know that, on an evening of distress, the founder of the Harmel tribe, taking an old crucifix down from the wall, had made all his children swear on the holy image to remain faithful to Him? From then on Christ held in the family, as He still holds it, the first place and the whole place. Léon, moreover, was the grandson of a woman of whom it was said, after St Francis de Sales,

that she had Jesus Christ "in her brain, in her heart, in her eyes, in her hands, on her tongue, in her ears and in her feet". Understanding Our Lord was thus for him, in advance, an inheritance from his father's side and from his mother's.

In this school he had at once understood that for him, as for individuals and for societies, Christ was the only sovereign worthy of being served, because He alone could redeem everything and transfigure everything. And in that loyal confidence which summed up his whole Credo, he dared to put Him forward as such one evening at an election meeting, to the acclamations of a public assembly in search of a candidate: "Vote for whomever you please. But know well that above all those who are asking for your votes, there is a man who went before them, who loved the workers more than all of them. Without him, servitude, more or less disguised, weighed everywhere on the weak. He alone brought back to earth, for the benefit of the humble, the torch of liberty, which had been extinguished for centuries. Better than by his words, by freely becoming a worker himself, he proclaimed before an astounded world the eminent dignity of the worker. That man was called Jesus Christ. Instead of fighting him, it is to restoring his reign in souls that we must strive, in order to prepare in our society the reign of justice, of sincere brotherhood and of peace."

Local history relates that, set aflame by this ardent appeal, the crowd, falling into unison with Harmel and giving an unforgettable triumph to the misunderstood divine One he had just revealed to it, began to shout up to the clouds: "Long live Jesus Christ!" Which made the Good Father say that this name was like an eighth sacrament that never failed to work wonders.

But to come to that, as to make a whole immense assembly thrill another time, beneath the stirring folds of a banner of the Sacred Heart, to repeated cries of "That is our flag!", one had to have deep within oneself the truly apostolic and conquering soul of Christ. That

was Harmel's mark. Because of it he had dreamed, when very young, of becoming a priest. Family circumstances had brought him back, by a happy destiny, to his father's mill; but one can become and remain an incomparable apostle in the clothes of a bourgeois and in the jacket of an artisan. What matters is not the garment, but the soul one carries. Léon's soul was all for Jesus and with Jesus allowed him to say: "I am never bored, for I always have Jesus to talk with." It also made him ask himself each evening, with homely punctuality, like a good commercial traveller drawing up his balance sheet, or better like a slave passionate to serve: "What have I done today for my master?"

But to rise to such heights of love, is that not to be already more than a Christian, and even more than an ordinary apostle: a true saint?

There is a sublime tenderness in holiness, no doubt, and Harmel, without being **sanctimonious**, which he abhorred, had with his Christ, in frequent prayer, outpourings and impulses of piety of an exquisite self-abandonment. At other times he poured out his love into the love of Jesus with a childlike simplicity (his letters bear witness to it) that is surprising in a man of achievement like him, pressed by business and carried along by time. Yet it is a fact that he took the time for daily Mass and Communion and for the habitual visit to the Blessed Sacrament, and that two nights out of two (what an example!) he kept himself awake of his own will for more than an hour, to adore the Master in His tabernacle close at hand and to remain in a sweet tête-à-tête with Him, and with His immaculate Mother, whom by a formal deed he had made a member of his mill.

These were unequivocal marks and proofs of an attachment that seemed impossible to exceed. But holiness is not something purely of the feelings. To tell the truth, is it not rather and above all an imitation and a likeness? Léon Harmel at least means to be the man and the knight of Christ only by reproducing His virtues in full. Such is,

to keep to those which characterise the Sacred Heart above all others and define it, the reason for his humility and his meekness, and above all for his spirit of penance, which grew in him into a spirit of holocaust and reparation.

It is strange that a man like Harmel, happily self-made, surrounded by the admiration of crowds and crowned everywhere with a kind of glory, despite the contradictions that are the lot of all sowers of ideas and all conquerors, and that were his too, — should have had all his life, not the instinct, which is repugnant to man, but the deliberate will to lower himself, to efface himself and almost to annihilate himself. Do Catholics know that this Good Father had offered himself in advance by vow, — not without a shudder of his nature, which was steeped in pride, he said, — to every ignominy and every confusion, and that he had a kind of mystical dread of the natural pleasure that he nevertheless tasted in human success?

René de la Tour du Pin has told in what anguished tones, in 1874, his saintly friend cried out to an audience in Lyons: "Your applause frightens me." This is indeed the public echo of the humble voice that repeated inwardly every day a saying already familiar to his old father: "I am nothing, I am worth nothing, I can do nothing", a kind of ejaculatory prayer to which Harmel added after each clause an alleluia of thanksgiving, and which he continued in this way as a litany of holy humility: "From the desire of being loved, esteemed, approved, deliver me, O Lord. From the fear of being blamed, humiliated, despised, deliver me, Jesus." Here, caught in the act, is the man who at each of his retreats went as far as the incredible resolution never even to excuse himself, and who summed up all the homage of his free servitude to his master in this habitual acknowledgement of his nothingness: "All the good I do, it is the Sacred Heart who accomplishes it." So, while others, in their self-love, count on the joys of success, — he, so that more souls might be saved, called for failure as a fruitful

blessing, trembling lest he become, through vain self-satisfaction, the thief of divine glory.

But a verse of the litanies of the Sacred Heart, which had moved him deeply on his first visit to the **Scala Sancta**, haunted above all his thought of resembling the Crucified still more closely. Beyond humility, it was not only evangelical meekness towards vexing things and people, which he carried to a rare degree of joyful forbearance; not only Christian patience in difficulties and trials, whose sacred name he particularly loved and which he used as a key to paradise; but suffering, which he considered the great work of life, an overwhelming work at times, but one which, no more than the others, ever wearied him, for "fatigue," he said, "I for one do not believe in it"; suffering fully received and generously accepted, suffering sought out, yes, even to the **saturatum opprobriis**, and in the full rigour of the word.

One day he would express to God the desire for it as for a privilege, for he regarded pain as the divine sign. It had first laid waste the earthly paradise that the tenderness of a beloved wife, sacrificing herself so that he might live, had made for him at Val des Bois. From the crucible of separation he came out transfigured, and he was heard saying under the grip of the trial: "Jesus, at least at Val des Bois, will now be loved for Himself alone." And so he would climb in silence, for long years, a hard and willingly chosen Calvary. Mortification and penance were then his favourite companions. He embraced them not only to the point of renouncing the most legitimate pleasures, and of the strict practice of the three great religious vows that he had taken after he was widowed, but to the shedding of his blood under the lashes of the discipline that beat his flesh, and to the immolation of his dearest affections, as when he took his beloved daughter to the Poor Clares of Moulins, leaving her the charge to consume herself there in love and sacrifice on the cross of the divine Bridegroom who had chosen her, as on a marriage bed, in the thought that those who

suffer are the public sin-bearers and in fact the redeemers of the people.

Far from her, despite his broken heart, he would go on finding that suffering is the first of goods, the daily earning of heaven and the only one worth having, and he had not words enough to thank the good Lord for marking him with His seal by making him suffer.

So as never to fail to make expiation, even when Providence spared him, in a spirit of penance and reparation, once again with Francis of Assisi, whose scrupulous disciple he was, — as early as 1870 he had founded, for the members of the Conference of St Vincent de Paul, an **Inner Association** of friends, each member of which bound himself by a vow, which he had taken first, to ask the Lord daily to accept him as a voluntary victim and to lead him in His footsteps, according to His divine good pleasure, by the way of sufferings and crosses. For his part he walked in it until death, without a backward glance, in an ever more perfect likeness to the man of sorrows that Jesus had been, abandoning himself moreover soul, body and goods, as a slave, to the divine Heart, after the manner of Christ on the gibbet, and making to the souls in Purgatory, through Mary, Mother of mercies, in a kind of promise of paradise to the good thief, the offering of all the satisfactory works of his life and of all the suffrages that might be applied to him after his death.

To complete in Harmel the man of Christ who emerges from these telling details, what feature is then missing? Sometimes he asked himself this. It was that he still had days of happiness, and he complained of it to his Jesus: "What have I done to You, Lord, that today You have not visited me with some trial?" Is there not in this **Cupio dissolvi** of Léon Harmel something like an answer to the divine likeness that the great apostle called for, and without which one is not altogether the man of Christ! The Good Father asked for it more expressly at other times, in his generous way, when he said, for instance, as the pain grew worse: "But do not hold back with us, O be-

loved Jesus. Let our life be eaten away by cares and sorrows, if You are to be glorified by it."

These sublime attitudes and these supreme words, which one could multiply, are enough to complete the portrait. They also express the decisive means of truly exalting the Redeemer in the world: **mortificatum in carne, assumptum in gloria**. To understand Him, to love Him, to preach Him, no doubt, but to imitate Him in His passion and make Him live again in oneself, all bleeding: that is the secret of Harmel's supernatural triumphs, after the others... Contemplating their wonders, some ill-disposed people asked one day with irony: "How many Communion did all these successes cost at Warmeriville?" The blood of Christ, poured out in souls, certainly contributed its divine share, but the sufferings of the Good Father paid the rest. To whoever refuses them, evades them or misunderstands them, the glory of any redemption never falls.

For they achieve nothing for the reign of Christ, those who, always arguing about Him without suffering, make Him the only victim of their controversies and their divisions. Those too ply a poor trade with Him who, caring only for themselves, can endure nothing for His cause. Powerless, again, are all those who keep asking themselves somewhat naively: does this earn me money?, instead of saying to themselves: does this save Him souls? Baneful contractors of social resurrections, finally, are those who have not understood that, provided one puts into it at least one's personal sacrifices and one's blood, if need be, a mill or a business house can be Christian and prosper, without violating the laws of human prudence and while observing all the niceties of the law of the Gospel.

It is plainly evident from all I have said of his gifts of himself that Harmel was not one of those barren workers; rather, as man of the workers, man of the Pope and man of Christ, in the full sense of the words, he rose up in the world with the conquering elevation and the

singular fruitfulness that the Master had promised Himself when He should be lifted up on the Cross.

And so his great figure and his great life, without any need at this hour to crown them with the memory of their prodigious achievements, appear on the horizon as the great social figure and the great social life of his century. When the one fades and the other goes out, in 1915, by the hospitable azure waves of the Mediterranean, which brought him providentially closer to Rome, where he had lived so much, they kept for us, in a splendid old age, the majesty of a dawn and, despite the din of war, something like a pledge of resurrection.

It is for him at least a fitting reward for his works, and a new kiss from heaven to those who are going to take up his inheritance, that his last Eucharistic evenings in Nice, still so active and so devout, had the divine sun for their object and for their sunset. Nothing then is so sublime as this serene end of a man who, a witness to Christ to the last, wishes before he dies to mount, properly dressed and standing, a last guard of honour before the Master come down under a roof and become his guest. In His divine company, among some of his family who had hastened to witness his soul's flight to heaven, he kept the persevering optimism that was the strength and the glory of his career, with the stubborn hope of making the reign of Christ in the peace of Christ rise up behind him. And his dying lips seem to murmur once more the watchword he fulfilled so well: "Come now, sow Christ: harvests will spring from it."

Allow me on this subject, gentlemen and my brethren, while we wait for him to breathe his last, to dwell on that thought of joyful opportunism which was so much his own, which sums up the reasons for his existence and which remains ever so true, that "to be of one's time, to understand one's time, to live with one's time: that is what has always seemed to us the indispensable means of being able to work to make it better." "If I had had to choose an age to live in," the Good Father often repeated, with an enthusiasm that his last mo-

ments did not make falter, "I would have wanted no other than this one. Never was there one so beautiful, nor one so well worth living."

It has been said, not without accuracy, that those are evil days in which truths diminish. But are we not in the happy times when truths grow for us in light and in authority? Listen indeed to the verses of this canticle of Harmel, satisfied with his century, listing the wonders he himself witnessed: "Liberalism killed by the Syllabus; the proclamation of the infallibility of the Pope; the immense development of devotion to the Sacred Heart; the return of the churches of France to the Roman liturgy; the cult of the Immaculate Conception made popular by the miraculous medal, then confirmed by the dogmatic definition of 1854; the wonders of Lourdes sanctioning the word of the Pope; Leo XIII making all the powers of the earth acclaim the papacy and taking up again the traditions of the Church for the protection of the humble; later, with Pius X, truth displaying a superb disdain for human opinions; error driven out of the posts it should never have entered; Montmartre, no less full by night than by day; the Eucharistic Congresses carrying the triumph of Jesus in the Host across the world; the Catholic Professional Unions, the independent unions, the Catholic youth and gymnasts' associations, the permanent protest against human respect..."

Harmel's joyful visions stopped there; but since then the religious movement, in spite of ostracism and persecution, has not slackened... We need not follow it as far as our National Catholic Federation. But to end, and to lull the sleep of the sturdy and great Christian industrialist who is departing into his eternity, allow me to call up, after the manner of a **Nunc dimittis**, the dream he dreamed one day with his fine youthfulness of soul: a dream that has become at Val des Bois the testimony of an unforgettable past, the reality of a magnificent present in which nothing of yesterday has disappeared while it has grown, and the fruitful hope that tomorrow will do better still for the social cause: "At last," he proclaims, "the majestic swaying of the

steam engines, the shrill noise of the perfected tools, the activity of the mills will sing the glory of God who created man and gave him intelligence and genius. The smoke that escapes in long spirals from our tall chimneys will no longer appear to us as an exhalation from some vent of hell. The Christian will be able to compare it, not without a happy emotion, to the moving waves that escape from the censers, for it will rise towards heaven as a homage of sanctified labour."

Anything added to this page could only spoil it. One would think the Good Father had prepared it for himself as a shroud of glory and hope. May he rest in it in peace; and let us, who have just gathered the high lessons of his life, know that it is less a spectacle for us than an ideal. Our admiration is not enough for his funeral eulogy: for his workers, for the Pope and for Christ, it is works and virtues like his own that he asks of us. Amen.