

L É O N H A R M E L

**Le Val-des-Bois. Report presented to
the National Congress of Christian
Democracy, in Lyon, on 27 November
1896**

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The numbered notes are those of the original work; here they are numbered continuously from beginning to end.

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

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Le Val-des-Bois

Mr Léon Harmel, the apostle of the working class, presented to the National Congress of Christian Democracy, at its session of 27 November 1896, a remarkable report on the Val-des-Bois mill and on the institutions that have been created there.

This highly instructive report, enriched by its author with valuable notes, introduces us to the organisation of the social works that have already produced so many results.

We publish today the first part of this most interesting work, and we shall complete its publication in our next issue.

Gentlemen,

I have been asked to set out for you the organisation of Val-des-Bois.

You will allow me to dwell on the guiding thought that has directed us, and to place it above the institutions, which may hide the idea.

It is an act of faith in the soul of the people, and the soul of the people has answered us.

Have you not been struck, in reading the Old and the New Testament, by the place given to the little ones, the humble, the disdained? God's plan clearly emerges from it, in favour of those whom the world despises.

In the sixteenth century, in the flood of heresies that swept over Europe, it was the men of the people, the manual workers, who put up the most effective resistance. The Swiss cantons, Ireland the noble martyr, and in France the League, offer us examples such as are also found in other nations. One could sum up the divine history in these words: *Gesta Dei per humiles*.

Now, since the Renaissance and Protestantism, the divine plan has no longer been understood. People believe only in the educated classes, which Le Play points out as the most active agents of corruption, and in the wealthy classes, in which selfishness and pleasure too often stifle generous feelings¹.

And so it is above all among the masses of the people that we must look for the reserves of social salvation, because the enforced austerity of life, work and suffering are the springs that keep mankind close to God.

It will be objected that we want to level everything, that we do not recognise the social hierarchy. Quite the contrary; only, on this point we share the opinions of Le Play. He defines the upper class as the body of persons who devote themselves to others, and the lower class as the body of persons who use the time and the resources at their disposal exclusively in their own interest or in that of their family.

The true leaders, then, are not necessarily those who hold honours, but often men of modest condition, who transform their surroundings by their generous and persevering action. The power of the infinitely small is a modern discovery, not only in living organisms and in geology, but also in literature and in history².

The Christian organisation of the Middle Ages was based on these principles.

1. In our industrial towns we see simple workers who have risen to the highest positions adopt the prejudices of the class they have entered and show, if not contempt, at least mistrust towards their equals of yesterday. They no longer remember the intelligence and energy they once had. For their children, they seem to forget that these same master qualities often disappear in prosperity; we see this in the frequent reversals of fortune that we witness.

2. From Taine's theses there emerges a fruitful truth: that history is made of obscure thrusts, of imperceptible pressures, exerted upon one another by those grains of fleeting dust, mankind; that the unknown or the unrecognised, creators of the "milieu" and creators of the "moment" (for it is men, after all, who make up the influences before they undergo them), deserve to appear as the true weavers of history. (Goyau, *La Quinzaine* of 15 October, p. 566.)

As long as the Church governed the world, the workers had their social influence recognised and honoured.

It is therefore a Christian feeling that we have followed, in appealing to the free initiative of the workers and in basing the reform on the reciprocal action of like upon like. In this system, the employer is reduced to the modest role of educator. He must strive to restore in each person the sense of dignity through the practice of responsibility: for it is responsibility that makes the man; it is responsibility that establishes the true hierarchy in society, based on the practice of the duties of self-denial and devotedness, as we see in the family with parents who understand their mission.

This method does not prevent the disagreements inherent in every human community; they sometimes even go as far as hostility, but without harm, for they only make the necessary freedom more sincere, and the voluntary adherence deeper.

We therefore draw attention to the special feature of the organisation of Val-des-Bois: the workers are the instruments of good, from the moral point of view through mutual apostolate, in their trade through the factory councils, in public life through the committees, and finally in the family through mutual help and through the institutions that promote comfort.

I.

The apostolate.

From the beginning, all our action has been based on mutual apostolate. We began with two workers, in 1861, and we waited two years for propaganda, carried out from man to man, to make it possible to gather a few members.

The employers intervene only to prevent a bold propaganda of evil, which would become an oppression of consciences. For the rest, they respect the personal opinions of the workers, relying on the devotedness of the best of them to spread good with patience and discretion.

Thus, even today, even in the company of veterans (those who have worked at the mill for more than twenty-five years), a few, in full view and knowledge of the whole population, have never ceased to keep away from religious practice.

Those who have attributed the Christian reform of Val-des-Bois to an improper moral pressure by the employers have doubtless never tried to convert anyone; otherwise they would know that, without respect for freedom and without a discretion that must go as far as delicacy, there is no way to establish serious convictions, nor, consequently, to achieve a real transformation.

How is the apostolate organised? The associations of the different ages, which we call *fundamental associations*, seek to develop among their members the spirit of devotedness. Let us take as an example the association of the children from the age of seven to First Communion. Like all the others, it has its Council, which meets every week; there hearts are formed to generosity and sacrifice for the salvation of their companions.

One of these young councillors was eight years old; his simple little soul had been drawn by the desire for the apostolate. One day his mother, waking him, discovered that he had replaced his bolster with a piece of wood: “What are you doing there, my dear little one, what are you thinking of? — But, Mummy, the dear Brother told us that we must make sacrifices for the conversion of our companions, and I tried that one.”

We attribute to this formation of the children the number of vocations that continues among the young men and young women. For some years we have constantly had about fifteen students for the priesthood.

The practice of devotedness, begun in early youth, continues and reaches its full flowering in the fathers and mothers of families, who are the true social authorities of our little people. Mutual help and services rendered form something like family ties among all.

Here, among a hundred, is an example of the conversion of an adult:

It was a young couple who had forgotten all religious practice. Happiness had been driven from the home by almost daily scenes.

The district councillor took an interest in her new neighbour and won her trust and affection by a thousand services. She took pity on this poor woman, so unhappy and without consolation. She showed her how the thought of God sanctifies suffering, at the same time as it makes it bearable. At last, after several months, she succeeded; but the husband was to know nothing.

One evening, the two women climbed the steps of the chapel. A single gas jet was lit, and the chaplain, forewarned, was waiting.

On coming out of the confessional, the mistrustful eyes of the convert searched every nook and cranny, fearing to be betrayed by some witness. Suddenly she shuddered: she had glimpsed a shadow on the other side of the confessional. Looking very closely, she recognised..... her husband! He had met at the workshop a companion who had grown fond of him; he told him his sorrows, how the dreams of love and happiness had turned into a troubled and painful life. The other showed him the only remedy, the only source of peace and of true joy. Little by little, the prejudices fell away; at last the decisive word was spoken: "You are right, I will go to the chapel, and I will unburden my heart to the good Father chaplain."

A few months later, one Sunday, the husband told me the story, and he ended with these words: "Now, at every break, I am impatient to go home, and I never stay there as long as I would like, because I have found love and joy there again."

Conversions of this kind are numerous, but we do not know their details. They are the result of a spontaneous workers' apostolate, in which the employers' action plays no part. The seed has been sown, either in the chapel or at the meetings; the good Lord makes it grow where his Spirit wills.

But the most touching and most effective form of apostolate is that of suffering, what we call the *Inner Association*.

The worker is brought close to God by his life of mortification and toil. His soul is unconsciously prepared for great thoughts, for great generosity.

How many times have we not seen the eyes of a humble sick man shine with enthusiasm when he was told of the infinite reach of his sufferings united with those of our beloved Father and Brother Jesus Christ? When young people, still ignorant of the sorrows of life, have been shown the wonderful horizons of the apostolate, their hearts have been lifted and the desire for sacrifice has been seen to arise in them. They have understood that the royal mission, the divine mission of man, is to fill up in himself what is wanting in the Passion of Jesus Christ for the salvation of souls.

How I love them, and how I admire them, these men with faces sometimes rough and hands calloused, whose hearts overflow with delicate and generous feelings. They are truly other Christs, unknown to the world, but all the more admired by the angels as they do not know their own worth and think they are performing ordinary acts while leading a heroic life.

A father of a family, no longer young, had joined the *Inner Association*. A cruel illness required successive operations at the hospital in Reims; he bore them with courage, uniting them with the sufferings of Our Lord for the salvation of his companions.

One day the surgeon sent him back to us, declaring that he could do nothing more.

I read the letter to the heroic patient, who thanked God for having accepted his sacrifice. He resolutely prepared himself for death.

He had asked his children to join him in a novena to the Blessed Virgin. He wanted to celebrate the 15th of August in heaven. His prayer was not granted. He went on suffering until September, always with a supernatural joy that shone on his face.

At the point of death, during his agony, a neighbour was offering him the commonplace consolations usual on such occasions. He answered: "Think how happy I am: in ten minutes I shall be in heaven." Then, fearing no doubt a certain presumption, he said to his children: "It is not that I have deserved heaven, although I have suffered much for the good Lord, but I love Our Lady of the Factory (Notre-Dame de l'Usine) so much, and I know that she loves me so much, that we shall be happy to see each other, and she will put me in heaven."

And indeed, a few minutes later, his soul flew away joyfully to the good Mother he had loved so much.

When I follow the funeral procession of one of these men, it seems to me that from this humble coffin there rises something like a song of triumph and love to our King Jesus Christ, who raises these little and humble ones so high, as if to make them the glorious witnesses of his power.

II.

Factory Council.

For some years, people have been seeking almost everywhere the forms of organisation most favourable to social peace. Thus in Belgium Councils of Conciliation and Chambers of Explanation have been founded, and they work successfully. Attempts have been made and are still under study in Parliament.

At Val-des-Bois, the Factory Council, founded in 1883, is not, properly speaking, a Council of Conciliation. Its direct aim is not to settle conflicts, but it seeks to prevent them. It bears the mark of the family atmosphere, which is truly the spirit of our organisation.

It is made up of simple workers, excluding the foremen, who might hamper freedom. The choice is made, from among the senior and most skilled men in the trade, by their companions of the Union

Council³. These fortnightly meetings with an employer have a fixed agenda, which makes it possible to touch on everything: hygiene, accidents, disciplinary measures, the running of the machines, wages, bonuses, apprenticeship. Affectionate trust puts everyone at ease; the small grievances, when there are any, are set out simply and familiarly; in this way the seeds of discontent are checked, which might fester and grow worse if no heed were paid to them. The workers know that they officially have representatives and, if need be, advocates of their cause. At the same time, the councillors become the employer's co-workers and so contribute to the prosperity of the establishment. Though it is unofficial, their share in the management of the mill is none the less real, and, we may add, beneficial. Does the authority of the foremen suffer from it? In reality, no. Of course, we had already avoided the all too frequent omnipotence that makes the foreman the unchecked arbiter of the worker's fate. No fine is valid until it has been signed by the employer⁴. Direct appeal to the employer is strictly maintained; he alone can pronounce dismissal, after hearing both parties. It must be admitted that the foremen from outside who come to visit us are somewhat astonished, and fear to see authority diminished by these legitimate restrictions. But when they study the results obtained, together with their colleagues of Val-des-Bois, they very soon recognise that unlimited authority appears to the workers as a tyranny that stirs up popular hatred and anger, whereas with these tempering measures it is strengthened by the esteem and affection of all.

Moreover, it is easy to show that nowhere is discipline better observed and the conduct of the men easier. The reason is that, by re-

3. Mixed union of Val-des-Bois, founded on 2 August 1885. The workers' syndics, appointed by their companions, must, in order to be elected, obtain two thirds of the votes cast.

4. Which has reduced the total to a maximum of 19 to 20 francs a year, for nearly 700 workers.

specting their dignity and developing in them the spirit of responsibility, one obtains a voluntary adherence a thousand times preferable to the result of constraint.

The apprentices' competitions are judged by the Factory Council; the employers' sons sit this competition and receive the diploma signed by the worker councillors. It is a bond of esteem and affection that unites the young beginners with the working family.

The women workers have separate workshops; they also have their own special Factory Council, with a fortnightly meeting. I sometimes attend it, and I admire the boldness with which they defend their companions, without ever mixing in a single hurtful word or one that smacks of a bad spirit. Each of them has a privilege: that of letting a woman worker leave the workroom, with a card in her name and on her own responsibility. The work does not suffer from it, and there are no abuses; in this way certain delicacies that the Christian spirit bids us respect have been preserved.

It has been proposed to form a single Factory Council for several establishments; this arrangement seems to us hard to reconcile with the family spirit needed to go down into the small details of daily life.

But we implore industrialists to organise, each for his own workers, this institution, which has proved itself and is possible everywhere, in every situation. They will come to know their workers, their needs, their aspirations. The workers, in drawing closer to their employers, will know their hearts, at the same time as they will be introduced in a certain way to the difficulties of industrial life.

The affectionate relations that will follow will bring trust and will develop the sweet feeling of Christian solidarity.

III.

Public life.

The present political regime claims its popular origin. The duties of citizens are very important, since on their fulfilment depends the greatness or the decline of France.

We thought that our organisation should not be a stranger to this side of social life.

Our motto *Christ and Liberty* is a whole programme. It indicates that the Christian worker must defend his faith, his rights and his freedom in public life, by every legitimate means.

Monthly general meetings, presided over by a companion, allow our workers to practise speaking in public and defending their ideas.

A Committee of Resistance, made up solely of workers, organises the defence of order and of the interests of families against the attacks of the enemies of God and of the fatherland, against the invasion of the politicians who speculate on the miseries of the people.

The days of 16 August and 11 October remain a striking testimony to the courage of our little people. It was not their employers they thought they were defending, but their homes and their work. They regard the mill as a kind of collective property in which they have their large share, and they will no more allow their common good to be touched than their private good. The agitators came up there against a force they did not know.

Those who attended the meeting of 11 October saw that the workers alone sat on the platform. They spoke in very good terms, and the employers, moved witnesses of the devotedness of these good people, had only one task: to beg the workers not to use violence and to refrain from ill-treating the provocateurs from outside.

These events tightened the bonds of trust and friendship that united us. Our men have formed a union against the bad press, and they spread the good newspapers with superb enthusiasm. They

wanted to take legal action against the papers that had insulted them. We were determined to remain completely outside this affair. It was the Committee of Resistance alone, without any employer present, that gathered the companions, addressed them and persuaded them to act; 248 men over twenty-one signed the writ. Some abstained, without provoking either anger or surprise.

What life flows through this community, where one breathes deeply the fruitful air of freedom! What a development of private initiative in this current, where each one feels at ease, sheltered from all oppression and all constraint!

From the electoral point of view, we know how difficult it is for an employer to be the accepted candidate of his workers. The Workers' Electoral Committee has achieved this result, and Mr Félix Harmel, one of the employers, is mayor of Warmériville. The most real independence is left to each man. The Electoral Committee distributes its ballot papers the day before, so as to avoid even the appearance of any pressure.

We are all Christians and citizens; we have the same principles and the same interests to defend; we therefore walk hand in hand, to win the rights and freedoms that are equally dear to us all.

(To be continued.)

Le Val-des-Bois

(Continued and concluded.)

We give today the continuation and the end of the very interesting report on Val-des-Bois presented on 27 November 1896 to the congress of Catholic democracy in Lyon by Mr Harmel.

IV.

Family.

Wages. — The first element of life for the family is the wage. We were very struck by the teachings contained in the Encyclical *On the Condition of the Workers*, in which Leo XIII places the law of natural justice regarding wages above the free will of the parties. The medal distributed in Rome to all the members of the unforgettable pilgrimages of 1891 bore on its reverse this sentence: *Merces operariorum clamat in aures Domini*. These words resounded in our hearts like a supreme call to justice. We studied the question.

Among the theologians, the Rev. Fr Liberatore, professor at the Roman College⁵; the Rev. Fr Lekmuhl, one of the great theological authorities of our day; the Rev. Fr Antoine, a Jesuit of the Province

5. To meet normal and ordinary needs and duties, society must offer an ordinary and normal means. Now, on the one hand, it is normal for a worker to have a family, and, on the other hand, the normal means that God gives him is work. The remuneration of work must therefore be sufficient for the needs of the family. (Liberatore, *Principes d'économie politique*, p. 250 ff.)

of Paris⁶; among the economists, Ricardo, J.-B. Say, Le Play and C. Périn⁷, lay down the principle of the wage sufficient for the family.

If we examine the modern opponents, we find above all: casuists who rely on exceptions, as if they did not confirm the rule⁸; publicists who, in order to be right, need to make their opponents say what

6. *Cours d'économie sociale*, by the Rev. Fr C. Antoine, S.J.; published by Guillaumin et Cie, 14, rue de Richelieu, Paris. It is a complete and very precise encyclopaedia of the controversies of our time, in which social economy and political economy are harmoniously united under the pen of a justly esteemed professor.

7. According to Ricardo, the natural price of labour is that which furnishes the workers with the means of subsisting and of perpetuating themselves in the family.

J.-B. Say thinks that the wage must be more than sufficient for the family. "As for rough work," he says, "which can be done by anyone at all, and competition being great, such work brings in only just what is needed to live with a family, the minimum of subsistence including the degree of comfort customary in the country (370 and 371)."

Le Play, in his work on the organisation of labour, states on several occasions that the wage must be sufficient for the life of the family. In the first volume of *la Réforme sociale* (p. LXXIX), he defines the wage as the remuneration granted to the worker in exchange for his work; in model societies it comprises two parts: one (the wage properly so called), proportional to the worker's efforts; the other (the subsidies), proportional to the needs of the family.

"The spirit of the encyclical, the reasons by which the Holy Father explains his doctrine, cannot, it seems to me, leave any doubt about his intention to include in the just wage the resources needed to keep the worker and his family alive." (Charles Périn, *Premiers principes d'économie politique*, 2nd edition, 302.)

8. One could raise against the law of weekly rest objections similar to those raised against the sufficient wage. In both cases, impossibility removes the duty; but does one therefore cease to teach Sunday rest as a divine law and as the essential basis of the prosperity of nations?

So too, for the sufficient wage, the exceptions, which are moreover more hypothetical than real, cannot excuse the inhuman theories at which Christians ought to blush; they must not prevent us from proclaiming the law of natural equity, from showing that its fulfilment is the principle of material as well as moral prosperity, in accordance with the word of God: *Justitia elevat gentes*.

they have never thought or said⁹; and finally short-sighted egoists, who do not understand the disastrous consequences, even from the material point of view, of the violation of natural equity.

The truth clearly appears against the objectors.

We believe, then, that normal work, performed by a man placed in ordinary conditions, must produce a remuneration sufficient for the worker and for an ordinary family. We believe, with Mr Le Play, that employers must provide in their overheads for a reserve intended for the needs of large families.

We have estimated that for families burdened with young children at Val-des-Bois, with the moderate rents, the use of gardens and the advantages of the countryside, the sum needed to live can be put at 4.20 fr. per week per head, which is equivalent to 5.60 fr. per week in town (0.60 fr. for 7 days, and 0.80 fr. for 7 days).

This minimum is not always reached by families in which no child works, by widows, and by homes ravaged by illness or infirmity.

We consider it necessary to restore the balance upset by these various circumstances, by paying what is lacking for the necessities,

9. They accuse the supporters of the sufficient wage of demanding, for the same labour performed by different workers, different rates of pay, proportioned to the number of each man's children.

It may be convenient to slander one's opponents in order to make them ridiculous, but is it really honest?

Who has ever put forward such a proposition?

If they were in good faith, they would recall that Le Play long ago gave the formula that reconciles at once the wage proportioned to the work and the subsidies proportioned to the needs of the family. He brings out these two parts from the very definition of the wage. All the publicists accepted without opposition the law proclaimed by Le Play. They began to fight it only after Leo XIII had recalled the principles in this matter.

by means of an institution that we call the *Family Fund*¹⁰.

In accordance with our principles, this institution, although entirely funded by the employers' fund, is managed entirely by a Workers' Commission that meets every week, examines the insufficient wages and makes them up in kind, as the families wish¹¹.

It will be objected that this institution cannot be set up in the same way in towns. But has the heart not resources enough to find the special means required? We recall the definition of the wage given by Le Play in *la Réforme sociale*: The wage is the remuneration granted to the worker in exchange for his work; in model societies it comprises two parts: one (the wage properly so called), proportional to the worker's efforts; the other (the subsidies), proportional to the needs of the family.

Ah! Gentlemen, let us not be afraid of the idea of justice; on the contrary, let it be a constant concern of our lives.

10. *Example*: A widow with three children, of whom only one daughter works, receives a weekly supplement calculated as follows:

4 persons at 4.20 fr. = minimum 16.80 fr.

A single woman worker at 2.20 fr..... 13.20 fr.

Supplement..... 3.60 fr.

A dyer has six children under thirteen; the subsidy is calculated as follows:

8 persons (children and parents), at 4.20 fr. = minimum 33.60 fr.

Earnings, 4.50 fr..... 27.00 fr.

Supplement..... 6.60 fr.

11. We must say, to the credit of the Railway Companies, that they have entered upon this path by granting supplements to employees who have more than three children.

At the *Compagnie P.-L.-M.*, staff whose salary does not exceed 2,100 francs and who have more than three children or persons treated as such dependent on them receive 24 francs per child per year. Treated as children are the brothers, sisters and nephews of the employee who have lost both father and mother, and his father, mother, father-in-law and mother-in-law.

The *Compagnie de Ceinture* gives staff whose salary does not exceed 1,800 francs 48 francs a year for three children, and 24 francs for each additional child; in addition, a housing allowance of 144 francs, instead of 72 francs for single men.

The *Nord* does as the *Ceinture* does, except for the housing allowance.

In this respect, the little and the humble give us lessons that should make our pagan society blush. They practise justice, often to the point of heroism, with touching simplicity.

Allow me to cite a few examples.

A widow came to us with her little family, burdened with nine thousand francs of debts left by her husband. As soon as the children's wages were enough for the barest necessities, she began to put money aside, and in eight years she was able to repay the capital and the interest. She died recently, happy with her sacrifices, saying to her children: "I brought you up in privation, I have nothing to give you, but I leave you your honour!"

Another widow had only daughters, and therefore more modest wages; by dint of privation and energy she managed to repay 12,000 francs in fifteen years.

Some time ago, a young man came to see the accountant and said to him: "Now that I am beginning to earn, I shall be able to fulfil my great wish to pay my father's debts. I have been able to draw up an exact list of them; here it is. You will deduct from my fortnight's pay, and when you have 100 francs, you will make a first distribution." Once the first sum was obtained, the accountant went to see the creditors; they were astonished, the debts were old, nobody counted on them any more: "Let this young man keep his money, we ask nothing of him." He would not accept this, and when the accountant offered to buy back the debts at 50%, he answered: "I want to restore my father's honour; it will be the joy of my life."

Are you not, like me, filled with admiration before such delicacy? What an exquisite sense of justice! Do you not understand that the masses of the people, who still hold such virtues, appear to us as a hope!

The *permanence of wages* is very important for the worker's budget; fluctuations are always harmful. We think it difficult, not to say impossible, for the budget to make up, even through high earn-

ings in times of work, the deficit caused by unemployment. At Val-des-Bois, when an accidental slackening forces a particular kind of machine to stop for a few days, we employ the workers in tidying or in other tasks. In times of crisis, as in 1848 and in 1870-71, we make the journeys and the sacrifices needed to obtain work.

At the time of the fire, we immediately rented a mill in the Ardennes¹².

For all these reasons, and above all, we must proclaim it, through the protection of God, the Val-des-Bois mill, founded in 1840, has not seen a single worker suffer from unemployment, even partial. We believe that this is a precious element of prosperity.

Reserves are necessary to avoid destitution, which may knock at the door of the home some day or other. Our forefathers had understood this fundamental law of popular prosperity. The communal and corporative property was considerable and made it possible to meet unforeseen needs brought on by accidents, ruin or death. Our improvident governments have squandered, to no profit, the reserve of past centuries; the public relief offices are sinking under a task they will always be powerless to fulfil.

We have tried to remedy this gap, in the very small measure in which we can, through the institution of the *corporative bonus*.

We give this name to the rebate obtained through the economic institutions (either the Cooperative Society or the approved suppliers). This rebate averages 5% of purchases. It is deposited, according to the rules, in the mill's fund, where it earns 5% interest. This small capital is repayable only on leaving the mill, on the death of the head of the family, or when he has passed the age of fifty. The passbook makes it possible to borrow, without interest, up to the same amount.

12. On 13 September 1874, a fire devoured in a few hours the four-storey mill, leaving standing only the single-storey outbuildings.

The advance is repaid fortnightly, as agreed, so as not to alienate or reduce the corporative bonus¹³.

Savings are very considerable each year at Val-des-Bois; this result is due to habits of order and foresight, the natural fruits of the Christian spirit. For our part, we give every facility for the smallest deposits. The school savings bank accustoms the children to thrift. The girls are encouraged in it by the marriage dowry, which is equal to the sum of the savings made, up to 100 francs. Deposited first in the mill's fund at 5% interest, the savings are then invested, according to the owners' wishes, on the proposals of a Workers' Council of which the accountant is a member. In general, investment in securities is preferred. The inheritance laws put an almost absolute obstacle in the way of acquiring real estate, which, in small inheritances, becomes the prey of legal proceedings or is sold for a pittance.

Sickness, accidents and *old age* find what remedy is possible in the Mutual Aid Society, the accident insurance and the provident fund for the pensions of the old workers who can no longer work. These institutions are managed by Workers' Councils, which also look after the families during the twenty-eight days and the thirteen days.

The *Christian home* has kept something like a reflection of the vanished earthly Paradise. Mutual love and the obedience of the children make the house a little kingdom, where peace and joy, under the eye of God, beget a happiness renewed each day and soften the trials inseparable from life.

13. The corporative bonus of 175 families currently amounts to 15,465.05 fr., plus the shares in the Cooperative, bought successively by means of this bonus, for a sum of 10,650 francs. In addition, about a thousand francs are paid out each half-year to the families who meet the conditions laid down in the statutes for receiving it.

The corporative bonus would be much larger if all the families concentrated their purchases on the institutions. But we believe it is better to have smaller reserves and greater freedom. As for the employers, they would scruple to interfere with the preferences or the whims of the housewives. The economic institutions must develop through the workers, and not through the employers' action.

To this most enviable end contribute the organisation of the mill, the schools, the fundamental associations and the chapel.

At the mill, the most advantageous posts are given by preference to members of large families, who are made to work together as far as possible; the wages of the same family are grouped on a detailed pay slip and handed to the mother on Thursday morning, market day. The Mutual Aid Society pays for school supplies above five children, or when the father is dead; it admits the elderly parents from outside whom filial piety takes into the home.

The schools are organised at once for a practical education, for Christian upbringing and for the science of housekeeping, so necessary for girls.

The fundamental associations group together, by free adherence, persons of the same age: children, young men, young women, men and mothers of families; each has its autonomous Council, appointed by its peers, its meetings, its own institutions and its own administration. Their aim is to call forth mutual devotedness and to make reign that atmosphere of peace and mutual help which brightens life. There, as everywhere, no one enters except of his own free will; the dissenters are numerous enough to ensure the independence of each.

The mill *chapel* is the family centre par excellence. There everyone is at home, employers and workers, in equality before God. Seats go to whoever comes first; it is the congregation who sing and pray all together.

The Catholic religion, which came forth from among the manual workers, is truly the religion founded by the people, sustained by the

people, defended by the people¹⁴.

She alone knows how to find, in her ceremonies, her chant and her rites, that sublime poetry which consoles and fills with enthusiasm the little as well as the great, the ignorant as well as the learned. She rocks mankind as a mother rocks her little child to soothe its tears and win its smile. At the same time, through her doctrinal teaching on justice and on love of neighbour, she prepares for mankind the sum of temporal happiness possible after the Fall. While the other religions reserve their intellectual and honorific favours for the powerful, she lavishes her sublime teachings tenderly on the poorest; she honours in them the glorious humanity of the divine Worker of Nazareth.

That is what the mill chapel is.

Four times a year, at the end of High Mass, in the presence of all the people assembled, the little children who are past their third month are solemnly blessed and consecrated to the Sacred Heart. It is the father of one of the children who reads, in the name of all the parents, the touching formula.

14. We have read somewhere, in an author who has more than once been our opponent, an admission that is very interesting to record from his mouth; here is its exact meaning:

The genesis of the ancient religions escapes us; we do not know how India, Egypt, Rome and Greece built up their Olympuses. We have every reason to believe that these gods, selfish and cruel pleasure-seekers, sprang fully armed from the brains of the aristocracies of old. There is only one religious genesis that we have been able to follow and that we know scientifically: the genesis of the Christian religion, and we see that it came forth from the world of the workers, from what are called the lower orders.

Those who want to make it a religion of caste are utterly contrary to history as much as to the teachings of the Gospel. It was within the Church, and from the earliest days, that the ideas of universal suffrage were proclaimed and applied: to each according to his works.

Bishops and Popes were chosen without regard to birth or fortune, but solely for personal merit, to such a degree that a freedman was seen to become Pope, and sons of peasants to rise to the highest honours.

The newly married receive honours there, as being on that day the king and queen of the workers' family. Seated in armchairs near the choir, surrounded by their relatives, who occupy the front rows, they receive the good wishes of the priest; when Mass is over, they are escorted by the associations to a meeting hall, where an employer congratulates them and presents them with the crucifix that will preside over their home, the housekeeping book¹⁵ with its useful advice, and the dowry of which we have spoken.

It is again in the chapel that the absent are remembered: those who are serving their country, those who are in Spain¹⁶. Friends are named there, the sick are spoken of, and those who have entered eternity, and prayers are said for all. The edifying deaths, so common among the people, are recounted; the intentions of each are commended, the anxieties of the mothers, the cares of the heads of families and the prosperity of the mill.

There the young conscripts say their farewells, coming to draw the strength to remain Christians while becoming valiant soldiers ready to sacrifice everything for their country.

The chaplain is the servant of our little people: whether to guard the hearts of our young men while developing that frank cheerfulness which is the privilege of chaste souls; or to console, and make the joyful star of hope shine in the midst of physical or moral suffering; or finally to introduce minds to the knowledge of men and things, in social and historical questions.

Frequent *festivities*, with the cheerful brass band, the choral societies and the games societies, bring together the members of the families, gladden their souls and rest them from the prosaic realities of the mill.

15. *Le Bonheur domestique*, advice to women on the management of their household, published by Messrs Delachaux et Nieslé, Neuchâtel (Switzerland).

16. Four years ago we founded a mill in Spain, at Sabadell, where the managing group is made up of workers from Val-des-Bois.

Banquets of men, of young men, of young women, cement the union of hearts in joyful feasts and tighten the bonds of the associations.

Everything is organised, conducted and presided over by the worker councillors. The employers are the guests, and are surrounded with attentions in which affection has more place than respect. It is from this feeling that the name of *Good Father* arose, given first to the founder of the mill, then to one of his sons. It is the people who founded this dynasty of love, and the little children lie in wait for the Good Father as he passes, to greet him and receive a sweet.

Nothing here is, properly speaking, our personal work. No doubt we have had the will to respond to the duties that God imposed on us in placing us at the head of a community of workers. But we can say that it is a common work, in the sense that we have applied ourselves to calling forth initiative, without confining it within rules and laws devised in advance.

We have docilely followed the Christian guidance that emerged from this popular milieu, where life is so active when it is awakened without being constrained.

Without any preconceived plan, without realising it, we have listened to the voice of the people, which for us Christians is the voice of God when it is not turned aside from its natural aspirations. We have thus been able to bring our stone to this work of rebuilding the family.

The family, indeed, is not a sum of isolated numbers; it is a harmonious union, whose welds are precisely the intimate customs that I have just brought before your eyes.

For all this, glory to Jesus Christ, who has the most tender love for the little and the humble, and who wills to save society with their cooperation.