

C O U S I N - H E N R A T

Historical Study of Warmeriville and its Dependencies, Vaudétré, Ragonet, Le Pré, Les Marais and Le Val-des- Bois

*Chapter XII, The mills of Warmeriville: the Val-des-Bois mill and the
Harmel family (p. 349-376)*

Reims, L. Monce

1900

THIS EDITION

This is an English translation of the original French text, made for the website leonharmel.com in 2026. It follows the original sentence by sentence, without cuts or additions.

This document gives in full a text published in Chapter XII, The mills of Warmeriville: the Val-des-Bois mill and the Harmel family (p. 349-376), translated from the 1900 edition. It has been typeset in the spirit of the original: title pages and headings follow the layout of the original publication; the illustrations have been cut out of the digitised document and restored.

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

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

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CHAPTER XII

THE MILLS OF WARMERIVILLE

Summary. — The Val-des-Bois mill, the Ragonet mill.

PART ONE

The Val-des-Bois Mill

Val-des-Bois is the Mill which, in 1840, replaced the old Moulin-de-Bas of Warmeriville. It stands on that pretty river, the Suippe, whose graceful and picturesque windings have tempted the so artistic brush of our fellow citizen from Reims, Mr Barreau. There is an abundance of shrubs, groves and woods, whose green finery almost hides the mill and its buildings in summer, which explains the poetic name of Val-des-Bois given to it by Mrs Jacques Harmel, the grandmother of the present owners.

At the end of the last century, the father of Mr Jacques-Joseph Harmel was already running a large woollen manufacturing business at Sainte-Cécile. He set up the second spinning mill of the French Empire. (Biographical notice by Mr J.-J. Goose.)

When that country was annexed to Belgium, his son, the head of the present family, wishing to keep his status as a Frenchman, came to settle at Angecourt, in the Ardennes, then at Boulzicourt, and at La Neuville-lez-Wasigny (an establishment that disappeared after a fire in 1891). Mr Jacques Joseph was in partnership with his brothers, Félix and Hubert Harmel. The Boulzicourt mill has remained in the family of the second brother, and it is now the property of his son, Mr Léopold Harmel. Mr Hubert Harmel retired from business while still young, and his son, Mr Albert Harmel, later joined the Val-des-Bois mill, founded in 1840 by Mr Jacques-Joseph Harmel.

Successive Transformations of the Mill

The first installation to succeed that of the corn mill was a carded-wool spinning mill for flannel, an article then very prosperous on the Reims market. In 1850 the mill grew with the addition of a combed-wool spinning mill. In 1864, the creation of the so-called high-fashion yarns, of which the Harmel firm long had the exclusive rights, made it known and increased its importance. It was in the same year that the combing works was set up. Dyeing was installed only in 1880. Until then the dyeing had to be done at Roubaix, a very inconvenient and very costly obligation. In 1886, the mill invented and worked a patent for dyeing combed wool on bobbins, which simplifies handling and reduces waste to a considerable extent.

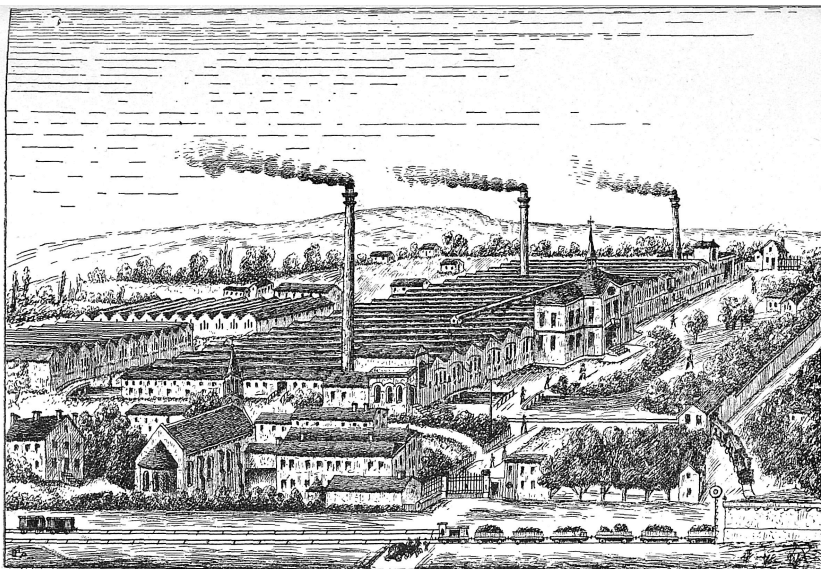
The Members of the Harmel Family before the Industrial World

The carded-wool industry, together with the combed-wool industry, expanded rapidly, and business reached almost every market in Europe. But the Directors of the mill did not rest content with these results. They modified and improved the machines used in their manufacture, as is shown by the patents they have held and still hold, and by the many medals won at the various exhibitions that have followed one another since 1862:

London, Reims, etc., Paris 1878 (Renewal of gold medal).

Always pressing forward, the firm of Harmel Frères invented in 1882 a machine for the mechanical removal of burs, thistles and straws from textile materials. This patent, adopted with enthusiasm by the industrial world under the name of the Harmel system, is certainly the most considerable and at the same time the most effective invention to have appeared in the textile industry in the last 25 years. The favour with which it was received and the extraordinary results obtained meant that in less than two years more than 1,500 machines

of the Harmel system were running in the largest combing works of Roubaix, not counting those working abroad.



L'abbé J. Chevallier del.

Val-des-Bois

In the difficult times which the wool industry has gone through and is still going through, the various members of the Harmel family have had to keep pace with the rapid march of progress, to find the innovations needed to perfect their products, and to be able to satisfy the ever-changing whims of fashion while holding their own against the competition.

Having braved all these difficulties, the Harmel firm has kept its rank, and today it is considered the most important in the department.

Awards Won at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1900

Class 82. — Woollen yarns and fabrics

2 *Gold medals*: Harmel Frères; Ladame Léon, collaborator.

2 *Silver medals*: Aubry Edmond, Esqui Emile, collaborators.

4 *Bronze medals*: Delcroix Henri, Maquinay Antoine, Rudler Charles, Scherrer Charles, collaborators.

Class 102. — Remuneration of labour

1 *Gold medal*: Harmel Frères.

1 *Silver medal*: Aulner Léon, collaborator.

Class 104. — Agricultural unions

1 *Silver medal*: Syndicat agricole de la Champagne.

Class 105

1 *Gold medal*: Harmel Frères.

1 *Silver medal*: Sacotte, collaborator.

2 *Honourable mentions*: Guillaume, Gaucher, collaborators.

Class 106. — Workers' housing

2 *Silver medals*: Harmel Frères; Pilardeau Emile, collaborator.

1 *Bronze medal*: Griffon-Champenois, collaborator.

1 *Honourable mention*: Godfroy Alexandre, collaborator.

Class 108. — Intellectual and moral development of workers

1 *Gold medal*: Harmel Frères.

2 *Bronze medals*: Jolivet Alfred, Hallet Gustave, collaborators.

Class 109. — Provident institutions

1 *Silver medal*: Harmel Frères.

1 *Bronze medal*: Gentilhomme François, collaborator.

3 *Honourable mentions*: Bruno Charles, Glatigny Eugène, Gobinet Etienne, collaborators.

Summary

Harmel Frères: 4 gold medals, 2 silver medals.

Agricultural union: 1 silver medal.

Collaborators: 1 gold medal, 5 silver medals, 8 bronze medals, 6 honourable mentions.

Total: 27 awards.

Outlets for the Products of the Val-des-Bois Mill

The combed yarns of the Harmel mill are used for dress fabrics and for cloth fabrics. They are sent to every market in France and to the great centres of Germany, Austria, Italy and Russia. Everywhere they have carried the good name of the village of Warmeriville, which, thanks to this considerable commercial expansion, is known far and wide.

The wool used comes for the most part from Australia, from Buenos Aires and also from France. The average quantity consumed in the mill itself is 700,000 to 800,000 kilos a year.

The customs duties between France and Spain obliged the firm to follow its customers into that country, where it owns a large spinning mill at Sabadell, near Barcelona.

Senior Management of the Val-des-Bois Mill

In the first period, which lasted until 1865, the senior management consisted of Messrs Jacques-Joseph Harmel and his sons Jules, Léon and Ernest Harmel.

In the second period, which extended until 1886, we find the three brothers again, who had taken on their cousin, Mr Albert Harmel.

Then comes the present Company, made up of Mr Albert Harmel and Messrs Félix and Léon Harmel, his nephews, both sons of Mr Léon Harmel, the Good Father.

We shall in any case have occasion to say more about the management of the mill in the section “Biographies”.

The Mill

From 1840 to 1874, the mill consisted of vast five-storey buildings nearly 100 metres long. After the fire of 13 September 1874, it was rebuilt as single-storey buildings; the rooms are spacious and well lit. Their height is 4.50 metres under the beams and 6 metres under the ceiling. Ventilation is provided by multiple fans, each of which removes about 15,000 cubic metres of air an hour. 90 cooling units cool the air in summer and maintain a temperature which, while favourable to working the wool, meets the desirable conditions for the workers’ health. The lighting, formerly by gas, is today provided by electricity. One also notices in the mill all the latest improvements and all the most meticulous precautions to protect the workers against accidents at work.

The Workforce

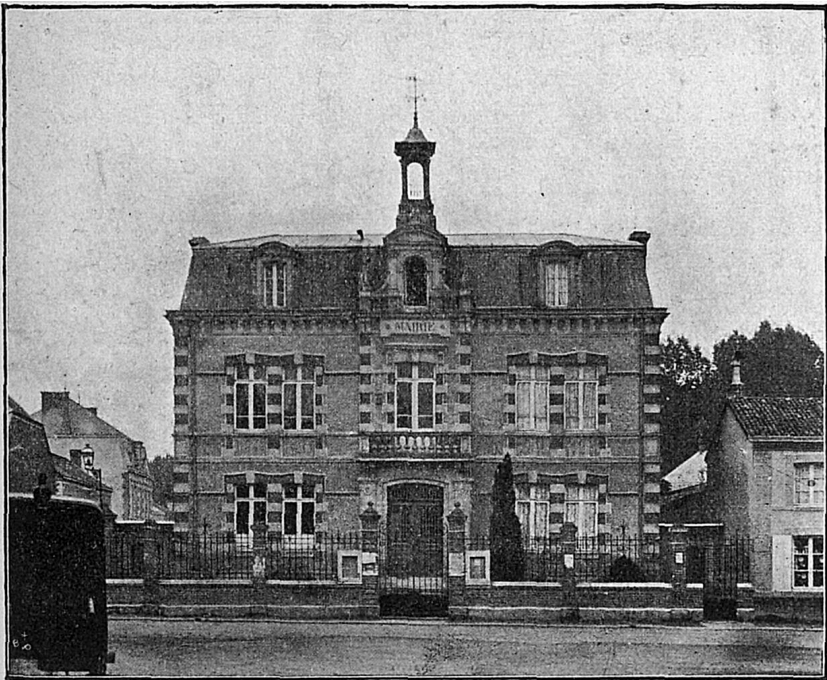
The mill’s workforce has constantly grown, so that today, in 305 families, there are about 800 members actually working and about 45 foremen or clerks.

What is most remarkable about the Val-des-Bois mill is that there has never been either a strike or a lay-off. In difficult years, such as 1848, 1870, 1871 and 1874, the firm always managed to find the means and make the sacrifices needed to keep its workforce employed. In the painful years of 1870-1871, all the elements of work were lacking at once: coal to produce power, money to keep business going, the post to maintain communications and facilitate transactions, and finally transport to dispatch the manufactured goods. The employers

of the day, by dint of energy and self-denial, managed to overcome all these difficulties and to meet every need.

When the fire of 1874 almost completely destroyed the spinning mill, another mill was rented at La Neuville-les-Wasigny, and within the next three days the male workforce, carried to that place, suffered no lay-off. The women found work in the annexe buildings which house the preparation department and which had been spared.

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★★



La Mairie de Warmeriville.

HONORARY AWARDS

Appendix

Society of Veterans of the Val-des-Bois Mill

made up of 70 workers with 25 to 58 years of service at the mill as of October 1899.

Not counted in the ranks: 2 employers, 1 doctor.

Summary of Honorary Awards

1 Cross of Knight of St Sylvester.

1 Silver-gilt medal of the Minister of Commerce and Industry, presented by Mr Carnot.

27 Medals of honour of the Minister of Commerce and Industry, one of them presented by Mr Félix Faure.

1 Medal of honour of the Minister of the Interior (devotedness).

49 First medals of honour of the Industrial Society of Reims.

1 Medal of honour of the Society for the Protection of Apprentices and Children Employed in Factories.

1 Medal of honour of the Association of French Industrialists against Industrial Accidents.

2 Medals of honour of the Society for the Encouragement of National Industry.

5 Medals and Honourable mentions, Universal Exhibition of 1878.

12 Diplomas of honour, General Association of Commerce and Industry in Fabrics and Textile Materials.

2 Honourable mentions, Relief Society.

In all, 102 awards won by the workers.

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1. — 17 March 1841, 58 years, Mrs WARMONT, Aimée, wife of GENET. Silver-gilt medal, Minister of Commerce, presented by Mr

Carnot, at Reims, on 18 September 1891¹.

2. — 17 September 1842, 56 years, Mr VOIRON, Alexandre. Bronze medal, Universal Exhibition 1878; medal of honour, Minister of Commerce, December 1893.

3. — 15 May 1843, 55 years, Mr HUBERT, Jean-Joseph. Bronze medal, Universal Exhibition 1878; medal of honour, Minister of Commerce, December 1893.

4. — 12 May 1844, 54 years, Mr BARTHÉLEMY, Jean-Baptiste. Honourable mention diploma, Universal Exhibition 1878; medal of honour, Minister of Commerce, July 1894.

5. — 26 July 1844, 54 years, Mr AUBLIN, Jean-Charles-Edouard. Honourable mention diploma, Universal Exhibition 1878; medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, December 1895; medal of honour, Minister of Commerce, presented by Mr Félix Faure, at Reims, on 16 July 1896.

6. — 17 November 1845, 53 years, Mr PÉRIN, Martin. Honourable mention diploma, Universal Exhibition 1878; medal of honour, Minister of Commerce, July 1894.

7. — 28 April 1850, 49 years, Mrs GAILLARD, Catherine, widow of LAMARCHE. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, October 1899.

8. — 29 January 1854, 45 years, Mr TERNEAUX, Florent-Théotine. Medal of honour, Minister of Commerce, 23 February 1893; medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, 25 March 1893.

9. — 1 April 1854, 45 years, Mr WARLET, Jacques-François. Medal of honour, Minister of the Interior, act of devotedness, 1852; medal of honour, Minister of Commerce, July 1894.

10. — 15 April 1854, 45 years, Mr PROTIN, Pierre. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, October 1894.

1. The figures in front are serial numbers; the date that follows is the year of entry into service at the mill, and then comes the number of years of service.

11. — 1 September 1854, 44 years, Mr JOLIVET, Alfred. Diploma of honour, Association of Commerce and Industry of Paris, 18 October 1894; medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, October 1894; medal of honour, Minister of Commerce, August 1896; medal of honour, Association of French Industrialists, 1897.
12. — 13 September 1854, 44 years, Mr LADAME, Léon. Medal of honour, Minister of Commerce, July 1894.
13. — 8 July 1855, 43 years, Mr GENTILHOMME, Didier-François. Diploma of honour, Association of Commerce and Industry of Paris, 18 October 1894; medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, October 1894; medal of honour, Minister of Commerce, August 1896.
14. — 9 February 1858, 41 years, Mrs FAUDIER, Alphonsine, wife of BLONDEAU. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, October 1899.
15. — 5 December 1858, 40 years, Mr MANGIN, Armand. Diploma of honour, Association of Commerce and Industry of Paris, 18 October 1894; medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, December 1896; medal of honour, Minister of Commerce, February 1897.
16. — 10 December 1858, 40 years, Mrs CAMUS, Henriette, widow of PÉROTIN. Medal of honour, Minister of Commerce, 1 January 1899; medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, 29 January 1899.
17. — 11 March 1860, 39 years, Mr COPRÉAU, Pierre. Diploma of honour, Association of Commerce and Industry of Paris, 18 October 1894; medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, December 1894; medal of honour, Minister of Commerce, January 1897.
18. — 3 May 1860, 38 years, Mr ESQUI, Emile. Diploma of honour, Association of Commerce and Industry of Paris, 18 October 1894; medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, December 1896; medal of honour, Minister of Commerce, February 1897.

19. — 18 May 1860, 38 years, Mrs LAMARCHE, Irma, wife of GENTILHOMME. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, December 1896.
20. — 10 August 1861, 37 years, Mr GLATIGNY, Jean-Baptiste-Eugène. Diploma of honour, Association of Commerce and Industry of Paris, 18 October 1894; medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, December 1896; medal of honour, Minister of Commerce, February 1897.
21. — 17 August 1861, 37 years, Mrs JACTAT, Mathilde. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, 29 January 1897.
22. — 6 March 1862, 37 years, Miss CLONET, Félicie. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, October 1899.
23. — 6 March 1862, 37 years, Mr CLONET, Joseph. Medal of honour, *Industrial Society of Reims*, 29 January 1899.
24. — 17 April 1862, 37 years, Miss MAHOT, Elvire. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, 2 December 1895.
25. — 19 February 1863, 36 years, Mr GODFROY, Alexandre. Diploma of honour, Association of Commerce and Industry of Paris, 18 October 1894; medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, December 1896; medal of honour, Minister of Commerce, February 1897.
26. — 1 April 1863, 36 years, Mr CHAMPION, François. Knight of St Sylvester, Rome, 4 May 1892; diploma of honour, Association of Commerce and Industry of Paris, 18 October 1894; medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, December 1896; medal of honour, Minister of Commerce, February 1897.
27. — 10 May 1863, 35 years, Mr GENET, Philippe. Diploma of honour, Association of Commerce and Industry of Paris, 18 October 1894; medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, December 1896; medal of honour, Minister of Commerce, July 1898.
28. — 12 October 1863, 35 years, Mr PÉROTIN, René. Diploma of honour, Association of Commerce and Industry of Paris, 18 October

1894; medal of honour, Minister of Commerce, August 1896.

29. — 10 March 1864, 35 years, Mrs THOMASSIN, Marthe, wife of HUYET. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, December 1896.

30. — 16 August 1864, 34 years, Mr CHARLIER, Désiré. Diploma of honour, Association of Commerce and Industry of Paris, 18 October 1894.

31. — 1 October 1864, 34 years, Mr WOIRON, Camille. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, December 1895.

32. — 17 October 1864, 34 years, Miss TOMSON, Marie. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, December 1899.

33. — 27 November 1864, 34 years, Mr HALLET, Jean-Baptiste. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, December 1895.

34. — 15 June 1865, 33 years, Mr SCHERRER, Charles. Medal of honour, Society for the Encouragement of National Industry, 24 June 1898; medal of honour, Minister of Commerce, 1 January 1899; medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, 29 January 1899.

35. — 12 August 1865, 33 years, Mr ANDRY, Emile. Medal of honour, Society for the Encouragement of National Industry, 24 June 1898; medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, December 1895; medal of honour, Minister of Commerce, 1 January 1899.

36. — 15 November 1865, 33 years, Miss BELVA, Marie. Medal of honour, Society for the Protection of Apprentices, Paris, 14 June 1896; medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, 29 January 1899.

37. — 1 October 1866, 32 years, Mr SERVAIS, Adolphe. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, 29 January 1899.

38. — 5 October 1866, 32 years, Mr SERVAIS, Joseph. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, 29 January 1899.

39. — 12 February 1867, 32 years, Mr PÉROTIN, Vital. Medal of honour, Minister of Commerce, 1 January 1899; medal of honour, In-

dustrial Society of Reims, 29 January 1899.

40. — 31 July 1867, 31 years, Mr BLONDEAU, Adolphe. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, December 1895; medal of honour, Minister of Commerce, 1 January 1899.

41. — 17 January 1868, 31 years, Mrs CHARLIER, Félicité, widow of MAINGON. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, October 1899.

42. — 17 January 1868, 31 years, Miss MAINGON, Philomène. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, 29 January 1899; medal of honour 1900.

43. — 17 March 1868, 31 years, Mr DÉCARREAU, Florentin. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, 29 January 1899; medal of honour 1900.

44. — 13 May 1868, 30 years, Mr LECLÈRE, Jean-Marie. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, 29 January 1899; medal of honour 1900.

45. — 15 May 1868, 30 years, Mrs LECOURT, Marie, wife of GÉRARD, Joseph. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, 29 January 1899.

46. — 10 June 1868, 30 years, Mr AUBLIN, Julien. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, 29 January 1899.

47. — 29 November 1868, 30 years, Mr GUYOT, Alferte. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, 29 January 1899; medal of honour 1900.

48. — 2 November 1868, 39 years, Miss GUYOT, Joséphine. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, 29 January 1899.

49. — 2 November 1868, 30 years, Mrs MUNOT, Mélanie, wife of DÉCARREAU. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, 29 January 1899.

50. — 10 December 1868, 30 years, Mr LAPORTE, Léon. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, 29 January 1899.

51. — 17 June 1869, 29 years, Mr MAGIS, Maximilien. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, 20 January 1899.
52. — 20 August 1869, 29 years, Mr EME, Grégoire. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, 29 January 1899.
53. — 26 September 1869, 29 years, Mr BÉGLOT, Henri. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, 29 January 1899.
54. — 15 May 1870, 28 years, Mrs MITTIAUX, Amélie, wife of LEROY. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, October 1899.
55. — 6 October 1870, 28 years, Mr BRABANT, Jean-Baptiste. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, October 1899.
56. — 17 October 1870, 28 years, Mr TOMSON, Auguste. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, October 1899.
57. — 13 March 1871, 28 years, Mr JOLIVET, Ernest. Diploma of honour, Association of Commerce and Industry of Paris, 18 October 1894; medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, October 1899.
58. — 21 March 1871, 28 years, Mr GÉRARD, Joseph. Medal of honour, Industrial Society of Reims, October 1899.
59. — 20 July 1871, 27 years, Mr DUFOUR, Benoit.
60. — 4 August 1871, 27 years, Mr DUFOUR, Joseph.
61. — 4 August 1871, 27 years, Mr DUFOUR, Augustin.
62. — 17 September 1871, 27 years, Mr COLIN, Adolphe.
63. — 3 October 1871, 27 years, Mr RAUX, Ernest.
64. — 15 February 1872, 27 years, Mr PECK, Edouard.
65. — 2 April 1872, 27 years, Miss EME, Marie.
66. — 2 September 1872, 26 years, Mr AUBRY, Edmond.
67. — 15 October 1872, 26 years, Mr DARDART, Aimé.
68. — 18 October 1872, 26 years, Mr DUPUIS, Victor.
69. — 30 May 1873, 25 years, Mr DUFOUR, François.
70. — 1 March 1874, 25 years, Mr SACOTTE, Adolphe.

Not counted in the ranks. — Employers.

- 1 January 1849, 50 years, the Good Father, Mr Léon HARMEL.
- 1 January 1863, 36 years, Mr HARMEL, Albert.

Doctor.

15 October 1865, 33 years, Mr BRODIER, Alphonse.

An Annexe of the Mill

In all the mills of the Suipe Valley that were founded before the railways were built, an annexe was indispensable: it was generally a farm. At that time, all the materials to be worked and all the manufactured products were brought in and carried away by wagons. The horses of the farm served this purpose. At Val-des-Bois, a farming estate was created and worked by Mr Jacques-Joseph Harmel.

For some years now, the farm has been let to Mr Hautavoine-Georgin.

Besides its arable land, the Harmel family has acquired, in various parts of the district, sizeable fir plantations, which it works for the coal mines and for firewood².

PART TWO

Val-des-Bois



BY THIS SIGN YOU SHALL CONQUER

Historians relate that Constantine, still undecided about his belief in Christ, was about to give battle to his rival Maxentius. A luminous cross, surrounded by this inscription: *In hoc signo vinces*, appeared to him in the sky, and it was for him the visible sign that came to

2. Information supplied by a member of the Harmel family.

strengthen his resolve and confirm his determination. He had it embroidered on his standards, and victory remained faithful to him.

It is from this luminous and fruitful motto, which so admirably symbolises the supremacy of faith and religion in the temporal sphere, that the Harmel family has drawn its inspiration, not only for itself but also for the management of its mills. Everyone in France, and I might say in the whole of Europe, knows the religious opinions and the social doctrines which it professes so loyally and so firmly. But many do not know that, if at Val-des-Bois they are uncompromising on principles, they are full of affability and even of liberality towards persons. The welcome is generous and cordial, whatever the opinions of the person received. This explains how the working population, so large and so varied, has been won over by this benevolence and by the regard, carried even to excess, with which the independence and individual liberty of the workers are surrounded. We may astonish many people by saying that there are workers who have 20, 25, 30 years of service and more at the mill and who have always remained indifferent, outside all religious practice.

Under these conditions, it was natural that Mr Jacques-Joseph Harmel should take the initiative of a series of economic and social institutions, intended to develop mutual trust between employers and workers and to increase the well-being of the latter.

The affection and veneration which the mill's workforce had for Mr Harmel senior, that happy old man, *Fortunate senex*, earned him the nickname of the Good Father, a most touching title which so perfectly symbolises his goodness and his care for his dear workers, and their heartfelt gratitude.

His sons ardently carried on their father's tradition; they realised the dangers that surround workers abandoned by their employers, their natural protectors. And so they created those admirable institutions which, were they more widespread in the mills, would serve, if not to ward off social miseries, at least to alleviate them greatly.

At the time we write these lines, it is Mr Léon Harmel who bears the title of Good Father. His workers conferred it on him in a most touching demonstration, a few weeks after the death of his venerable father³.

The Chapel

On 4 September 1862, a modest oratory was blessed at Val-des-Bois; it was intended for the Employer's Family only.

Successive enlargements made it possible to admit to it, with their pupils, the men and women religious in charge of independent education.

The fullest privileges were granted by His Eminence Cardinal Gousset in 1865. The children of the mill make their First Communion there. However, baptisms, weddings and funerals take place at the church of Saint-Martin in Warmeriville. In 1873, the oratory was replaced by the building that stands today. The Superior General of the Daughters of Charity blessed it on 21 September 1873. The Sacred Heart of Jesus is its Patron.

The chapel, which had become too small as the population steadily grew, was doubled by a side aisle on the right in the autumn of 1897; it is dedicated to St Anthony. It has a pipe organ of 12 stops (Didier van Castel firm, of Nancy), with an electric blower, which adds to the splendour of the religious ceremonies. Mr Pilardeau is its organist. The first chaplains were Lazarists, then priests of the diocese of Reims, and today they are religious, the Fathers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Saint-Quentin (Rev. Frs Charcosset and Mammès).

3. Information supplied by a member of the Harmel family.

The Independent Schools

These schools comprise the infant school, the girls' schools, run by the Sister Servants of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Saint-Quentin, and the boys' schools, run by the Brothers of the Christian Doctrine.

The first infant school was founded at Val-des-Bois in 1862 and was run by three Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul.

In 1863, the buildings were enlarged and the schools proper were founded. In the same year, three Brothers of the Christian Schools arrived to take charge of the little boys.

The infant school is attended by 40 boys and 60 little girls, a total of 100 children.

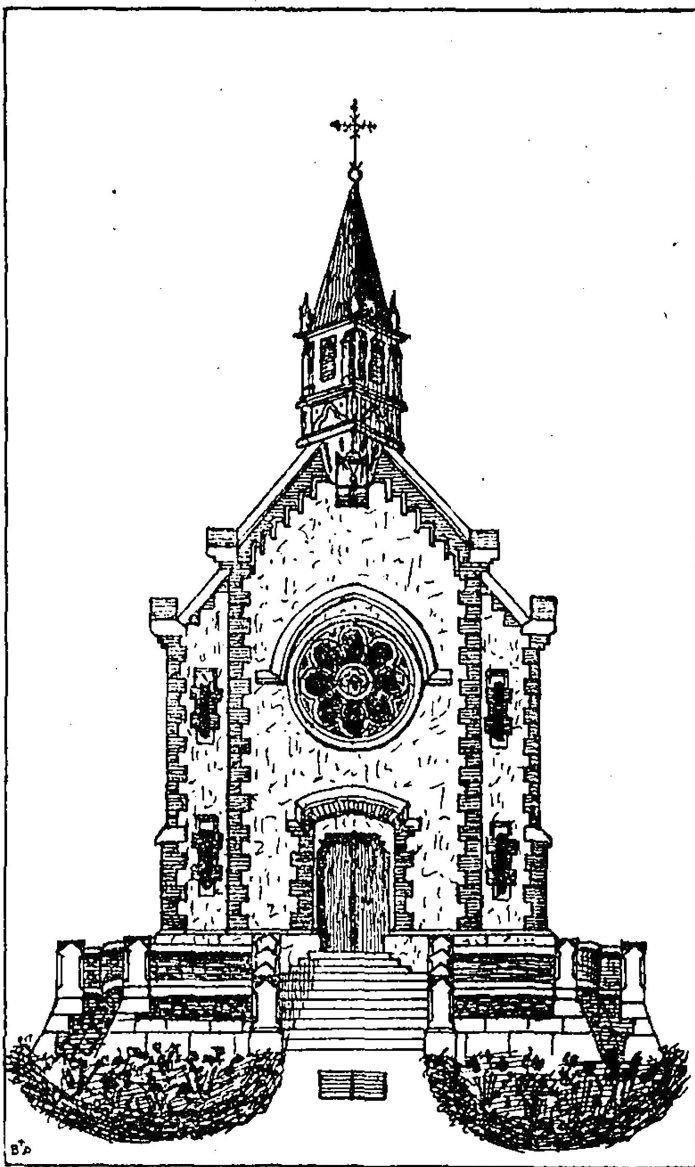
The schools include 80 girls aged 6 to 13 and 50 adults, a total of 130 girls.

The boys' schools at present take 90 boys aged 6 to 13 and 52 adults, a total of 142 boys.

This makes a school population of 372 children.

The first headmaster was Brother Vidal, who was succeeded by Brother Guy-Marie in 1875 (died at Val-des-Bois on 22 April 1898). The present one is Brother Arbogaste.

The first superior of the Sisters was Sister Angélique, then Sister Vincent and, since 1888, Sister Véronique, of the Saint-Quentin order.



L'Abbe A. Chevallier del

Warmeriville. Chapelle du Val-des-Bois Portail.

The figures above show that, if Messrs Harmel frères were to give up independent education, the commune of Warmeriville would have to more than double its school premises and considerably increase its teaching staff, which would place very heavy burdens on the taxpayers.

Various Associations

From the religious, social and economic point of view, the working population of Val-des-Bois is divided into a certain number of associations, of which we shall mention only a few.

St Aloysius Gonzaga, aged 6 to 13, 98; Little Circle, aged 13 to 16, 44; Men's Association, over 16, 350; a total of 492.

St Philomena, aged 6 to 11, 65; Holy Angels, aged 11 to 15, 55; Children of Mary, from 15 until marriage, 140; St Anne, married women, 230; a total of 490.

Mutual Aid Society

A mutual aid society, which has existed since the mill was founded, gives a free right to the doctor's care, to medicines, to a cash allowance during sickness, to free funerals, etc.

Agreements have been made with an insurance company to provide the workforce with compensation in case of injury or serious accident.

During the reservist training periods of 13 and 28 days, workers paid by the day receive an allowance equal to half their wages, and those paid by the month receive their salary in full.

Workers' Housing Estates

Messrs Harmel frères house all their workers, either in houses belonging to them or in others which they rent from various owners. They own several workers' housing estates, where the annual rent is 78, 90, 100 and 110 francs, according to the size of the dwelling and the number of rooms it contains. The workers can become owners of their homes.

Saving, which is widely encouraged, has enabled a group of former workers to own about 225,000 francs in houses, land, securities and deposits in the Savings Bank.

The main workers' housing estates are: the Cité Jeanne-d'Arc, 20 dwellings; the Cité Sainte-Virginie, 24 dwellings; the Cité du Bon Père, 10 dwellings; the Cité Saint-Joseph, 4 dwellings; the Cité Saint-Paul, 4 dwellings; and the Cité Saint-Jacques, 3 dwellings.

Various Societies

The mill has various Societies, whose aim is to develop the minds of the young and to provide them with pleasant and free recreation.

The Philharmonic has about 50 members, whose playing is very good, as is shown by the many awards won at various competitions. It adds to the splendour of religious and patriotic festivals. Its active president is Mr François Champion and its conductor Mr Ladame.

The Fire Brigade, made up of about 90 members, lends the support of its devotedness and courage in the commune and the surrounding area to combat the most terrible of scourges. It has two powerful pumps and a complete set of equipment supplied and maintained by the mill. Its captain is Mr Aulner.

The Gymnastics Society, the Choral Society, the Drama Section, whose many public performances are always warmly applauded, etc.

Professional Union

We read in the statutes of the Val-des-Bois Corporation:

Article 1. — *Creation.* — A mixed union was created on 2 August 1885 in the Val-des-Bois mill, between the employers on the one hand and the workers on the other, under the name of the Val-des-Bois Corporation.

Art. 2. — *Purpose, duration.* — The Union or Corporation, constituted under the law of 21 March 1884, has as its object the study and defence of the economic, industrial and commercial interests common to the employers and the workers, whose efforts contribute, in various forms and by different means, to the industrial undertaking.

Its duration is unlimited.

Art. 3. — *Institutions.* — The Corporation strives to create for the benefit of its members all the institutions tending to their moral, intellectual and professional good, as well as to the improvement of their material situation, such as:

Corporative fund, Corporative patrimony, Corporative bonus, Provident fund, Savings fund, Advice, Services to be rendered, Hostel, Good reading, Library, Family fund, Care of widows and orphans, Schools, Vocational training, Consumption committee, Professional or factory council, Mutual aid society, Cooperative society and its Committees, Recreational societies, Dowries for girls.

The most original and remarkable institutions are the Family Fund and the Factory Council.

The Family Fund is a wage supplement provided by the employers' fund and distributed on Sundays by a workers' committee to each family whose total wages have not reached the sum of 4.20 fr. per week per head. Example: a family of four children, with the father and mother, must earn $6 \times 4.20 \text{ fr.} = 25.20 \text{ fr.}$; a family of six children, with the father and mother, must earn in its week $8 \times 4.20 \text{ fr.}$

= 33.60 fr.. This minimum is made up every week, and so the families are safe from destitution.

The *Factory Council* is made up of ordinary workers, foremen being excluded. They are the authorised representatives of their fellow workers for all complaints. At the fortnightly meeting, one of the employers takes up professional questions with the councillors, so as to give them a real influence in the management of the mill. This workers' participation, far from harming discipline, has only strengthened it. It has kept a good spirit in the workshops, and fines have become unnecessary: they have fallen to the figure of 4 to 10 francs a year.

Agricultural Union of Champagne

The registered office of the *Syndicat agricole de la Champagne* (Agricultural Union of Champagne) is at Val-des-Bois.

This association, founded a few years ago, in 1894, aims to protect and defend the interests of farmers and to deal with all the commercial questions relating to their occupation, such as the joint purchase of fertilisers, seed and farm implements.

The annual subscription is two francs.

The number of members is unlimited, and at present there are about 1,200. Its active President is Mr de Boham, mayor of Fresnes (Marne)⁴.

Several general meetings are held every year; deputies and other prominent figures come to contribute their experience, discuss the interests at stake, and then use their influence with the public authorities to assert the rights and just claims of the farming world. In 1900, at the Paris Universal Exhibition, the *Syndicat agricole de la Champagne* won a silver medal for its exhibits.

4. See pages 53 and 54, Boham Family.

Biographies

Mr Jacques-Joseph Harmel, the head of the Val-des-Bois family, was born on 23 May 1795 at Sainte-Cécile.

Of a firm and enterprising character, he founded in turn Angecourt, La Neuville-les-Wasigny, Boulzicourt and finally Val-des-Bois.

It was to this last creation that he devoted the strength of his mind and the treasures of his heart. He gave it the Christian social character that it has kept. He had the happiness of enjoying the fruit of his labours. His workers knew him only by the name of *Good Father*. His old age passed surrounded by the respect and admiration of his workforce and by the affection and veneration of his family. He died at Val-des-Bois on 3 March 1884, in his 89th year.

Mr Jacques-Joseph Harmel was deputy mayor of Warmeriville from 1852 to 1871.

Here is the note we find in the *Revue de Champagne et de Brie*, volume 16, page 203:

“On 3 March 1884 died Mr Jacques-Joseph Harmel, founder of the Val-des-Bois mill, near Reims, whose organisation is a model proving how happy and fruitful the results of Christian principles well applied can be. This creation dates back to 1840. Mr Harmel was born on 23 May 1795. The Marquis de la Tour-du-Pin retraced his life in eloquent terms.”

Mr Jules-Hubert Harmel. — Mr Jules Harmel was one of the brothers of Mr Léon Harmel, industrialist at Val-des-Bois, commune of Warmeriville; he was born at La Neuville-les-Wasigny (Ardennes) on 29 November 1827 and died at Val-des-Bois on 23 May 1894.

Being by nature essentially an artist, he applied these special gifts to his industry. From 1864 onwards he created the novelty yarns, whose form and manufacture he constantly brought to greater perfection. It may be said that it is to him that the industry owes this special line, which enjoyed such great popularity.

He assisted his brother in the administration of the mill and in his care for the workers. He concerned himself not only with material progress but also with the institutions founded on religion and charity for the benefit of the workers.

The name of the Harmels, as Christian employers, is known throughout the world (*Annuaire Matot-Braine*, year 1895, page 293).

Mr Pierre-Louis-Prosper-Léon Harmel. — Mr Léon Harmel is the second son of Mr Jacques-Joseph Harmel; he was born on 17 February 1829 at La Neuville-les-Wasigny (Ardennes). In his youth he showed himself very active in the management of the mill and very devoted to all the institutions that were to make Val-des-Bois a model mill. On his father's death, in 1884, his family and his workers acclaimed him with the name of "Good Father". From 1871 to 1876 he was deputy mayor of Warmeriville, but he had to resign these administrative duties, being a teacher in independent education; he remained a municipal councillor until 1888. Mr Léon Harmel is the author of a *Manuel d'une Corporation chrétienne* (A. Mame & Fils, Tours 1879). In this work he sets out the successive transformations that took place from the moral point of view in the Val-des-Bois mill. He shows how, according to his experience, social relations between employers, foremen and workers can be regulated.

Mr Léon Harmel, with a number of Catholics of Reims, was one of the founders of the Economic Society of Our Lady of the Factory and the Workshop. Not living in Reims, he could not keep an active part in its management, but he remains a shareholder. His secretary is a member of its supervisory board.



Le Bon Père (M. Léon Harmel)

The public life of Mr Léon Harmel belongs to history. We can only point out one of its salient features. For many years he has devoted himself to making known the professional, economic and liberal organisation of Val-des-Bois, citing in support of his advice the results

he himself had obtained. Since 1874 we have seen him take an active part in all the great Catholic gatherings, congresses, assemblies and workers' meetings, and that in almost every part of the country. In the Catholic world, in France as abroad, he is a figure of note; his influence is felt in every circle. It was he who first proposed the laws protecting workers which Socialism and Parliament have taken over as their own. He is the organiser of the workers' pilgrimages to Rome, the promoter of that great popular movement which has already brought thousands of workers into contact with the Pope.

His services to the Church and to Society have obliged Mr Léon Harmel, in spite of his modesty, to accept the following honours: Knight of St Gregory the Great, Knight of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, Grand Officer of the Pontifical Order of Pius IX.

Warmeriville may justly be proud to possess a man of such moral and intellectual worth, whose name will remain closely bound up with the history of France and with that of the Church.

Mr Jacques-Ernest Harmel. — Mr Ernest Harmel was born at Rethel on 30 April 1830 and died at Reims on 28 September 1885. He was the third son of Mr Jacques-Joseph Harmel. In the mill he was in charge of sales; he was the perfect type of the travelling salesman, maintaining the most cordial relations with the customers he visited, of whom he always knew how to make friends. He had a leading part in the development of the mill. An accomplished musician and composer, he left several highly regarded works, notably the *Stabat Mater*, which is performed every year, on Good Friday, in Reims cathedral.

Mr Joseph-Albert Harmel. — Mr Albert Harmel was born at Boulzicourt (Ardennes) on 6 January 1843. He is the son of Mr Hubert Harmel. He always looked after the technical side, introduced important innovations in manufacturing and noticeably improved the products of the firm of Harmel frères, which owe to him the preference they enjoy today. After the fire of 1874, it was he who rebuilt

the Val-des-Bois mill and gave it the artistic character that strikes visitors. He equipped the industrial side with the latest improvements, adding in turn combing, dyeing and special twisting. He is the creator of the large spinning mill that the firm of Harmel frères owns in Spain. He actively assists Mr Léon Harmel, the Good Father, in all his works for the social regeneration of the workers and the improvement of their lot. He was a municipal councillor from 1888 to 1892. Around the year 1878, he took on Mr Maurice Harmel. Because of the active part Mr Albert Harmel took in founding the Sabadell mill (Spain), the Queen of Spain appointed him, in 1899, Commander of the Order of Isabella the Catholic.

Mr Marie-Joseph-Maurice Harmel. — Mr Maurice Harmel was born at Warmeriville on 2 August 1854. He is the eldest son of Mr Léon Harmel. He was the active and intelligent helper in all the reforms and all the improvements undertaken by Mr Albert Harmel for the smooth running of the mill. In 1896 he generously offered his place as partner to his brother, Mr Léon Harmel junior. On the death of Mr Félix Harmel, Mr Maurice put on the mayor's sash. The good family traditions will continue with him. In 1899, Mr Maurice Harmel was appointed Knight of St Gregory the Great by the Sovereign Pontiff.

Mr Anne-Alexandre-Léon-Félix Harmel. — Mr Félix Harmel was born at Warmeriville on 3 March 1857. The second son of the Good Father, his abilities in managing the mill marked him out to replace his Father. Called to the municipal council in 1892, he became deputy mayor, then put on the mayor's sash in 1896. In 1897 Mr Félix Harmel, as mayor, obtained free of charge from the railway administration a siding which is of the greatest service to the inhabitants. In 1898 he had almost all the streets of the commune metalled, on good terms for the taxpayers.

On 14 June 1899, the employers' and workers' family of Val-des-Bois was plunged into immense grief by the sudden death of Mr Félix

Harmel. He was not only a good husband, a good father and a good son, but also a skilful and kindly administrator, and an ardent and stirring speaker. He was well known as the right hand of his father, whom he assisted in all his undertakings with energy and intelligence.



M. Félix Harmel

Mr Félix Harmel was a Member of the Academy of the Arcadians, Chamberlain of Cape and Sword to His Holiness, Knight of the Order of Pius IX, Knight of the Order of the Advocates of St Peter, Grand Officer of the Pontifical Order of St Gregory the Great.

Mr Adrien-Théodore-Stanislas-Léon Harmel. — Mr Léon Harmel junior was born at Warmeriville on 17 January 1868, the fourth son of Mr Léon Harmel. He succeeded Mr Maurice Harmel in the mill in 1896. He is in charge of technical management; he is an engineer of

the Industrial School of Lille, a reserve second lieutenant in the 16th Infantry Regiment, President of the Mixed Rifle Club of Warmeriville, Knight of St Gregory the Great, Chamberlain of Cape and Sword to His Holiness.

Around the senior management, a galaxy of young men is rising, preparing to walk in the footsteps of their elders. Mr Pierre Saucourt is the eldest of them; he is the grandson of Mr Léon Harmel, the Good Father. He was born at Laon (Aisne) on 4 August 1876. He is beginning his apprenticeship in the mill.

The Harmel Family and the Religious Orders

The Harmel family has given eight of its children to religion: Mr Jules Harmel, five: a Poor Clare, Juliette; two Franciscans, Georges and Victor; a Trappist, Gustave; and a Salesian of Don Bosco, Théodore.

A daughter of Mr Léon Harmel, Maria, a Poor Clare at Paray-le-Monial, then Foundress of a convent of St Clare in Jerusalem.

Mr Georges Bureau-Harmel: Louis, a Jesuit.

Mr Reimbeau-Harmel: Jules, a Salesian of Don Bosco.

We do not intend to give the history of the various religious orders to which several members of the Harmel family belong. We wish only to say a word about the Salesians of Don Bosco. Don Bosco, a priest of Turin, is the St Vincent de Paul of modern times; he established the Salesian Society in 1847. The work of Don Bosco and his disciples consists in taking in abandoned children and gathering them in youth clubs, first in Turin and then in a host of other towns, among them Marseilles in France. In Don Bosco's vocational schools the children learn various trades: some are shoemakers, others are tailors, locksmiths, joiners, bookbinders, typesetters, etc. As for Don Bosco's disciples, their ministry extends not only to confession and preaching but also to fostering vocations and to foreign missions. Don Bosco died on 31 January 1888.

We close these few pages by paying public tribute to *Mr Alexandre Maupetit*, a former Papal Zouave, who has become Mr Léon Harmel's assistant in the direction of the works since the death of Mr Félix Harmel (1899).

Mr Maupetit has just been raised to the dignity of Commander of St Gregory the Great. This mark of high favour was granted to him by the Holy Father Leo XIII.