

**LIFE OF BLESSED
MARCELLIN JOSEPH BENEDICT
CHAMPAGNAT
1789 - 1840
MARIST PRIEST**

**Founder of the Congregation
of the Little Brothers of Mary**

by

**ONE OF HIS FIRST DISCIPLES
(Brother John-Baptist Furet)**

*All to the greater glory of God
and in honour of the
august Mary, Mother of Our Lord
Jesus Christ.*

**BICENTENARY EDITION
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Apart from some peculiarities in the use of capitals, the present text is a reproduction of the first Life of 1856. The notes are drawn from the research of the last thirty years into Marist origins. They aim at bringing precision to the work of Brother John-Baptist, clarifying it, and changing it when necessary. When the notes refer to Marist publications the reference only is given. (See the list of abbreviations. In the English edition, the French abbreviations have been maintained.) When the notes come from other works the essential points are given. The notes come especially from the work of Brothers Alexander Balko, Anibal Canon, Gabriel Michel, Paul Sester, and Pierre Zind. They were put together by Brother Roland Bourassa, and checked by Father John Coste S.M.

The notes of the Introduction are those of Brother John-Baptist.

Brother Ludovic Burke did the English translation.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Summary of Annals, Brother Avit, F.M.S. 1789-1840.
AAL	Archives of the Archdiocese of Lyons.
ADL	Archives of the Department of the Loire.
AFD	Achievement from the Depths, Br. Stephen Farrell, F.M.S. 1986.
AFM	Archives of the Marist Brothers, Rome.
ALS	Counsels, Teachings, Sayings (of Marcellin Champagnat), 1927.
AN	National Archives of Paris.
APM	Archives of the Marist Fathers, Rome.
BI	Bulletin of the Institute of the Marist Brothers.
BQF	Our Models in Religion, 1924.
CM	Marist Chronicles (The Founder), Br. Anibal, Luis Vives, Zaragoza, 1979.
CSG	Circular Letters of Superior Generals.
FMS	Review of the Marist Brothers, Rome.
LPC 1	Letters of Father Champagnat, Vol. 1. Br. Paul Sester, F.M.S. 1985.
LPC 2	Letters of Father Champagnat, Vol. 2, Index, Brs. Raymond and Sester, 1987.
MC	Marcellin Champagnat, Bishop Laveille, Ed. Téqui, Paris, 1921.
MEM	Memoirs - personal souvenirs, Br. Sylvester, F.M.S.
NCF	The New Congregations of Teaching Brothers in France, 1800-1830, Pierre Zind, F.M.S., Lyons, 1969.
OM	Marist Origins, Vols. 1,2,3,4., J. Coste, S.M. and G. Lessard, S.M. Rome. 1960-1967.
OME	Marist Origins, Extracts on the Marist Brothers.
PPC	Practice of Christian Perfection, Alphonsus Rodriguez Ed. de Cosson, Paris, 1837.
RLF	Marcellin Champagnat and the legal recognition of the Marist Brothers, Vol. 1 - to 1840, Br. Gabriel Michel, F.M.S., 1986.
SA	St Augustine, Complete Works, Ed. Louis Vives, Paris, 1878.
SAL	St Alphonsus Liguori, Ascetical Works, Ed. Paul Mellier, Paris, 1843.
SFS	St Francis de Sales, Complete Works, Ed. Nierat, 1898.
SMC	In the footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat, Vols. 1 and 2, Br. Pierre Zind, F.M.S., (Articles from "Marist Presence", 1970-1987).
VPC	Life of Father Champagnat, Ed. 1931.

PREFACE

To write the life of a saint, to reveal his struggles, his triumphs, his virtues, and all that he has done for God and neighbour, is to proclaim the glory of Jesus Christ, the divine Redeemer of the world the model and author of all sanctity. Indeed, all the saints who enlighten us, and who by their example dissipate the darkness of sin and ignorance, draw their light from the life of Jesus; they are filled with ardour by meditation on his virtues; in much the same way, a single torch is used to light a number of lamps, providing them all with light and heat. (Saint Macarius: His teaching).

There is no saint who cannot say with Saint Paul: "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me." (Gal. 2,20). He lives in their intellect through faith, by which they begin to share eternal life; he lives in their memory by the recollection of his greatness, his goodness and his benefits, the very thought of which overwhelms them with joy; he lives in their heart by his love; he lives in their virtuous acts and in all the spiritual faculties of their soul; he it is who gives them a savour for eternal truths; he makes them attentive to divine inspirations; it is he who draws them by the fragrance of his virtues. Hence, everything by way of grace and gift in the saints, has its source in Jesus and redounds to his glory.

According to St John Chrysostom: "The saints are like the stars of the sky combining their splendour to proclaim the glory of Jesus. Everything within them breathes his spirit; their every word sounds the praises of his perfections; their actions record the victories of his grace; all their sufferings are sacrifices paying homage to his greatness; in a word, their life is a replica of his and excels in his virtues." (NOUET. The Life of Jesus in the Saints).

To write the life of a saint, is to stigmatize vice, to encourage piety and virtue. The life of a saint is seen by Saint Gregory as an instruction on the virtues and how to acquire them; it is a clear mirror, showing us our faults and imperfections with such truth and with such consequent disgust, that the very sight is enough to persuade us to correct them. The life of a saint, vividly presents to us evangelical perfection and all the steps available to us in the quest for it; it is the Gospel in action, and St Francis of Sales asserts that there is no more difference between the written Gospel and the life of a saint, than between a musical score and its performance.

As we read the lives of the saints, we are gently but firmly moved to follow their example; it is as if each of them invites us to follow the same path; as if each virtue that they reflect says to us in pointing to them, what chastity said to St Augustine at the beginning of his conversion: Why shouldn't you be able to do what these others have done? Was it by their own strength that they overcame the difficulties met on the way to heaven? No, it was by the grace of Jesus Christ that they conquered sin and practised virtue. The same grace is at your

disposal, he was told, and using it you are capable of doing all that they did.

It is true that the example of all the saints may be very useful in leading us to perfection. However, St Peter Damian reminds us of the need for the same prudence in the choice of saints, as governs our choice of the virtues most necessary or most appropriate for us. We should choose those saints whose life best fits our profession and our circumstances. Each Institute and each profession, in St Jerome's view, have their leading figures whose example serves as a model to which the others ought to conform. He would want bishops and priests to form themselves on the pattern of the apostles and apostolic men so that they match them not only in honour but in merit. We, who make profession of a solitary life, he suggested, can model ourselves on a Paul, an Anthony, a Julian, an Hilarion or a Macarius. Following the wise advice of that great Doctor, the Brothers should take as master in the spiritual life and model in the practice of virtue, their pious Founder: nothing can be more useful or profitable to them, than his example.

To raise the saints to the peak of holiness, God sometimes leads them by extraordinary ways, causing us to admire rather than imitate them; at other times, they are led along the common, beaten path but they follow it in an heroic and very perfect fashion which provides us with an object both of admiration and of imitation. By that path, God sanctified our venerated Father; as a result, his life is, in every respect, a model which we can, and ought to, imitate. In the mirror of that life we shall see our faults and the virtues God asks of us; that life is a Rule in action, teaching us on every page what we must do in order to be pious and fervent Religious, zealous for the glory of God; in order to be filled with love for Jesus Christ; in order to be Religious truly devoted to Mary and genuine imitators of the humility, simplicity and modesty of that noble Virgin and of her hidden life. Each of us, while studying and meditating on the virtues depicted for us in that life, should say to himself: "There, is the model which I ought to copy, which I must labour to reproduce; I shall be a perfect Religious, a true Little Brother of Mary, only if I bear a resemblance to that prototype of the perfection of my state."

After the death of Saint Benedict, his most important disciples were raised to ecstasy during prayer. God showed them a broad path, stretching towards the East from the Saint's cell up to heaven. The path was studded with torches which spread a soft, clear light. St Maurice, watching the spectacle with the other Brothers, was intent on it when an angel appeared to him and asked him what he was looking at so attentively. On his admission of ignorance about the nature of the path, the angel explained to St Maurice, that it was the way which led his Father Benedict to heaven; that he must follow the same path, imitating his Father's virtues, if he were to reach heaven; that he should observe exactly the Rule left by Benedict, just as Benedict himself had done.

We Brothers, reading the life and sayings of our pious Founder, ought to apply to ourselves the words of the angel to St Benedict, and say: "There is the path, there is the Rule which our Founder has followed in doing good, in order to gain heaven and to reach that height of perfection which he achieved. If we want to be his true disciples, if we want to continue his work and share his glory in heaven, we must follow in his steps, imitate his virtues, keep the Rule which he has given us and which he himself kept so faithfully; for that Rule is the only one capable of leading us to God and to the haven of salvation; any other route we might take would lead us astray and into the abyss."

The prophet Isaiah, speaking to the faithful Israelites exhorts them to meditate on the actions and the life of Abraham, who was their Father, in order that they might be inspired by the example of that great patriarch, to walk, with a firm step, the path of holiness. Let us make our own, the thought of this prophet; let us fix our eyes constantly on the one whom God has given us as Father and model; let us study his spirit of faith, his outstanding confidence in God, his burning zeal for the salvation of souls, his tender and generous love for Jesus; let us master his filial attitude towards Mary, his profound humility, his mortification, his detachment from creatures, his constancy in the service of God, in order that we may be spurred on to the practice of these same virtues.

Boleslas IV, King of Poland, used to wear a locket with his father's image. Whenever he was to do something important, he would take it in his hands and say as he looked at it: "Father, may I preserve in my person, the honour of your house and the good example you have left me; may no act of mine ever be incompatible with your constant exemplary conduct." Like that virtuous prince, let us undertake nothing without reference to our Father, without recalling his virtues, without moulding our conduct to his example and his spirit; let our every word and action be worthy of him and such as he would be glad to own: in harmony with his words, his teaching and his example.

God has given to the Founder of each Religious Order, abundant graces of state and the spirit of the religious family of which he has made him the leader and the model. It is from the Founder that those gifts flow into the souls of his Religious, vivifying their actions and their virtues. Religious who have not acquired the spirit of their Founder or who have lost it, should be regarded, and should regard themselves, as dead members: they are in the greatest danger of being lost, of abandoning their vocation and returning to the world. Should they happen to remain in Religion, even then they would find it very difficult to preserve grace and save their soul. Like branches that wither and die, although attached to the trunk, these Religious, having lost the spirit of their state through repeated infidelities, forfeit charity for the same reason and are damned for their misuse of the very means which were designed to lead them to the highest perfection. It is not merely useful for a Religious to acquire the spirit of his state and of his Founder; it is something essential, indispensable for him; one who

lacks that spirit, is without grace, virtue, peace or happiness during this life; he is deprived of salvation and bliss in the next.

The chronicles of the Friars Minor, founded by St Francis of Assisi, record the following vision of a Friar of the Order. He beheld a tree of marvellous beauty and size. Its roots were of gold; its fruit was men; and those men were Friars Minor. The tree had as many main branches as there were Provinces of the Order; each branch carried fruit that matched the number of Friars for its Province; in this way he was shown how many there were in the Order and in each Province, their names, age, rank, employment, graces, virtues and defects. High up on the centre branch, he detected the Superior General, John of Parma; on the peaks of the surrounding branches, were the Province Superiors. He also saw Jesus Christ, seated on an elevated throne of dazzling splendour; the divine Saviour summoned St Francis, gave him a cup full of the spirit of life and instructed him to visit the Friars of the Order and give them a drink from the cup, for Satan would attack and strike them: a number would fall and never recover.

Accompanied by two angels, St Francis set about doing this, beginning with John of Parma. He took the cup, drained it, with a holy eagerness, of the spirit of life it held, and at once became as brilliant as the sun. Then the Saint presented it to all the other Friars in turn; but there weren't many who received it with becoming respect and piety and who drank it completely; the small number who did, became immediately resplendent like the sun; the others were either blackened, dark, deformed and repulsive, or partly so, partly shining - depending on whether they had drunk or poured out the spirit of life.

The next instant, a fierce wind blew up and shook the tree with such violence that the Friars fell to the ground. The first to fall were those who had poured out the whole cup; devils seized them and dragged them off to be cruelly tormented in dark dungeons. By contrast, the General of the order, and those who, like him, had drained the cup, were carried by the angels to a resting place of eternal life and light. In the end, under the impact of the storm, the tree itself fell and was swept like a toy by the winds. When the storm had abated, there arose a new tree from the root of the one that had just been torn out; it, too, was golden and so were its leaves and fruit; this signified the renewal of the Order and indicated that the Friars who rejected the spirit of their Founder were lost, and replaced by others who proved faithful.

"Not all the children of Israel", says St Paul, "are true Israelites; not all those born of Abraham, are true children of Abraham." It is likewise true that not all Religious are genuine Religious; those who are so only in name, dress, appearance, and who carry out only the exterior duties, are not so at all. Those alone are Religious who possess the spirit of their Founder and imitate his virtues; it is that spirit and those virtues which are the guarantee of his vocation, of his perfection, of his happiness here and hereafter.

May all Little Brothers of Mary thoroughly grasp this important truth and apply themselves assiduously to study the life and the

instructions of their holy Founder, to imitate his virtues and acquire his spirit! Those who had the good fortune to live with him have imbibed his spirit at the source from his daily instruction and the personal advice they received; their successors must draw that spirit from the constant meditation on his life, on his favourite sayings and on the Rule of the Institute. It is to put this boon at their disposal, that we have so carefully gathered all the words of our venerated Father; for this reason, we have outlined his teachings, we have described his views on the various virtues and have indicated his aim and motives in drawing up most of the Rules he has bequeathed us.

There is only one thing more to do to ensure that our Brothers can read this life with pleasure and profit, that is, to vouch for the truth of all that it contains, supporting this claim by indicating the sources. The documents on which the story draws have not been chosen at random; fifteen years of laborious research have gone into compiling them. They have been gathered:

1. From those Brothers who lived with Father Champagnat, who witnessed his conduct, were closely involved in his actions, shared his labours and heard his instructions. Those Brothers gave us their written notes; besides, we discussed the content of those notes with each of them. This enabled us to check the accuracy of their record and to gather orally other points and information that our questions brought to mind.

2. From a great number of other persons who lived with Father Champagnat or knew him in a special way. These included distinguished ecclesiastics and pious, lay friends who supported his work.

3. From the Father's own writings, including a host of letters to Brothers and other people; we have read and re-read those letters very attentively. Much valuable information was also discovered in the many letters written to the Founder by the Brothers and by a wide variety of correspondents.

4. From our own recollection: for we had the privilege and the pleasure of living nearly twenty years with our venerable Father, of being a member of his Council, of accompanying him on many journeys and of lengthy discussions with him; these embraced everything about his legacy to the Brothers by way of Rule, Constitutions and method of teaching; and in general they covered everything concerning the Institute.

We may say, therefore, in all sincerity, that, in writing this Life, we record what we have seen, what we have heard and what, over a long span of years, we have been in a position to contemplate and study.

No matter how edifying the Life of Father Champagnat may be, the knowledge gained of him would be very inadequate, if we

confined ourselves simply to telling his story. Imposing actions, grand undertakings, protracted and painful words, don't add up to much; what constitutes their value and merit, what represents their true excellence, is the spirit which animates them. Now, it is that spirit, comprising the attitudes and dispositions of the Founder, which is the object of the Second Part of this work, one which we believe more edifying and more profitable to the Brothers.

We could well have called this First Part, "the Rule in action"; in fact, Father Champagnat is seen there as a perfect model of the virtues special to our state in life: humility, poverty, mortification, zeal, punctuality and exactitude in regular observance. Following the example of the Divine Master, he began by doing before teaching, that is, he first observed himself, what he gave us as Rules and what he required of us in the practice of piety and virtue.

It can be remarked in conclusion, that this part of the Life has the special value of presenting us simultaneously with his example and his teaching. So, he will often be heard to speak for himself, sometimes by drawing on his letters and other writings, sometimes by using notes provided by Brothers, and sometimes by resorting to our own recollection. We lay no claim to a verbatim reproduction of his words when reporting his teachings and exhortations - this would have been impossible; but we have been able to capture faithfully his views and attitudes. We are therefore thoroughly convinced, and our conscience supports this conviction, that we have conveyed the spirit of Father Champagnat; we have managed to outline his teachings, to quote his important sayings, and to portray his attitude to virtue, to the Rules and to the way of observing them. These things are all in our work, and only these.

DECLARATION OF THE AUTHOR

To conform to the decree of Pope Urban VIII, of the year 1631, we declare that we assign merely human authority to the events recorded and titles accorded in this Life. We use the words "Saint" and "Blessed" in relation to Father Champagnat and others we speak of, only as description of what ordinary usage and opinion believe. Moreover, we submit this work to the judgment of the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church; we withdraw or correct, in advance, everything that our ecclesiastical Superiors might find reprehensible.

INTRODUCTION

So important is knowledge of God, that Jesus Christ came on earth to impart it to men. He went on foot from town to town, from village to village, instructing, catechizing and teaching his heavenly doctrine. Children were as much the object of his zeal as were others. "Suffer them to come unto me", he said to his disciples, "for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Besides, he uttered the most terrible threats against those who scandalize them, so much does he have their salvation at heart. It is the Son of God, then, who is the author and prime teacher of Christian doctrine: he brought it from heaven; he taught it on earth; and we can remark that he spread it more by catechizing than by preaching. What lifts the catechetical function above every other way of announcing the word of God, is that it is used in an unprecedented way, by Christ and his Apostles.

The Church in the first centuries had only masters similar to the Apostles: the catechists were her doctors. This sacred function of teaching Christian doctrine in a simple style congenial to the listeners, is one received by the Bishops from Jesus Christ.

They regarded it as inseparable from their roles as Fathers and Pastors. While it is true that swelling numbers of faithful forced them to delegate the task to others, they took good care to select for the work only the most capable and most virtuous people available in the Church ¹.

The greatest Doctors of the Church's first centuries, gloried in discharging the duties of catechist and preparing catechumens for Baptism. St Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem, St Ambrose, Archbishop of Milan, St Gregory of Nyssa and St Augustine, even composed works, which we still have, for the instruction of catechists, showing them how to teach the principles of the Christian faith to children, and to adults being prepared for Baptism.

In the Church of Alexandria, there was a famous Catechetical School. It was, in fact, made so famous by the exertions of Pantenus, St Clement of Alexandria and Origen, its successive Directors, that students flocked there from the most distant countries.

¹ Father Garreau, Life of de La Salle, Vol. 1.

It was there that St Gregory Thaumaturgus learnt the elements of the faith and made the progress which later won him the admiration of all centuries.

The Church of Constantinople lists amongst its dignitaries the catechetical officer; whose task it was to instruct the people, including those who re-entered the Church after heresy. Origen, while only eighteen and still a layman, was responsible for the instruction of catechumens. At Carthage, St Cyprian confided the same office to a rhetorician, named Optatus. He tells us about it in these words: "We have appointed Optatus, one of the rhetoricians, master of catechumens." Two hundred years later, the deacon, Deo gratias, filled the same office in the same church and it was at his instigation that St Augustine composed his beautiful *De catehizandis rudibus*. From all this, it is clear that it could be a deacon, a priest or a simple lay person who was entrusted with the task; more store was set by the catechist's talents, virtue and special gifts, than by his status ².

This practice endured until such time as most people had embraced Christianity and the lack of catechumens gradually made the catechist redundant. Parents, (or in their absence, godparents) then remained responsible for teaching children Christian doctrine ³. At the same time, the Bishops were careful to establish schools in which the principles of Religion and profane studies were taught to the young. The appointment, in episcopal churches, of a Doctor or Chancellor, goes back to this period. Those who were assigned this function were to supervise the day-schools and were empowered:

1. to nominate and appoint schoolmasters and schoolmistresses.
2. to resolve and judge any altercations arising amongst them.
3. to draw up Statutes and Rules for the day-schools and monitor their exact observance.

Most of the Councils held in the Middle Ages, earnestly recommended the foundation of schools and urged the pastors of the parishes to teach catechism to the people, who were then in a state of great ignorance. This was particularly true of the Councils of Chalons-sur-Saône, in 813; of Aix-la-Chapelle, in 816; of Paris, in 829; of Meaux, in 845;

² Complete Course of Theology, Vol. 20, Ch. 3.

³ Father Garreau. Life of de La Salle. Vol. 1.

of Toul, in 859; of Troflé, in 909; and of the Lateran, in 1179 and 1198 4.

Despite these recommendations, the temper of the times was such that the ignorance went from bad to worse and the role of catechist was held in disregard. It is possible to give two indisputable proofs of this fact: the example of Gerson, and the Decree of the Council of Trent, Session 24, concerning catechism 5.

The zeal exercised by Gerson in the function of catechist at Lejons, caused him to be accused of weakness of mind; that outstanding figure was forced to write a work to justify his conduct 6.

The Fathers of the holy Council of Trent were appalled at the ravages caused in the Church by religious ignorance, and were convinced that it was due principally to the failure of the Pastors to instruct their people. They therefore issued a number of Decrees to remind priests responsible for souls, of their obligations in this important matter 7. Of all these Decrees, none was more necessary, none more fruitful, than the one which required every parish priest to teach the children catechism on Sundays and feast days. Three effects of that Decree succeeded in renewing the face of the Church. 8

i) It roused priestly zeal for the christian instruction of children and gave rise to the establishment of catechism classes every where. The Church had hardly spoken, when on all sides admirable zeal was applied to the instruction of children. Numerous Provincial Councils confirmed and published the Decree of Trent and ordered their priests to open classes for the teaching of catechism. In Italy, St Charles Borromeo published that Decree in his first Provincial Council and with the support of his suffragan Bishops, he directed that the children should be summoned to catechism class by the sound of a bell 9. The first Synod of Siena 10, that of Camerino in Umbria 11, the Synods of Monza, Cesena and Forli, those of Parma, Albano and Montefiascone, and a great number of others, followed the same example. The Synod of Brescia in Lombardy recommended parish priests to distribute rewards amongst the children in order to attract them to catechism,

4 Father Joly, chancellor of the church of Paris. The Teaching of children.

5 History of the Catechisms of Saint-Sulpice.

6 Gerson. Treatise on zeal for leading children to Christ.

7 Council of Trent, Session 24, Ch. 4.

8 History of the Catechisms of Saint-Sulpice.

9 Acts of the Church of Milan, Provincial Council, 1565.

10 Synod of Siena, 1599.

11 Synod of Camerino, 1630.

adopting towards them the language and feelings of a mother 12.

Spain showed just as much zeal and enthusiasm. The Provincial Councils of Valencia and of Tarragona, published the Decree of the Council of Trent and instructed priests '10 use everyday language in their catechism classes 13. In the kingdom of Naples, the Provincial Council of Salerno, followed the example of Milan in calling the children to class by bell 14.

The North was filled with the same spirit and made like provisions. In Bohemia, the Synod of Olmutz laid down, in explaining the Council of Trent, that question and answer form was to be used and that careful instruction should follow memory learning 15.

Some German towns allotted public money to ensure the success of such a holy activity and notably the annual awarding of prizes. The Council of Constance encouraged priests to make catechism so pleasant for the children that they would find it a form of enjoyment rather than a burdensome task. The Synod of Anvers did likewise 16, that of Augsburg added wise guidelines on fruitful catechetical instruction. The Constitutions of the Diocese of Trèves instructed priests to minimize the absence of children 17; those of Sion, called for the distribution of rewards 18; those of Osnabruck, emphasized the need for short, clear questions; those of Ypres, wanted the questions explained by means of examples and comparisons 19. The Synod of Gand urged the magistrates of the towns to make a personal appearance at the distribution of catechism prizes so that their presence might stir the children's interest; the Synod of Saint-Omer emphasized most of the decrees mentioned 20. The Statutes of Tarantaise and especially those of Annecy, promoted the value of catechism classes in the Savoy.

Naturally, France did not simply sit back and admire these fruitful reforms. The Council of Besançon in 1571, drew up rules for teaching catechism 21; the Council of Bourges, the Synods of Metz, of Rouen,

12 Synod of Brescia, 1603.

13 Council of Valencia, 1565; Council of Tarragona, 1591.

14 Council of Salerno, 1596.

15 Synod of Olmutz, 1591.

16 Synod of Anvers, 1610.

17 Constitutions of the Diocese of Trèves, 1622.

18 Constitutions of Sion, 1626.

19 Constitutions of the Diocese of Osnabruck, 1628.

20 Synod of Gand, 1650; of Saint-Omer, 1640.

21 Council of Besançon, 1571.

of Orleans, the Statutes of Troyes, of Angers and of all French dioceses, without exception, required parish priests to provide catechetical instruction. Zeal for implementing the Decree of the Council of Trent penetrated to the New World even, with the Councils of Lima and of Mexico, rivalling, in eagerness, those of traditionally christian lands 22.

ii) The Decree of Trent caused the teaching of catechism to be highly esteemed. While on an sides, Councils focused on the christian instruction of children, there were Bishops, high-ranking clergy and miracle-working Saints, who themselves carried out the function of catechists and effectively high-lighted its importance by the powerful example they gave to the christian world.

St Charles Borromeo, Archbishop of Milan, found time each week, despite his busy schedule, to teach catechism to the little children and to guide the catechists whom he had appointed in every parish of his diocese 23.

On all Sundays of the year and on the Saturdays of Lent, St Francis de Sales taught catechism together with his Canons in turn. The children were summoned to this catechism class by a herald, wearing a kind of blue coat-of-arms, with the name Jesus embroidered in golden letters. The herald rang a small bell as he went through the streets and cried in a loud, resonant voice: "Off to christian doctrine class, children; there you will be taught the way to paradise." The holy Bishop always had a supply of rewards which he himself gave to the children to entice them to the class. Twice a year, he accompanied them in solemn procession through the city 24.

St Ignatius Loyola and his companions bound themselves by vow to teach catechism. When he became General of the Order, he began his responsibilities by teaching catechism for forty-five days in a Roman church. In imitation of him, the Superiors of the Company of Jesus, teach catechism for forty days, on taking office 25.

St Francis Borgia travelled through the country, bell in hand, calling the children and teaching them Christian doctrine. Yet, children weren't the only ones to gather at the sound of the bell; people of all ages flocked to hear him. They had a name for him

22 Provincial Council of Lima, 1582; of Mexico, 1585.

23 Life of St Charles Borromeo.

24 Life of St Francis de Sales, Father Larivière, p. 262.

25 Life of St Ignatius by Father Maffé, p. 121; and by Father Bouhours, p. 219.

- the man from heaven - and they listened to his words as though they were heavenly and divine oracles 26.

In the city of Goa, St Francis Xavier went about calling aloud for the heads of families to send along their children and their slaves, to catechism classes. The holy man according to his biographer, held the view that Christianity would soon flourish in Goa, if the youth were thoroughly taught the principles of religion; in fact, it was through the children, that the city began to be transformed 27.

Blessed Peter Claver spent his life teaching catechism to the slaves; he prepared more than two hundred thousand" of these for baptism 28.

St Philip Neri, by his daily catechism classes to all sorts of persons, produced extraordinary fruits in the city of Rome. St Vincent de Paul, when parish priest, made a point of learning the local dialect, to be more capable of teaching catechism. Through that kind of instruction, he reformed his whole parish 29.

It was by teaching catechism that St Francis Regis began all his missions. A great preacher was moved to exclaim once, when he heard, the Saint catechizing in a church of Puy: "This great servant of God converts souls and inflames them with divine love through his catechism lessons, while we reap such a small harvest from our impressive sermons." 30 Blessed Jerome Emiliani gathered together the little children of Venice twice each day, to teach them catechism; he achieved immense good by this means, in that vast city 31.

The Archbishop of Capua, St Robert Bellarmine, brought the children together in his cathedral, taught them catechism himself and distributed rewards for the best answers. This learned dignitary gave his explanations like a true father, with the result that all were deeply moved. Hence, as soon as it was announced that the Archbishop was taking the catechism class, people of all ages presented themselves with the children 32.

Dom Bartholomew, Archbishop of Braga in Portugal, resigned from his episcopal office to devote himself entirely to the humble role of catechist.

26 Life of St Francis Borgia, p. 157.

27 Life of the Saint by Bouhours, pp. 119, 571.

28 Life of Blessed Claver.

29 Life of St Vincent de Paul, Collet, pp. 36, 62.

30 Life of the Saint, by Daubenton, p. 112.

31 Acts of the Saints, Month of February, p. 218.

32 Life of Bellarmine, by Frizon, p. 255.

The saintly Bishop of Cahors, Alan of Solminiac, never ended a parish visit without teaching catechism, and his zeal continually inspired him with new ways of making his instruction interesting and attractive 33.

Father le Nobletz began giving catechism classes when he was fourteen. He carried on that °ministry so successfully until his death, that he revived the whole of Brittany 34.

The Founder of the Ursulines in France, Father Romilion, feeling a call to teach the children catechism, began that ministry at Isle in the county of Venaissin, with extraordinary success. Such was his gift for getting the children to love his classes that he used to teach them for two or three hours at a time, without the least sign of boredom on their part 35.

Father Ivan, who founded the Congregation of Notre-Dame, held a catechism class for the children each Sunday. In his zeal, he made his own engravings for pictures to distribute to them 36.

The revered Caesar of Bus was so enthusiastic and successful in the same ministry, that he earned the title, Apostle of the children. In old age, his eyesight, failed but that didn't stop him catechizing up till his death 37.

Our own wonderful France had its catechists combing city and country to instruct the ignorant. The Josephites, started as simple catechists and went on to the education of youth and the conducting of colleges. Antony Roussier, with the group that he had gathered around him, brought catechetical instruction in turn to the regions of Lyons, Forez, Velay and Auvergne 38.

Pope Clement XI was so convinced of the importance of catechism, that he summoned the parish priests of Rome, in the first days of his Pontificate, and earnestly exhorted them to show great zeal in instructing their parishioners, especially the children; he outlined for them the method they should follow and stressed particularly the need to adapt to the age and ability of the children. He didn't stop there: he himself set an example. That great Pontiff could often be seen stopping in the streets to teach catechism to little children; and to fire their zeal, he gave medals or rosaries to those who had answered well 39.

33 Life of Bishop Alan of Solminiac, p. 241.

34 Life of Father le Nobletz, p. 126.

35 Life of Father Romilion, p. 83.

36 Life of Father Ivan, p. 51.

37 Life of Caesar of Bus, p. 168.

38 Life of Father Démia.

39 Guide for those who teach the word of God, p. 379. After such examples who would not consider himself happy to be a catechist for little children?

iii) The third effect of the decrees of the Council of Trent was the foundation of numerous Societies whose aim was the education of youth. The great examples of zeal we have just recorded were needed to highlight the necessity and excellence of catechism; those examples were perpetuated in the Church by the establishment of Congregations devoted to the christian education of youth.

St Pius V, raised up by God to repair the ravages made in the Church, set up at Rome a Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, dedicated to catechism. A great number of people vied with one another to enter it and bound themselves to teach catechism on Sundays and feast days. Seeing the marvellous fruits of the Confraternity, the Pope, by a special Bull, exhorted all Archbishops and Bishops to introduce it into their dioceses; he granted indulgences to all who joined it and to those who attended the instructions ⁴⁰.

St Charles Borromeo established the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine at Milan and exerted himself to spread it throughout his diocese which underwent a complete change in no time. The holy Archbishop received great satisfaction from visiting the catechism classes he had fostered. By the time he died, there were about seven hundred and forty such classes spread through Milan and the rest of the diocese; there were more than three thousand catechists catering for the forty thousand or more who attended ⁴¹.

From the time he was made a Bishop, St Francis de Sales established the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine at Annecy. He drew up rules for maintaining order and for ensuring stability ⁴².

The Society of Jesus, which was founded at the time of the Council of Trent, devoted itself likewise to the sanctification of children and it conducted many colleges. Stephen and Sigismund, both Kings of Poland, as well as the Emperors of Austria, Ferdinand I and Ferdinand II, declared that they had found no more powerful means for strengthening the Catholic faith in their lands, (harassed by the heresy of Luther), than the schools of the Jesuit Fathers. "From those schools", affirmed the great Henry IV, King of France, "there issued not only excellence in literature, but also in faith and piety."

(39) What an honour, what glory, what a consolation for Brothers to be engaged in a ministry carried out by so many great men, by so many saints and by Christ himself. It was in order to imbue the Brothers with an exact idea of the sublime function of teaching children catechism, that we wrote this introduction to our Founder's Life.

⁴⁰ Life of St Pius V, p. 507.

⁴¹ Life of St Charles Borromeo, p. 462.

⁴² Augustus of Sales, p. 306.

The German Lutherans openly admitted that the Jesuit colleges were a scourge to them and the ruination of their Reform 43.

Caesar of Bus conceived the idea of setting up a Congregation whose essential spirit, whose indispensable duty and principal function for all time would be to teach christian doctrine. It would be an Order of Catechists for the Church, just as that of St Dominic was an Order of Preachers. That Society, launched in 1597, under the title, "Priests of Christian Doctrine", and approved by Clement VIII, could count fifteen houses and twenty-six colleges, at the time of the Revolution 44.

Not long afterwards, St Vincent de Paul laid the foundations of another Congregation, having as its object likewise, the instruction of children. He directed his priests, in the missions preached to the country folk, to give a short catechism instruction at midday and a longer one in the evening; in the course of the latter, they were to question the children. One day, it came to him notice that a certain priest had ignored his advice. St Vincent wrote to him in these terms: "I have been very much saddened to learn that instead of teaching catechism in the evening during your mission, you were preaching sermons. This is something which should not happen, because the people have greater need for catechism and it is of more benefit to them; in teaching catechism, it seems that one has a greater opportunity, as it were, to follow the method used by Christ to convert the world; besides, it is our custom and one that has been abundantly blessed by Our Lord, since it is more favourable to the practice of humility." 45

At about the same time, Father, later Cardinal, Bérulle judged that the country people had great need of the word of God; he saw that the practice of taking catechism classes had almost died out; he therefore founded a Society of Priests whose aim was to train seminarians and to impart christian education to children. Pope Paul V issued a Bull to approve this Congregation under the name of Priests of the Oratory. They took charge of schools and seminaries. In addition, they sent out catechists to country places and some of their Houses were completely given over to teaching catechism 46.

43 History of the Society of Jesus, by Crétineau-Joly.

44 History of Caesar of Bus.

45 Life of St Vincent de Paul, by Abelly, Vol. II, p. 10.

46 Life of Cardinal Bérulle, p. 391.

Many other Congregations, with the same aim, were founded about this time. There were, for instance, the Eudists, who reinvigorated Normandy; the Josephites, established at Lyon by Father Crétenet and responsible for catechizing the regions of Lyon, Bresse, Forez, Velay, Auvergne, etc., as well as conducting many schools; the Barnabites, and the Oratorians of St Philip Neri, in Italy; the Piarists of St Joseph Calasactius in Spain, etc. 47

Thanks to the zeal displayed by the members of all these Congregations, the Christian education of the children from middle-class families was well catered for. The same was not true of the children of the poor. These lived in considerable degradation and ignorance because, almost everywhere, there was an absence of religious schoolmasters. The need to remedy such a deplorable state of affairs was acutely felt by all the great men whom Providence raised in this century to regenerate society. One of these vigorously asserted: "The evils of the Church can be cured only by seminaries and primary schools: seminaries are the schools of our priests; primary schools are the seminaries of ordinary Christians. But, for these schools to serve Christians well, they must be conducted by masters who are apostles not hirelings." 48

To secure apostolic teachers, the Congregation of Saint-Sulpice formed a Prayer Association under the protection of St Joseph, patron and model of all who teach children. "As the instruction of poor children is sadly neglected", wrote an Association member, "God, who looks after his Church, perhaps wants to remedy the deficiency by extraordinary means; perhaps he intends to raise up men and women to discharge the duty of teaching, with apostolic zeal. This seems to be his object in sending the Spirit of prayer into the hearts of so many people." There is no doubt that Providence lent an attentive ear to such ardent prayers; the proof is that soon afterwards, many lay Congregations were founded for this ministry, which had been previously neglected. And, as if God were determined to show that sons of Father Olier deserved the credit for powerfully advancing the designs of Providence, almost all the Founders of Congregations devoted to primary education in France, were trained at Saint-Sulpice 49.

From this time onwards, a few attempts were made to set up Christian schools for the children of the poor, and in many towns,

47 Life of Father Crétenet; Life of Father Roussier; of St Philip Neri; of St Joseph Calasactius.

48 Life of Father Bourdoise.

49 Life of Father Olier, Vol. 2, p. 322.

Societies of Priests were formed, and these opened primary schools with a view to greater opportunity for teaching the children catechism 50.

To bring back the town of Privas to the bosom of the Church, when its Catholic population had fallen to forty, Father Olier found that the best means was to open schools there for poor children. His idea was that if Huguenot children could be attracted to the school, and in their early years be given a love for the Catholic religion, the foundations of the heresy would be undermined. His intuition was correct. Father Couderc who was put in charge of those schools, and later of the rectory of Privas, transformed the town entirely 51.

Father Bourdoise, observing that the catechetical classes of the parish of St Nicholas of Chardonnet at Paris, were of hardly any value to youth, seized on the pretext of opening schools in that parish. To do this, he enlisted the help of the Society of Priests, filled with the spirit of zeal and devoted to the instruction of poor children 52.

Peter Tranchot, a former speaker of the Paris Parliament, bought a house at Orleans which he converted into a school conducted from charity; he taught in it himself and accompanied the children to church, reciting prayers on the way. Similar schools were established at Blois and Tours; and more than thirty were founded in the diocese of Orleans by Francis Perdoulx, a virtuous layman animated with the same zeal as Tranchot 53.

A priest of the diocese of Lyon, Charles Démia, who was a proctor in the Archbishop's opened a kind of seminary where excellent schoolmasters were formed. The pious Founder, himself trained at Saint-Sulpice, put the institution under a Sulpician, knowing that no one surpassed them 54.

Father de la Salle, Canon of Rheims, founded the Congregation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. These soon spread throughout the towns of France and today give religious instruction and christian education to more than two hundred thousand pupils 55.

Similar institutions developed for the Christian instruction of girls. Amongst other Congregations which sprang up in France, one could name:

50 History of the Catechisms of Saint-Sulpice.

51 Life of Father Olier, Vol. 2, p. 480.

52 Life of Father Bourdoise, p. 474.

53 The Influence of Religion in France, Vol. 2, p. 323.

54 Life of Charles Démia, p. 137.

55 Life of Father de La Salle, by Garreau.

the Sisters of Notre-Dame established at Bordeaux and approved by Paul V; the Religious of the Visitation; the Ursulines, who numbered three hundred Houses within half a century; the Religious of Notre-Dame in Lorraine; the Daughters of Charity, founded by St Vincent de Paul; the Sisters of St Joseph established at Puy; and, in the same city, the Teaching Sisters; the Sisters of the Faith, in the diocese of Agen; the Daughters of St Genevieve; the Sisters of St Charles, founded by Father D mia at Lyon; the Sisters of the Child Jesus, a project of Father Barr ; and, besides these, numerous other Congregations, not so well known but contributing significantly to the renewal of society at this time of universal reform 56.

However, the Church is always a militant body and she had hardly healed the wound made by ignorance and by Luther's heresy, when the forces of hell formed up new combats and, consequently, new victories. The storm whipped up by the philosophy and the impiety of the eighteenth century, passed through France and through Europe, shattering altars and thrones and leaving a trail of ruin. After that disaster, when society had regained some equilibrium and had taken stock of its woes, there was only one voice to proclaim the necessity of religious instruction; only one voice insisted that the future of the family, of France and of the whole of society, hinged on the education of the new generation 57. This view did not stop at a merely sentimental stage but issued everywhere in action and in the most generous sacrifices for the foundation of schools.

Yet, we may ask, in the eloquent words of a distinguished Cardinal: "Why this proliferation of private and public schools: schools for children, schools for adolescents, schools for adults, day schools, night schools and Sunday schools? Why these infant schools

56 History of Religious Orders, by Henrion.

57 The Pastors of the Church are unanimous in regarding the religious instruction and education of youth, through Christian schools, as one of the great remedies for the ills of society. Pius IX has just added his weight to their cause. In his Encyclical to the Bishops of Italy, 8th December 1849, he writes: "Warn those responsible for souls, to be your vigilant collaborators in all that concerns the education of young children. You shouldn't be surprised, Venerable Brothers, that we speak at some length on this matter. Your prudence surely tells you that we should both make every effort, use every means, struggle with unshakable constancy and employ continual vigilance, in regard to everything relating to schools, to the instruction and education of young boys and girls."

opening in almost every township and even nurseries to give shelter and protection to the newly-born? Why indeed all this enthusiasm, this foresight, these completely new institutions, considered the enduring honour of the sages of society, who put the rest of society to shame? People like to call it progress, improvement, a quest for quality. Is that all it is? No, it is an endeavour to meet a deep-seated need of our times; it is a remedy that indicts the evil which is currently afflicting us.

Do you not see that normal roles are changed and even reversed; that it is the family from which society should draw its strength, while in actual fact the family is being shored up by society? If family education were all that it should be, no one would ever have thought of substituting adoption for maternal care. Was there any thought, a century ago, of setting up infant schools to teach the basics of religion and morality? Were day nurseries proposed so that children could be fed and cared for? No! And why not? Because then the family was christian. True, schools were used to touch up and complete the education given, but the first school of all was the home hearth. In the new services provided by charitable assistance, there is much to praise and there is reason to bless those who conceived them and then carried out their ideas; but every discerning mind will recognize in this phenomenon, frightening evidence of a sad decline in public morality." 58

Impiety has inflicted deep wounds on religion; but the greatest and the one which exacerbates the others, ensuring their continuance, is the almost general break-down in family education. Indeed, most parents no longer give religious instruction to their children. This may be because they are preoccupied with temporal affairs; it may be through ignorance of their religion, having had no instruction during their own youth; it may be that they are irreligious and therefore indifferent to the salvation of their children. Whatever the reason, a large number of young people would remain ignorant of the truths of faith and would wallow in vice, had not God, in his infinite mercy shown pity to them, raising up pious teachers to take care of them and give them a christian education. This is a noble task; it is an immense one, beyond the scope of the traditional Congregations; God has therefore furnished his Church with a number of others. These, taking cognizance of the conditions of our time, have adapted their Rule and

58 Directive on family education, by Cardinal Giraud, Archbishop of Cambray, p. 28.

their assignment of works, to the apostolic task they are called on to fulfil. The new Congregations we speak of, (to mention only the men), are:

The Brothers of Christian Instruction for Brittany, founded by Father John de la Mennais, former Vicar General of Saint-Brieuc.

The Brothers of St Joseph, of the diocese of Mans, whose Founder is Father Dujarrié, parish priest of Ruillé-sur-Loire.

The Brothers of St Gabriel, of the diocese of Nancy who have Father Frechard as Founder.

The Brothers of Christian Instruction of the Holy Spirit, founded by Father Deshayes at Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvres in Vendée 59.

The Marianist Brothers, founded at Bordeaux by Father Chaminade, Canon of the Metropolitan Church of that city.

The Brothers of the Sacred Heart in the diocese of Puy who were founded by a French Missionary, Father Coindre.

The Brothers of St Viator, in the diocese of Lyon. Their Founder was Father Querbes, parish priest of Vourles.

The Brothers of the Cross and the Brothers of the Holy Family; the former founded by Father Bochard, who had been Vicar General of Lyon; the latter, by Brother Gabriel Tabarin.

The Brothers of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, established by Father Fièrè, Vicar General of Valence.

Finally, the Little Brothers of Mary, now united in a single family with those of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux and of Viviers; founded in 1817 by Father Champagnat, whose life follows.

59 History of Religious Orders, by Henrion.

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

Birth, parents and early education of Marcellin Champagnat.

The holy priest, whose life we are writing, was born at Marlhes, a village situated in the mountains of Pilat. It is in the district of Saint-Genest-Malifaux 1, which makes part of the Department of the Loire. At that time, the parish belonged to the Diocese of Puy in Velay 2. It was severed by the Concordat of 1801 and attached to the large diocese of Lyon.

He was born on the 20th of May, 1789 and baptized next day, the feast of the Ascension, by Father Alliot 3, the parish priest, being given the names of Joseph Benedict Marcellin 4. His godfather was

1 LPC 2, p. 570.

2 LPC 2, p. 617.

3 AA, p. 16.

4 The Christian names do not always follow the same order. The baptismal certificate has: Marcellin, Joseph, Benedict (AA, p. 16); the religious profession record is signed by Father Champagnat himself as: Joseph, Marcellin, Benedict. (OM I, p. 928, illustration, 37). Marcellin is the principal Christian name, being also that of his godfather.

Marcellin Chirat, a maternal uncle; his godmother, Margaret Chatelard, a cousin by marriage 5.

His father's name was John Baptist Champ gnat and his mother's, Mary Chi rat; they had six 6 children: 3 boys "and three girls. Marcellin, the subject of our story, was the youngest and the last 7. Providence destined him to be the Founder of an Institute whose special character would be humility and simplicity and whose aim would be the christian instruction of country children.

Providence accordingly caused him to be born in humble 8 circumstances, in a poor country, in the midst of a population that was deeply religious but uncultured and uneducated. This was so that he would know at first hand the needs which he was to alleviate, as well as the conduct and character of those whom he would later furnish with teachers.

Marcellin's father was a man of sound judgment and was well-educated for that time and place. His prudence and his kindly disposition had won him the esteem of all the inhabitants of the parish. He settled the differences which arose amongst them and they relied on his ruling and on his proverbial honesty 9. Madame Champagnat was a person of strong character, who managed her home and her household with thrift and perfect order. Her solid piety was reinforced by all the virtues belonging to a faithful spouse and a worthy mother. Her whole life centred on the care of her house and the education of her children. Fully occupied with her duties, she lived such a withdrawn life that she hardly knew the families of the hamlet although it boasted only fifteen to twenty households 10. The neighbouring women resorted to her in troubles, doubts and necessities; they never went away without experiencing the effects of her charity, prudence and wisdom; invariably she was able to give

5 She is shown as such in the baptismal record (AA, p. 16).

6 Brother John-Baptist overlooks the children who died young. (AA, pp. 14-16); there were 10 children.

7 In fact, Marcellin is the second-last.

8 For the Champagnat family, see Brother Avit (AA, pp. 12-18); also, Voyages et Missions, "The Family", No 133, 1977; and BI, xxn, pp. 607-610.

9 John-Baptist Champagnat played a leading role in the story of the Revolution at Marlhes, during its darkest two periods. He was secretary of the municipal offices (2/6/91), colonel of the guard, justice of the peace, commissioner of the General Council of Saint-Etienne (12/8/92), first elector in the parliamentary assembly (26/12/92), and president of the municipal administration of the district (29/12/92). He signed himself Champagnat. Cf. AA, pp. 21-22.

10 The census of 1814 gives for the whole commune of Marlhes, 2425 inhabitants with 55 of them from Rosey.

them consolation and encouragement.

Madame Champagnat was a woman of few words and didn't seek out the news of the village or of individuals. Her favourite saying was that we should look to the proper governing of our own life and to the conduct of those under our care, not worrying about the behaviour of others or about matters that don't concern us. This fine mother added to so many excellent qualities, a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin, reciting the rosary daily with her children. Besides, she read out or had others read, the Lives of the Saints or some such edifying book; evening prayer was a family event; in addition, she privately carried out several other practices of virtue and piety, undertaken to honour the Blessed Virgin and win her protection.

The child of benediction born to her and destined to become so great a servant of Mary was, without doubt, the reward for her piety, her devotion to the august Mother of God and her unwavering fidelity in honouring Mary. She herself nursed and raised him, as she had done for her other children; as soon as he began to speak, her chief care was to teach him the common prayers and the habit of repeating often the sacred names of Jesus and Mary. She didn't stop at forming her children to piety and accustoming them to religious practices; she strove as well to correct their defects, to mould their character and to inculcate the social virtues and good manners basic to the peace of the family and the welfare of society.

She insisted that her children practise restraint in speech and wouldn't let them associate with those peers or others who might scandalise them and lead them into evil. While she didn't let them want for any necessity, she did wish them to be temperate: at table they were not to serve themselves or to make their likes and dislikes too plain, instead of being satisfied with what they were given. To a neighbour who expressed surprise at her methods and advised her to allow her children more freedom, she replied: "I know what is right for my children. I look after them and see to all their needs; but I don't want them to become used to taking what is best and most to their liking; I don't want them to develop greedy habits."

Although she loved all her children dearly, little Marcellin's mother felt a particular affection for him. This was not due to his being the youngest; it was because of a presentiment of what the future held for him. Her intuition was fully confirmed by a sign which could not be other than supernatural and which

presaged God's plans for the child, as well as the benefits God wished to bestow on the Church through him. Several times, on approaching the cradle where baby Marcellin was lying, she noticed a kind of luminous flame ¹¹ which seemed to issue from the child's chest. When it had hovered around the child's head, the flame rose and spread through the room. Such an extraordinary occurrence filled her with a fear in which surprise and admiration mingled. She was now convinced that Heaven had merciful designs on that child. Although she didn't know what they were, it was her duty, she felt, to promote those designs by being particularly careful to bring him up in piety.

That pious mother was wonderfully supported in this task, by an aunt ¹² of the child, a woman of outstanding piety and great virtue. She was a religious who, like many another, had been driven from her convent by the men who were then covering France with blood and ruin. While she was discussing with the boy's mother one day the happenings of the era, young Marcellin, who was listening to them without their realising, said to her: "Aunt, what is the Revolution? Is it a man or beast?" "Poor child", the good Religious replied in tears, "may God grant that you never experience its reality: it is more cruel than any beast in the world."

This virtuous lady, discerning in her nephew dispositions favourable to piety, took great delight in teaching him the mysteries of our holy religion, in getting him to recite his prayers and in relating stories from the lives of the Saints. She also gave him frequent instructions and exhortations on devotion to the Blessed Virgin, to the Guardian Angels and to the souls in purgatory. These instructions, and the good example that always backed them up, made a deep and indelible impression on Marcellin's mind and heart.

Often during his life, he was heard to speak of his pious aunt and of his childhood lessons from her. It was clear from the way he spoke, that he was still imbued with the dispositions she had

¹¹ Eight witnesses at the Beatification Process spoke of this prodigy, but do so only on the basis of hearsay. "John Claud Quiblier, born at Rosey on October 25th, 1827, declares that he has been told by Mary Clennont, wife of Bartholomew Champagnat, Marcellin's brother, that Father Champagnat's mother, one day saw little Marcellin's cradle surrounded by flames as white as snow". (Cf. Reverend P. Joannes Claudius Granottier, parish priest, year 65. Positio, XV, Testis, folio 920, p. 48).

¹² Marcellin had, on his father's side, at least one aunt (Louise), Sister Theresa, who died in 1824; a great-aunt (Jean) died at Marlihes in 1798; they were Sisters of Saint-Joseph (M, pp. 13-14).

striven to inculcate and that he retained for her a gratitude and a love which would last a lifetime.

In this way Marcellin was educated and formed to piety by his mother and his virtuous aunt, being kept at a distance from harmful company. Constantly surrounded by good example, he became a pious and docile child, endowed with great purity of soul. He prepared assiduously for his First Communion, which he received with great fervour at the age of eleven 13. Two incidents occurring about this time tell us how seriously he already reflected and what an intelligent and accurate mind he had.

Since his mother and his aunt had not been able to advance his reading to a satisfactory standard, Marcellin was sent to a school Master whose task was to perfect his reading and teach him to write. On his first day of attendance, as he was very timid and didn't leave the place he was given, the teacher 14 called him

13 The normal age was thirteen (AFM 146.003). After Bonaparte's coup d'état, priests return from abroad and priests from hiding venture into broad daylight. Christian life can resume its customary style. This is especially so in the villages slightly distant from the towns. Marcellin is one of the first group making their first communion in the year, 1800 (Chronologie FM, 1976, p. 22).

14 The teacher's name was probably Bartholomew Moine (SMC, Vol. 1, p. 18 and NCF, p. 121). As he had all the children in a single classroom and used the individual method, corporal punishment must have been a routine affair, as it was the practice of the period (Cf. Antoine Prost, L'Enseignement en France 1800-1967. Ed. Armand Colin, Paris, 1968, p. 115).

to his side to read; but just as he arrived, another pupil took up a position in front of him. Then the teacher, somewhat angered and perhaps thinking that he would please young Marcellin vigorously boxed the ears of the child who wanted to read first and sent him off sobbing to the back of the room. This was hardly calculated to reassure the new pupil and banish his timidity; so, he said later, he had shaken all over and was more inclined to cry than to read.

Marcellin's discerning mind was indignant at this cruel act and he vowed never to return to a school run by such a teacher; the ill-treatment inflicted, without reason, on that child showed what was in store for himself; at the first opportunity, the same could happen to him; he therefore refused to have anything to do with that man's lessons, still less with his punishments. Indeed he was unwilling to return to that teacher in spite of the reiterated entreaties of his parents.

This incident was afterwards related many times to the Brothers. He wanted to make them understand the extent to which harsh treatment and angry corrections turn children away from the school; how that experience sets their minds against the teacher and gives them a dislike for his classes.

While he was following the instructions to prepare for First Communion, it happened one day that the priest¹⁵ responsible, worn out by the inattention and carelessness of a child whom he had already reprimanded, spoke to him strongly, called him an offensive name and applied a shocking comparison to him. The child, utterly crushed by this severe reprimand which he had incidentally brought on himself, remained quiet; not so, his companions, who kept up the nickname. After the class was dismissed, they vied with each other to surround him and repeat the name he had been given. The poor child looked down, growing angry and excited, and threatening his companions. The only result was to intensify their spitefulness and prolong their cruel fun.

To escape their stinging jibes and torment, the unfortunate child was forced to keep away from them, remaining alone and attending the catechism class almost by stealth. As time went by, his character was affected, and he became gloomy, harsh, hostile and almost uncivilized. "You see", Father Champagnat would say later on, "an education spoilt and a child likely to become, through his unpleasant character, the bane and the scourge of family and neighbours;

¹⁵ Probably his curate, Father Laurens, appointed from July 27th, 1781 (AA, p. 16).

and, all this, because of an indiscreet word, of an angry outburst, or of a show of impatience which could so easily have been suppressed." So affected was Father Champagnat by this incident, that he framed a rule expressly forbidding Brothers to give the children any nickname 16.

In spite of Marcellin's exemplary conduct and the pious attitudes he manifested, he doesn't seem to have had any idea, at that time, of leaving the world or of becoming a priest. He appeared, rather, to be bent only on continuing the role of his parents who were small farmers, putting a flour-mill¹ to best advantage. His father, who was shrewd and skilled, could turn his hand to almost anything called for by the family's needs. He taught his son carpentry, masonry and all the other tasks required for the running of a farm. Marcellin's energy, strong constitution and love of work, led him to carry out all these kinds of activity with enthusiasm and marvellous success.

By the time he reached fourteen or fifteen, thoughts of interest and saving were tossing about in his mind. When he was given a few coins, unlike most people of his age, he would put them aside instead of spending them on trifles. No one was to lay a hand on his treasure, even to buy his clothes which, he claimed, should be provided, like his brothers', from the family purse.

His parents, quite pleased with his orderliness and thrift, gave him two or three lambs which he was free to fatten and sell for himself. He certainly raised them very carefully, then sold them and bought others; these in turn were raised and sold, always at a profit; in this way, his trade and saving soon allowed him to amass a tidy sum of six hundred francs 18. For a sixteen year old, that was a lot of money; therefore, if he didn't already consider himself rich, he saw prospects of his becoming so. Plans were laid to expand his small business. One of his brothers was to join forces with him and they would pool resources in a life-long partnership. But God had other plans for Marcellin and made them known to him in a quite providential way.

16 "A Brother will not use the intimate form of address (tutoiement) to his fellows and not even to the children; no one shall be called by a nick-name." (Rules of 1837, chap. 5, art. 4).

17 Brother Avit describes John-Baptist Champagnat: "Skilled valuer, called upon for determining shares... To this important role, he added that of dealer and farmer; when the weather was favourable, he worked one of those small water mills known locally as: 'Listen-for-the-rain' ". (AA, p. 13).

18 During the Second Empire, the annual salary for a farm domestic was 50 francs; he was lodged, clothed and fed. (Cf. Archives nationales, F 11. 2705 42 Loire, 10 yearly agricultural survey, 1862).

CHAPTER TWO

*Marcellin is called to be a priest. Reflections on this vocation.
His behaviour and progress in the seminaries.*

France had just emerged from the confusion into which the Revolution had plunged her. The Church, now free, purged the temples that had survived the onslaught of impiety; she rebuilt at least some of those destroyed by the revolutionary turmoil; she reorganized her priestly army and strove to fill the gaps left in her ranks by martyrdom, apostasy and death ¹. At that time, the Archbishop of Lyon was the famous Cardinal Fesch, a man of piety and an uncle of Napoleon I. This prelate grieved to see a big number of parishes in his extensive diocese, without priests. He made generous sacrifices to set up seminaries and to promote priestly vocations ². He had given his Vicar General, Father Courbon ³, the responsibility of doing his utmost to recruit seminarians through the parish priests. Father Courbon was from Saint-Genest-Malifaux and was a special friend of Father Alliot, the parish priest of Marlhes. He therefore instructed one of the lecturers ⁴ of the Major Seminary, who was from that region and was going to spend some of his holidays there, to approach Father Alliot, asking him to find a few pious and intelligent young men who would make good priests.

¹ "Sir, the size of the diocese of Lyon, comprising three large Departments, imposes upon me the duty of intensifying my zeal and care for the formation of future priests. Experience tells me that sixty to eighty priests die each year in my diocese. The same number must therefore be ordained to maintain the level of resources indispensable for the needs of the faithful. I am already two hundred and forty priests short and there are several sectors of the three Departments where there is no priest within eighteen miles." (Card. Fesch à l'Empereur des Français, le 21 mai 1805, en J. Jomand, Fesch par lui-même, p. 46).

² On the zeal of Fesch for the fostering of seminaries and on his difficulties with his uncle Napoleon, see OM 4, p. 279.

³ LPC 2, p. 149.

⁴ It is not easy to suggest names. In OM, we read: "John-James Cartal, (1756-1840), a Sulpician from the diocese of Puy and perhaps, for this reason, identifiable perhaps with the priest who sparked Marcellin's interest in the priesthood." (OM 4, p. 130).

The lecturer carried out his mission as requested, saying to the parish priest of Marlhes: "Father Courbon wants me to ask you to find him some young men for the Minor Seminary. He believes there will be some here in your mountains, which are the home of faith. Can you put me on to any?" Father Alliot thought for a while and answered: "Off hand, I don't know of anyone suitable. "However", he added after further reflection, "there is the Champagnat family, with several boys 5 who seem rather shy, but I haven't heard that any of them wants to study Latin 6. You have to pass through Rosey anyway, (that was the family's hamlet). Go in and see!" The priest went to Rosey and paid Mr Champagnat a visit. The greeting was cordial and respectful. After the usual exchange of courtesies, the visitor ventured the remark: "You don't know why I've come. The parish priest told me that you have several fine boys, pious and self-effacing who would be capable of studying Latin and becoming priests. I have come to see if this is true." The father was taken aback by those words and pointed out that his children had never shown a desire to study Latin. "Do you want to?" he asked the eldest, who was there. "No", he answered timidly, with a blush. "And where are the others?" the priest continued. The younger brother and little Marcellin who had been together at the mill, arrived as he spoke. "There now", said the father, "you see the priest has come to get you to study Latin. Do you want to go?" The answer from the younger brother was unequivocal He gave out a short but expressive "no." Marcellin mumbled a few confused and incomprehensible words. But the priest took him aside, examined him closely and was so delighted with his unassuming manner, his candour, his unpretentious attitude and his open and frank character, that he said to him: "My boy, you must study Latin and become a priest. It is God's will" A few minutes' conversation fixed Marcellin's will on his vocation and his will was never after to waver.

That account gives rise to a few thoughts that might help some young Brothers. God alone gives each his vocation and he can make known in infinitely varied ways the state of life he wills

5 This episode should be placed after the death of the son, John-Baptist (August 8th, 1803). In fact, Julienne Epalle, giving testimony in 1886, at the Ordinary Process of Beatification, specifies the name John-Bartholomew and John-Peter. Now, she was a neighbour; and the parish priest, Granottier, testified that she was mentally sound and completely trustworthy (AFM, cahier 1886, 104. 13, No. 26).

6 Expression equivalent to: preparing for the priesthood.

for a soul. Sometimes, the call is striking and direct. This was the case for the Apostles, to whom Jesus' invitation was "Come follow me." 7 It was so, too, for St Paul, struck to the ground on his way to Damascus 8; many besides, have been called by a miraculous summons. However, in the ordinary course of events, God lets each know his vocation by the attraction felt for it; he simply gives certain lights, inclinations and inspirations to those souls he calls to religious life and in this way they are led to leave the world; he uses even natural factors to influence souls: a sickness, a change of fortune, a humiliation or a persecution. St Paul, the first hermit, withdrew from the world to avoid persecution; St Arsenius, to get away from the anger of his pupil, Arcadius; and St Moses, a recluse, to escape the penalties of human law incurred because of theft. At other times, a word, a piece of advice, a friend's good example may be God's means to lead the soul as he wishes. It is therefore a serious mistake to question a vocation because it was begun at an early age, led by the advice of a father or mother or of a pious teacher; or, following the example of a childhood friend; or, in response to some natural motives.

St Francis de Sales points out that God's calls are not all followed from the same motives and that in very few cases are the motives wholly supernatural. If we study the women's conversions recorded in the gospel, we see that only Magdalen approached Jesus out of love; the woman taken in adultery, did so through force; the Samaritan woman 9, by chance; and the Canaanite woman was looking for help 10. For St Francis, the manner of approach is unimportant; what matters is to persevere in good. Those who were compelled to attend the wedding feast in the gospel 11 enjoyed its delights all the same. For each of the ordinary types of call enumerated, there are large numbers who have entered religion, persevering to become great servants of God and excellent religious. Some who experienced an extraordinary call, however, did not persevere and were lost. Take Judas who, like the other apostles, was chosen by the Lord himself.

Marcellin's decision to study Latin was not a passing whim. His parents doubted his ability to do so and tried to dissuade him,

7 Mt. 19,21.

8 Acts. 9, 2-8.

9 Jn. 4,7.

10 Saint François de Sales, Louis Vives, VI, 531. Paris, 1871.

11 Mt. 22, 1-4.

pointing out the trouble he had experienced in learning to read and the lack of taste he had shown for study. Their words fell on deaf ears. He was no longer interested in the farm-work or the little business deals that used to mean so much to him: his mind was made up and his clear response was that study would be his total preoccupation. Nothing would have suited him better than immediate entry into a seminary, but his reading and writing skills were inadequate to begin studying Latin. So he asked his parents to let him stay a while with one of his uncles ¹².

This man was a teacher in the parish of Saint-Sauveur. He knew Latin and could teach Marcellin its elements while completing his primary schooling. After a year ¹³ with that uncle, who spared no pains but had little success, he was against Marcellin's entering the seminary. "Your child", he advised the parents, "persists in his determination to study for the priesthood, but you would be mistaken to let him do so; he hasn't the ability to succeed." He had made many efforts himself to divert Marcellin from the idea, telling him that he wasn't meant for such lengthy studies and predicting that he would eventually give up, bemoaning the lost money, the lost time and perhaps even, the lost health. Marcellin had prayed and reflected for the whole year and was not the least put off by his uncle's speech or his parents' remarks. "Get my things ready", he insisted. "I am determined to go to the seminary. I shall succeed, because it is God who calls me." As there was still reluctance to buy his outfit, he added: "Don't let the expense be a problem! I have money to pay for it." His clothing was, in fact, paid for from his savings ¹⁴.

Even before his thoughts turned to a vocation, Marcellin's behaviour had always been exemplary; but from the time that he decided to become a priest, it was even more edifying. He went

¹² Benedict Arnaud was Marcellin's brother-in-law, husband of his sister, Marianne (AA, p. 24). When Napoleon has a survey done in 1807, to determine the teaching situation in France, the inspector encountered Arnaud's College at Saint-Sauveur. It had twelve pupils, who were offered: reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, history and Latin (ADL T, 735). One of Benedict's young pupils, Brother Tarcisius, said of him that he "had studied Latin; he was a model christian and a competent teacher" (Cahier written in 1879, at Noumea, New Caledonia).

¹³ The recruiter arrived in August, 1803 (AA, p. 24 and Chronologie, p. 23). It wasn't till All Saints, 1805 that Marcellin entered the seminary. The delay may have been due to his father's death, on June 13th, 1804 (Cf. BI XXVI, p. 679: certificate of death).

¹⁴ Marcellin had put aside 600 francs, the equivalent of about four or five years of seminary fees.

more frequently to the sacraments, spent a longer time at prayer, was seen to be more recollected, more unassuming and less concerned with affairs of the world. His devotion to Our Lady showed an appreciable increase: he said the rosary every day; and he put his vocation in Mary's hands as king for the light and intelligence to succeed in his studies.

Marcellin was accepted for the Minor Seminary of Verrières 15, near Montbrison. He entered in October, 1805 16. Because of his excessive shyness, the first days were rather difficult for him. He couldn't bring himself to ask for what he needed. Even at table he was too frightened to pass his plate to be served; it took the pangs of hunger to persuade him to do the same as the rest. For a start, his timid bashfulness and rustic appearance made him the butt of student jokes; but his open character, his good behaviour and courteous manners, soon got rid of any unfavourable impression and earned him general esteem. He was then in his seventeenth year and a tall young man; so much so, that he was the biggest, though least advanced, in his class. He could easily have been disheartened to find himself surrounded by children 17 who were all ahead of him; instead, that fact inspired him with even greater enthusiasm for study.

Marcellin's Superiors trusted and valued him because he was pious, faithful to duty and responsive. They made their attitude clear by appointing him supervisor and prefect of the dormitory, passing over many who had been there longer and many who were more advanced in class 18. He was surprised and overcome to be given a responsibility which he thought beyond his deserts and competence. However, he accepted without demur, having already made it a rule never to refuse a request issuing from a superior.

15 Verrières (Cf. OM 4, p. 430).

16 Classes returned on All Saints' day. (OM 1, p. 136, note 1).

17 In sixth year (Le. beginning of secondary studies) the average age was 15 (the range: 10-23) and Marcellin was sixteen. At the end of one year, June-July, 1806, Father Perier, Superior of the seminary told him that he should not consider advanced studies. Saddened but not disheartened, Marcellin made a pilgrimage with his mother to La Louvesc, to the Tomb of Saint Regis, to implore Mary's help (Cf. Julienne Epalle, testimony at the process of beatification, AFM cahier 1886, 104. 13, No. 26).

18 It is not easy to say exactly when he was given this position of trust (Cf. A. Balko, *Evolution spirituelle de Marcellin Champagnat*, BI XXX, No.

217, pp. 397-398). See, too, three articles on the subject by the same author: FMS, No. 54, 1983, p. 801; No. 56, 1984, p. 833; No. 57, p. 849).

The new task was a considerable help in speeding up his progress. Every night, having done the rounds of the dormitory, closing doors and windows and seeing that all the students were in bed, he shaded his lamp for some time then went to work studying next day's lessons until well into the night. As his bed was in a sort of recess, that continued for several years without being noticed. The effort at study and the extra work it entailed, somewhat weakened his health but greatly accelerated his progress.

When he arrived at the seminary, his reading and writing were so poor that it was suggested that he spend a few months strengthening his French. He wouldn't hear of that and begged the Superior so earnestly to let him learn Latin, that he gave in to please him.¹⁹ He was convinced that Marcellin would take only

¹⁹ A study of his sermons suggests that he had a good grasp of Latin; there are few faults in his numerous quotations (Cf. BI No. 215, 1972).

a few days to be sick of it and would come of his own accord, requesting to be put in the preparatory French class. Things turned out differently: after a few months, he was one of the first in the class 20 and in that first year passed through two classes.

Yet Marcellin's dedication to study did not divert him from his efforts in spiritual advancement. He longed for learning, it is true, because he was aware how indispensable knowledge was; but his longing for virtue was even stronger. He had help in the form of the regular seminary life, the religious exercises, training, wise spiritual guidance and constant good example. He put them all to good use. During prayer times, which had a special attraction for him, his simple fervour was noticed by Superiors and companions alike. Not satisfied with prayers said together, he often sought to pray in private, especially by making visits to the Blessed Sacrament during recreations. There were instructions given in the seminary on the Blessed Virgin and on St Aloysius and St John Francis Regis. His devotion to them all received a fillip from these talks and the accompanying practices.

Up till his entry into the seminary, he had gone to the sacraments monthly. He then asked to be allowed receive Holy Communion, fortnightly at first, and later, each Sunday. The liturgy of the seminary was solemnly impressive and stirred his heart, filling it with deep emotion that he could scarcely control. Often, the hymns would bring tears to his eyes. St Teresa's on Holy Communion and the desire for death touched him particularly 21.

However, Marcellin did not restrict his piety to feelings of love, knowing that solid virtue demands good works, such as the avoidance of sin and the fulfilment of every Christian duty. His own views on the matter were written down by him 22 at the time, in these words: "Oh my Lord and my God, I promise never to offend you again. Under your inspiration I shall make acts of faith,

20 Consult the outlines of Marcellin's curriculum: for the minor Seminary of Verrières, OME, pp. 30-42; for the Major Seminary of St Irenaeus, OME, pp. 43-46.

21 This hymn used to send Saint Teresa into ecstasy. The French version is the one found in a collection of the period, with plain-chant notation. The seventh verse ends: "You know, my God, that when I possess you, I can, alas, keep you hardly for a moment..." Marcellin often scrawled those first words on rough drafts that have been kept (Cf. AFM, Carnet 132.3, p. 4; also, LPC 1, doc. 73, p. 178).

22 AFM: dossier 11, carnet n. 1; also OME, doc. 6, p. 37.

hope and charity. I promise to avoid bad company ²³, taking care to serve you faithfully. I aim to give good example and as much as possible, to lead others to be virtuous. I shall instruct those ignorant of your divine precepts, and teach catechism to the poor as well as the rich. Grant, oh divine Saviour, that I may be faithful to these resolutions."

Faithful constantly he was! His Superiors vouch for his being a model of piety, regularity, obedience, humility and sound attitudes, during the whole of his sojourn at Verrières ²⁴. He didn't simply give good example; he let slip no opportunity of having his fellow students commit themselves to virtuous living. Helped by a natural eloquence and a persuasive tone of voice, he easily found an audience and won over a number of them to God.

One young student, previously distinguished for his ability and virtue, conceived a complete distaste for study and prayer. He was even taking steps to leave the seminary, when Marcellin noticed the sad turn of events, and determined that he would spare no effort to restore him to the right path and retrieve his former dispositions. He managed to be with him at recreation and to learn that the chief cause for his loss of interest in study was the belief that he had been punished unjustly several times. "Look, my friend", he argued, "either you deserved those punishments or you didn't. If you did, as seems the case to me, you shouldn't be upset, still less blame the teacher; accept them with docility and gratitude and use them to make up for your faults and to remedy your defects; if you are convinced that you were not guilty of the lapses you have been punished for, resign yourself to them all the same in reparation for the many real faults that have escaped punishment. Use the opportunity to practise self-denial, in imitation of Christ who was punished, though innocent. Besides, how can you justify at your age, obstinacy, neglect of religious duties and failure to study; and all this, because of trifles? Can't you see that the devil is making game of you and that the aversion

²³ In the original, there is as well, "never to return to the tavern without necessity" (Cf. OME, doc. 6, p. 37). Brother John-Baptist omits that part. The reference to the "tavern" in the context of "bad company" takes us back to the period of mild dissipation as a young seminarian when, with the "joyous troupe" he occasionally visited one of the many cafes quite close to the seminary, which was in the centre of the town. (Cf. AFM, Etienne Bedoin, doc. 151/1n. 1).

²⁴ The reference could be to declarations of Father Barou, future Vicar General or of Father John-Louis Duplay, future Superior of the Major Seminary.

for your teacher is instilled by him to ruin your future, causing the loss of your vocation and perhaps your soul? Come on, get rid of those wretched thoughts! We shall make a novena to Our Lady and you will see that all those fancies that fill your mind will become a thing of the past."

The novena was begun and didn't get very far before the young man saw the light; he realised why he had lost interest in study and had become less prayerful. The sole reason was the false advice given him by an evil fellow student whose company he determined to avoid. He kept his resolution, soon regained his first fervour, resumed his studies and became an excellent priest.

Having finished his humanities at Verrières, Marcellin got ready for entry to the Major Seminary at Lyon; to which he was admitted in October 25, 1812. It was always his view that the years spent here were amongst the happiest of his life. He resolved straightway to be constantly faithful to observances of the Rule, understanding that it was the expression of God's will for him as well as the shortest and best way to advance in perfection. The life and the studies at the seminary rightly seemed to him a preparation for Holy Orders, so he increased his efforts to acquire the learning and virtue befitting a worthy priest. He had a serious look at himself to discover his defects and the virtues he needed most, and came to the conclusion that he had special reason to combat pride, which he saw as his main vice. So he decided to make this the focus of his particular examination of conscience and, in order to eradicate that vice more easily, he enlisted the help of another student who was to point out his defects and reprove him each time he noticed any failures.

Marcellin well knew that every perfect gift comes from God ²⁶ and that it is only through his grace that we can triumph over pride by humility. He therefore earnestly asked for that virtue in all his prayers. He made up a special prayer for the purpose which he said often and wrote down in these words ²⁷:

Oh Lord, I admit that I do not know you well enough and that I am full of sin and imperfection. Help me to know my faults and above all give me the grace to struggle against them, fighting

²⁵ In fact - November 1st, 1813. What explains the error here is that the 1812-1813 year spent at Verrières, being for philosophy (or logic) was seen as part of the Major Seminary course which was at Lyon.

²⁶ James, 1, 17.

²⁷ Brother John-Baptist has somewhat modified the literal expression of the text, which can be found elsewhere in OME, Doc. 6 (2), p. 37.

on till I correct them. This is a favour that I ask for with the deepest humility of heart. Because you fought and conquered human pride by your own deep humility, Divine Heart of Jesus, my prayer goes up especially to you. I beg you to make me humble, to destroy the pride that I have built up; and I ask this, not because men are repelled by pride, but because it displeases you and spurns your holiness. Holy Virgin, my Good Mother, ask the adorable Heart of Jesus to grant me, your unworthy servant, this grace: to know myself, to fight against myself, to overcome myself and to eliminate my pride and self-love. At your feet, Mary, I form the resolution to carry on a relentless war against them.

To wage the war that he proposed, he took up two particular challenges: the first was to refrain from any vanity, sarcasm or slander in speech, and, in general, from any faults of the tongue; the second was to be always upright, polite and charitable to his fellow students and to take every opportunity to be of service to them.

In order to implement these two aims, he resolved:

1. To perform a penance any time that pride got the upper hand causing him to fail by proud thoughts or words.
2. To speak without distinction to all the students, doing everything possible for them despite any repugnance felt, for this could spring only from pride.
3. To regard himself as the least of the mall and prefer himself to none of them, insisting that such a preference could not be justified by talents - he had none and was last 28 in his class; or by virtue - he had still less of this and was full of pride; or by attractive personal appearance - although God made his body, he didn't choose to make it handsome. How could one who, was, in a word, only a little dust, dare be vain about it?
4. To mix freely with all at recreation and try not to babble on.
5. To take good care not to slander anyone under any pretext whatever.
6. To keep silence between recreations, not speaking or gesticulating at all in class, in the corridors or on the stairs, except through great necessity.

28 The summary of marks for the First Term of the first year of Theology has the comment for Marcellin: quite ordinary. After that remark, fifty-one of the eighty-four pupils outscore Marcellin (OME, doc. 9, p. 45).

7. During class, lectures or other assemblies to supplement silence with a maximum effort at constant attention.

8. To visit the Blessed Sacrament at the end of a class or lecture, examining there whether he had kept his resolutions, and to ask humility.

"My God", he resolved, "I promise with your help to do my best to be faithful to these resolutions, but you know how weak I am. Have pity on me then, and give me the grace never to sin by my tongue. Holy Virgin, pray for me; you know that I am your slave 29 and, in truth, unworthy of such a great favour; however, my unworthiness will highlight your kindness and mercy towards me."

We can tell from his writings that he frequently renewed these resolutions. On the 3rd of May, 1815, he added the following:

"To-day, vigil of the Ascension of Our Lord 30 and vigil of my baptismal anniversary, I renew my determination to fulfil all my previous resolutions as already set down; I add the following ones, placing them under the protection of the Blessed Virgin, St John Francis, St Aloysius and of my patron, St Marcellin.

1. Any time that my evening examination of conscience shows that I have been guilty of slander, I shall go without lunch next day.

2. Whenever I tell lies or exaggerate, I shall recite the Miserere to ask God's pardon for those faults.

My divine Jesus, I promise by the help of your holy Grace, to be faithful to these resolutions. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for me."

Such burning desires to overcome his faults and acquire virtue, and his firm perseverance in adopting the necessary means, resulted in his making rapid strides in the way of perfection. It didn't take him long to be a leader in fervour and fidelity amongst the large group of young levites then filling the Major Seminary 31. His time was shared between prayer and theology. He even made good use of recreation

29 The idea of making one self a slave of Mary, was an ancient one and was much emphasized by leading figures in the French School of Spirituality:

Bérulle, Condren, Boudon, etc. We have no written Consecration to Mary in which Marcellin uses the spiritual slavery concept.

30 Marcellin kept up the anniversary of his baptism, not on May 21st, but on the feast of the Ascension because, in 1789, the feast fell on that date (OME, doc. 1, p. 29, note 1).

31 In 1815-16, there were 252 students at the Major Seminary: 31 in 4th year, 75 in 3rd, 115 in 2nd and 30 in 1st (OM 1, pp. 207-209).

time. He spent it talking over spiritual matters with fellow students or in acts of charity, such as attending to the sick, decorating altars, sweeping out the church or making visits to the Blessed Sacrament, when his frequent requests to do so, were granted.

Marcellin gave a constant example of many virtues: fidelity to rules, respect for Superiors, obedience, humility, charity, affability, mildness, modesty, piety and assiduous effort at work. From that time onward he also became noted for his burning zeal for God's glory and for the salvation of souls. He distinguished himself likewise by that spirit of faith, that total detachment, that immense confidence in God, that love of mortification and that generosity, all of which shone brilliantly in him and will be demonstrated by extraordinary and moving instances, in the story which follows.

CHAPTER THREE

Edifying conduct of Marcellin Champagnat during his holidays. He visits the sick and teaches catechism to the children of the hamlet. His austere and mortified life weakens his health. He unites with other pious seminarians to plan the Society of Mary foundation. He prepares for Holy Order and is ordained.

Marcellin's life style was just as regular during the holidays I as it was in the seminary. This can be seen from the programme he set himself, one that he followed with the greatest exactness. It is given in full here 2, for the reader's edification:

1. My holidays will be spent with my family.
2. I will travel rarely from home.
3. As far as possible, I shall fit in with my relatives' way of life. I shall treat them all with respect, meekness and love, striving to win them all for Christ by word and example. I shall avoid saying anything to anger or distress them.
4. My normal rising time will be at five o'clock and never later than five thirty.
5. I shall meditate daily for at least a quarter of an hour.
6. Every day, if possible, I shall attend Mass, returning straight home to study my theology for no less than an hour.
7. At a quarter to twelve each day, I shall examine my conscience as in the seminary; then I'll say grace and have lunch.
8. In order to avoid intemperance and its resulting faults, I shall try not to satisfy my appetite fully.

1 Julienne Epalle, a neighbour, recounts how Marcellin spent his holidays as a seminarian. See Appendix I, at the end of the chapter.

2 For the whole of Marcellin's rule of life, see A. Balko, "L'évolution spirituelle de Marcellin Champagnat", in BI XXX, No. 217, p. 387 ff. (Cf. AFM. 131.2).

9. I shall set up an oratory in honour of the Blessed Virgin and St Aloysius. I shall kneel before the crucifix and, in spirit, adore the Blessed Sacrament. It is there that I shall carry out my religious exercises in the utmost recollection.

10. In honour of our Redeemer's passion and death, I shall fast on Fridays.

11. I shall teach the truths of salvation³ to rich and poor alike.

12. I shall visit the sick as often as I can.

13. For Confession and Communion, I shall be guided by my confessor.

14. I shall see to it that I am never alone with persons of the other sex.

15. During my evening study, I shall aim at another hour's theology⁴.

16. Having said night prayers with the family, I shall read in private the subject of next day's meditation.

"I count on your help, oh Blessed Virgin, my divine Mother, " he prayed, "to follow these few rules. Make them pleasing to your divine Son. May he preserve me during the holidays and all my life, from sin and anything that could offend him."

They were rules that he drew up for his first seminary holidays and though they were already quite strict, he subsequently added these others:

1. I shall rise daily at five and meditate for half an hour; then I shall say the Little Hours of the Office and assist at Holy Mass.

2. One hour of the morning will be spent at the study of scripture and another at theology.

³ Julienne Epalle: testimony on the preaching of young Father Champagnat. See appendix II, at the end of the chapter.

⁴ This study was expected, since the theology course ran for three years instead of four and the seminarians had to make up during the holidays, what had not been covered during the year, especially in Church History, Scripture and Liturgy. "These subjects were accorded a certain importance but, in fact, they were allowed only a few odd moments of class time." (Cf.

Alonza Luis, La formación intelectual de J. Cl. Colin en el Seminario de S. Ireneo de Lyon, Roneo, p. 53. APM.)

3. After lunch, I shall take an hour and a half, or at most two hours, for recreation, during which I shall visit any sick people in the neighbourhood or anyone needing my advice.

4. Recreation over, I shall revise for an hour the theology treatises already studied and, for a further hour read some ascetical work, dealing with the virtues necessary for a worthy priest.

5. That will be followed by another hour's recreation, after which I shall say Office, that is, Vespers, Compline and next day's Matins and Lauds.

6. Before dinner, I shall try to arrange half an hour's spiritual reading.

7. On Sundays and feast days, I shall assist at two Masses and at Vespers. For Communion, I shall adhere as closely as possible to the seminary practice.

8. On those same days, I shall be sure to spend an hour between Masses reading scripture and in the afternoon, after the Church services, I shall teach the children catechism, if possible.

In the time remaining, I shall find an hour to study theology.

9. I shall keep courtesy calls to a minimum.

10. I shall not take part in gambling or in any game likely to give scandal. I shall take my recreation in the form of some manual work.

Again, he prayed: *"Oh Blessed Virgin, as I can't keep the rules without your help, I call on your powerful intercession with God, hoping that you will obtain for me the grace to be faithful to them for the greater glory of your divine Son. St Francis Regis 5, who has such power with God, my hope and my request are that your intercession will enable me to carry out the rules I have drawn up."*

The evidence that we have gathered on Marcellin's holiday behaviour, shows us that he went beyond the rules outlined: he added many other practices of virtue and spent almost all that time intended for rest and relaxation, at prayer, at study or in doing charitable deeds.

5 Saint John-Francis Regis effected a cure at Marlhes during one of his three missions in the village. The diorama of La Louvesc includes a representation of the event. This remembrance is always present to the people of Marlhes, who venerate the "cross of Saint Regis" at the entry to their village.

With his gift of a vocation to the priesthood, God gave Marcellin an inspired zeal for the salvation of souls and for the instruction of the ignorant. In the seminary, as we have seen, he never passed over an opportunity to direct his zeal towards any fellow students whom he could influence; but, convinced of his special responsibility to work for the spiritual welfare of his relatives, his holidays were particularly given over to this. To begin with, he commended them to God in all his prayers; then, in all circumstances, his conduct was a model for them; he read to them every day from some religious work and added words of comment and advice; in daily conversation with them, his words were always aimed at instructing them in the truths of religion, leading them to love it and showing them its beauty and benefits; he urged them to practise devotion to the Blessed Virgin, to the Guardian Angels and the souls in purgatory; each evening, he took part in family prayers, and the rosary was added as well, on Sundays and feast days.

Frequently he would gather village children in his room to teach them prayers and catechism ⁶. On Sundays, even the adults were assembled and he spoke to them briefly but feelingly on the mysteries of religion, the duties of a Christian and on the way to assist at Mass and at other church services. Even thirty years later ⁷, there were those who recalled what he had taught them and who, with tears in their eyes, described the feelings he had stirred in their souls.

The children loved him and had a great respect ⁸ for his presence; the knowledge that he was in the neighbourhood was enough to make them obedient to their parents and to keep them to their duty. One of them used to explain: "Such was my impression of him that the very remembrance of him would ensure that I avoided wrong. When temptation came, the thought of what Marcellin would say if he were there watching, restrained me and gave me strength to resist my youthful passions." It wasn't only the children who held Marcellin in respect: his presence led young men and women to assume modesty

⁶ Brother Theophane, Superior General, declares: "Bishop Epalle of Oceania, related that his first idea of a vocation was due to Father Champagnat's influence." (Cf. *Positio super virtutibus, Romae*, fol. 720, p. 74). Also, AA, pp. 26-27.

⁷ That is, at the period when Brother John-Baptist was researching.

⁸ This dual impression will be experienced at different times of his life, by those in contact with him. "Father Champagnat was firm, yes, that's true; at the very sound of his voice, on a single look from him, we would have trembled; but he was above all a kind man; he was compassionate; he was a father" (Brother Francis, AFM, carnet 13; instruction, p. 917).

and reserve in their words and deportment. One day when he was known to be away, they met in a barn for a dance, having carefully closed the door so that they would not be observed. Marcellin returned sooner than was expected, learnt what was happening and went immediately to the farm where the dance had been organized. He climbed to the barn and burst out with the remark on entering: "Ha! This is a fine way for Christians to behave! Let me see, now, if you can answer your catechism as well as you can dance!" In the twinkling of an eye, they were all gone - some dashing through the door, others hiding in the hay or jumping from the window. There was only one old servant left. She began to close the barn and was administered a sharp rebuke ⁹.

Marcellin Champagnat has been called an austere christian; indeed his whole life was characterized by a strong bent for

⁹ One hundred years earlier, Grignon de Montfort had composed hymns to denounce the harmfulness of dancing. The time of the Directory had seen a great weakening of morals and a distinct cultivation of the waltz. Father Champagnat was, therefore, doing no more than his duty as a priest.

penance and mortification 10; he was extremely reserved and modest in his actions and deportment, hard on himself, opposed to comfort and all that flattered nature, moderate in food and drink and opposed to whatever could only please the palate or satisfy sensuality. At home, he lived like his relatives and would allow nothing special to be prepared for him or anything extraordinary done on his account. He insisted on taking meals with the family so as not to disturb them, and resisted any change of meal times or of normal fare. He took nothing whatever between meals, not even a piece of fruit or a glass of water 11. One day he was walking under a cherry tree and had an urge to eat some cherries. He took one and put it into his mouth but immediately blamed himself for lack of mortification. Proclaiming that he would under no circumstances accept the slavery of sensuality, he spat out the half-chewed fruit, trampled on it, and promised God that he would never again fall victim to the demon of gluttony.

You young Brothers, looking after kitchen supplies, often run the risk of this temptation. Should the devil of gluttony tempt you to eat between meals, remember the example of the pious Founder and show how faithfully you imitate him. The spirit of darkness and sensuality will assure you that it doesn't matter much if you taste the dishes you have constantly in your hands or under your gaze; that it is no harm to eat one of the fruits you look after or to take some food or a drink which you seem to need. Of course, it isn't of major consequence to give in once, but the habit of giving in is another matter. Such a habit could have a serious outcome, bringing on the worst of faults. How many young Brothers lost all relish for piety, gave up moral living and even forsook their vocation through yielding to such faults! Besides, your virtue in resisting temptation and in mortifying your taste and sensuality, is not a small matter either. It preserves you from such great harm, wins grace from God, curbs nature, subjects it to the will and leads you to union with God.

Marcellin had a robust constitution and had never been sick as a child. However, his austere mortified life and his intense

10 Father Champagnat was a faithful disciple of the suffering Christ. That is why he didn't dodge opportunities to suffer, and even made his own, as can be seen from the fasts and severe discipline he lays down for himself in his rule of life.

11 This was a practice followed by Saint Ignatius and Father Colin. (Ant. Textus VI, p. 78, No. 35.1; 11, p. 42, No. 5.2).

application to study took toll of his health, and he was forced to interrupt his third year of theology ¹². In order to recuperate, he went home for a few months and, since he was barred from study and hated idleness, he worked in the fields. Before long, this restored his health and made him fit enough to go and finish his theology course.

We are dealing with the time when Napoleon ¹³, having escaped from Elba, returned to France and proceeded to Paris. The city of Lyon was full of excitement and confusion. The enemies of the Church, capitalizing on the nation's crisis, hoped to be rid of the Church as they were already of the king, who was in flight from the victorious battalions of the great Emperor. They therefore insulted priests, threatened them, chased them and forced them to flee and to hide. Marcellin, oblivious of all this; and a stout-hearted character anyway, was making his way unconcernedly through the streets of Lyon, headed for the seminary. A pious lay person, coming out of his shop, ran up to him and asked: "How can you be out in the streets at such a time, sir? Don't you know that one of your fellow-priests has just been grossly insulted and was on the verge of being thrown into the Saône?" "Why should I fear?" was Marcellin's unmoved response. "I haven't harmed anyone." "I know that," continued the gentleman.

"Your fellow-priest hadn't either. It is very unwise of you to be in the streets right now." "I am going to the seminary", explained Marcellin.

"The seminary", said the other, "has just had a police investigation, and a garrison has been installed there, because it was rumoured that there were arms." ¹⁴ "There are arms, all right", exclaimed Marcellin, "and I have one here." Saying this, he held up his breviary and went on:

¹² In 1815-1816.

¹³ Napoleon passed through Lyon on March 10th, 1815. His uncle, Cardinal Fesch, had been obliged to flee to Rome and would return only at the end of May. Marcellin's return to Lyons, took place a few days after the passage of the Emperor (Cf. OM 4, p. 278-280).

¹⁴ The seminarians were very much in favour of the Bourbons. The Cardinal must have been keenly aware of this during his sojourn at Lyon from the 26th to the 29th of May, 1815 (Cf. OM 1, doc. 38; OM 2, doc. 562 (2), OM 2, doc. 767). Father Champagnat himself must have reached the point of wishing for the return of the Bourbons; this would undoubtedly be due to the recent attitudes of Napoleon and especially his struggle against the Pope. So, at the end of his 1815 resolutions, we find a promise to say Masses, "if the king returns" (OME, doc. II (7), p. 51).

"Those are the seminary arms - not exactly calculated to cause uneasiness to the Government." Maintaining his calm and peace, he thanked the kind man for his keen solicitude, and, without quickening his step, headed for the seminary, which he found quite undisturbed despite the excitement prevailing in the city 15.

About this time the foundation of the Society of Mary was laid. A few seminarians, led by John Claude Colin and Marcellin Champagnat 16, used to have frequent meetings to reinforce their piety and their practice of priestly virtues. Zeal for the salvation of souls and the best means to that end, were what they normally discussed. Their exchange of feelings about this goal and plans for it, gave rise to the idea of founding a Society of Priests. The Society would work for the salvation of souls in the Missions 17 and by teaching youth. This elite group had a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin, a fact which prompted them to place the new Society under the patronage of the Mother of God and give it Mary's name 18.

Having come to an agreement about their pious project and said many prayers for it to God and to their chosen Mother and patroness, they confided in Father Cholleton, who was then the Superior of the seminary 19. This worthy priest, knowing their piety and virtue, praised and approved their plan 20 and encouraged them to implement it. Moreover, he opted to join them, placing himself at their head and assembling them periodically in his room. There, he guided and strengthened them and worked

15 For the state of mind pervading the seminary - which was far from being calm - see, besides the above documents, Lyonnet, "Le Cardinal Fesch", Lyon, Perisse 1841, 11, pp. 576-580.

16 Brother John-Baptist names here only the two chiefly responsible for founding the Society of Mary: Colin and Champagnat; he says not a word about the role of Courveille.

17 That will be more especially the goal of the Fathers, in imitation of Saint John-Francis Regis, whose life was read in the refectory, in 1815 (OM 2, doc. 591 (7), p. 398).

18 Speaking of the name, "Society of Mary", Father Colin will say explicitly in 1869: "This name was suggested by Father Courveille" (OM 3, doc. 819 [6a], p. 218). Courveille himself said that he had the inspiration on August 15th, 1812 at Le Puy. (Cf. OM 2, doc. 718 [5], p. 580).

19 Father Cholleton, LPC 2, pp. 133-135.

20 Courveille's first approaches to Déclas date effectively from the period of the One Hundred Days (March-June, 1815) (OM 2, doc. 591). But the dissemination of the idea took place only at the next resumption of studies (November 1815). Brother John-Baptist sums up in one paragraph, the development of a project which occurred progressively over two years. (OM 2, doc. 718 [16] and doc. 750 [2]).

with them to elaborate the details of the new Association. In one such meeting, it was agreed to go together on pilgrimage to Fourvière and to lay their plans at the feet of Mary 21. The young seminarians, led by Father Cholleton, went up to Mary's shrine 22, entrusted their holy endeavours to her maternal heart and begged her to bless the project, if it were calculated to resound to the glory of her divine Son. That is precisely what she did, with the result that the new Society, born under her auspices and at her shrine, has developed 23 and has seen its offspring become as numerous as the stars in the sky 24.

However, the plans of the new Association made no provision for Teaching Brothers 25. It was Marcellin Champagnat alone who conceived their institution and who alone put his idea into execution. He would often say to his companions: "We must have Brothers! We must have Brothers to teach catechism, to help the missionaries 26 and to conduct schools." No-one disputed the wisdom of having Brothers, but since their existence had not been envisaged in the plan of the new Society, the constant repetition, "we must have Brothers", was not taken very seriously. In the end, Marcellin was told: "Well, since it was your idea 27, you see to it!" He willingly accepted the task and from that moment his determination, his plans and his efforts, were all focused on founding the work of the Brothers.

21 The Latin text is in OME, doc. 15, pp. 61-62; Appendix III, at the end of the chapter, gives the English translation.

22 To-day it is called the Chapel of Fourvière.

23 The statistics for the Marist Brothers alone, in the year that the biography of Father Champagnat was published (1856), record 1536 religious teachers, with 50,000 pupils in 312 schools (Cf. CSG 11, p. 289).

24 Ex. 23, 13.

25 It is certainly true of Father Colin who will say so explicitly (OM 3, doc. 820 [10], p. 334). In his statement of resignation in 1837, Father Champagnat said that it was he who had been given the responsibility by the others, to take charge of the teaching Brothers (OME, doc. 152, p. 339).

26 When Brother John-Baptist wrote this biography, there were, in fact, Brothers assisting the missionary priests in Oceania. But, among the Fathers, even those who remained in France were missionaries. In this connection, we know that even in Father Champagnat's time, there were Brothers from the Hermitage, assisting the Fathers at Belley and Lyon.

27 Father Colin says in his memoirs: "However, Father Champagnat, vicar of La Valla, had dedicated himself to founding the Institute of the Marist Brothers. The idea of such an Institute was entirely his own. It was he who, vividly remembering the difficulty experienced in his own education, remarked to his fellow seminarians: 'We must also have teaching Brothers'." (OME, doc. 171, p. 470).

Marcellin Champagnat, who was so much taken up with his spiritual growth, with the plans he was developing for the greater glory of God and with his theology studies, saw the seminary years rapidly slipping by. He never worried in the least about what would become of him or what post he would be given. With total indifference to the various possible appointments, he left himself entirely in the hands of his Superiors, whom he saw as the channels of God's will for him. One day some of the seminarians were expressing preferences for one post or another, daring that they were ready to try and persuade their Superiors, if necessary. Marcellin asserted that he would never do such a thing, for, if he requested a particular position and then experienced difficulties and trials, he would be plagued by the sad thought of having perhaps brought the trouble on himself; besides, he would then feel that he was probably not where God wanted him. On the other hand, by abandoning himself to Providence and letting himself be guided by obedience, he would be happy in the assurance that he was where God wanted him and that he would always be able to claim: "It is by your will, oh Lord, that I am here. I rely on you for the help and grace necessary to succeed."

One seminarian indicated to Marcellin that he would like to be assigned to a parish not too far from his parents, so that he could see them more often and be useful to them. "A priest", Marcellin countered, "should be like Melchisedech 28, without parents; that is, they should not preoccupy him." "We are not priests", he continued, "in order to be useful to our families but to serve the Church and to save souls. If you visit your parents frequently, or if they come to see you too often, they will be constantly discussing their temporal affairs with you. You will develop an interest in these and become preoccupied to the detriment of your piety and your zeal; and the sublime functions of your sacred ministry will suffer. Besides, these contacts will be sure to set people talking, to scandalize the faithful and rob you of their esteem and confidence. If you wish to be a priest after God's own heart, you should therefore give up the desire to be placed near your parents.

It is a temptation that you should fight against." Such were the dispositions and attitudes with which he prepared for ordination. On January 6th, 181429, feast of the Epiphany, Cardinal Fesch, Archbishop of Lyon, conferred on him,

28 Gen. 14,16; Heb. 7,3.

29 OME, doc. 10, p. 47.

the clerical tonsure, the four minor orders, and the sub-diaconate. This took place in the Archbishop's palace chapel, when Marcellin was twenty-four years, seven months and seventeen days old. From that time, he always celebrated this feast with special devotion, to mark the grace that the Lord had given him in calling him, on such a day, to the sacred ministry.

The following year he was ordained deacon 3°. At last, came the dawn of the long-desired day; it was the day that he had prepared for by so much study, so many prayers and so many acts of virtue; that day had caused him fear in his humility, but his love for Jesus Christ had made him look to it and hail it from afar as the greatest and most solemn of his whole life; in a word, it was the day on which he would receive a privileged participation in the priesthood of the Son of God, empowering him to offer in sacrifice, the Lamb without spot. He spent the week prior to the memorable day in deep Retreat. Bishop Louis William Dubourg 31 of New Orleans, (delegated by Cardinal Fesch 32), ordained him priest on July 22nd, 1816. Marcellin was twenty-seven years and two months old.

Most 33 of the students who had joined 34 Marcellin to found the Society of Mary, were ordained with him. On parting to go their separate ways to their assigned posts, they all committed themselves to working towards, and making every personal effort to implement, the plans they had laid 35; they would write often to one another to maintain the bond amongst them and to preserve and even enhance the spirit that animated them.

Before leaving Lyon, Father Champagnat visited Our Lady of Fourvière to renew his consecration to the Blessed Virgin and

30 Cardinal Fesch was at Paris, and Bishop Simon of Grenoble, ordained the new deacons. (OME, doc. 12, pp. 51 ff).

31 Bishop Dubourg also took the opportunity to speak of his Louisiana mission; as a result Philip Janvier, one of those destined to become Marists, will leave for the United States (OM 4, p. 302).

32 Text of the Authorization (OM 1, doc. 48).

33 The author says "most", for some received only the diaconate on that day. (OM 1, doc. 45 to 50).

34 It seems, rather, that the group formed around Courveille (OM 3, doc. 798; 819 [10,11]; 820 [6-7]; 845 [11]; 892 [3]).

35 It was the day after the ordination, i.e. July 23rd, 1816 that the pilgrimage to Fourvière took place and their consecration to Mary (OME, doc. 15, pp. 58-64). Text below, Appendix 3.

place his ministry under her protection 36. He said Mass and then, kneeling in front of the image of Mary, read out the following act of consecration 37. It is given just as he wrote it:

"Oh Holy Virgin, I raise my hands to you as the treasury of mercy and the channel of grace. I earnestly ask you to take me under your protection and to intercede for me with your adorable Son. Ask him to grant me the graces I need to be a worthy minister of his altar. It is under your auspices that I wish to work for the salvation of souls. I can do nothing, oh Mother of Mercy, I feel powerless; but you can do all things by your prayers. Holy Virgin, I put all my confidence in you. I offer you, I give you, I consecrate to you, my person, my labours and all the actions of my life."

APPENDIX

At the age of 86, Julienne Epalle, a neighbour, testified as follows: "During all the time he was on holidays as a seminarian, Champagnat remained at home; the only exception was when he was seen visiting the sick and comforting them with kind words or visiting the Church in his respectful way. At home, he wore his coarse soutane and ate the same kind of food as his parents, refusing to dine abroad; he already lead a saintly life. For the pleasure of my parents, (neighbours of the Champagnat family), he spent a few hours every day instructing us. I was the eldest and eleven years old at the time; I still recall the dignified bearing of the young seminarian and the sound advice he gave us for our conduct towards one another towards our parents and towards God." Julienne's young brother, John-Mary, who was then fifteen months old and was saved by Marcellin from drowning, testified also in 1886, but only what he had heard. "How often have people told me... when he was at Verrières, he spent his holidays studying or working on the farm. They still point out the little secluded room where he spent the major part of each day and the garden walls he built. He never wasted time in useless social calls." "Elderly people recall with emotion the pious instructions he gave them du ring his seminary holidays and the fear he instilled into them when he caught them dancing." (Positio, XXXIX Testis, fol. 624, p. 71).

36 The reference is to the Black Virgin, above the altar. It had replaced, at the beginning of the 17th Century, the original statue, burnt during the siege of Lyon, in 1562, by the followers of the Baron des Adrets.

37 The original version of the text has not been found.

APPENDIX II

In her testimony of 1886, Julienne Epalle said also: The young seminarian was consumed by zeal for the glory of God. In the very first week of his holidays from the Major Seminary, he told a few Rosey residents: "If you come, I shall teach you catechism and tell you how to spend your life." His small room filled up. On the following Sundays they flocked from the hamlets of La Frache, la Faye, Ecotay Marconnière (Malcognière), Montaron, Allier (L'Allier), and the room was too small. He stood at the threshold of the door and spoke to the audience crowded into his room and an adjoining one. Despite his youthfulness, he preached so well that children and adults often remained two hours without being bored. Quite a number of people from the market towns around Marlhès came to hear him, amongst them the Superior of the Sisters of Saint Joseph."

APPENDIX III

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. All for the greater glory of God and the honour of Mary, Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ. We, the undersigned, wishing to labour for the greater glory of God and of Mary, Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ, affirm and publicly declare that it is our sincere intention and firm purpose to dedicate ourselves, as soon as is opportune, to the foundation of the pious Congregation of the Marist Fathers.

So it is, that by this document bearing our signatures, we irrevocably consecrate ourselves and all that we have, as far as is possible, to the Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We do not take on this commitment lightly or irresponsibly, for human motives or swayed by temporal gain; instead we take it on in all seriousness, after mature reflection, having taken wise counsel and weighed the whole matter before God, seeking only his glory and the honour of Mary, Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Hence, we commit ourselves, for that purpose, to difficulties, work, suffering and, if necessary, every kind of torture.

We can do everything in him who strengthens us, Jesus Christ, to whom, for that very reason, we promise fidelity in the bosom of our Mother, the Holy, Roman and Catholic Church, we adhere with all our strength, to the most holy head of that same Church, the Roman Pontiff, as also to our most reverend Bishop, in order that we may be good ministers of Jesus Christ, nourished with the words of faith and of sound doctrine which we have received by his grace; we are confident that under the peaceful and religious rule of our very

christian king, this excellent foundation will see the light of day; considering all this, we solemnly promise to give ourselves and all that we possess, for the salvation of souls in every possible way, working in the name of the Virgin Mary and under her auspices. In this whole matter, however, we remain submissive to the judgment of our Superiors.

Praised be the holy and Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary! Amen."

CHAPTER FOUR

Father Champagnat appointed curate at La Valla; state of that parish. His daily routine. His attitude of respect and deference towards the parish priest, consulting him invariably. Efforts to understand what the parishioners were like and to win their confidence. Priority given to the children.

Not long after ordination, Father Champagnat I was appointed curate of La Valla 2, a well-populated parish in the district of Saint-Chamond (Loire). He took up his position without delay. At sight of the steeple of the La Valla church 3, he was overwhelmed by humility and, falling on his knees, begged God's pardon for his faults, imploring him not to let them be an obstacle to the success of his ministry. He then commended to Jesus and Mary the souls about to be entrusted to him, asking them to bless his labours and all that he would undertake for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

To care for the La Valla parish, which takes in the slopes and the passes of Mount Pilat, was one of the most arduous and demanding of tasks. Its two thousand population 4 was mostly scattered amongst deep valleys or on steep heights. The La Valla territory really beggars description. No matter what direction you go, there is nothing but steep rises, sharp descents, crags and precipices. Several of its hamlets, situated way down in the ravines of Pilat and at an hour and a half's distance from the church, were almost inaccessible for want of passable roads.

1 The appointment of Father Champagnat was dated August 12th, 1816 (AAL reg. des pouvoirs, quoted in OME, doc. 16, p. 67).

2 The census of 1820 records 2423 inhabitants. Le Bessat (about 350 inhabitants) was then part of La Valla, although situated 8 kilometres away.

3 A red cross, situated below the village at the crossroads from Marlihes and Saint-Chamond, marks the traditional spot for this prayer of Father Champagnat (Cf. - for the history of the cross - L'Echo de La Valla-en-Gier, No. 167, November, 1927).

4 When Le Bessat became a parish and a township in 1830, the number of inhabitants of La Valla fell to 2039 (1836 Census). At the time Brother John-Baptist wrote, in 1856, the number had risen to 2269.

The people of La Valla were good folk and full of faith⁵, without sophistication or education. Several factors accounted for their ignorance of the church, the chief of them being the very nature of the landscape. Most of the inhabitants lived scattered and lost, as it were, in lonely spots that were hard to reach. Hence they rarely came to church. The parish priest, although a worthy man, was not popular; a speech defect prevented him from giving his people the instruction required, making his talks unattractive and consequently of little value to his listeners. Besides, there was no teacher for the boys⁶. Such was the physical and moral condition of the parish to which Father Champagnat was sent.

He wasn't the least bit daunted by the state of affairs: trusting in Providence, he began at once to clear the spiritual field entrusted to him. Before treating his labours in detail, we want to report the timetable he spelt out for himself during his ordination Retreat; he followed this without fail, while he was curate at La Valla:

"Oh Lord, everything in heaven and on earth is yours. I want to be yours too, by a free gift of myself so that I may do your holy will entirely and may work faithfully for my own holiness and that of the souls you have entrusted to me. For this reason, I promise to be faithful to the following resolutions:

1. I shall make at least a half an hour's meditation every day and, as far as possible, immediately after rising and before leaving my room.
2. I shall always fix my meditation subject in advance and prepare it carefully.
3. I shall spend at least a quarter of an hour preparing for Mass and at least as long in thanksgiving.

⁵ The spirit of penance was notable. Thus, in the Rivat family of Brother Francis, not only was abstinence observed but fasts too, especially the long, Lenten fast (Manuscript notes of Father David, nephew to Brother Francis). On the other hand, in places like Le Bessat, distant from the church and often isolated because of snow and bad roads, it is understandable that religious ignorance and every other kind, were very great. Father Champagnat, in his letter of January 28th, 1834, wrote to Louis-Philippe: "Appointed to a country parish, what I saw at first hand made me even more keenly aware of the importance of... training teachers" (LPC I, doc. 34, p. 99).

⁶ See Note 1 of Chapter 7.

4. Once a year, I shall read through the rubrics - of the Missal 7.
5. Some time during the day, I shall visit the Blessed Sacrament and Mary's Chapel.
6. Whenever I have to leave the house for a sick call or some other commitment, I shall make those two visits. On my return I shall do likewise, to thank God for the graces given me and to ask his pardon for faults I may have committed.
7. Each evening, without fail, I shall make my examination of conscience.
8. Whenever it shows that I have been guilty of speaking ill of my neighbour, I shall take three strokes of the discipline. I shall do the same when the examination reveals boastful words.
9. I shall study theology for an hour every day.
10. I shall never give an instruction without preparing it.
11. I shall constantly recall that I carry Jesus in my heart.
12. In all my actions, I shall keep myself in God's presence and I shall be very careful to preserve recollection.
13. I shall strive particularly for meekness and, in an endeavour to win others more easily to God, I shall treat everybody with great kindness.
14. Part of the afternoon will be spent visiting any who may be sick in the parish.
15. After Mass, I shall be available for confessions; the rest of the morning will go to study unless I am required for some priestly ministry.
16. For meals, type of recreation and other daily routine, I shall follow the seminary customs, if I have a choice.
17. I shall read through what I have drawn up and resolved, once each month.
18. For any failure related to religious exercises I shall take the discipline in union with the sufferings of Christ. My aim in this,

7 Father Champagnat followed, in this, the example of Father Gardette, Superior of the Major Seminary, who set great store by a well-conducted liturgy. For the whole of Marcellin's rule of life, see A. Ballo, *L'évolution spirituelle de Marcellin Champagnat*, BI XXX, No. 217, pp. 387 ff.

is to make an act of love and of faith; I pray that Mary herself may render this poor effort acceptable to the Holy Trinity." ⁸

We can add that Father Champagnat always rose at four o'clock, made his meditation and then went to the church to say Mass 9, unless forced to delay it for some reason. His whole day was given over to prayer, study and the duties of his ministry. He rarely went out and his visits were only for the sick or for some charitable purpose. Recreation time was spent with the parish priest or in some manual work. It was between nine and ten o'clock that he usually went to bed.

In the diocese of Lyon, the curates share the house and life of the parish priest: a laudable custom which does much to maintain union and priestly love amongst the priests of the same parish. Marcellin was delighted to have the parish priest always with him, as a monitor of his conduct, as a source of rich experience and as one whose personal direction formed him for the sublime functions of the priestly ministry.

Marcellin always held him in the greatest respect and affection and always made this clear in public. Nothing was done without consulting him, and good works were undertaken only after getting his advice and approval. Besides, he was always, ready and willing to replace him on sick calls to distant hamlets, or in other of the more demanding priestly duties. However, he devoted himself above all, to securing for him the esteem and affection of parishioners, upholding his authority at all times and in all places. He would defend the parish priest's conduct against his critics and, even when there was actual fault, would find a way of excusing him by skilfully giving a favourable twist to blameworthy conduct. Marcellin sometimes had good reason to complain about him, as we shall see later, but he never deviated from this course of action, always remaining attached to him; every day, he gave the parish priest, by his respect and submission, proof of the consideration he had for him and of his eagerness to serve and please him.

On arriving at La Valla, Marcellin confided in him as in a father, requesting him to be free with opinions and advice and

⁸ He was to enjoin the same practice on his Brothers, prescribing an hour's religious study daily (Rules, 1837, art. 38). .

⁹ We do not know the time-table of Masses at La Valla. That of Marlihes, we do know from "Memoirs on religious practice", which indicates that, on Sundays, the first Mass is always celebrated at about sunrise (Presbytery Archives).

to be kind enough to point out his defects and to correct his faults.

In this sensitive area, Father Champagnat in turn rendered the parish priest an important service. This good man, despite his admirable qualities, had the unfortunate weakness of drinking to excess¹⁰. Regrettably, this shortcoming, so serious in a priest, had become known. Father Champagnat was filled with deep sorrow at the harm it caused the parish priest and the scandal it caused in the parish. With prudence, respect and love, he did his utmost to halt the evil. Firstly, he prayed fervently that the parish priest

¹⁰ As a result of comments by Father Favre, Superior General of the Marist Fathers (OM 2, doc. 757, pp. 763-764) and of Father Etienne Bedoin, parish priest of La Valla, as soon as the book was published, (AFM, 151/1 n. 1), that paragraph was replaced by the following; It was the parish priest himself who later reported this fact, and he added: "The conduct of Father Champagnat was so regular and exemplary that during his eight years as curate with me, although I kept a close eye on him at his request, I never once had occasion to draw his attention to a genuine fault; but I did often have to moderate his enthusiasm for work and his spirit of mortification.

If I had left him to himself, he would have spent much of the night in study or in prayer and would have fasted to the point of endangering his health. They are the only two reproaches I could make against him. I should point out that he wasn't one of those fanatically religious people who are guided by the feeble light of their own mind; instead, he received my remarks with deference and complied with them unquestioningly and with full submission."

might have the grace to correct himself; next he raised the matter gently with him, practising abstinence from wine so that the offender might be led to imitate his sobriety. While he didn't succeed in bringing him to correct completely his evil tendency, he did have the consolation of preventing many failures and warding off many excesses.

From the time that Father Champagnat arrived at the parish, he set about winning the confidence of the inhabitants of La Valla, knowing full well that he must have their affection and esteem if he were to do good amongst them and lead them to God. His cheerful, frank and open character, together with a manner that was simple, modest, cheerful, kind and noble, all at the same time, was a considerable asset to him in the process. When he was passing through the streets, or met up with a group, he had a pleasant word for everyone - offering praise, consolation, encouragement or congratulation. At ease in conversation with everyone, he had the knack of adjusting to their level, of adapting to their character and of entering into their way of seeing and understanding things. Having prepared their mind and heart, he would give the conversation an edifying turn, offering good advice or a reprimand as circumstances indicated ¹¹.

If he met children, he would often stop to say a word of encouragement, give them a gentle pat or a holy picture, or ask them their catechism. For the aged, he was full of care and consideration; for the young, he showed understanding and leniency; for the poor, he had generosity and compassion; for everyone, he was kind and affable; he made himself all things to all men, to bring them to love religion and to win them for Jesus Christ ¹². But the biggest factor in his securing the affection and esteem of the faithful was his edifying conduct: his piety, his orderly life and his exact discharge of duties. He was always available, and showed himself ever obliging no matter at what moment his services were demanded or he was called to the church or to the bedside of the sick.

¹¹ "All that I can say of Father Champagnat, having had frequent dealings with him, is that he has always struck me as an incomparable person, very hard on himself (he wore a hair-shirt), and hard on others, but always for their good. He was gentle, affable and able to talk easily to everybody. He was the Father of the parish. He accomplished incredible good in the district. Everybody revered him" (John-Baptist Badard, *Positio*, XX fol. 575, p. 442). J.B. Badard, was the brother of Brother Bartholomew and son of John-Mary, sacristan.

¹² 1 Cor. 9, 21-22.

His first concern was to fathom the nature of the La Valla inhabitants, to get to know their disposition, their -good points, their vices and defects and what evil practices and licentiousness were to be found in the parish. The investigation adequately made, he recollected himself before God, drew up plans and framed extremely prudent projects to eradicate corrupt customs, to correct defects, to promote piety and virtue, to make his ministry useful to everybody and to achieve the maximum good.

Before any undertaking, he was careful, (as we have already intimated), to submit his proposal to the parish priest, taking his advice, working out everything with him, and getting his approval for whatever he wanted to do for the welfare of the parish. In this, of course, he was fulfilling a duty; but we should point out that he had a particular love of dependence, a deep respect for his Superiors and an invariable custom of willing and acting according to their intentions and desires rather than his own. His principle was that obedience must regulate zeal, if this is to be pleasing to God and of use to our neighbour; hence he would have preferred to give up a plan or put aside a good work than to take on anything whatever against the wish of his Superiors or without their consent.

Even more, he wasn't satisfied to have a broad approval from them of the good he felt inspired to pursue; no, his conduct was faithful to the details of their instructions and advice. He was convinced that his zeal would be purified as a result, that he would not be acting at all from natural motives and that God would bless his work.

The children 13 were the first to reap the fruits of his zeal, and, from, the very day 14 of his arrival at La Valla; he turned his attention to the foundation of a group of teaching Brothers. But, so as not to fragment the story of that important enterprise, let us look first at what he did to improve the parish.

According to Father Champagnat, principles imbibed when young have an influence throughout an entire life. That is why he devoted particular attention to children, applying himself to instructing them in the mysteries and truths of religion, to forming them to virtue and to inculcating the habit of fulfilling their Christian duties. He took sole charge of the teaching of catechism

13 From the end of 1816, Father Champagnat opened a school at La Valla in the hamlet of Le Sardier: it was in the hands of a lay person and had boys and girls, paying fees (Cf. FMS, 1973, No. 6, p- 86).

14 Father Bourdin is less explicit (Cf. OME, doc. 166 [1] p. 437, note 4).

and attended to it very faithfully every Sunday and, in winter, on most week days as well. He had an easy manner in his catechetical instruction and spoke simply. First of all he required memorized answers. Those who could read, were to learn the words by heart themselves, the others, he taught himself. Then he teased out the meaning with short follow-up questions.

He was always listened to with indescribable pleasure, for he had a special gift for capturing attention and for conveying his meaning clearly. So skilled was he at interesting them and sparking their curiosity by comparisons, parables and little anecdotes relevant to his subject, that each pair of young eyes was constantly riveted on him. To arouse competition, he sometimes put the same question to several children or reframed it in several ways, and when all had given their answers, he would point out the best one and reward its author with a word of praise. Moreover, he took good care not to embarrass the children, helping them instead to say what they weren't sure of; if they seemed upset, he encouraged them and hinted at the answer.

Although Father Champagnat was kind and approachable, he was always reserved and conscientious in his teaching. This was partly in deference to the divine word and to the holiness of the place where he taught it; partly, to help the children be suitably quiet, restrained and respectful.

Such was his influence over them all that one word of blame or a trifling punishment was enough to rein in the daring and to give the others pause".¹⁵ One day a child gave way to laughter and disturbed a companion. Father Champagnat called him up and sent him to kneel in the chancel. The child did so in a reverent manner and, although the catechism class finished a moment later and all the others left, he stayed in that position with the same recollection and respect. Father Champagnat found this behaviour quite touching and went up to him, gently took his arm to raise him and having praised his docility, invited him to leave. His kindness towards children, his influence and control over them and the attention with which they listened to him, vividly impressed any observer; soon the news spread through the parish that the new curate was a skilled catechist and a true friend of children.

He seldom needed to resort to punishment. Instead, his way was to appeal to the children's better feelings, to use emulation,

IS Cf. AA, p. 284.

rewards and appropriate praise. As rewards, he would give religious pictures, artistic maxims, rosaries and the like. Although these items were not expensive, the lucky recipients prized them highly and kept them as precious treasures.

If catechism is to benefit children, it must be made enjoyable for them. Father Champagnat was very aware of this and so he was rewarded by seeing his lessons followed with very close attention. Nothing would deter the children, whether it was cold, snow or rain. Off they would go to catechism. Some of them took an hour, an hour and a half or even two hours to get to the church and yet they would arrive in time for the class, even though it took place at a very early hour. It often happened that some arrived at the church door before daylight. More than once, there were those who, misled by the moonlight, set out too early and found the church door still shut after their three mile journey. On one such occasion, Father Champagnat, arrived soon after, lantern in hand, to say Mass. His reaction was one of great surprise at seeing a group in front of the church door. On drawing nearer, he was deeply moved to discover that they were children

from his catechism class. When he had opened the church, they went in with him and the kindly priest, noticing that they had knelt in a draughty spot near the door, left the altar to move them up to a more comfortable place. After Mass, he gave his usual catechism class and publicly praised their unflagging zeal, so as to inspire the others. He advised them, all the same, not to leave home so early, lest they have an accident.

Father Champagnat did not confine his efforts to caring for First Communion candidates. He was insistent that parents send the younger children also. However, he heard that some parents would understandably ignore his requests, (especially those living at a distance), through exaggerated tenderness or excessive fear of an accident on the way. He therefore adopted another strategy to attract these innocents. He promised a reward to anyone who brought along a little child. This holy ruse was a raging success.

Next day, several children arrived for catechism full of joy and enthusiasm, one accompanying his young brother; another, a little cousin; a third, a small friend or neighbour whom he had promised to look after and bring back safely to its fond mother.

The promised rewards were promptly distributed, and, in such a way that all hearts were stirred with the desire to win one also, by bringing along a little companion. Soon, the class numbers were very large, and before long they included all the children of the parish. The priest's zeal was certainly satisfied. God did not delay in giving him the reward due to that zeal. One day, a child from the First Communion class arrived 16, together with his little brother whom he presented to Father Champagnat to receive a holy picture, which was immediately given him. Now, do you know who that timid little child was, full of candour and innocence?

It was Gabriel Rivat, the future Brother Francis 17, and his immediate successor as Superior General of the Institute.

The news spread through the parish like wildfire that Father Champagnat's catechism classes were absorbingly interesting.

Grown-ups were eager to hear them and flocked to them in large numbers on Sundays. He was forced to adapt his method slightly to suit the new listeners. So, having explained the text of the day's lesson using short, clear and simple questions within the scope of the weakest minds, he then deduced the implications for moral

16 John-Mary, the second-youngest Rivat child, born in 1805, whose age matches what is said here.

17 We can reasonably assume that it was the end of 1816 or the beginning of 1817: Gabriel was, therefore, eight.

conduct and offered reflections calculated to move their hearts and lead them to the practice of virtue. It didn't matter what subject Father Champagnat was presenting, he had the gift of meeting the needs of each one whatever their status, age or circumstances. This caused the people of La Valla to remark: "He has something for everyone, and everyone who hears him learns the truths he imparts!"

CHAPTER FIVE

Father Champagnat reforms the parish by his sermons and his congenial catechism instructions. He reproaches vice and breaks down corrupt practices. His zealous charity for the sick.

Father Champagnat was no less effective with his sermons than with his catechism instruction. In the pulpit, he was very vigorous. His whole being was a sermon: his gestures, his modest and pious demeanour, the tone of his voice, his vivid, forceful and lively language, were all just what was needed to impress and touch the listener. He never climbed into the pulpit without a preparation of study, reflection and prayer.

His first sermons were short and informative, the very first being only a few simple reflections, which however, made all the listeners ecstatic. Each one avowed on leaving the church: "We have never been blessed here with a priest who preached as well as he does." That feeling and verdict did the rounds of the parish.

Families found out when he was to preach and flocked in to fill the church. His ordinary topics were the great truths: death, judgment, hell, the enormity of sin, the necessity of salvation and the misfortune of losing one's soul. So powerful was his treatment of these subjects that on several occasions his whole audience was in tears and the most hardened sinners were shaken. His words were so clear, warm and full of unction that they convinced all minds and stirred all hearts. After the flow of tears, followed remorse, sorrow for having offended God, and the genuine desire to return to his friendship and serve him faithfully for the future.

In no time, a marvellous change occurred in the whole parish.

Faith took on new life, piety flourished again, the sacraments were frequented in an almost universal transformation. Amongst the elderly especially, the fruits were plentiful, valuable and lasting.

Most of them wanted to make general confessions and actually did so with sentiments of the most lively sorrow. These general confessions were very numerous and resulted in countless fruits

¹ Cf. A. Balko, Father Champagnat in his instructions and unpublished sermons, BI, No. 215, 1972, pp. 73-86; and BI, No. 166, 1957, pp. 453-468.

which gave the parish a totally new aspect. The confessional finished off the work of conversion, begun in the pulpit.

No words can convey the kind-heartedness he showed to penitents, speaking to them with a sweetness, love and conviction that often brought tears to their eyes. His words were particularly apt for instilling a horror of sin, drawing away from vice and inculcating a love of virtue. "He is from Rosey", was the saying, "and his words are as sweet and pleasant as roses!" Yet, the urging that they found so much to their liking, in no way flattered sinners. Instead, they were spurred to heartfelt repentance, to a detestation of their sins, to a holy impatience to be rid of them and to a resolution never to repeat them. It has been pointed out that nearly anyone converted by him, persevered in the practice of virtue.

Before Father Champagnat's arrival at La Valla, some there, hadn't been to confession for a long while; a large number of others did no more than confess at Easter and fulfil the rest of their religious duties only now and then. He had the happiness of converting the former and stimulating the faith of the latter. He spoke to these people so powerfully and so eloquently of the infinite treasures we have from our Saviour, Jesus Christ, through the sacraments, that before long the confessionals were besieged and monthly communions increased fourfold. It was to him that most of the faithful went ². Hence on Saturdays, Sundays and important feasts, he had to spend a large part of the night in the confessional. Early in the morning on Sundays and feasts, he would go to the church where a crowd of penitents awaited him. He heard confessions till it was time to sing the eleven o'clock High Mass, which was always followed by Vespers ³.

This custom of singing Vespers at the end of High Mass, gave him the idea of arranging evening devotions for the people of the village and those near enough to the church. The parish priest was in favour of the project and it took the form of sung Compline, evening prayers and a spiritual reading with accompanying comments. Given the zest which Father Champagnat put into all he did,

² Testimony given at the time of the Process of Beatification: "Father was an excellent confessor, highly esteemed by the faithful. I don't believe he was harsh; he was like a kind papa, acting calmly and with great leniency towards sinners" (Cf. Father Pierre Louis Mallaure, Positio, XVI, fol. 775, p. 129).

³ The parishioners from distant hamlets would not have been able to return to the church in the afternoon for that prayer.

almost everyone in the village soon took part in the evening exercise. He filled it with readings, exhortations, and simple comments which were varied but always deeply moving. This exercise contributed perhaps more than anything else, to his infusing piety and solid virtue into that large number of fervent Christians, who constituted the glory and edification of the parish. In these down-to-earth meetings, he entered into the minutest detail on Christian duties and on practising piety in a way that sanctifies daily actions and gives them merit for heaven. Let us look at some examples 4:

"My dear brethren", said he, one Sunday, "this is the height of the working season: the days are long and the heat oppressive; you go off to work early in the morning, coming back often, only late at night; you toil and sweat all day. Oh, how much you can merit for heaven if you want to! Oh, how pleasing you will be to God and how many graces he will shower on you if you know how to sanctify your actions and your sufferings! And, how do you go about doing that? Offer them to God in the morning, uniting your sufferings and weariness to those of our good Saviour. Before beginning the day, and sometimes in the course of it when you remember, offer your work to God, in words like these: 'My God I want to do and suffer all this in obedience to your holy will, in imitation of Jesus Christ, in expiation of my sins, to merit your grace, to receive paradise from you and your blessing on my children and all that belongs to me.'"

"My dear brethren, if you follow my advice, you will be excellent christians, you will be true children of God; your work will be one, long prayer; your every step, your every action, each drop of your perspiration, all will be counted and will be rewarded. Oh, how pleased God is with someone who acts in that way! What a treasure of merits he amasses for all eternity! What glory and reward await him in heaven! There you have it - the great secret of how to save your soul, how to win a wonderful crown, how to become saints the easy way: for you don't increase the burden of your work by offering your actions and weariness to God; in fact, you will find the work easier since you are doing it from love of God; in his kindness, he will help you, strengthen you and comfort you; he will bless you and give you temporal prosperity; you will enjoy peace of soul and the confidence, that

4 Brother John-Baptist reconstructs rather freely the sermons he quotes. There is no corresponding manuscript.

these days of suffering will be followed by unending rest and this short span of pain, by eternal happiness."

Another time, he said to them: "My dear brethren, I strongly urge you to take every opportunity to practise mortification. You are now harvesting your fruit and so are seeing and handling it constantly. Refrain from eating any of it, except at meal time. Not that it is sinful at all to eat a fruit, but to abstain from one is an excellent act of mortification, if this is done for love of God and in a spirit of penance. Such acts of self-denial and others like it are possible to you every day. It may be putting up with your neighbour's defects or controlling your tongue so as not to fail at all against charity. In addition to giving you mastery over your passions and preserving you from sin, these acts will win great graces for you, will merit the protection of God and obtain for you an abundant reward.

These little acts of mortification, considered singly, seem insignificant, but they add up to a real treasure. With two or three a day, you will have hundreds by the end of the year; at the end of your life, although you may no longer remember them, God who keeps good reckoning, will show them to you in such numbers that you will not be able to count them. This practice of mortification is a guaranteed way of meriting greatly and of sanctifying oneself without fuss, unobtrusively and without his king the snares of vanity." Once he addressed these words to mothers: "Naturally, you love your children well; you would like to see them well-behaved and blessed by God. Your happiness would know no bounds if an angel were to assure you: your child will one day be a saint. Well, it depends on you whether that will be so or not; your child will be a saint, provided you really will this to happen. Yes, if you bring it up well, if you train it in virtue and piety from its earliest years, I promise you, in God's name, it will be a saint. Did I hear you say that it's not at all easy to bring up a child in a christian fashion; that you would like to educate your children well, but don't know how to do so? You are mistaken. It's very easy for parents to raise their children well, as I shall show you.

My dear mothers, offer to God every day, the child that you carry in your arms and consecrate it each day to the Blessed Virgin. Ask that divine Mother to make it a good child, one who preserves its baptismal innocence and saves its soul. Come from time to time, to offer the child to Our Lord in the Holy Sacrament of the altar; beg him, who loved children so much, to bless your child and make it grow in wisdom and grace as it advances in

age 5. As soon as it can speak, teach it to say frequently the holy names of Jesus and Mary and to recite short prayers morning and night. Keep your child close to you, not allowing it to frequent bad company or go with anyone that might cause it scandal. See that you yourself are a shining example to your child.

Endeavour to inspire it with a great horror of mortal sin, pointing out at times that it is the worst of all evils and that you would rather see your house on fire than have your child offend God. Speak frequently to the child concerning the time of First Communion, requiring it to pray daily asking God for the grace

5 Luke 2, 52.

of a worthy first reception. On Sundays, take it with you to the church and teach it to follow the Mass and to take part piously in the church services, just like yourself. Make quite sure that your child is inspired by you to be devoted to the Blessed Virgin, to develop the habit of saying a few prayers to her every day and of seeking her help with complete confidence, in every need.

Is it really difficult to carry out all that? Of course not! And yet this is all that is needed to give your child a christian education and ensure its salvation. No, a child brought up in this way will never be lost. No, no, the Blessed Virgin will never allow a soul so often consecrated to her, to become a reprobate. Even if that soul should stray for a time, she will know how to lead it back to the path of salvation. Our Lord will not allow a child for whom his blessing has been so frequently sought, to become a renegade, to forsake grace and forfeit heaven.

The gospel tells how this divine Saviour once took a child, embraced him and blessed him; it is generally thought that this child became St Martial. A single blessing of Jesus was enough to ensure his salvation and make him a great saint. Can you believe that your own child, blessed every day, will not be saved? That is impossible, quite impossible. A child who is often dedicated to Jesus and Mary will never be lost." These considerations had an enormous effect, and on the following Sunday, the fathers were to be seen at Mass with their boys and the mothers with their daughters.

His matter-of-fact instructions or his sermons, were sometimes forcefully levelled at those vices, corrupt practices or disorders, prevalent in the parish. He inveighed most vigorously against drunkenness, dances, nocturnal gatherings and the reading of bad books. His zeal suggested a very efficacious way to put a stop to the unhealthy assemblies and dances⁶ which were held at certain times of the year in most hamlets. This was to conduct a catechism class there, on the very day those gatherings were customary. On hearing of the date of such an intended assembly, (and he did have his scouts), he used to announce from the pulpit that on that same day he would be taking catechism in that

⁶ The clergy weren't the sole opponents of the waltz. The Journal de Paris wrote on July 8th, 1807: "Husbands and wives, mothers and all people of good sense have been protesting against the waltz. J.J. Rousseau said that he would never allow his daughter or his wife to waltz. No other dance, indeed, is more likely to make a woman lose her head and to inflame her every sense".

Clearly, Father Champagnat shared the views of his time. He campaigned against dances at La Valla (Cf. P. Zind, *Sur les traces de M. Champagnat*, Vol. 1, p. 59).

hamlet. These announcements were usually enough to quash the idea, for he was very much feared and respected.

On returning, one day, from the church where he had been hearing confessions until quite late, instead of taking a meal, he said to the Brother who was waiting for him: "I am going out." "Where are you going so late, Father?" the Brother queried. "I am going on a sick call", came the answer. "Well, you must have something to eat first", suggested the Brother, only to be told: "No, I haven't the time." Since his mind was made up, the Brother offered to go with him, and he agreed. The sick person was not in danger but Father Champagnat had other things in mind. He had been informed, while returning from the church, that several hamlets were to hold dances, it being Carnival time.

In the first hamlet, in fact, quite a large throng was taken by surprise. Singing and dancing were in full swing. He waited for a moment at the door, threw it open and without so much as a word, gravely ran his eyes over the group. The singing and dancing came to an abrupt halt; the bystanders got to their feet and together with the dancers stood dumbfounded for one second; then they rushed helter-skelter for doors and windows to slip off out of sight, while some of the less agile ones, thwarted by the congestion, hurled themselves under the tables. Only the lady in charge of the house went up to him sometime after and asked his forgiveness, with tear-filled eyes and clasped hands, alleging in her defence that it was the first time for her and that she would certainly never return. Father Champagnat replied in the firm tone of voice that characterized him: "Or is this simply the first time you have been caught?"

He turned his attention then to other hamlets, in one of which he found a dance under way and it broke up like the first. The return to La Valla was very daunting, for the night was quite dark and the roads were in bad condition and iced over. Fortunately he had a staff with him and used it to grope his way along, but he tumbled often as he went. By the time he got back, it was past midnight, and, as he wanted to say Mass that day, he went to bed without taking any food, having warmed himself a little first ⁷.

There was another time, when he learnt during the course of the day, that a dance was set to take place that same evening in a hamlet very distant from the church. He made up his mind to

⁷ The law of Eucharistic Fast forbade even a drop of water from midnight onwards.

go and stop it. Having said night prayers and given his little community the meditation topic for next morning, he informed a Brother that he was going out and wanted him to accompany him. "I did so", the Brother later related, "and though it was always a pleasure to go with him, this time I had mixed feelings because of the pitch black night and the cold drizzle. After we had walked for some time along a narrow road which skirted a mountain, I took a false step, falling into a deep hollow from which I had no hope of rising. It was useless for Father Champagnat to suggest various ways of extricating myself; I just couldn't succeed. He then scrambled down himself, fussed around for me in the bushes, and with a mighty effort, managed to haul me out back onto the track. At short distance from the hamlet, some people who caught sight of us, and the barking of dogs, alerted the company which had assembled, and they scattered posthaste. Father Champagnat turned back with the comment: 'We should rejoice, Brother, at having prevented God from being offended. St John Francis Regis was quite insistent that the happiness and reward for his life's numerous treks through the countryside, would be perfectly adequate if he had thereby prevented a single mortal sin. How could we complain of being slightly wet, of bumping against an occasional stone, of tumbling clumsily into a ditch or getting our hands scratched? Thank God, rather, for giving us the grace to suffer something for him and to be useful to others.'"

He attacked these abuses so strongly from the pulpit and made so many approaches on the issue, to the young people and to their parents, that he eventually succeeded in stamping out entirely those nocturnal gatherings.

Drunkenness was another vice and one which he found even more difficult to eradicate. But he triumphed in the end, by dint of prayer, exhortations and threats of God's punishment. The inns used often be packed to the doors, before he arrived at La Valla. Now they were deserted and people were ashamed to be seen in them even on business during the day. Whenever his urgings from the pulpit and its power were not enough to bring an abuse to a halt or to correct some vice, he sought out the guilty in the privacy of their homes. He then begged, exhorted and threatened until he had won a promise of conversion.

In a similar undertaking, he set out to rid the parish of bad books, widely disseminated in its precincts, and again he was successful.

8 Acts, 5,41.

All such books⁹ were destroyed and replaced by worthwhile works on religion and piety. He was responsible for the setting up of a library to provide suitable books for those who had a taste for reading. He personally took responsibility for the distribution of those books to the youth because this enabled him to give them a word of advice, to guide their reading and keep them pious and virtuous. It cost him a lot of money to set up the library but, when there was question of promoting good or of thwarting evil, he didn't count the cost, willingly giving all that he had.

In doing the rounds of the parish and visiting the homes he would skilfully lead people to show the books in their house; if there were any bad or doubtful ones, he carried them off. Once he collected so many of them that they kept his bed-room fire going for several days. Quite often he didn't merely lend books but made a gift of them to parents, recommending them to read them or have their children do so. On such occasions, he sometimes read out a little himself, following that up with a few reflections by way of conversation, if time and circumstances permitted.

Perhaps his most tiring work and the one in which his zeal shone most resplendently, was his visits to the sick, and the careful administration of the sacraments to them. Day and night he was unfailingly at their beck and call. He didn't even wait to be sent for; as soon as he heard that someone somewhere was sick, he was off to see him. The harshness of the season, rain, snow, nothing would stop him: he braved any obstacle to bring the help of religion to dying persons.

In the course of the 1820 winter, it was reported to him that a poor woman was dying and unable to go to confession because the weather was very bad and there was so much snow that the priest of the parish hadn't dared go and see her. The weather was in fact so frightful that not a soul stirred out of doors. A fierce wind whipped up swirls of snow and the air was so full of it, that one couldn't see five yards ahead and the roads were impossible to pick out. Father Champagnat, heedless of the dangers, set out at once to hear the confession of this woman who lived about six miles away¹⁰. Lucky for her that he did so; she died immediately after receiving the sacraments.

⁹ This period was marked by widespread dissemination of the philosophers' writings, especially those of Voltaire. This was done by pedlars. Often, on the occasion of a mission, one day was assigned to the burning of evil books.

¹⁰ This too justifies our believing that it was the parish of Tarantaise.

"Never", says the Brother who relates the incident, "had I seen Father Champagnat as happy and merry as he was that day. He kept on thanking God that he had arrived in time to impart the blessings of religion to that woman; but he thanked God too for his own preservation from danger. He had, in fact, been thoroughly frightened by the great peril he feared. Yet, he remarked with a laugh: 'If God hadn't taken a hand in the matter, if he hadn't given us his powerful help, we should never have come through it.'"

On another occasion, the weather was so bad that the parish assistant 11, a strong and healthy man, refused to go with him on a sick call. "Don't be afraid, my friend", urged Father Champagnat, "God will help us." They certainly had great need of God's help, as the assistant was soon to discover. The ground had a covering of several feet of snow. The wind had heaped it up on all sides, covering the roads and obliterating them beyond recognition. The assistant was quite familiar with the region, but that didn't save him from mistaking the way and plunging into a pond where, but for Father Champagnat's help, he would have stayed. When the danger was over, he begged the priest not tell anyone of his experience, and on arriving home, he went straight to bed to get warm and to ward off illness. Father Champagnat was frightened that the good fellow might suffer harmful effects from the accident, and went to see him soon afterwards. Finding him in bed, he quipped laughingly: "What's the matter with you? Only a few hours ago, I left you in fine fettle." "You can stop pretending to know nothing", was the assistant's answer. "Thinking that you couldn't keep it a secret, I told the whole story, but pray that I don't end up sick after that bath. You did promise me God's protection, yet he didn't prevent me from getting up to my neck in the water." "My promise stands", said the Father. "God will look after you. Don't fear. He subjected you to trial by water, now you will be tried by fire 12 and that will cure you completely."

As soon as a sick call was received, Father Champagnat dropped everything to go and help; if the patient were in danger,

11 Probably, John-Mary Badard, father of Brother Bartholomew. When Bartholomew was born (1804) he was described as "nail-maker"; later (1808, 1817, 1825) he appears in the Civil Registers of the State as "parish clerk". A young brother of Bartholomew, John-Francis, testifying in 1886, recounts the same fact in regard to his father: "I fell into an icy pool of slush, and suffered no harm... My father was sacristan at the time" (Cf. AFM, Témoignage de 1886, No. 104. 13, p. 16).

12 Ps. 66,12.

he moved smartly so as to arrive in time. "In such a case", was the simple avowal of one who'd had the experience, "a strong and healthy assistant might manage to keep up by dint of much perspiration; but if he were a fifteen or sixteen year old, as he often was, he had to perspire much more profusely still." Whenever Father Champagnat had administered the last sacraments to someone, he usually made a few short and moving remarks to those present. He would speak of the need to be ready for death, of the nothingness of earthly things or some topic appropriate to the time and circumstances. Hardened sinners were sometimes so much touched by those moving exhortations that they changed their lives and asked to go to confession.

He didn't confine himself to a visit or two to hear the confession of the sick. No, he saw them often, preparing them for death and helping them to perform acts of virtue suited to their situation. Given his extreme kindness and the deep fervour of his constant words about God, the sick were enormously consoled to see and hear him often.

One morning, he left at five o'clock to hear the confessions of the aged and infirm so that they could be properly disposed for their Easter duties. Having done this for all those in the neighbourhood, he spent the rest of the day in the hamlets, seeking out the men who hadn't yet confessed. If he didn't find them in their houses, he went looking for them in the fields or woods. The kindly insistence of his words, according to the Brother with him, was such that no one held out against his prayers and entreaties.

They all undertook to visit him in his room and they kept their word. The next day and the ones which followed, he ministered similarly to the aged and the hardened sinners in sectors of the parish.

The goal of many of his journeys was to establish peace and union within discordant families or between squabbling individuals. Since he enjoyed the respect and confidence of everybody, they were glad to accept him as arbiter of any parish conflicts which might arise. How often did he restore harmony in families, reconcile enemies, thoroughly eliminate long-standing feuds, and bring back to the sacraments people who had steered clear of the pastor for some alleged slight! His flair for conciliation, his cheerful character, his simple, gentle and affable ways, captivated all hearts. Good and bad alike loved him and accepted with pleasure, (or at least not too much pain), his counsels, warnings and even reprimands.

He had the rare gift of not upsetting, even when administering

a reproof 13: like a sympathetic doctor forced to prescribe bitter pills but coating them with all possible sweetness, Father Champagnat invariably gave a pleasant twist to his reprimands. It might be by means of a few words of exoneration, of praise or of encouragement which led to an admission of faults and an awareness of their evil consequences, without damaging self-esteem.

Moving around one Sunday, he came across a man who was forging his scythe, and he pointed out that he shouldn't be doing so, on such a day, since it was unnecessary servile work. The worker stopped at once and made to go off. The priest, in order to soften the reproach, volunteered at that juncture: "My friend, you didn't know you were doing wrong, and I'm sure that you would not have, had you known so." The worthy countryman, delighted at his sympathetic treatment, confirmed the priest's judgment and assured him that there would be no recurrence.

When Father Champagnat arrived home after these tiring rounds, he was generally bathed in perspiration and thoroughly exhausted. Yet, he took neither rest nor refreshment but went straight to work. In the houses he visited, it required great necessity or some serious circumstances, for him to partake of anything. A few words that he let slip on one occasion, give us a clear idea of the weariness, the labours and all the sufferings endured over the period of eight years that he spent as curate of La Valla. On the occasion in question, he was crossing Mt Pilat with a close friend. They were going through part of the parish and he looked out on all the regions that he had criss-crossed in every direction, came to a brusque halt, and exclaimed: "How many miles have I trudged through these mountains, how many shirts have I soaked with sweat! If it were all gathered together in that valley, I think there would be enough to take a bath." Then he went on: "I may have perspired indeed in my treks, but I have the delightful consolation of having always arrived, with God's help, in time to comfort the dying with the rites of the Church. To-day, nothing consoles me more!"

13 Letter of Father Champagnat to Brother Dominic, November 23rd, 1834 (LPC 1, doc. 49, p. 128 and commentary in BI. No. 216, 1974, p. 231).

CHAPTER SIX

Father Champagnat founds the Institute of the Little Brothers of Mary. Calling his first followers; the way of life he gives them.

Father Champagnat's priestly duties and the rich harvest of souls he reaped, in no way distracted him from his plan to establish a group of Brothers. It was a preoccupation that was always with him: in the midst of the most absorbing tasks; travelling; off visiting his country parishioners whom he found sadly ignorant; teaching the children catechism; or at prayer, especially the mighty sacrifice of the Mass. When he spoke with God, he pleaded persistently for his plan, with the frequent avowal:

"Here I am, Lord. I come to do your will." 1 There were however times when he was overcome by fear of illusion, and earnestly prayed: "If my inspiration does not come from you 2, my God, if it is not conducive to your glory and the salvation of souls, drive it far from me." These misgivings, springing in fact from his deep humility, did not deter him all the same, from preparing to implement his plan. It was on his very first day 3 at La Valla that his eyes fell on a young man who seemed to him just the one to be the first candidate for the Society he had in mind. The youth came looking for him one night, to hear a sick person's confession.

Father Champagnat took the opportunity to say a few words to him about God and the emptiness of earthly pursuits. He urged the young man to practise virtue and sounded him out on his career hopes. The priest was so impressed by his answers and his good disposition, that on the very next day he visited him at home 4, bringing him a copy of "The Christian's Manual" 5.

1 Ps. 39,9; Heb. 10,9.

2 He had developed a moral certitude that the Society of Brothers should be founded and in his 1837 statement of resignation (OME, doc. 152, p. 339), he will recall that he had been commissioned by other future Marists to assume responsibility for the Brothers' branch.

3 For the second time, the author speaks of "first day".

4 Father Bourdin says, in this regard: "First Sunday of October, Brother John-Mary - a good man - came to seek help for a sick person at La Rive (hamlet of La Valla) - met him there" (OME, doc. 166 [1], p. 437). Also, LPC 2, p. 300.

5 A collection containing the New Testament, the Psalms, the Imitation of Christ and a few prayers, including the Office of the Blessed Virgin.

The young man, John-Mary Granjon, hesitated about taking it, on the grounds that he couldn't read. Father Champagnat insisted, saying that he could use it to learn to read and that, if John-Mary wished, he would himself give him lessons. Shortly afterwards, the priest stressed the advantages of coming to live at La Valla, where he could see him more often and give him more regular lessons. John Mary therefore came to live not far from the church, and, with Father Champagnat as guide, he not only learnt to read and write but became a model of piety and virtue for the whole parish.

At this stage, something happened in a clearly providential manner, to dispel Father Champagnat's misgivings and make him decide to go about setting up the Society of Brothers without further delay. He was summoned to a hamlet, one day, in order to hear a sick boy's confession. As usual, he set out at once. Before proceeding with the confession, he put a few questions to make sure that he was sufficiently instructed to receive the sacraments. To his great surprise, the child knew nothing about the principal mysteries and, in fact, didn't even know whether God existed. Greatly upset at finding a twelve-year-old⁶ in such ignorance, and fearing that he would die in such a state, he sat down beside him to teach him the mysteries and truths necessary for salvation. It took him two hours for the instruction and confession. It was extremely difficult to impart, even the most fundamental truths, to a child who was so sick that he scarcely grasped what was being said.

Having heard his confession, and helped him make several acts of love of God and of contrition as preparation for death, the priest left him, to minister to a sick person in an adjoining house. As he went out, he asked after the sick youth, to be told by his tearful parents that he had died a moment after the priest's departure. Then he felt an upsurge of joy at having been there so opportunely, but it was mingled with a shudder of dread at the danger run by the poor boy, whom he had perhaps just snatched from the gates of hell. He went home overwhelmed by those feelings and saying over and over to himself: "How many

⁶ John-Baptist Montagne, living in the hamlet of Les Palais, beyond Le Bessat (OM 4, p. 220).

⁷ In one of his conferences, Brother Francis refers to a dying young man whose death spurs on Father Champagnat's zeal, but he puts his age at seventeen. That adolescent was born May 10th, 1800 and died October 28th, 1816. He was therefore sixteen and a half. (Cf. Parish Archives of La Valla, Catholic Register).

children are in the same predicament every day, exposed to the same dangers because they have no-one to teach them the truths of faith!" Then he became obsessed, with overwhelming intensity, by the thought of founding a Society of Brothers to obviate such disasters through the Christian education of children. The result was that he went off to see John-Mary Granjon and tell him everything that he planned to do. He explained to him all the good that his projected Institute was capable of achieving and asked him if he would like to be part of it and dedicate himself to the education of children. The young man, who had listened with rapt attention, said in reply: "I am in your hands; do what you will with me. I shall consider myself very happy indeed to devote my strength, my health and even my life, to the Christian instruction of little children, if you believe I am capable." Delighted and edified at this answer, Father Champagnat urged, in turn:

"Courage! God will bless you and the Blessed Virgin will bring you companions." That promise soon had its fulfilment, for, on the Saturday 8 of that same week, a youth presented himself offering to share his way of life.

John-Baptist Audras 9, a boy of angelic innocence and purity, one day found a copy of "Think well on't" and read it eagerly.

The tears welled up in his eyes and he took the resolution to save his soul at all costs. In this frame of mind, he fell on his knees, asked God what he should do to serve him perfectly, and got up with his decision made to enter the Congregation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. He mulled over the idea for a couple of days then shared it with his parents, who took no notice, thinking it a boyish whim 10. A few months passed by and he found his resolution even stronger. He went off early one Sunday morning to hear Mass at Saint-Chamond in St Peter's church; then he arrived at the Brothers' monastery 11, asked for the Brother Director, whom he enlightened as to his plan, begging his help to implement it by writing a letter in support, to the Superior General.

8 The first Saturday which followed October 28th, 1816, fell on November 2nd.

9 LPC 2, pp. 339-340; BOF, pp. 1-32.

10 Born on June 21st, 1802. He was therefore fourteen and a half (OM 4, p. 189).

11 Cardinal Fesch made Lyon their principal centre. They opened schools in the region; for example, they were at Saint-Chamond from 1806 (RLF, P. 9).

The Brother Director was impressed by his dispositions and encouraged him in his laudable aim but pointed out that he wasn't old enough to enter the novitiate ¹²; meanwhile he should pray to God about his vocation and consult his confessor on this important matter. John-Baptist was only partly satisfied by the Brother's words. He was very happy to see support for his desire to leave the world and a promise that he would be able to join the Christian Brothers; but he was very disappointed to face some time of delay. However, he duly followed the advice he had been given, meriting the grace of achieving his goal sooner than he had expected.

On the following Saturday, he went to see his confessor, Father Champagnat. To him, he revealed his inner dispositions, the steps he had taken, unbeknown to his parents, to enter the Christian Brothers, and the outcome of his efforts. The priest listened attentively and searched out the motives behind his vocation. The effect was to lead Father Champagnat to believe that he had discovered the second stone of the edifice he was proposing to construct. It turned out to be the first for, as we shall see, the first young man did not persevere.

However, he did not consider it opportune to convey the depths of his thoughts to his penitent. Instead, he simply encouraged him to be faithful to his resolution of entering religious life and to pray fervently so that God's designs upon him might be clear. Noticing how attentively young Audras listened to him, he thought for a moment, examining before God, just what he should say to the young man. That very instant, he seemed to hear an inner voice telling him: "I have prepared this boy and I bring him to you to be the foundation stone of the Society which you are to establish." Then, giving no hint of how deeply moved he had been by that voice or inspiration, he turned to the young man, with the suggestion that he come and live with Granjon. As an inducement, the priest offered to give him lessons and to help him become a Religious.

John-Baptist duly informed his parents of what had been proposed to him. They didn't stand in his way, since they viewed the offer as a kindness of the curate towards their child and as a means of having him educated without much expense. It wasn't

¹² In the beginning at La Valla, there was nothing prescribed about age. The 1824 Prospectus (OME, doc. 28 [3], p. 88) as well as the 1837 Rules (Ch. 1, art. 4. AFM 0132.0102), mention "15 to 30 years".

long before Father Champagnat revealed all his plans to his new student and sounded him out on the possibility of joining the new Society. The young postulant, who excelled in docility to his spiritual Director, replied: "From the time that I came under your guidance, I have requested only one virtue in my prayer to God and that was obedience to the grace to renounce my own will; so, you can do with me what you think fit, as long as I become a Religious." Fine virtue indeed and admirable dispositions! They won the heart of his spiritual Father, evoking a deep affection for his protégé; and they drew down God's blessing and merited, (as we shall see later) perseverance in his vocation.

Since Father Champagnat had two subjects who were so well disposed, he thought that it was time to launch his project. The problem was where to find suitable accommodation for them. Not far from the presbytery, there was a small house for sale ¹³. Though he had no money he didn't hesitate about buying the place, which had two features particularly in its favour: closeness to the presbytery, a fact which would facilitate his guidance and formation of the young men; and a very moderate price. Hence he bought it, and the small garden and plot of land that went with it, for the sum of sixteen hundred francs, which he was forced to borrow. When the deal was finalised, he set himself to repair and clean it, adding the bare necessities of furniture. The two small plank beds and the little dining table, were the work of his own hands.

These things done, he installed his two Brothers in that tiny dwelling which was thus the cradle of the Institute of the Little Brothers of Mary. The stamp of poverty was everywhere evident; but the stable of Bethlehem and the house of Nazareth were poor, and the children of Mary were to resemble their Mother and bear the seal of her poverty and humility from their very birth as a religious body. It was on the 2nd of January, 1817, that the two novices took possession of the house and began their community life, laying the foundation of the Institute of the Little Brothers of Mary.

Their time was spent in prayer, manual work and study. In the beginning, the exercises of piety were few and short: morning prayer; attendance at Mass; a few short readings from the Christian's Manual or the Golden Book ¹⁴; rosary; visit to the

¹³ It belonged to Mr Bonner, who made chairs for the church. See two sale documents, OME, doc. 16 and 17.

¹⁴ "Golden Book" or "The practice of humility", by Dom de Sainte Catherine.

Blessed Sacrament 15; night prayer. The manual work took the form of making nails 16, from which they received enough money to pay for their food. Father Champagnat loved them as his children, visited them often, sometimes even lent a hand in their work, encouraged them, gave them lessons in reading and writing, guided them and confided to them his views and his plans for advancing the glory of God and securing the salvation of souls. The two novices faithfully corresponded to his attentive efforts; their winter was passed alone, practising virtue in peace and in fervour; spring brought them a new Brother. Antony Couturier 17,

15 It took place in the church, for the Brothers had a chapel only from 1820. It was situated above Father Champagnat's bed-room.

16 At that period, the industry was found in the entire region. The industrial towns of the valley of the Gier, of the valley of the Ondaine and of the valley of the Furan, were able to support associated activities in the surrounding country-side. The metallurgic processes provided wire which the country craftsmen turned into nails. In the off-season it was a way to make a little money, while remaining at home. It was a craft which lent itself to community involvement. On almost all the La Valla farms, there was a stone for making nails similar to the one which is in the Founder's room -at La Valla. (Cf. John-Paul Bravard, *L'Ondaine, vallée du fer*, p. 58, Ed. Le Henaff 1981. Also, A Balko, *La fabrication des clous*, FMS, 1976, No. 19, p. 244.

17 Brother Lawrence said: "My brother, second; me, third: Couturier or Brother Antony, fourth." (OME, doc. 167, p. 453).

a good, pious young man but quite uneducated, asked to join the community. His wish was granted and he was to become the outstanding and virtuous Brother Antony. He died at Ampuis on the 6th of March, 1850, having used up his strength and health in the instruction of children. His life was a model of fidelity to rule, of humility, obedience, patience and attachment to his vocation.

The parents of John-Baptist Audras were unaware of what Father Champagnat had in mind and of how their son felt about becoming a Brother with him. They put pressure on him to return home 18 but he vigorously resisted the idea, being now well settled and sure of his vocation. Though he begged them earnestly to leave him there in happiness, his prayers fell on deaf ears. Even worse, they opted to rule out further pleas by sending an older brother with the express order for him to return home. When that brother conveyed his parent's wish, the pious novice was thrown into turmoil. However, after a brief reflection, he ran off to find Father Champagnat, sobbing out: "My brother has come to take me home but I don't want to go with him. Please bring my parents to reason and persuade them to leave me in peace." The priest calmed and comforted young Audras and went out to speak to the waiting brother.

He went up to him with a laugh and in his own decisive way, inquired: "So, you want to take your brother home?" "Yes", was the reply, "my parents have ordered me to bring him back." "Instead of doing that", suggested the priest, "you would do better to ask your parents to let you join him here." "What would you make of me?" came the query, provoking the affirmation: "A good Brother, a good Religious!" The youth protested that he was too stupid for that and fit only to dig in the fields. "Come now," admonished the Father, "don't belittle yourself like that; it's a worthwhile thing to be able to dig; but come and join us and I shall certainly make something of you." The other insisted: "But, Father, I am too bad a boy to become a Religious." Assuring him that he knew better, and that he was not a bad boy but a fine one, Father Champagnat promised him that, if he came, he would not regret it and would do much good. "You almost make me feel that I would like to come", admitted the youth, "but people would laugh at the news of my coming here to be a Brother." "Let them laugh to their hearts' content", said the Father reassuringly.

18 In the spring of 1817.

"God will bless you, you will be happy and save your soul. What more do you need? Go and tell your parents that you want to come here with your brother and that I am expecting you at the end of the week. «The young man went home to his parents and had no great difficulty in getting them to agree to let him and his brother follow their vocation. He entered the novitiate a few days later 19 and took the name of Brother Lawrence 20, becoming the fourth Brother of the Institute. His name will come up a number of times in the course of this story, and we shall have cause to admire his simplicity, deep humility, piety and zeal for the christian instruction of children. His brother, John-Baptist, having a special devotion to St Aloysius Gonzaga, took the name of Brother Louis 21, and Granjon, that of Brother John-Mary. About the same time, Bartholomew Badard, a youth of fifteen or sixteen, entered the novitiate and, under the name of Brother Bartholomew 22, became an excellent Religious.

Father Champagnat hadn't forgotten about little Gabriel Rivat who, we saw earlier, was brought along to his catechism class. The child's piety and intelligence were so striking that he paid particular attention to him. At this stage, Gabriel had just made his First Communion 23 though he was only ten years old. In a desire to attach him to the fledgling Institute, Father Champagnat suggested to his parents that they should let him live with the Brothers. This would facilitate his education, and the priest himself promised to teach him Latin. To the novitiate 24 therefore he went, took a few Latin lessons and, before long 25, joined the Institute under the name of Brother Francis. This decision gave great pleasure to his mother who had on several occasions reminded Father Champagnat: "My child belongs to the

19 John-Claude continued to work at the farm until winter. He entered the novitiate on December 24th, 1817 (AFM, Entry Register).

20 LPC, pp. 316, pp. 316-321.

21 The first Brothers kept their baptismal name. Certain of them chose another name: Brother Louis because of devotion to Saint Louis of Gonzaga; Brother Francis in memory of his mother, Françoise.

22 Brother Bartholomew was born on April 24th, 1804. He entered on May 2nd, 1818 (LPC 2, p. 71). See note 11, Ch. V.

23 Born on Saturday, March 12th, 1808, he made his First Communion on April 19th, 1818. (Carnet 1 du Frère François). The normal age was nearer to 13 (AFM 146.003).

24 May 6th, 1818 (LPC 2, p. 226).

25 September 8th, 1819 (LPC 2, p. 226).

Blessed Virgin. I have often given and consecrated him to her 26. Now, I give him to you 27. Do what you please with him." The child, too young to judge of his own vocation, but perfectly obedient and docile, allowed himself to be guided entirely by the advice of his wise Director, rightly regarding him as the interpreter of God's will for him. When eventually he was old enough to judge for himself in this matter, it never entered his head to subject his vocation to a fresh test.

Once the parish priest of Tarantaise 28 made an effort to persuade him to go to school and study Latin with a view to becoming a priest. Seeing that his advice fell on deaf ears and had no effect whatever, the priest challenged him: "Why don't you want to be a priest, like your brother?" 29 "Because", was the rejoinder, "I don't do my own will but God's and that is made clear to me by my Superior." That reply dumbfounded the parish priest and all night those words were tossing around in his mind: "I don't do my own will but God's." Next morning he confided to Brother Louis: "That young Brother Francis of yours kept me awake all night. His sentiments are really sublime. If he perseveres in them, as I'm sure he will, God will bless him and make him an instrument for his glory."

We rightly admire Brother Francis's conduct on this occasion. Those who are called to religious life like him, at an early age cannot do better than model themselves on him when the passions begin to assert themselves, and the spirit of darkness raises doubts about their vocation. It is then that they must remember that in giving a vocation to a child incapable of mature consideration, in enabling him by grace to leave the world, God speaks to his heart not to his intelligence and reason. He causes that heart to

26 Especially at Valfleury, near Saint-Chamond, when Gabriel was five. He was received into the Confraternity of Our Lady Help of Christians (AFM, F. François, Carnet No. 1, p. 48).

27 In a personal note, Brother Francis wrote: "Given by my mother to Mary, at the foot of the altar in the Rosary chapel of the La Valla church" (AFM, Carnet 1, p. 48).

28 Francis Preher, having arrived at Tarantaise in May, 1816, had re-established a school which functioned before the Revolution. Father Courbon, Vicar General, had done his first studies there (LPC 2, p. 149).

29 John-Antony, brother of Brother Francis; born on Christmas day, 1793.

He was drafted into the army at the age of 20, then entered the seminary and was ordained in 1823. Curate at Saint-Martin-La-Plaine, he died at La Valla in 1830, in the presbytery where he had retired for health reasons (LPC 2, p. 224).

respond to the advice of a prudent Director, of a father, a mother or a friend; he gives it a relish for piety, an attraction for religious life and the grace to follow the path pointed out to him.

This early vocation shows the great mercy of God, for it preserves the child from many faults and shelters him from the dangers of the world which could reduce his virtue to a sad shipwreck; it is a call that is all the more trustworthy for being entirely devoid of self-love and human motives. However, one of the most dangerous snares of the devil can be encountered later, when the judgment is formed. It is then suggested to the young man that he entered religious life without knowing what he was doing, without understanding the obligations involved and, therefore, without vocation. That is a false line of reasoning, reflecting the influence of the devil and of the passions. When Christ called the apostles, he did not say: "Make a reasoned analysis and then follow me", but quite simply, "Follow me." The grace which touches the heart and inclines it towards good, is every bit as valuable as that which enlightens the mind. God, then, is the source of vocation, whether he draws us through the heart, the feelings or some attraction; or whether he sways our mind by inspiration, by reflection or by wise judgment.

Seeing his subjects increase, Father Champagnat thought he should give them a more organized life, conducive to living in community. He knew that he couldn't always be with them himself, but he saw the importance of not leaving them to their own resources. His desire was to have a Director in charge of them whose role would be to lead them, to see that the Rule was observed, and to correct those who breached it or who committed other exterior faults. To make obedience and submission less burdensome to them, he would let them choose their own Director. He therefore arranged a secret ballot and each one registered his written vote. Father Champagnat publicly counted these and proclaimed Brother John-Mary, Director of the community. He had been there the longest, and he secured the most votes.

After suitable trial efforts, Father Champagnat also adopted for his subjects a costume that was simple and modest ³⁰. This

³⁰ There was no question of a soutane or of the blue coat which was later suggested by Father Courveille, but of a black costume. Brother Lawrence, (P. Zind) in BI vol. XXI, p. 536, distinguishes six stages:

1. At the beginning, secular clothes.
2. 1818: black pants, black frock-coat.

distinguished them from laymen and gave a recognizable form to the Congregation, causing it to become known and to attract vocations. The costume 31 consisted of a sort of blue coat which reached just below the knee, black trousers, a small cloak and a round hat. He chose blue, to remind the Brothers that they were children of Mary and that in wearing her habit and her colour, they should work increasingly to copy her life by the imitation of her virtues.

The Rule of the Community was then modified to refine it, and the principal practices of the religious life were introduced. The members rose at five o'clock and, in community, they said morning prayers which they followed with a half-hour's meditation. Then came Holy Mass and the Little Hours of the Office of the Blessed Virgin. They studied till seven o'clock, breakfast time; then the chores (mostly manual ones) were attended to in silence until lunch, which was at midday. There followed a visit to the Blessed Sacrament and recreation, which was always taken together, with the focus of conversation on religious topics or on those which would develop them as educators. Some of the afternoon also was given to manual work. About six o'clock, the community gathered to recite Vespers, Compline, Matins and Lauds of the Office, as well as the rosary.

Spiritual reading followed. Then they went to the kitchen for dinner before taking recreation, as after lunch. Having said night prayers, they read the subject of meditation for next day and, at nine o'clock, retired for the night. Every Friday, the day concluded with the Chapter of Faults 32. The Brother Director began by declaring his faults, and the others followed in order of seniority.

In order to foster the recollection and piety of the Brothers, a room was taken over and set up as an oratory 33. Father

3. 1824: a kind of blue overcoat, blue cloak 4. 1827: black, buttoned soutane; for those in temporary vows, a woollen cord; at perpetual profession, a brass crucifix, set in ebony.

5. 1828: soutane sewn waist high and then fastened with hooks and eyes.

6. 1829: cloth stockings replace woven ones.

31 Brother John-Baptist doesn't distinguish between the first costume and its successor. The first black costume is described in the report of Inspector Guillard, in the spring of 1822 (OME, doc. 19 [3], p. 73).

32 Brother Francis mentions (Carnet, No. 8, 15): at 6 o'clock chapter of faults; at 6.30, Office.

33 Brother Francis recalls the different places where, each year, he made his Retreat: 1820, the little chapel on the first floor (AFM, carnet No. 1).

Champagnat himself, arranged and painted it, installing a small altar; but, as the Community was very poor and could not afford to buy the altar accessories, the most indispensable of these were borrowed from the parish church. In front of that altar and at the feet of Mary, the Brothers carried out all their exercises of piety, their spiritual reading and the Chapter of Faults. There, too, they received the habit of the Institute and there, eventually, they knelt to sign their first solemn commitments ³⁴.

In the first stages, the Brother Director gave out the prayers and did the spiritual reading; later, the Brothers took turns according to seniority. In the same way, weekly turns were taken for reading at table and for cooking, which was then a very simple matter. The normal fare consisted of soup, milk products, vegetables and water for drink. That frugal diet didn't take long to prepare and the cook was able to be present at almost all the Community exercises. Everything about the Brothers' dwelling matched the simplicity and poverty of their daily meals. Their beds were a mattress and a bolster filled either with dried leaves or straw, two coarse linen sheets and one or two blankets whose quality was on a par with the rest.

This organization of the Community, gave it quite a different aspect. In their piety, modesty, harmony and mutual charity, the Brothers evoked the life of the first Christians ³⁵ whose footsteps they faithfully followed. The Brother Director lived up to the confidence that had been placed in him, acquitting himself of his responsibility with prudent zeal, and firmness tempered by kindness. He was always a leader to his Brothers, first to arrive for an exercise and a model of regularity, piety and all the virtues of a Religious. He delivered a stirring talk to them each week on the duties of their holy state, on how to conquer vice, (especially the predominant passion), and how to practise virtue. These talks were well prepared and full of substance; they were simple, down o-earth and generally delivered with great verve. The Brothers were an attentive audience and applied themselves enthusiastically to the practice of virtue and the eradication of faults. Moreover, the Brother Director did not let kindness degenerate into flattery: failure in duties drew appropriate penance, administered prudently and charitably. In addition, each Brother selected

³⁴ See the text for the 1826 formula of commitment (OME, doc. 52, p. 137; and FMS, 1978, No. 31, pp. 412-414 and no. 32, pp. 424-426).

³⁵ Acts, 4, 32.

another to monitor his failings. It was an act of charity and humility, carried out by both parties simply and frankly. Brother John-Mary himself chose one of the youngest and begged him in terms characteristic of his great humility, to do him this kindness, pointing out each lapse from duty. However, some time later, believing that the young Brother was letting him off too lightly, he asked his permission to choose a substitute.

Father Champagnat paid frequent visits to his young recruits and spent all his leisure time with them. He gave them a reading lesson each day, and in the process, availed himself of every opportunity to lead them to reflections bearing on the love of God, the avoidance of sin and the practice of virtue. On one occasion he visited them at recreation and noticed that they spoke rather loudly and were somewhat too noisy. "My friends", he gently reproached them, "your recreations need to be less boisterous; they are too much like the entertainment of seculars. If you want to be Religious, your recreation and all your conduct must reflect that fact. The Little Brothers of Mary should strive to imitate their Mother in all her actions. Now she was always modest and recollected, even during the times of relaxation that nature required."

This fatherly reprimand was effective; the Brothers, who had only just left the world, and who were quite unaware of the defect pointed out to them, accepted the correction both humbly and gratefully. They exercised such control afterwards that it never had to be repeated. They distinguished themselves by their excellent spirit, their good will and their keen observance of the Rule, which each spontaneously adhered to out of love of God and a desire to advance in virtue. One point alone posed a problem for them and upset them when they failed. That was morning rising. Since they were very poor, and hadn't been able to afford an alarm clock, they sometimes rose too early, sometimes too late. When the difficulty was reported to Father Champagnat, he set about remedying it. A bell was put up on the front of the house. Then a wire was run across the hundred metres between house and presbytery, terminating in his bedroom. Each morning, at exactly five o'clock, he himself rang the bell to wake them.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Brothers take over the La Valla school. Father Champagnat goes to live with them. Instructions on running a class and on teaching catechism. Brothers in pairs catechize in the hamlets.

It has been noted already that the parish of La Valla did not have a schoolmaster ¹. This was a situation which Marcellin viewed with great sorrow and he longed for the day when his Brothers would be ready to teach. Meanwhile, since they were not yet up to standard, he employed a lay teacher ², and he did so to achieve two aims he believed necessary: to provide primary instruction for children of the parish; to polish up the knowledge that the Brothers had already acquired and induct them into the method of teaching ³. Father Champagnat's zeal and devotedness urged him to form the Brothers himself, but the demands of his ministry denied him the time to do so in the way he believed necessary.

The young man he chose for the purpose was admirably suited. He had lived with the Christian Brothers and was well

¹ The La Valla Archives indicate that John Montmartin, in December, 1816, and again on May 27th, 1819 was called a Master-writer and that John Francis Maisonneuve was authorized to teach at La Valla, on May 10th 1819 (Cf. Civil Register of the State, ADL, TA). The parish priest, Rebod, came to the defence of a teacher who complained that the Brothers' school reduced him to a very poor state. Father Champagnat by insisting that the parish priest verify for himself that not one pupil of the Brothers had been drawn from the teacher's class (OME, doc. 166 [7] p. 439 and corresponding note), shows that he had been very careful to harm no-one. For the teaching personnel of the time, see LPC 1, pp. 14-15.

² A letter, written 60 years later, (17/XI/1888) by two widows (Jayet and Moulin) who were young girls in 1816, gives us some information on the very first school (hamlet of Le Sardier, near Le Saut du Gier), where Father Champagnat had installed the teacher, Maisonneuve, who was to train the first Brothers (FMS, 1973, No.6, p.86).

³ Brother Paul Boyat, Quelques aspects de la pédagogie des Petits Frères. BI, XXIX, pp. 76-77; also, P. Zind, Sur les traces de M. Champagnat, Vol. 2, pp. 76-77.

educated 4. In particular, his thorough knowledge of the Christian Brothers' Simultaneous Method 5, made him ideal for the position. This was the method that Father Champagnat wanted his Brothers to adopt. The teacher lived with the Brothers, set up his school in their house and the children soon filled it. The Brothers backed him up in his teaching, watched him in action, copied his style and adopted his method. In addition, out of school hours he gave them their own lessons on the various aspects of teaching.

It wasn't long before they were capable of running the school themselves and they suggested to Father Champagnat that they do so. He was opposed to the idea, because he wanted their first efforts to be in a humbler sphere and played out on a more modest stage. So he assembled them and confided to them: tilt may be that you are rash in believing yourselves adequately equipped to run the La Valla School yourselves. In any case, we mustn't forget that the spirit of our Congregation is one of humility. That's why it is fitting for us to begin on a smaller scale. You want to engage in the christian education of youth. That is the end of your vocation and something I thoroughly endorse. However, want the first fruits of your zeal to be dedicated to the most ignorant and most deprived children. My proposal, therefore, is that you go and teach 6 in the hamlets of the parish."

The proposal was greeted not only with respect and submission but with joy. The hamlets of Luzernaud, Chomiol and a few others were chosen. The Brothers went of a morning and returned of an evening. These first efforts, being blessed by God, were very fruitful. The good country folk, charmed and edified by the Brothers' devotedness, simplicity and zeal, reported to Father Champagnat their distinct satisfaction.

Within just over a year, the schoolmaster's misconduct and worldly attitudes forced Father Champagnat to dismiss him and to entrust his task to the Brothers. It was assigned to Brother John-Mary, the Director of the House. Through a wise and prudent firmness, he managed to maintain the order and discipline established by his predecessor. The favourable impression of the

4 The teacher Maisonneuve, had no teacher's certificate (FMS, 1973, No.

6, p. 86) because it was not required of the de la Salle Brothers in France at that time, in accordance with the law of February 29th, 1816 (LPC 1, art.

36, p. 21).

5 See Note 3, above.

6 From the beginning, the Brothers taught not only catechism but the school subjects. The hamlets selected were at a short distance.

school and the standard of instruction were preserved intact, because the Brother was quite well trained and had abundant zeal and devotedness. He was known in the parish for his piety and virtue, a fact which made no small contribution to his' authority over the children and which caused the parents to be delighted at his appointment.

Up till this time, the people of La Valla hadn't paid much attention to the existence of the Brothers; they knew nothing about the way the Brothers lived or what they aimed at; but perceiving their zeal and their devotedness for the instruction of children, and experiencing the success that resulted, they unanimously supported and applauded them. The enrolments increased considerably, pupils flocking in every day from all quarters of the parish. The children who were poor, paid nothing ⁷; the rest, paid only a small amount.

Father Champagnat was the animating force of the House. It was he who kept up the Brothers' spirits and guided them; it was he who induced the parents to send their children along; he now decided to extend the school's facilities. A single class was quite inadequate, he saw, for the large numbers offering. He formed a second one and was thus able to divide the pupils, classifying them according to ability ⁸ and consequently contributing greatly to their accelerated progress.

His attention was required for another, more serious matter. Some parents, unable to secure accommodation for their children to sleep at the Brothers' place, lodged them in the town, where they misbehaved, because they were left to their own resources after school. To get over this problem, Father Champagnat had repairs done to the house, and extensions put on. This enabled the Brothers to take in those children who had been placed in private houses. A few poor children also sought refuge. These were given a kind and enthusiastic welcome and, though the Community was itself penniless, it provided for all their needs.

⁷ This was in conformity with the Instruction of February 29th, 1816, of which No. 14 prescribed: "Every township is required to arrange for the children in it to receive primary education and that the poor do so at no cost" (RLF, p. 9). There was also the commitment given by the first Brothers: "Secondly, we undertake to teach freely the poor sent by the parish priest" (OME, doc. 62, p. 138).

⁸ Normally, with two classes one was for teaching reading (lecteurs) and the other for teaching writing, arithmetic and, gradually other subjects (écrivains). The classes were also called the lower (la petite) and the higher (la grande) (Cf. SMC, Vol. 2, p. 77).

Marcellin, who had unlimited confidence in God, even accepted responsibility for several abandoned children or orphans. He had them taught, fed and dressed. Later he placed them with respectable families and continued to monitor their conduct, to guide them and be a father to them. During the first year, he had twelve of these children⁹, whom he provided with everything necessary. When he was blamed for his actions, which were said to overtax the resources of the house, his retort was: "It's many years since I first heard that giving to the poor does not impoverish; that assistance at Mass does not impede prosperity; we are going to put those views to the test." Then he added in tones of deep faith: "God who sends us these children and gives us the graces to welcome them will certainly give us the means to feed them."

This new organization gave the school a considerable boost¹⁰. The classes were better managed and progress was more rapid. The children, thoroughly disciplined, were happy to attend school. They loved their teachers, had a taste for work and benefited from the good example and teaching that they received. On top of that, they took back to their homes, the good principles and the practices of virtue, that they had acquired¹¹.

The direction of the community of Brothers occupied much of Father Champagnat's time; it took up his recreations and all the periods not given to priestly duties. Yet, he was well aware that more was needed, since the Brothers were mere beginners in the religious life and in the art of teaching, and had constant need of his correction and advice. He saw that there would be certain shortcomings in their formation, as long as he was not at their head. Swayed by these reasons, and even more by his love for the Brothers, he decided to take up residence with them. He raised the matter with the parish priest, who made every effort to dissuade him. "How will you get on", he queried, "with those young people of yours? They may be good and pious but they are uncouth and poor. Not one of them would be capable of attending to you or of preparing your meals." No matter how valid they

9 The document of Father Bourdin alludes to the criticism levelled against Father Champagnat for his use of collections to support his orphans (Cf. OME, doc. 166 [17] p. 445; and FMS, No. 36).

10 The Statistics of 1824, the first official ones of the Marist Brothers, indicate 80 pupils at La Valla (Cf. P. Zind, BI No. 162, p. 161).

11 That doesn't mean that he was the "Director, but only the catalyst and spiritual director". (MEM, pp. 18-19).

were, these reasons did not change Father Champagnat's thinking in the slightest. He didn't need to be told that community life would entail poverty, privations and all the sacrifices inherent in religious life; but these were the very spur to his desire to be with the Brothers. He could see that the best way of attaching them to their vocation, of bringing them to a love of poverty, of regular life and of all the virtues of their holy state, was to put himself at their head, to throw in his lot with theirs, to become one with them and to lead them by example, being the first to put into practice what he preached. Besides, he loved his Brothers as his own children. With the heart of a father, he felt that he should be amongst them, living with them and like them, sharing their poverty, helping in their zealous efforts for the education of children, and honouring, with them, all the observances of the religious life. From the very beginning he had devoted himself entirely to the foundation of the Brothers, had sacrificed everything for it; he had expected to have to give it his care and labour and had prepared himself to do that and even more: to sacrifice for it, if necessary, his strength, his health, his very life.

That devotedness was necessary, if the foundation of the Brothers was to succeed; that was the price he had to pay - not a whit less! So, he got permission to leave the presbytery and went to live permanently with the Brothers, carrying over his own small stock of furniture. He moved at night so that he wouldn't be seen and tongues wouldn't wag. He occupied a small, low and unhygienic room¹² which was nevertheless the best in the house.

His simple fare was prepared with that of the Brothers, but he ate by himself¹³. It was a great consolation for him to see himself surrounded by his Brothers, to live with them and to be able to give all his time to their education and spiritual formation. Like the Good Shepherd, he constantly led his little flock¹⁴: he worked with his Brothers whether in the garden or making nails; he took his recreations with them; he visited the classes to encourage the pupils and guide the teachers, to whom he gave private lessons, forming them to the supervision of children and other pedagogical skills. The Brothers held him in the highest esteem, loving him

¹² "He was satisfied to have a rather narrow room, low, unhealthy and poorly furnished; it adjoined the kitchen" (AA, p. 41).

¹³ "As for the daily fare of Father Champagnat, it was practically the same as the community's; for convenience, however, his table was apart from the others" (MEM, p. 21).

¹⁴ John, 10, 4.

as a father; but as they were simple folk and not well versed in the proprieties, while showing him deep respect, they treated him pretty much as an equal. Not much care was taken to lavish on him the attentions befitting his priestly dignity and his position as Superior. This can be gathered from the following fact: Father Champagnat lived with them four years¹⁵ before any of them thought of offering to make his bed or look after his room. He did both, without complaining, despite his many commitments. It wasn't until 1822, that Brother Stanislaus¹⁶ asked could he do him that service and it was only with great reluctance that Father Champagnat consented.

When Marcellin moved in as head of his little Community, it was not with the intention of assuming the direction of the House. This would have been incompatible with the demands his ministry made on him; besides, it was more properly the province of the Brother Director than his own. He therefore entrusted to him the details of the running of the house, leaving him full liberty to act; far from hampering or diminishing his authority, he strove to strengthen and augment it. His presence in the Community enlivened the zeal and the fervour of all the Brothers; the children, too, became more pious and better behaved, while their parents, delighted to see him at the head of the school, were loud in their expressions of joy and satisfaction.

It is true that Father Champagnat was careful not to meddle in the government of the house, but he unobtrusively kept a check on the smallest aspects of his Brothers' conduct. He did this in order to form them in solid virtue and to make them first-rate teachers. With these goals in view, he worked relentlessly at correcting their defects, perfecting their characters, and inspiring them to love prayer and savour it; he likewise instilled zeal for the christian education of youth, taught them how to take a catechism class, showed them the secrets of supervision, and instructed them in disciplining a class and in forming the pupils' hearts and consciences.

He observed one day, that the Brother supervising the boarders, was taking little notice of them and was engrossed in reciting his Office. Father Champagnat drew his attention to this state of affairs, with the remark: "Brother, you should never lose

¹⁵ This seems to indicate that he came to live with the Brothers in 1818, since in February, 1822, when Brother Stanislaus arrived, he had already spent four years with them (LPC 2, p. 473).

¹⁶ LPC 2, p. 473; and AA, p. 47.

sight of your pupils." "The problem is", the Brother replied, "that, if I don't keep recollected, I can't pray and I reap no fruit from my Office." "Your first duty", the Father insisted, "is to supervise your children so as to keep them from harm and preserve their innocence. If you do that, your prayer will be more pleasing to

God and more meritorious, even though you experience a little distraction from your work, than it would be by avoiding distraction at the expense of an important duty. Do you know what it means to draw fruit from religious exercises? It means to obtain by prayer, the grace to practise the duties of one's state in life and to act well on all occasions. Hence, St. Augustine said that one who prays well, lives well. He meant that such a one knows how to sanctify all his actions, how to carry them out in a spirit of faith and to turn his work, of whatever kind, into a continual prayer. The best fruit, therefore, that you can draw from your exercises of piety, is to be faithful to all your responsibilities, to carry out perfectly the duties entrusted to you and to be for your pupils, a model of charity, patience, regularity and modesty." Marcellin often recommended to the Brothers to use discretion and prudence in their explanations of the catechism and to take good care to avoid labelling this or that fault a mortal or venial sin. Otherwise they risked giving the children a false conscience¹⁷ and exposing them to offend God. On one occasion, a Brother departed from the rule he had given. "Confine yourself", Marcellin warned, "to inspiring the children with a great horror of sin and leave it to God and the confessor to pronounce on the seriousness of their faults." Another time, having learned that a young Brother had imposed excessively strict prohibitions on the pupils, he summoned him and explained: "Speaking, wasting time... such breaches are not matters for severe embargoes. Go back and tell them that if they happen to speak a few words or fail slightly against your commands, there is no sin at all."

We can see how scrupulously sensitive he was in this matter and how much he feared leading children to act against their consciences. He often sat in on the Brothers' catechism classes and pointed out to them afterwards the mistakes they had made, what they should have avoided, how they could have captured the attention of the class, how adjusted better to its level of understanding and how instilled into it a love for the holy truths they were teaching. "To instruct the children well", he reminded them, «is a small matter; to make them love religion, is everything." Before very long, he had several Brothers who were skilful catechists and who carried out this ministry with a success beyond his wildest dreams.

¹⁷ The same attitude is found in Father Colin: See, "Entretiens spirituels", doc. 99 [8].

To inspire the Brothers with a spirit of zeal and to impress on them that the goal of their vocation was to save souls, he didn't rest satisfied with their catechism lessons, to the children of the school; in addition, on Sundays and certain other days, he sent the Brothers in pairs into the hamlets of the parish, to teach catechism to the country folk.

When they reached the hamlet they had been assigned, the two Brothers assembled children and adults in a barn or any other suitable place, said a prayer, sang a hymn and tested the young people on the words of the catechism; then the Brothers expounded the answers they received, using short, clear, supplementary questions. The session concluded with a short story having a moral to it, or with a few examples from history. As their instructions were carefully prepared, as their style was simple and moving and as they reinforced their efforts with deep piety and striking modesty, people, (often amounting to the total hamlet population), flocked in from all sides to hear them. Father Champagnat himself used to go along to the scene of their catechetical labours to listen, and to assess their performances. He made a practice of never alerting them in advance and he even arranged to see and hear everything without being noticed by the Brothers.

During the evening recreation, he would point out mistakes that had been made, correct any inaccuracies and show what had been missed from a complete explanation of a truth or doctrine. He would approve and praise the favourable aspects and always finished with a word of encouragement. The excellence of the role of catechist was highlighted, as was also the immense good that the Brothers were called to do, provided that they were filled with the spirit of their state and carried out their assigned task with total zeal.

These exhortations had such an effect on the Brothers that they all thought it a special favour to be chosen to teach catechism in the hamlets. It was a favour which they earnestly asked, but which was not lightly given. It had to be deserved by constant piety, solid humility and perseverance in a regular and edifying life. For a long time, Brother Lawrence had asked to be allowed the privilege of teaching catechism at Le Bessac. This was a laborious and challenging mission and could not be earned without many an act of zeal, self-denial and humility. Le Bessac, situated on the heights of Mt Pilat, at a distance of about six miles from La Valla, is shrouded in snow for at least six months of the year.

There was no priest in the hamlet, so the children and even the adults were abysmally ignorant.

Brother Lawrence used to carry his meagre stock of provisions with him from La Valla, returning on Thursdays to refresh himself spiritually with his Brothers and replenish his supplies. He stayed at a private house in Le Bessac 18 and prepared his own food:

soup (enough made in the morning to last the whole day); some potatoes and a little cheese. Twice a day he went round the hamlet ringing a little bell to gather the children. His virtue had given rise to such respect for him that hats were doffed by all, as he passed. He taught the assembled children their prayers and catechism and also how to read. On Sundays he got all the inhabitants together in the local chapel and began proceedings with evening prayer, the rosary and a hymn. After that he explained the truths of religion to these good rustics, and how to receive the Sacraments fruitfully. Besides, they were taught how to sanctify their actions, their sufferings and their poverty, by offering them to God and accepting his holy will without complaint.

Brother Lawrence experienced indescribable happiness in teaching these simple folk and in giving his life to the education of poor, ignorant children. The following story makes that clear.

One Thursday, having stocked up as usual at La Valla, he was returning to Le Bessac with Father Champagnat who was headed in that direction on a sick call. The snow lay two or three feet deep on the ground and the roads were iced over. Brother Lawrence was carrying a sack containing a large loaf of bread, some cheese and a quantity of potatoes, his provisions for the week.

Although the Brother was strong and the day was cold, because of the condition of the roads, he was sweating under his load. Noticing this state of affairs, Father Champagnat said to him:

"That's a difficult task you've got there, Brother." "O beg to differ, Father", was the answer, "but it is not burdensome. It is extremely pleasant." "I can't see", queried the Father, "how you can find it pleasant to scramble over these mountains, week after week, trudging through snow and ice, shouldering a heavy load and risking a headlong fall into some precipice." "I find it pleasant", the Brother insisted, "because of my absolute certainty that God counts our every step and that the pains we experience and the exertions we make, for love of him, he will reward with an immense weight of glory." "So you are quite happy", Marcellin

18 AA, p. 45.

challenged, "to teach and to catechize in this wretched part of the country and to carry your provisions on your back like a tramp." "I am so happy, in fact", he affirmed, "that I wouldn't exchange my lot for all the wealth in the world." "Well, you certainly have a high esteem for your task", Marcellin agreed, "but do you deserve to be given it?" "Oh no, Father", Brother Lawrence declared, "I am convinced that I do not deserve the favour of teaching catechism at Le Bessat; it is mine simply because of the goodness of God." "All that you have said is true", Marcellin concurred, "but at least you have to admit that to-day is a very nasty day." "No, Father", was the resounding response, "it is one of the finest days of my life." As he said these words his face blossomed into a smile and tears of joy stole down his cheeks. Father Champagnat, full of emotion and consolation at the sight of so much virtue, could scarcely suppress his own feelings 19.

It is a fortunate Marist Brother who is moved to imitate such an example; who thinks it a privilege to be allotted a class of poor, uncultured and ignorant children; who loves the hidden life and seeks to do good quietly. He certainly has the true spirit of his vocation; God will bless his labours and shower him with graces and consolations. It is Brothers like this who are the pillars and the glory of the Institute.

19 Towards the end of his life, Brother Lawrence begged Brother Francis to let him go and "teach catechism from village to village, asking for his keep" (CSG 11, p. 71).

CHAPTER EIGHT

Foundations at Marlhes and Saint-Sauveur. Brother Louis sets an example. Establishments at Tarantaise and Bourg-Argental

The school at La Valla was a success. The good conduct of the children, their progress, their piety and their attachment to their teachers, all served to focus public attention on the Brothers and to spread knowledge of them to the nearby parishes.

Some of the parish priests, anxious to secure such teachers for their schools, put their requests to Father Champagnat. Amongst them, Father Alliot 1, parish priest of Marlhes, claimed the right to be first served. Since several Brothers were now quite well trained, Marcellin believed that it was possible to accede to his former parish priest's wish, and promised him two Brothers. The first establishments like the Mother House itself, had poverty for a foundation. The house 2 which Father Alliot bought to lodge them, was small and unhealthy, with water seeping everywhere. Brother Louis was appointed Director and opened the house in 18193.

When the Brothers arrived at Marlhes, there was neither furniture nor provisions in their house. Hence they had to spend a few days at the presbytery where they came under very close scrutiny. There was general agreement that they were good, pious and modest; but it was also considered that they were too simple and uneducated. From the bedroom, Brother Louis and his companion heard the curate, a nephew of the parish priest, suggest to his uncle: "These two young people won't achieve anything-they are too lacking in knowledge and experience to run a school. They are really a pair of children 4. How could they discipline and

1 "Father Alliot took over the parish of Marlhes in 1781. It was he who gave the Founder his First Communion, in 1800. He insisted on having two of the first Brothers for his school in 1818, but saw them withdrawn in 1821. He died in 1822" (AA, p. 42). On Alliot, see P. Piat, Jean-Antoine Alliot, curé de Marlhes de 1781 a 1822.

2 Still to be seen in the village square at the time of this re-edition.

3 The statistics indicate the end of 1818 (AA, p. 42).

4 Brother Louis was 16; Brother Antony, 18 (AFM, 137.13).

form, children like themselves? I'm afraid that it won't be very long before we regret having invited them to the parish.¹¹ "That is quite true", echoed the parish priest. "Those two Brothers are very young; they could be a lot better educated, and I don't give them much chance of succeeding."¹² "Do you hear the way they talk about US?" protested Brother Louis to his confrere. "Let us leave this house where we are so harshly criticized. We would be better off within our own four bare walls; better having only bread to eat, than living in this place. Let us open our school, begin work in earnest and prove to them that we are equal to the task confided to us by our superior."

Next day, the school was opened. They concentrated on establishing discipline, on necessary silence, on habits of orderliness and cleanliness, on formation in piety, modesty and courtesy, on cultivating emulation and all those externals which denote a well-conducted school. In less than a month, the children were transformed. They seemed to have absorbed the piety, reserve and modesty of their young teachers. Parents, authorities and the general public⁵ were delighted at seeing the children so docile, so polite, so keen to learn and so attached to their masters. People never tired of watching them pass along the streets on the way to their hamlets. They walked in pairs, orderly and quiet. Cries of admiration went up on all sides. The curate and the parish priest were pleasantly surprised and could see that they had judged the Brothers too hastily. However, they were the first to rejoice at their success, to applaud it, to praise them as teachers and to do everything possible to encourage parents and children to maintain those happy beginnings.

Brother Louis, who was thoroughly imbued with the spirit of his state, taught not merely as a schoolmaster, but as a religious and an apostle. Of course, he was faithful to the secular instruction, because he knew this was a duty, as well as a way of attracting the children and winning them to God. His aim and ambition, however, were not to make great scholars of them but worthy Christians.

Brother Louis often reminded his colleague: "Brother, there are one hundred⁶ children in our classes. Well, then, that's one hundred souls whose innocence is entrusted to us and whose

⁵ AA, p. 43.

⁶ That is, in fact, the number given by the first statistics of 1824 (BI No. 162, p. 161).

salvation is largely in our hands. Those children will be during life, what we make them; we are the key to their future conduct. If we instil sound principles and form them to virtue, they will turn out fine Christian specimens. If, on the other hand, we neglect their religious instruction, teaching them only secular knowledge, most of them will be unworthy Christians, that is men filled with vice, and void of virtue. So, depending on how we carry out our task, we shall contribute greatly either to their salvation or their ruin. It can be said of us, what Simeon said of the divine child Jesus, 'They are set up for the salvation or for the fall of many' ⁷; for the salvation of all those whom we care for, instructing them and bringing them up as christians, for the ruin of those whom we leave in ignorance of our holy religion and whose faults we leave unchecked. The parents send us their children to learn reading and writing, but God leads them to us so that we can teach them to know Jesus Christ and how to reach heaven and so that we can make them pious and virtuous. There you have our goal! Let us strive to fulfil it; let us, without forgetting the rest, strive for it above all."

With such sound views and such religious principles, Brother Louis could not fail to bring up the children properly. His class was a real training-ground for virtue. The religious exercises were carried out with admirable piety and fervour. Catechism always held pride of place: every child in the school, learned and recited it twice a day. Brother Louis was such an adept at capturing the children's interest by his explanations, that they listened to him with rapt attention. It was especially the religious instructions which attracted the children to the school and bound them to it.

In the evening, they repeated at home what he had taught, the examples he had used and the virtuous practices he had recommended. The result was that the parents benefited from his instructions just as much as their children.

Brother Louis had a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin and so he made her Superioress of the House and wanted to be seen only as her steward. His zeal for spreading love of that divine Mother and for inspiring the children with devotion to her, was tireless. Each week, he gave a special instruction on this subject ⁸ and used every opportunity besides, to speak about her. Under such a master, the school could not fail to prosper. The children

⁷ Lk, 2,34.

⁸ Catechism on Our Lady is still given by the Brothers to the youth of to-day (Constitutions and Statutes, art. 84.1, 1986).

knew practically nothing when the Brothers first came to Marlhes. In little over a year, most of them could read, write and do a little arithmetic. Even more important, they knew by heart the four sections of the catechism⁹ and by their piety and behaviour were the pride and joy of their parents and a leaven for the whole parish.

Mr Colomb de Gaste¹⁰, Mayor of Saint-Sauveur-en-Rue, spent some of the summer with his family in their residence at Le Coin¹¹. Of a Sunday, he attended Mass at Marlhes, which gave him the opportunity to see the Brothers and their pupils there. He was very struck by the piety of the former and by the laudable deportment and behaviour of the latter. "Who are these teachers of yours?" he asked the parish priest. "I have been most impressed by them. Where did you get them?" The parish priest informed him that they were a group of Brothers under the care of Father Champagnat; that they were doing well and giving great satisfaction; and that they were loved by the parish and had managed to transform the children completely since taking charge of them.

Pleased with what he heard of the Brothers, Mr Colomb¹² immediately resolved to endow a similar foundation for his own parish of Saint-Sauveur. He put a successful request to Father Champagnat for two Brothers, and the opening of the new school was set for all Saints' day, 1820. Messieurs Colomb, de St Trivier¹³ and de la Rochette¹⁴, accepted responsibility for repairs to the house, for providing the essential articles of furniture and

⁹ These four sections are: The Apostles' Creed; the sacraments; the ten commandments; and the Lord's Prayer (Cf. Elisabeth Germain, *Langages de la foi à travers l'histoire*. Fayard, Paris, 1972, p. 44).

¹⁰ Peter Francis de Colomb, a squire, a Lord of Hauteville and Gaste (LPC 2, pp. 146-147; and OME, doc. 19, p. 74). He advised Father Champagnat to put an article in the Rule, forbidding the Brothers to dine with the parish priest or with outsiders (AA, p. 44).

¹¹ Le Coin was then a hamlet which, like Le Bessat, would later become a parish and township under the name of Saint-Regis who had passed that way in the 17th Century. In the first half of the 19th Century, Le Coin, belonged to the parish and township of Marlhes. Mr Colomb de Gaste, although Mayor of Saint-Sauveur, was a parishioner of Marlhes (LPC 2, pp. 146-147).

¹² The families of Colomb and Champagnat were certainly acquainted, if only because of the political activity of John Baptist Champagnat during the Reign of Terror (LPC 2, p. 146).

¹³ Cardinal Donnet has made it clear that Mr de Trivier had little to do with the foundation of the school of Saint-Sauveur, but much with that of Bourg-Argental (CSG 111, p. 544).

¹⁴ Probably Claude Victor de la Rochette, a knight and Lord of Bonneville.

for guaranteeing to the Brothers, a small annual income ¹⁵. Brother John-Francis ¹⁶, a very zealous type, was appointed as Director but being somewhat limited in education, he was assisted by a young Brother capable of taking the advanced class. This school ¹⁷, like those of La Valla and Marlhes, was a complete success.

At Marlhes, the Brothers enjoyed the trust and esteem of the parents to such an extent that every single one wanted their children at the school and a large number of pupils came even from neighbouring parishes. But the extraordinary success of the school was partly its undoing. As we have already noted, the Brothers' house was small, unhealthy and poorly constructed. Besides, the classrooms were too small for the numbers, as far as space, air and light were concerned. As this state of things endangered the Brothers' health, Father Champagnat asked that the house be repaired and extended.

The parish priest admitted that the Brothers' quarters were unsatisfactory and that the situation called for improvement. However, he was in no hurry to meet Father Champagnat's demands, whether because he was short of money or because Brother Louis ¹⁸ had been transferred, against his wishes and despite his representations. In those early ventures, people were happy with the Brothers and testified to their success, admiring their personal lives and approving their method of teaching and of looking after the children. Yet they were far from counting on the stability of the work or placing full confidence in the Congregation. On the contrary, it was looked on as something new, as a building without foundation, which the blasts of adversity ¹⁹ would capsize or carry off at the first opportunity.

The success of the school was not attributed to the particular spirit of the Congregation, the grace of state; it was seen as due

¹⁵ The report of Inspector Guillard reveals the pittance they received: 150 francs per year for the two of them. In addition they required a small contribution from the children who could pay; .50 fr; .75 fr. or 1 fr. (OME, doc. 19, p. 74).

¹⁶ Stephen Roumesy, who was to leave the Congregation later (LPC 2, p. 288).

¹⁷ LPC 2, p. 620.

¹⁸ The school was closed. Brother Louis replaced Brother John-Mary at La Valla and the latter was appointed Director of the school of Bourg-Argental (LPC 2, pp. 590 ff). For an attempt to date these events, see Appendix to chapter.

¹⁹ Mt. 7,27.

to the personal competence of the individual in charge of the school²⁰ and as the fruit of his talents. As a result, when a transfer took place, all was thought to be lost and the belief was held that the prosperity of the school departed with the Brother who was moved. Father Alliot held this belief with special conviction. So it was that, at the very same time that he was as king Father Champagnat for Brothers, he was sending off to the Christian Brothers at Lyon, the young men seeking advice on religious life. In fact, he would have regarded it as jeopardizing the interests, the vocation and the future of those postulants and as highly imprudent, to direct them to the Little Brothers of Mary or even to sit by and let them go there. His biggest mistake in the matter was that he didn't conceal, (even from the Brothers), his thoughts on this point.

"Don't bank on your Society's surviving", he warned Brother Louis. "A work like this can last, only if it is built on rock and your Congregation is built on nothing but sand ²¹; resources are needed which you neither have now nor will ever have." Brother Louis calmly retorted that the rock foundation which a Congregation should have was poverty and contradiction. He thanked God that these were there in abundance and they were for him a sure guarantee of God's blessing.

Another day he challenged Brother Louis with the folly of leaving a place where he was achieving much success. "I am going away, Father", he explained, "because obedience summons me." "But, don't you see", argued the priest, "that your departure will spell the death of the school?" Brother Louis did not agree, maintaining that his successor would surpass his performance, something which Fr Alliot dismissed as impossible. "Nat only is it possible", the Brother persisted, "but it is quite certain: for he is more capable and more pious than I." "You are well liked here", inveigled the parish priest, "and you are succeeding; stay on, and I shall take care of you and your future." "Never", was the curt reply which drew from the parish priest an equally curt: "You are wrong." Brother Louis insisted that he must do his duty; that when his Superior commanded, he must obey. "Y our Superior", Father Alliot maintained, "is inexperienced, unintelligent

²⁰ Father Alliot puts trust in a particular individual whom he knows, Brother Louis, but not in a Congregation which is attracting criticism (BI Jan. 1955, p. 158; and OME, doc. 19, Canton de 5t Chamond, April 26th, pp. 75-76).

²¹ Mt. 7,26.

and incompetent. His removing you from here against my advice, is a clear proof of it. Besides, I have known him a long time now." "At La Valla", countered Brother Louis, "they have a different opinion of Father Champagnat, regarding him as a wise and clever man; and we Brothers, look on him as a saint." The parish priest, quite exasperated, made no reply, and Brother Louis left, after as king for, and receiving, a blessing.

We can only admire the way Brother Louis handled this situation, giving evidence of the great virtues that were the basis of his character. In his humility and modesty, he rates himself well below his confreres in fervour and skills. Obedience has a child-like naturalness in him and he finds it so indispensable to his religious life that he calls it simply his duty, asserting: "My Superior commands; I must obey." He doesn't say: I must analyse the Superior's command; I must explain things to him: I must point out how the parish priest feels and the suffering that my transfer will give him. No, he says simply: I must obey.

For this Superior, who gives a command fraught with so much difficulty, whom he hears blamed and denounced, Brother Louis evinces incomparable respect and veneration. Firm as a rock in his vocation, he sets such little store by the temporal lures put before him that he doesn't bother to express his contempt for them; they fail to draw an answer from him. No member of the Institute should ever forget this example from one of his first models. Let him rather be a worthy confrere in like circumstances.

God rewarded Brother Louis for his noble conduct, starting with what he perhaps longed for most: the success of the school which had cost him so much work, anxiety and sacrifice. The new incumbent achieved complete success, in fact, winning the affection of the children, the confidence of the parents and the esteem of the parish priest. However, the house was in such a bad state that it was dangerous to the residents. When Marcellin visited his Brothers, he was so struck by their painful situation that he decided to remove them.

He went to see the parish priest, who gave him a cold reception. "I am taking my Brothers away," Marcellin announced. "Of course, you will send others in their place," suggested Father Alliot. "No," was the answer, "for I have none to sacrifice. The house is in such a deplorable condition that I couldn't in conscience leave Brothers or children there." So the Brothers went off to La Valla a few days later, and that foundation was given

up, temporarily at least, for it started again in 1833, with a new parish priest, Father Duplaix 22.

It was about this time that the school at Tarantaise was opened, with Brother Lawrence in charge. He had no one to assist him, and his school was a barn 23. It didn't have much by way of normal furnishings but there was no shortage of fresh air and space. He had no residence of his own but slept in the same dormitory as the pupils who were catered for by the parish priest. He ate much the same food as he had done at Le Bessac, and again prepared his meals at the presbytery.

Despite his teaching commitment at Tarantaise, he kept up his Sunday and Thursday catechism classes at Le Bessac. He would go through the village ringing his bell to summon the children; he went into the houses to take over the little ones and even grown-ups known to need religious instruction; he would gather them all in the village chapel sometimes keeping them there for several hours while they prayed or listened to his explanations on the truths of the christian faith. Brother Lawrence had a special gift for imparting an understanding of these truths and for making them loved and savoured. He had the knack of securing the children's attention, rousing their interest and leading them to love their catechism class. Even more to his credit, the grown-ups paid just as much attention, and they treated the divine word spoken by him, with the same respect, as when it came from the lips of their parish priest.

The success of the school of Saint-Sauveur was the talk of the town at Bourg-Argental, situated only a few kilometres away. Mr de Pleyné 24, who was its Mayor inquired of Mr Colomb, where he had secured those teachers whom the public praised so highly. The latter was better informed than anyone else, on the good which the Brothers were achieving, and therefore evinced a lively interest in them and their Founder. He explained to the inquirer, who they were, their aim, their way of life and the terms on which they would operate in a parish 25. Mr de Pleyné had for a long

22 Claude Duplay, elder brother of John-Louis, fellow-seminarian of Marcellin and later, Superior of the Major Seminary (LPC 2, pp. 208 ff.).

23 He was responsible for all the beginners, and the parish priest or his curate, looked after the Latin Students, some of whom were boarders.

Brother Lawrence was also a supervisor of the boarders (LPC 2, p. 316 and AA, p. 45).

24 Mr Devaux de Pleyne, LPC 2, p. 175.

25 Notes of Inspector Guillard on his visit to the district of Bourg-Argental, Spring 1822 (OME, doc. 19), pp. 72-73).

time entertained the idea of setting up a Brothers' school in his village but could not proceed for lack of funds. He was therefore delighted to see that the very modest demands made by the Little Brothers of Mary put him in a position to carry out his project. Writing immediately to Father Champagnat, he asked for three Brothers and was given them. He then attended to the house and furniture with such despatch that, within a few weeks, all was in readiness.

The Brothers destined for Bourg-Argental 26, were sent off by Father Champagnat in these terms:

"Brothers, our aim in coming together to form this little Society, was to impart christian instruction and christian education to the children of small country parishes; but now we find large towns looking to us for the same service. It is one that we certainly ought not to refuse them, seeing that the love of Christ, which should be our guide in loving, goes out to all men and that city children, too, have been redeemed by his Blood. But there are two things I want to say on this point: we should never forget that we were founded principally for country parishes and that we should give special preference to their schools; religious instruction in large parishes and in the towns, needs to be at greater depth because of their greater spiritual needs and their more advanced primary education. In those centres more than anywhere else, pride of place must be given to catechism and religious practice. It is the Brothers' duty to bestow all the greater care on the christian education of children, the more neglected they are and the less their parents bother about them.

Go, my dear Brothers, go with confidence to produce fruit from the field that Divine Providence has given you to clear. If your task seems a hard one, remember that it is given you by God, whose help will not fail you, provided you are faithful to him.

The authorities, who give you charge of their school, and the parents, who can't wait to entrust their children to you, rely on you to give those children sound secular instruction. The Church, who sends you, has loftier goals in view: she asks you to teach those same children to know, love and serve their heavenly Father, to make them into good Christians and your school into a seed-bed of saints.

26 The superiority of Bourg-Argental did not stem from the size of its population - less than 2000, as against the 2500 or so of La Valla and Marlhes. Its importance lay in the political role it had played since the Middle Ages. At the time of the Revolution, it was one of three bailiwicks where the highest deputies of the Estates General met.

You are sent to destroy the reign of sin and set up that of virtue; to preserve the children's innocence; to prepare them for their First Communion; to get them to know Jesus Christ and the great love he has for them; to inspire them with devotion to Mary; and to train them to love the law of God. That, my dear Brothers, is the most important part of your task. That is the object of your vocation. God will bless you and shower prosperity on your school in proportion to your efforts for that cause and your zeal in attaining that end.

On your arrival at Bourg-Argental, you will go straight to the church to adore Our Lord, to offer yourself to him and to put in his hands the work entrusted to you, begging him to bless it.

From there you will go to the parish priest to pay your respects and to ask his blessing. Urge him to be a father to you, while assuring him that you will always be his devoted children. Next, pay a visit to the Mayor, your benefactor, and put yourself at his disposal to start school on the day he sees fit. Finally, my dear Brothers, never forget that the first lesson you owe your children and all the parishioners, is good example; be, therefore, models of piety and virtue for everyone." The Brothers arrived at Bourg-Argental at the end of 1821 and opened their school on January 27, 1822. A few days later, there were two hundred pupils in the school. Brother John-Mary was appointed Director and Brother Louis succeeded him at La Valla.

It may be asked why Brother John-Mary, the first Brother of the Institute was not left in charge of the novitiate. This was

27 Information on this school and on Brother John-Mary, is furnished by the report of Inspector Guillard (BI, No. 157, pp. 455 ff).

28 LPC 2, p.339.

Attempt to date the events of these years; - Brother John-Baptist arrived at La Valla in March, 1822 and would have been employed at Bourg-Argental at All Saints of the same year, since he was sick in February, 1823 (The Memorare in the snow, AA, p. 50). Brother Avit, in the Annals of Marlhes, speaks of 1822 and in the summary of the Annals, he says that 'in 1832 at the re-opening, eleven years had elapsed since our departure.' If, then, we take 1822 as the closing date, it would be at the very beginning of that year.

- Brother Louis would leave Marlhes at All Saints, 1820 and would take charge of the novitiate. Brother John-Mary would remain at La Valla but without responsibility for the novices who, incidentally, were very few between 1820 and 1822. - Brother Lawrence would replace Brother Louis at Marlhes, but would let the discipline slip through excessive kindness, as Brother Avit suggests in the Annals of Marlhes, giving to its closure, a motive

because Father Champagnat had not found him always obedient, and thought it advisable to transfer him. Brother John-Mary, in common with most of those who enter religious life when they are on in years, practised virtue in his own particular way. He was still inordinately attached to his personal opinion and this fact led him to go to extremes and to strive for an imaginary perfection. He wanted to be neither more nor less than a saint, a saint of the first order, and consequently, a saint after his own fashion. What is more, he expected the same perfection of others.

Father Champagnat tried, with only partial success, to get him to understand the danger of such behaviour. Since Brother Louis was more obedient and more imbued with religious spirit, Father Champagnat rightly judged him more fitted to direct the Novitiate House and to instil into the young Brothers, the spirit of the Institute.

which would reinforce that of the poor condition of the house. - As it was Brother Lawrence who closed Marlhes, it would be necessary to time it for All Saints, 1821 and not in 1822, for Brother Avit says that Brother Lawrence opened Tarantaise in November, 1821 (AA, p. 45). - If we retain the beginning of 1822 for the closure of Marlhes, we could suppose that Brother John-Mary was at Tarantaise on All Saints, 1821 and then went to Bourg-Argental on February 2nd, 1822.

CHAPTER NINE

*Father Champagnat asks God to send him postulants.
God's answer to his prayer*

The openings of Saint-Sauveur and of Bourg-Argental had emptied the novitiate: it was without novices or postulants. Any Brothers available at the Mother House had either been allocated to parish schools or were engaged in temporal duties¹. Marcellin was greatly consoled to see the success that his children achieved everywhere and the keenness with which their services were sought. At the same time, he suffered to see vocations so scarce. For three years, there had been only three or four subjects² and there was no sign that there were more in the offing, at least in numbers adequate to the demand.

The lack of subjects, which threatened the very existence of the infant Congregation, was truly a trial for its Founder; but this situation in no way discouraged him; instead it stirred up his zeal and intensified his confidence in God. Marcellin placed no reliance on human means to put an end to this state of affairs. He was, moreover, convinced that a vocation must come from God; that it is given by him and that it is he who guides those called to

¹ The entry Registers and a report on the State of the Congregation for 1825 (AFM, 143.01), show the Institute as having eight Brothers on January 1st, 1822. A document of the Departmental Archives of the Loire (ADL, T.10) notes: "September 25th, 1822, Granjon and Couturier authorized for Bourg-Argental; Roumezy and Bodard for Saint-Sauveur." It is reasonable to believe that they had been there since the beginning of the scholastic year. Besides, we know that Brother Lawrence, at the beginning of 1822, was no longer at Marlhes but at Tarantaise and continued, Thursdays and Sundays, his apostolate at Le Bessat, one of the schools of the parish of La Valla. That leaves Brothers Louis, John-Peter and Francis, for the town school at La Valla, and to teach in a few hamlets. Brother Louis would not use all his time for Claude Fayol and Antony Gratalon, the only candidates, before the March 1822 arrival of 8 postulants from the Haute-Loire.

² For the three years (1819-1821), the entry Register gives the admission to the novitiate of: Stephen Roumesy (1819), John-Peter Martinol (1820), Antony Gratalon (1821) and John-Baptist Tardy (1821). The last-named withdrew soon after and returned in 1827. This corroborates the number indicated, of "three or four".

the religious life, into the Communities he wishes to bless. So Marcellin put all his confidence in the goodness of God and begged him through ardent prayer to send him new subjects.

Marcellin had unlimited confidence in Mary's protection and was careful to have recourse to her 3 too. In her honour, he celebrated Mass and offered up many novenas. He reminded her with the simplicity of a child that being the mother, the Superioress and the protectress of his Community, it was up to her to take care of it and ward off its ruin. "It is your work", he maintained. "It is you who have brought us together, in spite of the opposition of the world, to procure the glory of your divine Son; unless you come to our aid, we shall perish and like a lamp without oil become extinguished. But, if this work perishes, it is not our work that fails; it is yours, since you have done everything for us. We therefore rely on your powerful protection and we shall count on it always." The Mother of Mercy, touched by the confidence shown in her by her servant, Marcellin heard his prayers and granted his wishes, making it clear that he had not relied on her in vain. In fact, the time had now come when the Congregation, which seemed to be struck with sterility, experienced a prodigious surge of growth. Its most marvellous feature was the means God used to make the Congregation known and to lead into it the subjects he had prepared and formed for it. In his powerful hands, every instrument can be made to serve his purpose, as this present incident proves; for we shall see that he made use of an unworthy individual, an apostate Religious, to accomplish the designs of mercy he had on the infant Congregation and to provide vocations for it.

About the middle of Lent, in 1822, Father Champagnat arrived home from the prayer and instruction that he had carried out in the church. He found a young man 4 waiting for him and asking the favour of being admitted to the Congregation. Not impressed by the young man's demeanour and dress, the priest was suspicious of the motives that brought him there. He asked him coldly where he was from and what had been his occupation till then. Discovering that he had left the Christian Brothers, after

3 "This scarcity worried the Founder. He prayed ardently to God and to Our Lady of Pity and prescribed numerous novenas" (AA. p. 46).

4 What we know of this man is that he "belonged to a distinguished family of the region". Our research has not succeeded in identifying him in the Christian Brothers' Registers.

being with them for six years, Marcellin's reply to his request was: "If you cannot succeed with the de la Salle Brothers or if their way of life doesn't suit you, you are no use to us and I have to say that I cannot accept you." However, since it was night-time he felt he must offer him hospitality, so he added: "You will sleep here to-night and go home to-morrow."

The young man who was very anxious to remain probably because he did not know what to turn to, used every ploy within his power to interest Father Champagnat in his favour and to gain his trust. Having had something to eat, he spoke to Father Champagnat at length about his home region and the numerous vocations it had yielded the Christian Brothers. Seeing the priest's favourable response to that subject, he went on: "If you take me, I promise to bring with me several postulants that I know."

Next day, he persisted so earnestly in his efforts to be given a try that he was allowed to spend two or three days in the House. The trial did not fully satisfy Father Champagnat; the young man's conduct raised his suspicions, so he sent for him and indicated

that he would have to leave. After further futile importuning to be admitted, the ex-Brother, seeing that he was making no headway, put this question: "Will you accept me, if I bring you half a dozen good subjects?" "Yes", he was told by Father Champagnat, "when you manage to find them." He then asked for a letter of authorization ⁵, and to get rid of him, Father Champagnat wrote him a non-committal letter ⁶, remarking as he gave it to him: "Go now and stay home or, even better, return to the Community you have left: our own House, and our way of life do not suit you."

Provided with his letter, the young man set out for his native region, situated about forty miles ⁷ from La Valla. He didn't lose any time when he got home, and before a week had passed, he had persuaded eight young men ⁸ to set out for La Valla or rather for Lyon, since he was careful not to mention to them that they were being taken to La Valla. In the district, he was believed to be a Christian Brother; besides, he made no reference to the Brothers of Mary; hence, neither the young people nor their parents had the slightest idea that the Brothers of Mary were involved. In fact, they had never heard of them. The agreement drawn up to fix the fees and the payment times, stated that the postulants were destined for the Christian Brothers' novitiate at Lyon. There was no mention of either Father Champagnat or of the Little Brothers of Mary.

Moreover, we shouldn't be surprised that this young man so easily persuaded so many others to follow him. To begin with, the finger of God is plainly visible in the episode; then, too, the misconduct of the unfortunate individual was not known and his family was well-off and was distinguished for piety; it was therefore no trouble for him to recruit those postulants, several of whom had already quite made up their minds to enter religion and had even reserved their places in the novitiate at Lyon. Only a few days were needed to put their outfit together and to make arrangements for departure.

⁵ This would ensure that priests and parents would give him credence.

⁶ Father Champagnat was Superior of a Community that had no authorization to teach (LPC I, p. 21, art. 36).

⁷ Clearly the distance from La Valla to Saint-Pol-en-Chalencon, village of Brother John-Baptist.

⁸ The incident of the 8 postulants (Cf. Gabriel Michel, BI XXVIII, pp. 270-280).

These pious young men, led by their guide, set out towards the end of March 9, 1822, in the firm conviction ¹⁰ that they were off to the Christian Brothers' novitiate at Lyon H. Having travelled for two days, they arrived at the top of the mountain which faces La Valla. "There", announced the ex-Brother, pointing out the parish steeple, "is the end of our journey!" "What!" the postulants exclaimed. "Is that where we are going? But that is not Lyon!" "No, it is not", he agreed, "but we have a novitiate here, where you will spend a few days before being taken on to Lyon."

The arrival of the ex-Brother with his troupe surprised Marcellin enormously. He was busy digging the garden; he dropped his work immediately to go and speak to them. "I can still picture him", recalled one of their number ¹², "surveying us from head to foot in astonishment, a reaction which showed clearly that he had not expected us. He asked us a few questions to sound out our dispositions and the motives behind our coming, before declaring that he could not accept us. That announcement amazed us, and our hurt was such that Father Champagnat, noticing it, softened the blow, by adding: 'I shall pray to God for light in this matter; you may remain till to-morrow.'"

Most of these postulants made a very favourable impression on Father Champagnat; if he was reluctant to accept them, it was because he didn't really know them; besides, he feared that their vocation hadn't been sufficiently scrutinized, that their motives were perhaps defective, that their arrival was due only to the persuasive efforts of one who brought them along so that he himself would be accepted; then, too, their number gave him several reasons for concern: they had perhaps been moved by mass enthusiasm and, in that case, should one decide to leave, there was a chance that the others would lose their enthusiasm and that all would go home, as they had come, one because of the others; the number stretched accommodation to the limit, causing a shortage of rooms and even of beds and forcing some to sleep in the barn ¹³, on straw; finally, funds were inadequate for that

⁹ March 25th, feast of the Annunciation (SMC, Vol. 2, p. 101).

¹⁰ Since Brother John-Baptist was one of them, he can speak with "firm conviction".

¹¹ The novitiate was beside the cathedral.

¹² It could well be that Brother John-Baptist is referring to himself in the third person.

¹³ Brother Avit writes: "He (Father Champagnat) subjected them to solid testing and received them eventually. They slept in the barn" (AA, p. 46).

number, for most of them contributed very little by way of fees and the Community, which was barely self-sufficient, was in no position to make sacrifices for them.

Marcellin, therefore, did not think it right to impose this burden on his Community, without consulting the principal Brothers. Next day, he explained to the assembled postulants: "I can't promise yet to accept you. Before I can tell you what I must do, I need to seek the advice of the Brothers. All I can do is allow you to stay for a few days; but since your eventual admission is far from certain, those who wish to withdraw now, can do so." At the same time, he wrote to the Brothers of Bourg-Argental and of Saint-Sauveur and requested them to report to him at Easter, which was ten days 14 away. They did so; he gathered them several times in his room, and explained to them the designs of God, which seemed clear for the burgeoning Congregation, in this matter. He gave it as his opinion that subjects visibly sent by Providence, should be accepted. Since the Brothers were all of the same opinion, it was decided that the eight postulants should be admitted and their recruiter also. However, they were to be subjected to special trials in order to test their vocation.

Marcellin's views, nevertheless, were not shared by his friends. These thoroughly disapproved of his action and strove by every means to induce him to dismiss the new-corners. "You cannot possibly keep that band of young people", they reproached him. "How will you manage to feed them? Your house 15 is too small to accommodate them. Besides, do you know what will happen if you do keep them? They will withdraw, after costing you a lot of money. You haven't the funds to feed and support them all.

Prudence demands that you proceed gradually and avoid saddling your Community so irresponsibly with such a weighty burden. So, at the very least, you must send away the youngest ones, and this is all the more necessary, because they are too young 16 to know whether they have a vocation." Marcellin had made up his mind and nothing would move him.

Yet, wise man that he was, he used every divinely inspired means to test the postulants and make sure that they were suited to his Congregation. Instead of putting them to study, he set them to work in the fields, from morning till night, without letting up,

14 April 7th (Cf. BI XXVIII, p. 279).

15 The visit .of Inspector Guillard, a month later, occurs with the house still under construction (Cf. OME, doc. 19, p. 76).

16 The ages vary from 15 to 25 years (BI XXVIII, pp. 275-278).

and on strict silence. There was a requirement to admit their failures; there were reprimands and public penances for even the slightest faults; every means was used to test them, but their constancy was proof against them all.

Though delighted and edified by their perseverance, Father Champagnat wanted to apply one, last test. He announced to them in the presence of the Brothers of the Community: "Since your hearts are absolutely set on remaining here and becoming Mary's children, I have decided to keep you all. Some of you, it is true, are still too young to know your vocation. These, I intend to place with some good country people to look after the livestock. If you behave well, if you measure up to their expectations and if you maintain your desire to enter religious life, I shall admit you definitively to the novitiate on the feast of All Saints. Let's see now, (and he spoke to the youngest), does that suit you?" "Since it is your will", came back the admirable reply, "I do agree, but on the condition that you will admit me without fail at the time you mention." That response reduced Father Champagnat to astonished silence; he looked down for a moment, before exclaiming: "Come, I admit you all here and now."

The constancy of these young people is a cause for wonder. What could move them to be attached to an Institute which put so many obstacles in the way of their admission to its ranks? Let one of them¹⁷ give us the answer in his simple, unvarnished account: "There was no reason to mistrust us so much and to be suspicious of our motives in coming; had we come from human motives, we should not have survived a single day. Who could have got us to stay on in a house where poverty was seen on all sides; where the only place to sleep was on a straw bed in a barn; where the only food was barley bread so badly cooked that it was falling to pieces, a few vegetables, and water to drink; where we had to work hard from daylight till dark rewarded by reprimands and penances to be accepted without complaint?

If I am asked now what could have pleased us in a situation where nature got short shrift and what made us cling to a Society which would have nothing to do with us, my answer is: the devotion to Mary which that Society practised. The day after we arrived, Father Champagnat gave each of us a pair of rosary beads; he spoke to us several times about the Blessed Virgin in his own

¹⁷ Some of these young men stayed several years but only two persevered to the end: Brothers Hilarion and John-Baptist, author of this book (Cf. BI XXVIII, p. 273).

convincing way, regaling us with instances of that Blessed Mother's protection. Every single one of us was so touched by the good priest's wonderful references to Mary, that there was just no hope of anything diverting us from our vocation."

In concluding this story, we can add the detail that the wretched individual who had brought along those postulants, had to be sent away a fortnight later for the same misconduct which had precipitated his dismissal from the Christian Brothers, that is, for moral offences.

All this naturally gives rise to a reflection which may be very useful to those who have doubts about their vocation, for the reason that it had roots in human motives or was fostered by a human agent. St Thomas argues that it is a wise plan to accept a call to religious life, even should, it issue from the devil, who is our enemy. He adds that an inspiration from the devil¹⁸ to follow a vocation, could be from God at the same time, since God often turns the wickedness of man's enemy against himself and to our advantage, in this way allowing us to cut off Goliath's head with his own sword¹⁹. St Thomas cites God's use of the envy and malice of Joseph's brothers, to raise him to the government of Egypt. He adds that the betrayal of Judas and the teaching of the Jews were means of our redemption. He therefore concludes that, no matter what its immediate source or stimulus, love for the religious life can come only from God.

Our eight postulants were indeed brought into the Institute by a religious who had profaned the holiness of his state and lost his vocation. They had a genuine call from God, all the same. Amongst them, there were some good religious: there was an Assistant General²⁰, there was the one who laboured for more than fifteen years to collect the documents which have been the basis of this life of the pious Founder.

As we said earlier, the progress of the Institute dates from this period. Previously, it was not known; the subjects it had received came either from La Valla or its vicinity; the incident we have just recounted spread knowledge of it and brought it vocations. Once the decision was made to admit the postulants, Father Champagnat sent one of the principal Brothers to .their

¹⁸ "God, in his wisdom, sees fit to use even the fallen angels to serve his purpose" (Summa, 1, Q 64, art. 4).

¹⁹ 1 Sam. 17,51.

²⁰ The Assistant and the one who worked for more than 15 years are one and the same: Brother John-Baptist.

parents to get some information regarding them and to collect the fee 21 for their support during the novitiate. This Brother called on the parish priests of the district 22 and acquainted them with the Institute. For their part, the postulants wrote to their parents to say that they were pleased and happy in their vocation. As a result, four 23 new candidates decided to take on the life, too. Their example was followed two months afterwards, by three others and within six months, more than twenty from that same district had entered the novitiate. True, not all persevered, but the progress of the Institute was still rapid. The Brothers of Mary became known; other subjects came to replace those who left. Where did these new youths come from? What was their home region? They were from the Haute-Loire, from the mountains of Velay; it was Our Lady of Puy who had prepared them and sent them to La Valla.

21 Francis Civier paid 400 francs. The others paid fees varying from 50 to 240 francs (AFM, Entry Register, p. 1). The sum of 400 francs was the maximum asked in the 1824 prospectus, (two years after the arrival of that group).

"They will pay 400 francs for the two years. Those who have an inheritance, will bring it to the Community, which will guarantee reimbursement should the novice leave. In such a case, a deduction is made for novitiate expenses" (AA, p. 58).

22 The district of Bas-en-Basset.

23 According to the Entry Register: Michael Marconnet of Boisset, Antony Monier of Boisset, John Aubert of Saint-Pol-en-Chalengon and Peter Vertore of Tirange (AFM, 137.13).

CHAPTER TEN

Father Champagnat builds to extend the novitiate. His care to form the novices to piety and the virtues of their state. Great fervour in the novitiate and in the Communities.

There was only the barn 1 for the postulants to sleep in. To remedy that state of affairs, Marcellin worked for more than a week to repair the garret 2 of the house and convert it into a dormitory. He used scrap timber to construct beds with his own hands, but since space was at a premium, one bed had to make do, for two. The garret was so low that you couldn't walk upright, and the only light filtered in through a little window. It was obvious that the house 3 could not accommodate so many people and a new building was a matter of urgency. Marcellin did not hesitate to undertake its construction. However, because he was short of resources, the work was done by himself and his Brothers, without external aid. The Community rose at four o'clock; the Brothers and novices made a half an hour's meditation together, attended Mass and then worked till seven in the evening.

Father Champagnat was the architect 4 of the new building; he ordered everything and directed everyone. Those Brothers and postulants most endowed with skill and strength did the masonry work with him and carried the heaviest loads; the others brought up the stones and made the mortar. This was of rich clay, without lime or sand. In fact, everyone was busy and happily worked away, each according to his strength, at building what they regarded as the cradle of the Institute.

1 Cf. AA, p. 46.

2 The loft was the second storey of the house (Cf. BI, 111, p. 31).

3 "It contained a refectory on the ground-floor, class-rooms on the first floor, a dormitory on the second and, on the third, an attic which became a dormitory during the holidays (AA, p. 47; and also, BI 111, p. 31).

4 Brother Lawrence says: "It was he (Father Champagnat) who built the whole of our La Valla house. The rest of us did something, of course, but we were not trained in building and it was therefore necessary to be constantly showing us and very often doing our work again. When there were big stones to carry, he was always the one to carry them" (OME, doc. 167 [4], p. 454).

Marcellin was always the first to begin work, he laboured without respite, and was usually last to leave. To gain time, he said his Office at night. The result was that he passed the whole day with the Brothers, except for the time when priestly duty summoned him to the church or to a sick call. The priests or the friends who came to visit him and other people who needed to speak to him, invariably found him on the scaffolding, trowel in hand, surrounded by stones. "I can see him yet", recalled a Brother who helped in the work, "his soutane covered with dirt and white with dust, his hands full of mortar, and his head bare. In this condition, he met those who visited him or asked for him; he welcomed them and spoke to them with a smiling countenance that reflected gaiety and happiness, though he was, for the most part, utterly exhausted."

One day, a priest friend who found him in this state, taunted him, saying: "You have indeed become a mason, Father!" "Even more", was the retort, "mason and architect." "Do you know", parried the visiting priest, "that the tradesmen are murmuring and plotting against you; that they object to competition from you; that they see you as robbing them of their work and forming a crop of young masons?" "Don't worry about them", the unruffled priest replied. "I am not afraid of their hostile attitude. In fact, I'll take you on as an apprentice, if you feel so inclined." At this, the visitor added *qui te* seriously: "My friend, you are going too far. Not only does this kind of work not become a priest, but you are letting it ruin your health." Marcellin was provoked to reply: "This work does not in the least compromise my ministry. Many priests spend their time less usefully. Nor can I see that my health suffers to any extent. Moreover, I don't do this because I like it, but because I have to. There is no room for us to move in that hovel and we can't afford to pay workmen. How can anyone object to our putting up a place to live in?" Silence was observed rigorously during work, signs being used when it was necessary to communicate. From time to time during the day there was reading, the responsibility of the weariest or of the youngest, who couldn't work. The others listened attentively, working at the same time. Books read were: *Advice for Sinners* 5; the lives of St Francis Regis, of St Vincent de Paul, of St Francis Xavier, and the like. The silence. and the reading

5 A work by Louis de Grenade (*Guia de Pecadores*), published in Lisbon in 1555 and widely known in France in the 17th and 18th Centuries (OM 2, doc. 561, p. 353).

were interrupted only for a few brief words of edification or encouragement from Father Champagnat. These words, and especially his example, were a stimulus to the faint-hearted and a source of courage to all. He was never heard to complain, nor did we ever see him lose patience or rouse on us though our awkwardness and other-shortcomings gave him plenty of reason to do so. If we didn't manage well what he asked us to do, he would show us kindly how we needed to go about it. If even that didn't work, he would carry out the task himself, making it clear that this was a pleasure for him and that he was satisfied with our good will. In a few months, the house was built. Father Champagnat, helped by a few Brothers or postulants, did all the carpentry: doors, windows and floors.

But material matters did not preoccupy him at the expense of instructing the novices. He took advantage of recreation times and Sundays to form them to piety and to see that they were adequately instructed. He taught them singing, trained them to serve Mass and to carry out the other Church ceremonies, to pray well and to teach catechism. His instructions were short but lively and enthusiastic; they focused almost always on piety, obedience, mortification, love of Jesus, devotion to the Blessed Virgin and zeal for the salvation of souls. It would take too long to give details but we can't refrain from quoting here some of his favourite sayings:

"A Brother who doesn't know how to pray, knows neither how to practise virtue nor do good amongst the children, for these are things learnt only in prayer." "Religious life is essentially a life of prayer. It is an opportunity to pray more than the ordinary faithful, to commune more frequently with God. Besides, it is impossible to fulfil the obligations of the religious life without true and solid piety." "A religious who lacks piety will neither esteem nor love his vocation, because he won't find any consolation in it." "How easy it is to practise virtue and how insignificant are the sacrifices it involves, when we love Jesus! The love of Jesus propels the religious along the path of virtue in much the same way as sails drive ships across the ocean. That love lifts him all unaware to the loftiest of virtues." "For love of money, men have no trouble undertaking the most arduous works or submitting to the harshest of privations. What a shame it would be if religious were less impelled by the love of Jesus!" "One who has a great devotion to Mary, will certainly have a great love for Jesus. Saints, such as Bernard, Bonaventure,

Francis of Assisi, Alphonsus Liguori and Teresa, who all had a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin, were distinguished by a great love for Jesus." "Mary keeps nothing back for herself: when we serve her, when we consecrate ourselves to her, she accepts us simply to give us to Jesus and to fill us with Jesus." "It was only to the beloved disciple that Jesus entrusted his mother. He wanted us to understand that he grants a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin, only to privileged souls on whom he has particular designs of mercy." "Poverty, mortification, humility, the virtues in general are like roses among thorns. People of the world see and feel nothing but the thorns; a Religious feels and savours virtue's charms, delights and consolations; so he doesn't notice the thorns, that is, the difficulties inseparable from the practice of virtue." "A worthy Religious experiences considerable consolation and happiness from a single exercise of piety, such as meditation, attending Mass, or a quarter of an hour's visit to the Blessed Sacrament. He experiences more, in fact, than those in the world who are most favoured by fortune, can extract from all the pleasures encountered during a long life." "Why is it that seculars resort so much to noise in the midst of their pleasures and profane joys? It is because they cannot succeed in stifling completely the remorse which haunts them; because their happiness is merely apparent, and so their heart is not at rest and finds only bitterness in sensual gratification." "By vocation, the Brothers are apostles - they are sent to make known to the children the mysteries of religion and to tell them the good news of the salvation that Jesus has won for us." "A Brother's strongest desire should be to excel at teaching catechism; that is, after all, his principal function and it is the goal of his vocation." "There are various ways of teaching catechism, that is of teaching the truths of salvation and of leading children and others to virtue. We teach catechism well, when we pray much for the children confided to us and for the conversion of sinners and infidels; we do so, equally well, when we give constant good example, being everywhere a model of piety, regularity, modesty and charity.

These two ways of teaching catechism have the advantage of suiting all Brothers, no matter what may be their employment and their talents or ability. In addition, they are more efficacious and simpler than the way which consists of explaining Christian

doctrine to the children: more efficacious, because grace, which is the one thing absolutely necessary to procure man's salvation, is obtained more surely by prayer and holiness of life than by . any other means; simpler, because we can pray and practise virtue at any time and in any place."

Marcellin kept up the custom of sending the Brothers in pairs, to teach catechism in the hamlets of the parish. A trained Brother was accompanied by a novice and he himself went along at times to monitor the quality of their performance.

One day, he turned up while a very young Brother, (about thirteen or fourteen years old), was seriously dispensing catechism to a few children and several adults. Marcellin thought the attendance disappointing, and said as much, threatening to stop sending the Brothers unless there was more enthusiasm about being present. One good lady rose and said in defence: "Father, don't scold us too much. If you had been here a little earlier, you would have found a lot more people here, but the catechism lasts for a long while and some had to go off."

The heavy work and the inconveniences associated with the construction of the house, did nothing to dampen the enthusiasm of the novices for their vocation. Nor was any harm done to the good spirit or to the piety which permeated the Community. On the contrary, at no other time was so much fervour and so much zeal for the virtues of religious life and for acquiring the spirit of the Institute, found in the novitiate. This fact filled Father Champagnat and the Brothers with delight and edification. To let you see what we mean, we give here the description traced by one 6 of those same novices:

"The Community was made up of simple and uneducated men, but before long it began to reproduce the virtues of its leader. Their love of prayer, their recollection and fervour were out standing. The time given to exercises of piety seemed all too short; permission was sought to extend these conversations with God. It was looked on as a special favour, to be allowed to prolong them, to pay a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, to say a rosary or to perform some similar exercise. This was done during recreations or after the nightly reading of the subject of meditation.

I can't recall a single instance in the whole of my happy stay in the novitiate, when a novice failed to rise on time and make his meditation with the Community. If someone happened to

6 The reference is probably to Brother John-Baptist himself.

commit a fault or to breach a point of Rule 7, he didn't wait to be reprimanded; he knelt down in the presence of the Community and spontaneously asked for a penance. Charity, union and peace were impressive. There was never an argument, an offensive or a hurtful word, heard amongst us. We loved one another as brothers, avoiding antipathy and exclusive friendship, as well as any attempt to stand out from the rest. A single heart and soul ⁸ animated us. If anyone happened to be in need, we vied with one another in zeal and devotedness to help him and bring relief. Recreation was spent in singing hymns or in uplifting conversation: no complaints; no anxiety; no discouragement. The normal' dispositions of each one were attractive gaiety, holy joy and tranquillity, all of which were reflected on every countenance.

There were several conspicuous features in the conduct of the novices: a most tender love and the deepest respect for Father Champagnat and the Brothers guiding and teaching us; as well as obedience and total submission to their wills, together with simplicity and humility. Oh! Happy times, where have you fled? he very thought of you brings tears to my eyes!"

Out in the establishments, the fervour of the Brothers was almost as great. Since they didn't yet have a Rule to spell out the details of their conduct, mapping out what was required of them at each hour of the day, they gave free rein to their ardent zeal for progress in perfection and for the sanctification of their neighbour. Their food ⁹ was of the plainest kind and they lived with a frugality and an economy which were often excessive. Teaching, religious instruction and care of the children did not suffice to satisfy their zeal. They undertook many other good works.

At Saint-Sauveur, the y organized various collections in the course of the year: wheat; potatoes; butter and cheese; clothing and bed linen; and money. The fruits of these collections went

⁷ The Rule was printed only in 1837. In the early days the Community had simply Regulations (Cf. AA, p. 41).

⁸ Acts, 4,32.

⁹ Brother Lawrence emphasises: "We were extremely poor at the beginning; we had bread the colour of the soil, but we always had what was necessary" (OME, doc. 167 [8], p. 455). Brother Sylvester notes: "all the bread we needed, made out of coarse flour, some soup, a few vegetables and water to drink" (MEM, p. 19). Brother Avit writes: "Father Champagnat ate the same fare as his followers, which consisted of clear soup or soup with oil, rye bread, cheese, milk products, vegetables, sometimes a little bacon, and water" (AA, p. 47).

to the upkeep of the poor children of the parish. The Brothers gave these a home till after their First Communion. Sometimes there were more than twenty such children. In addition, the collections enabled the poverty-stricken to be helped. Each week the Brothers had many loaves of bread made, and distributed them to people who were destitute. Besides, the Brothers regarded it as a choice work to visit the sick, to sit up with them at night, to make their beds and to attend to their every need.

On one occasion, it came to the Brother Director's notice that there was in the village a sick man abandoned by everyone. He was so covered with sores and vermin, that no one dared go near him. The Brother hurried to the place, and found the poor wretch lying on straw and covered only by a tattered blanket. He got a bed for him, brought him the food he needed, took care of him, bathed his wounds, combed his hair and visited him several times a day for a whole year.

Naturally, he didn't stop short at caring for the poor man's body but provided spiritual help as well. He instructed him in the truths of religion, got him to make a good confession, taught him to sanctify his sufferings, spoke a few encouraging words to him every day, led him to say prayers appropriate to his condition and helped him prepare for death. He didn't have the satisfaction of being with him to close his eyes in death, for the holidays intervened to separate them. However his heart must have swelled with joy and consolation on hearing that this dear patient had repeated his name at the hour of death and had said, as he died: "My God, my God, I love you and I commend to you this good Brother, who has done so much for me. Bless him and pay him back a hundredfold all that I owe him."

Every evening during winter, the Brothers taught catechism to the youth and the children of the village. This instruction was well attended and lasted for an hour and a half. These good Brothers provided it three times a day: in the morning school session, in the afternoon one and again in the evening. God blessed in a special way another zealous work undertaken by the Brothers. They used to seek out men who were not approaching the sacraments and urge them to fulfil this important duty.

Through their instructions, prayer and zealous efforts, the Brothers brought many back to the right path. Their ingenuity in touching the hearts of these people and their skill in winning them over and persuading them to resume their religious duties, were so notorious that the proverb arose: "The only way to escape is to run away and hide."

The parish priests and other people who saw the conduct of the Brothers and all the good they were doing, wrote letters praising Marcellin to the skies and congratulated him for having trained, in such a short time, men who were so pious and so devoted to promoting the cause of religion.

At that time, too, there was a big increase in requests for new establishments ¹⁰; during 1822 and 1823, foundations were made at Saint-Symphorien-le-Château, at Boulieu and at Vanosc ¹¹. The last of these had to be abandoned after four years because the house was in such a bad state and even basic necessities were sadly lacking. Two Brothers contracted serious eye trouble there and other illnesses which led to their deaths. The school at Boulieu had so many pupils that its Director, Brother John-Peter ¹², broke down and died, a victim of his zeal and devotedness.

At the last retreat, which he made in 1824, he had a presentiment of his approaching death. As he set out to return to his post, embracing Father Champagnat and as king his blessing, he said: "Forgive me, Father, if my departure brings tears to my eyes. Some voice deep inside me tells me that I shall never see you again in this world." So much did the pupils love him that, when one of them died on the same day as he did, the child's parents begged earnestly that he be buried in the same grave as his esteemed master.

It was about this period that the Brothers requested their Founder to let them use the intimate address, "Père" (Father) instead of "Monsieur l'Abbé". He readily agreed.

10 As to the number of these new establishments:

In 1822,	Bourg-Argental (2 Brothers)
In 1823,	Vanosc (2 Brothers)
	Saint-Symphorien-le-Château (3 Brothers)
	Boulieu (3 Brothers)
In 1824,	Chavanay (2 Brothers)
	Charlieu (3 Brothers)

11 LPC 2, index of place names.

12 Brother John-Peter (Cf. BQF, p. 38).

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Father Champagnat is opposed and persecuted because of his work with the Brothers. Bishop de Pins takes the Institute under his protection.

You might think that Father Champagnat would have earned only praise and approval for founding the Brothers. However, God saved the world by the Cross and he wishes all his works to be marked by this sacred sign. The Institute of the Little Brothers of Mary came to birth in poverty, grew up in a context of humility and knew the shadow of the Cross right till its Founder's death. May it always remain in that shadow, for from that Tree of Life spring its prosperity and the grace to be fruitful.

Marcellin was the target of opposition from the very beginning of his venture. So far we have been silent about this form of trial, preferring to deal with the subject in a special chapter. Men who gauged the chance of success from the human means disposed of, couldn't understand how a humble priest, without resources, could manage to found a Congregation. The very idea of doing so struck them as a chimera spawned by pride and rashness. "What does he mean to do?" they queried. "How can he, with neither money nor ability, entertain the idea of starting a Congregation? Pride is driving him to it; he wants to be thought important; he has a foolish, vain urge to be hailed as a Founder. What does he hope to achieve by taking these young men from the fields to have them grow pale over their books? They are pride filled loafers who, having idled away their youth, will return to their families to be a drag on them and will perhaps become the scourge of society."

Such were the views held about Marcellin, and not just by a few peevish people who chose to disparage him; no, their critical thoughts and language were shared by very holy lay folk and clerics of great virtue, including even some of his friends. They imputed to him a host of conflicting plans: at one time, he was setting up a college to compete with that of Saint-Chamond¹; at other times, he was said to be forming a Congregation of teaching Brothers,

¹ Father Cattelin, Superior of Saint-Chamond, had the idea that Father Champagnat wanted to sabotage his infant college. Marcellin, it is true, did teach Latin to a few pupils (Cf. OME, doc. 166 [19], p. 445).

of manual workers, of hermits, etc. It was even asserted that he intended to form a sect of Bégains 2. The Rules he had given his little Community, their style of life, their activities and their costume, were all the object of harsh criticism and blame 3.

These outcries about Marcellin reached such a pitch that they penetrated to the Archbishop's Palace. Father Bochard 4, a Vicar General, sent for him and confronted him with the opinions that were circulating in his regard. "It is quite true", was his reply, "that, since there were no teachers for the children at La Valla, I gathered a few young people to teach them. There are eight 5 of them living in community, and they spend their time either instructing the children, or developing the skills related to their primary teaching or to manual work. Strictly speaking, those young people 6 don't have a religious costume or formal commitments. They are there completely of their own free will, because they like the way of life and are attracted by the seclusion, the study and the teaching." "But the report is that you wish to form them into a religious Community and that you have installed yourself as their Superior", commented the Vicar General.

Marcellin pointed out that he did indeed direct them and train them but had no aspirations to be their Superior; that they had, in fact, chosen a Superior 7 and he was from their own ranks.

"Come now! Let's be plain", insisted the other. "Isn't it true that

2 On the Bégains, see Benoît Laurent, *Les Bégains en Forez*, Ed. Loire républicaine, Saint-Etienne, 1944. The period of the construction of the Hermitage, coincided with the appearance before the police-court (January-March, 1825) of several Bégains, accused of "dividing the Roman Church and of setting up in the city and its neighbourhood, a society known elsewhere as 'Quakers' " (p. 104). For the general public, "Béguin" was synonymous with:

people having fixed ideas, narrow-minded, obstinate.

3 The parish priest, Rebod, was a severe critic of Father Champagnat's conduct (OME, doc. 166 [20], p. 446).

4 Cf. OM 4, p. 198. Father Courbon, in a letter to Cardinal Fesch, gives a far from flattering portrait of Father Bochard (Cf. OM 1, doc. 31 [2], p. 183).

5 We are dealing with the first eight Brothers. (AFM, 137.139). Their order of entry was: Jean-Marie (Grignon), Louis (J.B. Audras), Laurent (J.-Cl. Audras), Antoine (Couturier), Barthélemy (Badard), François (Gabriel Rivat), Jean-Pierre (Martinol), Jean-François (Roumesy).

6 Father Champagnat informs Inspector Guillard, in April, 1822, "that he is waiting for the tree he planted only four or five years previously, to take root, before seeking legal authorization. He is anxious, however, for his Brothers to be exempt from military service" (OME, doc. 19 [10], p. 76).

7 The Director was Brother John-Mary who accompanied Father Champagnat for this interview (OME, doc. 166 [24], p. 448). Later, when making

you are harbouring a scheme to found a Congregation of Teachers?" "Yes", Marcellin admitted, "I have been thinking of training teachers for country children, and with this in view I got together a few young people whom God will use as he sees fit: for I seek nothing but his holy will" "But", the Vicar argued, "you have called them Brothers of Mary, so it is really a Congregation that you aim at forming. Now, since we already have a similar Institution ⁸ in the diocese, I won't have any others." After this exchange, the Vicar General put a proposal to Father Champagnat to amalgamate his Brothers with those whom he himself had founded at Lyon. Marcellin did not give an outright refusal but skilfully deflected the suggestion and took his leave. However, he knew full well that he must expect repeated exhortations to merge, and renewed opposition, if he turned them down.

When he left Father Bochard, Marcellin paid a visit to Father Courbon ⁹, the senior Vicar General who was familiar with his plans. He gave him a full account of the situation of his fledgling Community and of the obstacles it was meeting on sides, and ended by addressing the Vicar General in these terms: "You know my views and my aims; you know what I have done so far. Please, give me your opinion of this enterprise, which I am ready to abandon at your command, for I seek only the will of God. As soon as it is made clear to me through you, I shall bow to it." "I can't understand", Father Courbon reassured him ¹⁰, "why they make things so difficult for you. It's a fine work to train worthy teachers ¹¹ who are in such short supply. Go right ahead!"

the first requests for legal recognition, Father Champagnat gets a group of Brothers to sign (Cf. RLF, p. 39).

⁸ Thanks to the reports of Inspectors from the Academy of Lyon (reports listed, OM 1, p. 100), we can say with certainty that in the diocese of Lyon, before 1823, there were no teaching Congregations other than the Christian Brothers and the Brothers of La Valla. It was only in 1823 that the foundation of Father Bochard, to which he makes allusion, took shape (Cf. OME, doc. 21, p. 80). Cf. Interview related by Father Bourdin (OME, doc. 166 [241 p. 448]).

⁹ Father Courbon, LPC 2, p. 149. The problem concerning Father Bochard's roles is explained in his biography (OM 4, p. 198; also, BI No's 159, 161, 162, 163 and 165).

¹⁰ Compare this with the text of Father Bourdin, which is much more exact (OME, doc. 166 [23], p. 447).

¹¹ Father Courbon had himself founded an apprenticeship school in 1783 at Lyon, near the cathedral (Cf. Bulletin historique du diocèse de Lyon, 1922, 1er trimestre, p. 25).

This reply pleased Father Champagnat enormously and he went off to see Father Gardette, head of the Seminary, informing him of the progress of the Community and what the Vicars General had just said. Marcellin had always guided his actions by Father Gardette's advice. Now the latter encouraged him to proceed with his plans, and counselled against any form of union with the Brothers of the diocese. "Be prudent,"¹² he cautioned.

"Put your confidence in God and don't be disheartened because you strike opposition. In the end, your work will be the stronger for having met trials."¹³ It wasn't long before Father Bochard tried again to bring about the union of the two Congregations of Brothers. Seeing that Marcellin would have none of it, he roused on him, threatened to close the Brothers' House and to transfer¹⁴ him from La Valla.

Marcellin therefore returned from Lyon very distressed but totally confident in God and fully resigned to his holy will. It was all the harder to endure these trials because they emanated from one who was his Superior. Besides, he had to confine them deep in his heart, not adverting to them, or doing so only in general terms, so that his Brothers would not become frightened and discouraged.

When the new troubles struck, Marcellin prescribed special prayers and called on the Community to fast for nine days on bread and water. He himself made a pilgrimage to the tomb of Saint John Francis Regis at La Louvesc¹⁵, interceding with him for the necessary light and strength. But it was to the Blessed Virgin that he had recourse with the greatest confidence, earnestly asking her protection in a chapel¹⁶ dedicated to her, not far from

¹² Father Gardette could not put blame directly on Father Bochard; he confined himself to saying to Father Champagnat: "Be prudent; put your confidence in God" (OME, doc. 166 [26 and 27], p. 449).

¹³ LPC 1, doc. 7, p. 39.

¹⁴ Father Champagnat was, in fact, expecting this change which he broached with Father Combon (OME, doc. 166 [23], p. 447).

¹⁵ Testimony of Madame Sériziat on Father Champagnat's pilgrimages to La Louvesc. "The good Father Champagnat went rather often on pilgrimage to La Louvesc, on foot through the mountains. On his return, which was at night, he knelt on the door-steps outside the exterior church door and, bareheaded, remained in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, awaiting in this manner, the opening of the church in order to be able to celebrate Holy Mass" (Témoignage, 1886, AFM, 104.13, No. 38, p. 104).

¹⁶ It is a chapel situated one kilometre from La Valla and dating from the 15th Century at least. It is called Our Lady of Leytra but is more often given the title Our Lady of Pity. During the 17th Century plague, it was the

the village of La Valla. He visited that chapel with his Brothers, several times a week, offered Mass there, consecrated his work again to Mary, begged her to take it under her protection, to defend and preserve it, if it was destined to procure the glory of her divine Son.

Father Bochard¹⁷, however, returned to the fray, seeking the fusion of the two Communities. Unable to dispel Marcellin's reluctance, he treated him as obstinate, proud, rebellious and

sanctuary of the pestilence-stricken who lived near it because they were driven out of their village.

¹⁷ In September, 1823, Father Bochard gave Father Champagnat a cordial reception at the priests' Retreat (OME, doc. 166 [25]). He wanted to win support from the retreatants for his opposition to a recent decision of Pope Leo XII, who was going to appoint a Bishop Administrator for the diocese of Lyon. On that day, Father Courbon used the term "gallicanage" (smacking of Gallicanism) in regard to Father Bochard. The episode is related by Simon Cattet, in "Defence of the truth on Cardinal Fesch", pp. 291-292. It would have happened shortly before the arrival of Archbishop de Pins, which was between September and December, 1823.

narrow-minded; he capped that off by informing him that he was taking steps to have the House closed and the subjects dispersed.

He appears to have written along these lines to Father Dervieux 18, Dean of the district. For, a few days afterwards, that distinguished cleric summoned Marcellin to Saint-Chamond, and spoke to him in the same vein as Father Bochard. "What!" he expostulated. "Do you, a poor country curate, have the audacity to found a Congregation? Without money or ability and in defiance of your Superior's advice you take on the responsibility of such an enterprise! Can't you see that you are blinded by pride? If you have no concern for the harm you are doing yourself, at least take pity on the young men you are catapulting into such an awkward situation; for, sooner or later, your project will collapse and your subjects will be left without means of support."

Father Bochard's opposition to the Community of the Little Brothers of Mary, became public and raised a veritable storm of reproach and abuse against Marcellin. The parish priest of La Valla, who had been one of the first to criticize him and object to his project, and who kept Father Bochard informed on proceedings in the establishment 19, now intensified his invective. Two matters, in this regard, caused Father Champagnat great pain.

The first matter was the parish priest's open airing of his opposition to his curate and to the Brothers founded by him; he went so far as to blame him and chide him in public. One Sunday, while Marcellin was giving a short instruction at the end of Compline, the parish priest burst into the Church through the main door and from there intoned the hymn, "O crux ave", which ends Compline. The congregation, amazed and scandalized, turned in his direction, stared at him and listened to him sing with an air of disapproval which must have made clear to him how much his conduct was resented. Father Champagnat, without a trace of emotion or a hint of upset, went on with his instruction, when the priest stopped singing.

On another occasion, while Marcellin was giving instructions to prepare for Confirmation, he pointed out that the minister of

18 Mr Dervieux was President of the District Committee on Schools and in this role, one of his functions was to deal with complaints. The Director of the College of Saint-Chamond, for example, had few pupils and complained of priests who, here and there, were teaching Latin in their parishes and so, robbing him of pupils (OME, doc. 18, p. 71). Inspector Guillard verified that Father Champagnat ceased teaching Latin, in 1822 (OME, doc. 19 [9], p. 75).

190ME, doc. 19 [16, 20 and 23].

the sacrament was the Bishop. The parish priest entered the church at that moment, turned to the faithful and shouted: "Priests too, brethren, can administer the sacrament with permission." Such performances were quite frequent on his part 2°. Father Champagnat's invariable response was an unshakable patience.

The second of the matters referred to, was the abuse directed at Marcellin by the parish priest in the presence of the Brothers and his endeavours to destroy their allegiance to the Congregation. One of the best amongst them was offered employment in the presbytery; he undertook to place several others either in suitable positions or to have them admitted to other Communities. He did everything he could to retain Brother Louis and prevent him from obeying, when he was transferred to Bourg-Argental in 1823²¹. "I am your parish priest", he cajoled. "You were born in my parish and I don't want you to leave it. Let your Father Champagnat say what he likes. He doesn't know what he's doing." The good Brother, not a man to trifle with duty, and ever attentive to the voice of obedience, acted in this case as he had done at Marlihes.

Even Marcellin's confessor 22 abandoned him at the time of trials. Prejudiced by the false reports that came to him, and sick of the stories that were circulating, he went so far as to refuse to hear his confession. Father Champagnat had never undertaken anything, never made a single move, without consulting him. It therefore caused Marcellin extreme grief to see himself blamed and condemned by the very person who had, till then, been his support and guide. He begged him, without success, to be good enough to continue his spiritual direction; he achieved nothing and was forced to seek another confessor.

Father Champagnat was now in a very critical situation. He had not given up hope but he could not be sure what would happen to his undertaking. To rescue it from the persecutions which threatened it, he thought of asking to be sent to the American missions ²³. He mentioned this possibility several times

20 We know, however, that the parish priest had a high opinion of his curate, though he found him over-zealous.

21 This was the year when Brother John-Mary fled to la Trappe.

22 We have no document specifying precisely the name of the "confessor".

23 Father Champagnat was sure that the Brothers' branch of the Society of Mary should be founded; the other "founders" left it to him: "The branch of the Marist Brothers which had been entrusted to me in 1816..." (OME, doc. 152, p. 339). Moreover, one of the signatories of the Fourvière promise (Philip Janvier) was in U.S.A. where he had followed Bishop Dubourg; perhaps he saw in that a sign from Providence.

to his Brothers, asking them if they would be willing to follow him. The response was a unanimous one - that they would never leave him, even if it meant going to the world's end.

A few days afterwards, new reports reached the ears of the parish priest of Saint Peter's at Saint-Chamond. Father Champagnat got to know this, and called on him in an endeavour to head off the storm which was brewing. The parish priest, however, had no sooner caught sight of him than he showered him with reproaches and notified him that he intended to summon the police to La Valla in order to disband the Brothers and close the House. Marcellin made a humble, but ineffectual, request for permission to speak in his own defence and to explain his conduct and that of his Brothers. The parish priest²⁴ would have none of that. He shut the door in his face, summarily dismissing him.

It was the beginning of 1824. Father Champagnat and his Brothers, plunged in grief, expected to see the police appear at any moment. The slightest noise set them on edge and made them think that the police had arrived. It was at this juncture, that news was received that Archbishop de Pins²⁶ had been appointed administrator of the diocese of Lyon.

This new state of affairs revived the confidence of the pious Founder and led him to entertain hopes of brighter times ahead for his Congregation. After consulting God in prayer, he wrote a letter to the new prelate. In it, he gave a sketch of his project:

its origin, its aim and its state of progress. He concluded by declaring that he placed the work at His Grace's feet; that he himself was entirely at his service, perfectly willing to abandon the work or forge ahead with it, once the Prelate's pleasure in the matter was made plain.

As Father Champagnat had in all his conduct followed the advice of Father Gardette, Superior of the Major Seminary, he

²⁴ The Bourdin document is more nuanced on this matter. Father Dervieux, having read a letter from Father Courbon, that Father Champagnat had passed him, made the comment: "I am surprised that Father Courbon didn't write you anything more than that" (OME, doc. 166 [22] p. 447. Later, Father Dervieux became a great friend of Father Champagnat (AA, p. 318).

²⁵ Cardinal Fesch having refused to resign (OM 4, p. 279), Archbishop de Pins was named Administrator of the diocese of Lyons by the Brief of December 22nd, 1823, but it was approved by royal enactment only at the end of January, 1824.

²⁶ This letter has not been preserved.

sent him the letter 27 for the Archbishop, asking him to read it over and to present it himself to his Grace, if he thought that advisable. Father Gardette did deliver the letter and took the opportunity to sound the praises of its author and of the work which he had set going with such difficulty. The worthy Archbishop, whom the Little Brothers of Mary should never cease to look on as their father, straightway promised his protection to the new Congregation. "Write 28 and tell Father Champagnat", he ordered Father Gardette, "that I want to see him and talk about his work. Assure him meanwhile of my friendship." Marcellin duly went to Lyon and was introduced to the Archbishop by Father Gardette 29. He immediately knelt at the prelate's feet and asked a blessing. "Yes", said the Archbishop, "I bless you and all your Brothers. May God increase your little family so that it may fill not only my diocese, but France itself." 30 The Archbishop talked for a long while with Marcellin and sought an exact account of the origin, development and present state of the Congregation. Then he said: "You have my authorization to give your Brothers a religious costume and even to require them to make vows 31, for that is the only way to bind them firmly to their vocation." Then he went on: "Since your house is too small, you must build another. You can count on my help 32 in this matter." Marcellin went from the Archbishop to the shrine of Fourvière to thank God for so many favours received through Mary's intercession. He remained for a long while, humbly

27 Father Bourdin also speaks of those two letters to Archbishop de Pins and to Father Gardette (OME, doc. 166 [26], p. 449). Avit says: "Father Champagnat sent the new Archbishop a letter by the agency of Father Gardette, asking him to pass it on to His Grace, if he judged it opportune. Father Gardette, who knew the Founder and his work well, painted a glowing picture for the Archbishop" (AA, p. 54).

28 According to Father Bourdin, Archbishop de Pins wrote personally (OME, doc. 166 [27], p. 450).

29 Father Bourdin does not mention the presence of Father Gardette but only that of Fathers Cholleton and Barou (OME, doc. 166 [27], p. 449).

30 Marcellin Champagnat will later proclaim: "All the dioceses of the world come within our scope" (LPC 1, doc. 93, p. 210).

31 The Brothers made their first vows in 1826. Father Bourdin mentions the costume and the vow of chastity after the meeting of Father Champagnat with Archbishop de Pins and apparently as resulting from it (OM 2, doc. 166 [30], p. 450 and notes).

32 The construction began in May and the bulk of the work was finished at the end of the year. The interior work took a few months. The Brothers were able to move in, a year after the constructions began (AA, pp. 55-56).

prostrate at the feet of the Holy Mother, and, with a full heart, he consecrated himself once more entirely to her service.

There is one point that we really ought to advert to at this juncture - Father Gardette's important contribution to the Congregation in its critical situation. The protection and good will extended to it so generously and constantly by the Archbishop, were largely due to the efforts of that saintly priest. He hadn't confined himself to guiding and encouraging Father Champagnat, but had helped him with his own money. At any time that Marcellin visited the Major Seminary, Father Gardette provided him with advice, encouragement and material help for his work. The Little Brothers of Mary remain forever in the debt of that distinguished priest.

Back at La Valla, Father Champagnat found the parish in a state of commotion. A priest 33, brought in by the ailing parish priest to help out with the Easter ceremonies, had used Marcellin's absence to stir up the flock against their pastor. At his instigation, a petition had been drawn up calling for the transfer of the parish priest and for his replacement by the instigator. Marcellin indeed had good reason to complain about the parish priest, but he didn't hesitate to side with him and support him. He frankly condemned out of hand the action taken, and calling the leaders of the parish who had all signed the petition, he conveyed his displeasure. He not only urged them to abandon their procedure; he sharply rebuked the priest who had instigated all these intrigues and told him that he wanted nothing to do with him, causing him to become very angry.

However, as the parish priest's conduct had left him open to criticism, he was suspended from duties and replaced 34, not by his rival 35, but by Father Bedoin 36, a holy priest whose prudence and outstanding virtue soon won him the confidence, the respect and the affection of all. The Archbishop had offered the post to

33 John-Baptist Seyve, born at Saint-Genest-Malifaux, formerly curate at Tarantaise (1816-1820) and parish priest of Arthun (1821-1823) (OM 4, p. 354).

34 In fact, the Archbishop gave him the possibility of staying at La Valla but he preferred a chaplaincy with the Ursulines of Saint-Chamond; there he died shortly after, on January 27th, 1825 (AAL, reg. delib. 1, necrologie).

35 Father Seyve was appointed parish priest of Burdignes on May 5th, 1824. His display of wisdom there, seems to have been no greater. "The whole Municipal Council of Burdignes, on June 5th, 1830, wrote to the Prefect of the Loire a very violent letter against the despotism and annoying conduct of Father Seyve who was then parish priest (AD L, V. 15, No. 226).

36OM 1, doc. 103, p. 319.

Father Champagnat 37, but he didn't want to accept it, begging instead to be freed of the responsibilities of curate so as to be able to devote his total time to the work of the Brothers. Within a few months 38, he got his way.

The parishioners of La Valla loved Father Champagnat very much and applied the strongest possible pressure to keep him as parish priest. When they saw that he would not accept that function and had even made up his mind to leave the parish in order to build a new House in a more suitable and more accessible place, they made him most attractive offers to persuade him to remain. One person went so far as to offer him a property of considerable value, but nothing could make him change his mind.

37 According to Father Bourdin, this offer was made during the first interview with the Archbishop (OME, doc. 166 [27], p. 449).

38 We don't know exactly when Father Champagnat, appointed curate of La Valla on August 12th, 1816, (OME, doc. 16, p. 67), was officially replaced in his post. His last signature appears on March 20th, 1825 (parish Archives of La Valla, Catholic Register) and a receipt of February 21st, 1825, still gives him the title of curate (AFM, cahier Champagnat 3, p. 10).

CHAPTER TWELVE

*Fresh opposition brought on by the transfer of the novitiate.
The building of the Hermitage.*

On his journeys to Saint-Chamond 1, Father Champagnat had often let his eyes rest on the valley where the Hermitage 2 now stands. More than once, he had thought of it as a novitiate site, with its deep solitude, its perfect tranquillity and its great suitability for studies. "If God blesses us", he reflected, "We could very well set up house there." Yet, before finally opting for that position, he combed the surrounding district with two of the principal Brothers, to make sure that it was the best available. When he had had a good look at it all, it seemed the most suitable location offering for a religious house.

The valley of the Hermitage, divided and watered by the clear waters of the Gier, bounded on the east and west by an amphitheatre of mountains, covered almost to their peaks with verdure or with oak and fruit trees, is certainly a charming spot, especially in summer. But its restricted area, making it difficult to cater for a large Community there; the breezes and mists associated with the waters and decidedly uncongenial to weak constitutions or to health enfeebled by the exertions of teaching; these would be factors that would later force the chief House of the Institute to be moved elsewhere 4.

1 LPC 2, p. 542.

2 Before the construction, there was the hamlet of the Gauds, that is, Woods, on the left bank, and the Coulaud Wood on the right bank (OM 4, p. 423). When Father Champagnat had not yet selected the Hermitage site, Father Rouchon, parish priest of Valbenoîte, offered him part of the premises of a former Cistercian Abbey which he had acquired as a presbytery. Father Champagnat declined the offer (OME, doc. 23, p. 82).

3 The name "Hermitage" was most likely a choice of Father Courveille.

The first written mention of it was in the 1824 prospectus (OME, doc. 28 [2], p. 87). We can, besides, easily find other texts in which Father Courveille reveals his liking for a "hermitage" (OM 2, doc. 780 [2]; 784 [1]; OM 3, doc. 873 [12], 876 [20]). It remains true that Father Champagnat chose the site, appreciating the advantage of its isolation (LPC 1, doc 45, p. 124).

4 The publication of this book in 1856 coincides with the preparations, already under way, to establish the Mother House at Saint-Genis-Laval (Cf. CSG 11, p. 175 and 186; BI X, p. 31).

Human wisdom would see a strange imprudence in Marcellin's undertaking to construct such a costly building, while he was entirely without funds. The land 5 alone cost him more than twelve thousand francs. Naturally, then, when it became public knowledge that the community was moving and that a vast building was to be put up, there was a new storm of reproach, criticism 6, insult and abuse. This one perhaps surpassed even the outburst at the most turbulent time of the Institute. It was in no way abated by the Archbishop's 7 approval of the work, or by his high opinion of the Founder and good-will towards him. Nothing, in fact, could calm the agitated minds or silence the malicious tongues. His plan was regarded as sheer madness 8, and even his friends heaped blame on him and left no stone unturned to try to dissuade him. Alas! the world has no insight into the works of God, because they transcend its intelligence, clouded as it is by passion. The world treats these works as folly and their promoters, as madmen. "The world", says St. Paul, "treats us as fools." 9 Such was the treatment meted out to Christ in the court of Herod 10; his servants should expect no better 11.

Blessed John Baptist de la Salle, Founder of the Christian Brothers, defied relatives and friends by distributing his wealth among the poor and relinquishing his canonry in the Rheims cathedral. He did this to teach his Brothers a lesson of poverty, of total dedication to God and of renunciation of this world's goods. After it became known what he had done, the city inhabitants thought he had gone mad. When the worldly-wise saw

5 See Father Champagnat's and Courveille's deed of purchase for the Hermitage land (OME, doc. 26, pp. 83-84).

6 The simple folk were somewhat amazed. On September 6th, a neighbour of the Hermitage wrote to his parents: "Yesterday, *I* visited the Coulaud Wood, more out of curiosity than enthusiasm. *I* was reminded of the ancient Druids. Some were in the wood, others in the field; Vespers were in the open air with each one searching for a spot in sun or shade. People from Layat, (hamlet above the Hermitage, on the left bank), came out and sat down below their territory, with their prayer book. You know, that ought to be in the newspapers. Their voices rival Parisian singers for power" (private Archives of Ginot family).

7 See the encouragement afforded by Archbishop de Pins (OME, doc. 22, 23, 24 and 25).

8 Father de la Croix, future Archbishop of Auch, sent a message to Father Champagnat: "Tell Father Champagnat that he is building in vain" (OME, doc. 160, p. 386).

9 *I* Cor. 1,27.

10 Luke, 23,11.

11 Matt. 10,24; Luke, 6,40; Jn, 13,16 and 15,20.

him go past, they shrugged their shoulders in a gesture of pity, and commented: "See where his fanaticism and pig-headedness have landed him!" Before finalizing his resignation as Canon, he went to a church and, prostrating himself before God, remained absorbed in ardent prayer. At that time, two friends of his family came in, and one of them, full of worldly wisdom, remarked to the other with feigned pity: "Pray to God for poor Father de la Salle 12; he is losing his wits!" "You are right", retorted de la Salle, "he is losing his wits, all right; but the wisdom he is losing is that of the world in order to replace it with the wisdom of God."

The two pious Founders, whose projects are so similar, showed a striking resemblance in this matter, as in a number of others. It is good to make the comparison. "That mad Champagnat", alleged several of his fellow-priests and many other people, "must have gone off his head. What does he think he's doing? How is he going to pay for that house? He must be extremely rash and have lost all judgment to be blind enough to conceive such plans." A Lyon book-seller 13 had secured a loan of twelve thousand francs for Father Champagnat so that he could start the construction. This man called, on business, at a presbytery near Saint-Chamond and was invited to dinner by the parish priest.

On that day, there was a sizable gathering of priests, one of whom bantered on seeing him: "Well, sir, you seem to have got rid of your money?" "What do you mean, exactly?" was the reply. "The news is", continued the other, "that you have just lent twelve thousand francs to that fool of a Champagnat." "I haven't really lent it", corrected the book-seller, but I procured it and went surety for him." On saying this, he was reproached with having made a big mistake. When he asked why, he was told: "Because that man is reckless and stubborn; pride alone drives him, precipitating him into an undertaking which is doomed." Having protested that he had a higher opinion of Father Champagnat than the one expressed, that he believed he was a good man and that God would bless him, the book-seller was assured: "No, no; that's

12 J.c. Garreau, *Vie de Messire Jean-Baptiste de la Salle*, 1, p. 126. Ed. Mequignon, Cadet, 1825.

13 This book-seller is Mr Rusand and the lender with whom he went surety for Father Champagnat, was Mr Maréchal. The balance-sheet of August, 1826, mentions, in fact, a sum of 12,000 francs as due to the latter and a further 6000 francs owing to Mr Rusand. Elsewhere we find that both men rendered several services to Marist aspirants (Cf. OM 2, doc. 757, p. 780, note).

impossible; he is a hopeless man: no knowledge, no money, no ability. How could he possibly succeed? Hounded by his creditors, one day he will have to abandon ship and make off. It was unwise of you to stand surety for him; you only encourage his foolhardiness and put your money in jeopardy." "I hold Father Champagnat in high esteem", was the persistent response. "I have the utmost confidence in him and am convinced that this work will succeed. If I'm wrong, too bad! So far I have not regretted having helped him and I still believe that I shall never have to do so."

Father Champagnat was well aware of what people were thinking, and saying about him in public; but the talk of men had little influence on him, and he did not invoke the principles of human prudence to guide his life. So it was, that despite the large Community on his hands, despite a debt of four thousand francs, despite a lack of money, and with his confidence, (an unbounded one), in God alone, he fearlessly took on the construction of a house and chapel to accommodate one hundred and fifty people. The construction and the land purchase cost him more than sixty thousand francs.

This action certainly flew in the face of human prudence. No wonder that the carrying out of his plans drew so much fire on their author! However, to cut costs, the whole Community worked at the construction¹⁴; even the Brothers engaged in the schools were summoned to the task. It was a competition in zeal and devotedness with neither the weak nor the sick willing to refrain. One and all wanted the satisfaction of having a share in constructing a building which was so dear to them. There was one difference from the La Valla construction, in which the Brothers had done even the masonry. Masons¹⁵ alone now did this work, while the Brothers quarried and carried the stones, dug sand, mixed mortar and laboured for the stone-layers¹⁶.

Towards the beginning of May, 1824, Father Cholleton, Vicar General, came to bless the foundation stone of the new building; and such were the bareness and poverty of the House, that nothing could be found to give him for dinner. The Brother cook went up to Father Champagnat and asked: "What am I to do, Father, for I have absolutely nothing to give Father Cholleton." Reflecting

¹⁴ AA, 55-56.

¹⁵ "The management of the work was in the hands of Mr Roussier, head mason; Mr Matricon Benoît, carpenter; and Mr Robert, plasterer" (AA, p. 56).

¹⁶ AA, p. 56.

for a moment, he replied: "Go and tell Mr Basson 17, that the Vicar General and I are going to dine with him." That Mr Basson, who was rich and a great friend of the Brothers, welcomed them with pleasure. Moreover, this was not the only time that Father Champagnat called on him for such a service. He did so each time he found himself in a similar quandary.

To house the Brothers, Marcellin rented an old house 18 on the left bank of the Gier, facing the one under construction. The Brothers slept in an old garret so narrow that they were crowded on top of one another. Their food was of the simplest and most frugal variety. Bread, cheese, a few vegetables sent along occasionally by generous people from Saint-Chamond, very exceptionally a piece of pork, and invariably plain water for drink: that was their style of life. \Father Champagnat shared the conditions of food and housing, often accepting even the worst, for himself. For example, as no space could be found in the house for his bed, he was forced to put it on a kind of balcony, exposed to the onslaught of the wind and sheltered from rain only by the eaves. That's where he slept throughout the summer, and in winter he retired to the stable. The Brothers and their Founder underwent great hardship for almost a year, while they lived in that house, which was in a sad state of repair.

Right through the time of construction, the Brothers rose at four o'clock in the morning. Father Champagnat himself gave the rising signal and, when necessary, lit the lamps in the garret.

Having risen, the Community gathered amongst the trees, where Marcellin had constructed a small chapel in honour of the Blessed Virgin. A chest of drawers served as both vestment press and altar;

for bell-tower, there was an oak-tree on whose branches the bell was hung. Only the celebrant, the servers and the principal Brothers could fit in; the others remained outside 19. All prayed there, before an image 20 of the Mother of God. Such was their

17 Mr Basson had a house at La Valla. It is to-day the property of the Marze family, his descendants. .

18 The designs of the period were for constructions that provided for: living quarters, farm, laundry, and a small factory with tilt-hammers to make iron bars and comprising a forge too (Cf. N.D. de l'Hermitage, p. 37; also, MEM, p. 32).

19 Brother Avit writes: a brick oratory of 12 square metres. This was a wooded spot. A bell, hung from an oak-tree beside the oratory, announced the exercises of the day" (AA, p. 55). 20 It is a statue of Mary, holding the Child Jesus who is sucking his index finger. We have two of them: one at the Hermitage, one in the General House at Rome.

fervour that they seemed oblivious of all else, and the only noise was from the rustling leaves, the murmuring of the waters a little way off and the song of the birds.

Each morning, the Community went to the chapel, said morning prayers, made a half-hour's meditation and assisted at Holy Mass. - After lunch, they went there again to make a visit to the Blessed Virgin and in the evening they closed the day by a recitation of the rosary. Many a time, travellers along the road which skirted the mountain opposite, came to a stop, looked this way and that, wondering where those voices were coming from, singing as one and with such vigour. It was the Brothers, hidden amongst the trees and kneeling before the little altar on which the spotless Lamb was sacrificed, to the accompaniment of hymns of praise to Jesus and Mary.

Mass over, each went off to his work, giving it all his energies, in silence. On the hour 21, a Brother appointed to do so, rang a little bell. Then work was interrupted, each recollected himself, and together they recited the Gloria Patri, the Ave Maria and the invocation to Jesus, Mary and Joseph. No need to say that Father Champagnat was always first to work; he arranged everything, assigned the tasks, and maintained a general supervision. None of this prevented him, according to the opinion of the workers themselves, from accomplishing more stone-work than the most skilled of them. As we have already indicated, the Brothers were excluded from that work, but the masons did allow Marcellin to do it, because he was a master of the trade 22. Often he could be seen still building and working alone during the short siesta taken by workers, and again in the evening when the others were gone. At night, he said his Office, made out his accounts, marked the workmen's time sheets, listed the materials supplied that day, and planned the next day's work. It is clear, then, that he had very little time for rest.

21 The prayer is prescribed in the 1837 Rules: "During class, the prayer of the hour is said, as at the Mother House; the children remain seated" (Art. 12, p. 37).

22 Father Champagnat was a skilled worker. A letter from Father Forest on June 20th, 1836, shows that he saw him as an experienced builder. He wrote to him concerning the fixing up of a house for the Marist Fathers at Lyon: "If everything turns out as we hope, you will need to oblige us as soon as possible by coming to investigate what plan we can follow for the different repairs necessary before classes recommence" (OME, doc. ISO, p. 336).

It is worth pointing out that no Brother or other workman employed by Marcellin, was ever in an accident. This should be seen as a particular protection of God for the Community, especially as Father Champagnat spent his whole life building and always involved the Brothers in this kind of work. Quite often, serious accidents threatened the Community, but divine Providence, through Mary's intercession, always halted or averted the harmful effects. Let us take a few examples.

A workman, building at a great height on the side of the house next to the river, fell, and was headed for giant stones below, where he would have been dashed to pieces. On his way down, with the scaffolding materials, he was lucky enough to brush against a big tree and seize one of its branches, on which he hung till help came. He wasn't harmed, not even scratched. The protection of God is even more evident from the fact that the wood of the tree was brittle and the branch so weak that it couldn't normally support such a weight ²³.

A young Brother, attending the masons on the third storey of the building, was walking on a rotten plank which gave way under him, causing him to fall. As he dropped, he called on Our Lady's help and remained hanging by one hand, his entire body below the scaffolding. His situation was so dangerous, that the first workman to come to his rescue didn't dare approach him or touch him. A second, more fearless and generous, rushed forward, grasped the Brother's hand and pulled him back. The only harm he suffered was an extreme fright.

Ten or so of the strongest Brothers were carrying up stones to the second storey. One of them, having reached the top of the ladder with an enormous chunk on his shoulders began to feel faint under the weight of the heavy burden. His strength failed and the stone fell capsizing the Brother following, who was knocked to the bottom of the ladder. A slight movement of the head on his part, even though he was unaware of any problem, meant that he was simply grazed instead of having his head shattered. Father Champagnat, a witness of the incident from up above the ladder, considered his death as a foregone conclusion and gave him absolution. Yet he was not harmed, only so frightened that he ran around in the field as though out of his

²³ Father Bourdin wrote: A mason fell into the stream; Mass of thanksgiving." Father Coste adds the note: "Father Bourdin's mention of a Mass of thanksgiving, makes it clear that, in any case, he believed that an accident had somehow been avoided" (OME, doc. 166 [32], p. 451).

mind. All the Brothers present shared his fright, as did Father Champagnat, who immediately had prayers of thanks said for the protection God had just shown the Brother. Next day, he again 24 offered Mass for the same intention.

Although overburdened with work, Father Champagnat always found time, both at night and on Sundays, to give the Brothers instruction and spiritual formation. During that summer, he thoroughly instructed them on the religious vocation, on the end of the Institute and on zeal for the Christian education of children. So that they wouldn't forget what he had taught them about these different matters, he gave the Brothers a short written summary 25 of the main things he had said. We give its substance:

"The aim of the Brothers in joining this Institute has been above all to ensure the salvation of their souls, and to render themselves worthy of the huge weight of glory that God promises them and that Jesus Christ merited for them by his blood and his death on the Cross.

The chief means given them by God to acquire virtue, to sanctify themselves and reach heaven, are: prayer and meditation receiving the sacraments, daily attendance at Mass, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, spiritual reading, observance of the Rule and fraternal correction.

Brotherly love is the chief exterior support of the Brothers as well as being one of the most effective means of preserving the spirit of their state, of preventing abuses and keeping the Institute free of all that might endanger it. The Brothers should never forget, therefore, that by entering a Community and uniting to form a single family, they have undertaken to love one another as brothers, to edify one another, to engage in fraternal correction and to be of mutual assistance in reaching salvation.

Charity, which Jesus Christ calls his own commandment 26, ought to be one of their chief virtues, and they ought to apply themselves to practise it towards everyone but especially towards their own Brothers and the children: towards their Brothers, by being of service to them on every possible occasion, by glossing over or making excuses for their defects, by warning them charitably when there is need and alerting the Superior when such warning fails, by praying for them and being a good example to them; towards the children, by giving them religious instruction

24 Probably a reference to the first accident spoken of by Father Bourdin.

25 This document has not been preserved.

26 Jn, 15, 12.

and a Christian education. If this education is to be fully effective, the Brothers need to attend especially to the following points:

1. Teach catechism morning and afternoon, striving to impart to the children, the mysteries of our holy religion, the truths of salvation and the commandments of God and of the Church.
2. Arrange for the children to go to confession every three months; prepare them with the utmost care for their First Communion; teach them how to make their confessions properly; instruct them thoroughly in the dispositions needed for fruitful reception of the sacraments of Penance and Eucharist; urge them to have frequent recourse to these two sources of graces and salvation.
3. Avail themselves of every means suggested by zeal, to convince them of the necessity of prayer and to inspire them to love it and savour it; endeavour to have them pray always with attention, recollection, respect and piety; see that they know the morning and night prayers and all the others in use in our schools.
4. Talk to them often about the Blessed Virgin; instil in them unlimited confidence in her powerful protection; to achieve this, give them simple instructions, suited to their capacity and exactly what they need to develop that true devotion to Mary which is a mark of predestination.
5. Inspire them, at the same time, to have a devotion to their Guardian Angel and their patron saints and encourage them to pray often for the souls in purgatory. .
6. Have them sing hymns every day, train them in Gregorian chant, teach them to serve Mass and to take part in the ceremonies of the Church; use every possible strategy to attract them to the Church Services and show them how to draw fruit from their attendance.
7. Teach them to sanctify their actions, their work, their suffering by offering them to God and accepting his holy will; make them understand that virtue and holiness consist chiefly in avoiding sin, in being faithful to the duties of one's state in life and in sanctifying one's everyday actions through motives of faith and a supernatural intention.
8. Watch over the children with great vigilance; don't leave them alone in class, at play, or elsewhere; supervise them at all times so as to preserve their innocence, to get to know their

defects with a view to correcting them, their good tendencies in order to develop them and any misconduct which needs punishing to prevent scandal and the spread of evil; make school attractive to the children ²⁷, so that they will attend as long as possible and be kept clear of bad example and frequent inducements to offend God.

9. Inculcate respect for Christ's priests and obedience to civil authorities; fight constantly against a spirit of independence which is the major blemish on our society, and let the children see that obedience to priests, parents and civil authorities, is a commandment of God and a duty in all times and places.

10. Inspire them with a taste for work and lead them to love it; show them that idleness is one of the most dangerous vices for soul and body, being the source of numerous faults.

11. Train them to be temperate and courteous; give them a love of order and cleanliness, reducing the theory to practice by requiring them to treat all others with respect, especially those of exalted rank.

12. A final point: the Brothers should be models of piety and virtue for the children; in this way they will lead them to God much more by example than by words."

Sustained and invigorated by these instructions, the Brothers displayed admirable piety, modesty, devotedness and energetic effort during the entire time of the construction. The workmen were unstilted in their admiration for the spirit of sacrifice, of humility and of charity that prevailed amongst the Brothers; so much so, that their admiration was given clear public expression. The good example of the Brothers was not lost on the workmen themselves who, having admired them, did their best to imitate them. Hence they, too, soon became silent, modest, reserved in their speech and full of consideration and kindness towards one another.

However, with the approach of All Saints, thought had to be given to sending the Brothers back to the schools. Father Champagnat preached them an eight-day Retreat, suggesting to each the resolutions befitting his needs, his defects, his character

²⁷ School attendance was not compulsory and the children attended very irregularly, especially during the summer season. It was easy for them to play the truant (Cf. LPC 1, doc. 298, p. 543).

and his responsibilities; each one was to head his list of resolutions with: the constant recall of the presence of God.

Two new schools were opened during that year. The one at Charlieu 28 was requested by the Archbishop. The parish priest, Father Térél and Mr Guinot 29, the mayor, paid the initial expenses and proved to be lasting protectors and benefactors of the Brothers. The children were found to be in great ignorance and a prey to all vices that normally accompany it. For some time, their task was a difficult and thankless one, but their zeal, devotedness and patience triumphed completely in the end and that school 30 became one of the most flourishing in the Society.

The second school founded at this time, was that of Chavanay. The parish priest, Father Gaucher 31, presented himself in person to request Brothers, and accepted responsibility for some of the initial expenses of the foundation. The people of Chavanay were most enthusiastic about having the Brothers. A delegation of leading men was sent to the Hermitage to accompany them to their residence, and the school, with the total backing of the people, was attended from the start by all the children of the parish.

About the feast of All Saints in 1824, Father Champagnat was released from his duties of curate 32 at La Valla. Up till then, on Saturday evenings during the construction, he went up to La Valla to hear confessions and to say Mass on Sunday. Now that he was free from all commitment outside his project, he gave himself exclusively to the service and welfare of the Community.

Winter was passed on work inside the house. As he usually did, Father Champagnat led the workers, the carpenters, the plasterers, etc; The work went ahead at such a pace, that in the summer of 1825, the community was able to take up residence in the new house. The chapel 33, too, was completed and readied for divine service. Father Dervieux, parish priest of Saint-Chamond was delegated by the Archbishop to bless it, which he did on the

28 LPC 2, pp. 544-548; and OME, doc. 32, pp. 91-98.

29 Guinault LPC 2, p. 267.

30 Brother Louis was its first Director (AA, p. 61).

31 LPC 2, pp. 549-550; and OME, doc. 166 [25], p. 148.

32 There was a time lapse between the appointment of the parish priest, Bedoin and Father Champagnat's withdrawal as curate. In fact, Father Bedoin declared that Father Champagnat was his curate for six months. He himself directed the parish for 40 years (Cf. AAL, reg. délib. 1, p. 19; and OM 1, doc. 103, p. 319).

33 It was on the third storey and overshadowed by the little bell-turret which still exists.

Feast of the Assumption 34 of the Blessed Virgin. That holy priest, whose feelings towards Father Champagnat and his Congregation had changed, presented a set of candlesticks for the chapel and they were used at the blessing.

34 In fact, it was on August 13th, 1825, according to the official report (Cf. OME, doc. 37, p. 107).

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

*Father Courveille joins Marcellin and manoeuvres for the leadership.
Sad plight of the Community when Marcellin becomes dangerously ill.*

At a time of tribulations and persecutions from without, and of problems attendant on the construction of a very large house, a new kind of trial was encountered. This one was more painful to the Founder than any he had previously experienced.

Father Champagnat was now joined by two priests from the group formed at the Major Seminary to found the Marist Institute. They were Father Courveille 1, parish priest of Epercieux and Father Terraillon 2, chaplain to the Ursulines at Montbrison. Father Courveille claimed to have originated the idea of founding the Marist Society 3, and on this score he set himself up as the Superior General of the Society. Father Champagnat, who didn't know the designs God had on the Society of Priests, and who had a high opinion of Father Courveille, together with a very low one of himself, readily acceded to his assuming the role of Superior.

He likewise required the Brothers to look upon him as their Superior.

General opinion at the time, regarded the Society of Marist Fathers and that of the Brothers as one, believing that there was to be a single foundation under a single leader. The Brothers therefore accepted the new arrangement without any difficulty.

Moreover, they expected that Father Champagnat would always be in charge of them and that Father Courveille would exercise only a general control of them, being specially concerned with the

1 Courveille, LPC 2, p. 250.

He was officiating minister of Epercieux, a small village enjoying the rank of chapel of ease, not parish. He remained there 5 years (Cf. OM 4; p. 254). Father Champagnat went to see Father Courveille, only on the advice of another person whom he called Father Superior, that is, Father Gardette (Cf. LPC 1, doc. 30, p. 84).

2 Terraillon, LPC 2, p. 479.

3 It is certain that Courveille was the originator of the group of future Marists of the diocese of Lyon. Testimony of Father Declas (OM 2, doc. 551 [1] p. 340) and of Father Terraillon (OM 2, doc. 750 [1-2], p. 666).

priests. Thinking along these lines, they went to Father Champagnat in all their dealings and in no way modified their former relationship with him. Courveille was deeply hurt at seeing the Brothers ignore him, despite his title of Superior General ⁴, and have constant recourse to Father Champagnat. He therefore conceived the plan of having himself appointed as the special and exclusive director of the Brothers. Before making any move, he strove to gain the confidence of the Brothers and to win their allegiance, using every possible strategy.

During the holidays ⁵ of 1825, believing that he had sufficiently prepared their minds to adopt his views, he assembled ⁶ the Brothers. To conceal the trap he was setting, he gave a long discourse on the good the Society was called to accomplish and the different apostolates which it embraced. He concluded with the words: "Since, then, the priests who are here may at any time be called to other ministries, you must choose the one you want as leader, though you are free to choose any one of us. I love you enough to sacrifice myself for you; Father Terraillon, as well as Father Champagnat, shows a very great interest in you. However, each of us should have his own special domain, and unity is enhanced if a single one of us has particular responsibility for you. I therefore want you to let me know which of us you want as your Director. Pray to God for enlightenment; think seriously before deciding; don't be swayed by motives that flesh and blood ⁷ may suggest; seek only the glory of God, the interests of your Congregation and the welfare of your soul. When you have made your choice, write the name on a slip of paper. In a few minutes I shall come and collect your votes."

The Brothers, thinking everything was straightforward did, in all simplicity, exactly what they were asked; it didn't even enter their heads that they might lose the one who had brought them together in the first place and who was regarded and loved by all as their Father. After a moment's reflection, each wrote his vote without any consultation or even any word exchanged. Father Courveille having come back into the room, read the ballot papers,

⁴ Even when he was at Epercieux, Father Courveille already considered himself responsible for what was done, in his absence, in the area of Feurs, at La Valla, at Cerdon, etc. (OME, doc. 28, p. 87). See the 1824 prospectus (OME, doc. 28, pp. 87-89) where he seems, in effect, to give himself this title, signing first.

⁵ Brother Avit says: "The Brothers came down in May" (AA, p. 63). The school holidays were in September-October.

⁶ AA, p. 67.

⁷ Matt. 16,17.

on nearly all of which Father Champagnat's name was written. Seeing this, he shot a look at him and said to him with a feeling he could not hide: "It looks as though they put their heads together to give you their votes." Father Champagnat, who was conscious only of his own unworthiness, far from being offended at the ungracious remark, easily agreed with the other's views. Convinced that the Brothers had not given sufficient thought to the matter, he wanted that vote annulled and another taken. But before this was done he asked to speak to the Brothers. "My friends", he gently chided them, "I am afraid you don't understand the importance of what you are about. The choice you have just made is plain proof for me. If you wish the election to be in accordance with God's will, (and I'm sure you do), you must shed any self-will, disregard any human motive and ignore any esteem or affection you may have for me. The fact that we have known each other for a long while, does not make me better qualified than others to guide you; on the contrary, I believe those priests more capable than I of directing and forming you. They have not been involved in manual work, and since they have given all their time to prayer and the study of religion, they have knowledge of these matters which I lack.

Of course, I have no intention of abandoning you; but you can see that temporal affairs absorb much of my time, and that, despite my good will, I can't do for you, everything that I would like. Someone else, then, should be given the task of instructing you and of training you in piety. So, ask again for the light of the Holy Spirit and for the protection of Mary. Give the matter more thought; rid yourself of all emotional attachment and of every human perspective; then proceed to a fresh election." In a spirit of obedience, the Brothers did all that they were asked. The second vote, like the first, was carried out with great recollection and the Brothers, in their simplicity, didn't even think to confer. Each registered his vote and placed it in the place provided. Father Courveille, having counted the votes, bitterly reported: "It's still the same result!" Then, addressing Father Champagnat, he conceded: "You will be their Superior, since you are the only one they wish for." Indeed, they did wish for only him: almost all the votes, again named him. The Brothers' behaviour on this occasion is an undeniable proof of their good spirit and their genuine affection for their pious Founder 8.

8 On this same story, see the testimony of Father Sean (OM 2, doc. 625 [4], p. 441).

This year, 1825, saw the foundation of the Brothers at Ampuis. Father Hérard 9, a former American missionary, had the school built, and guaranteed the Brothers an annual allowance of six hundred francs. After the feast of All Saints, Father Champagnat decided to visit all his establishments to see, at first hand, the condition of the Houses, and to treat with the municipal authorities on a number of matters concerning the welfare of the schools, matters that could not be settled without his help.

The Institute boasted ten 10 schools at this time. These were: Saint-Sauveur, Bourg-Argental, Vanosc, Boulieu, Chavanay, Saint-Symphorien-le-Château, Tarantaise, La Valla, Charlieu and Ampuis. Marcellin carried out all those visitations 11 on foot and in quite bad weather. The Charlieu journey was particularly difficult, because of the heavy rains that had fallen, making the roads treacherous to travel. Besides, he was very hard on himself, didn't spare himself at all, and, when travelling, was oblivious of his own needs.

The truth of this can be gathered from his behaviour on another trip to Charlieu, slightly later. He took a conveyance at Saint-Etienne, at nine o'clock in the evening, reached Roanne at eight o'clock in the morning, said Holy Mass and, without a bite to eat, went off on foot to Charlieu, arriving there only at one o'clock. On his return, he left Charlieu at four o'clock in the morning, said Mass at Roanne, took a little soup and reached Vandranges, about 18 miles away, for lunch. Lunch over, he set out again and walked for several hours. He was very thirsty and asked a woman for a drink, refusing the wine she offered and taking only a little water. During the short stop in that house, he began to teach the children catechism and to distribute medals of Our Lady. By evening, he was at Balbigny, where he slept at the presbytery. Next day, he was off at four o'clock and covered twelve miles before stopping to say Mass. He then headed for La Fouillouse, taking some soup and fruit on arrive. His last stretch brought him to the Hermitage. It was then seven o'clock 12 in the evening.

9 AA, pp. 66-67; and LPC 2, pp. 528-529.

10 For those schools, see LPC 2, index of place names.

11 AA, pp. 67 H. These visits were carried out over about 50 days (AA, pp. 67-68).

12 From Charlieu to Roanne by to-day's route, is about 20 km; from Roanne to Vandranges by route N. 7 is 14 km; from Vandranges to Balbigny, 16 km; from Balbigny to La Fouillouse, 38 km; from La Fouillouse to Saint-Chamond, 18.5 km. That represents 105 km in two days.

We owe all these details to a workman ¹³ who accompanied him. He declared that he had never been so hungry as on that journey. "There were times", he confided, "when I was tempted to leave him to himself and to go into a tavern for something to eat." That was Father Champagnat's manner of living during his travels. It is no surprise, therefore, that he so rapidly wore out the strong constitution given him by nature, and that he died at such an early age.

On his return to the Hermitage, he had to endure further trials from Father Courveille. The latter, who had been thoroughly mortified by the preference shown to Marcellin in the elections held during the vacations, took advantage of his absence from the Hermitage, to show the Brothers how upset he was. He even wrote, to those in the establishments, letters full of bitter reproach for the fact that they continued to have recourse to Father Champagnat and to regard him as their Superior; he claimed that such behaviour was an insult to him, and a failure in respect and trust, which would certainly bring the curse of God on the Institute. Father Champagnat was not exempt from his display of pique: everything he did, was blamed.

According to Father Courveille, the Brothers were badly directed; the novices were not sufficiently challenged, were not adequately educated and lacked satisfactory training in piety; the discipline of the House was neither strict enough nor sufficiently monastic; temporal affairs were neglected and money was squandered - in one word: he thought Father Champagnat a poor administrator and he relieved him of the purse strings ¹⁴.

However, in changing hands, the purse was no better filled indeed, it was often empty. Then Father Courveille ¹⁵ would vent his bad humour in bitter attacks on Father Champagnat.

The pious Founder was careful to hide these troubles and afflictions and he absorbed their bitter impact all alone. However, the fatigues of the long and difficult journeys he had made, were now reinforced by these trials, to cause an illness which brought him to the brink of the grave. On his journey to Charlieu he was

¹³ That workman was Philip Arnaud, nephew of Father Champagnat (Cf. AA, pp. 166 and 243. MEM, p. 36).

¹⁴ Non-extant letters.

¹⁵ Brother Theodosius said: "He (Courveille) asserted himself, took charge of everything but there was no sustained effort. He was highly emotional. One moment, everything was fine, magnificent, generosity abounded; then, everything was ruined, and was changed" (OM 3, doc. 860 [1 and 2], p. 825; and OME, doc. 40 and notes, pp. 112 ff.).

already suffering. However, he made light of his illness and did nothing to combat it. Even more, he still launched himself into laborious activities on his return. Although he felt himself wasting with a burning fever, he insisted on attending the Christmas midnight ceremonies as well as the High Mass and Vespers on Christmas day. It was only next day, the feast of St Stephen, when he could go on no longer, that he took to bed, after saying Mass. The illness made rapid headway so that, within a few days, there seemed no hope of a cure, and his life was even despaired of. It ought to be said here, to Father Courveille's credit, that he seemed very distressed at the sickness and wrote 16 to all the establishments, asking the Brothers to pray, and to have prayers said, for his recovery 17.

As soon as it became generally known how critically ill Father Champagnat was, creditors flocked in, looking for their payment. As their demands could not be met, they threatened to seize the furniture and sell the house. That's what would have happened, if the worthy parish priest of Saint-Pierre, Father Dervieux 18, hadn't summoned them and accepted responsibility for all the debts. A few days later, in fact, he paid off six thousand francs.

But the financial problem was only the beginning. The Community, filled with deep sadness at the sickness of Father Champagnat, later became thoroughly discouraged. Brothers and novices alike, were convinced that, if he died, all was lost and the only thing to do would be to disband. Certainly; Father Courveille's behaviour did nothing to reassure them and dispel their fears. Instead of calming the Brothers, encouraging them and inculcating confidence and resignation, he turned their hearts against him by excessive strictness and unnecessary severity. Because of the anxiety each one felt about his future and that of the Institute, a certain relaxation and frivolity crept in; but order and discipline could easily have been restored with a little

16 Father Courveille, in a circular of January 3rd, 1826, asked the Brothers to pray for the recovery of Father Champagnat (Cf. OME, doc. 41, p. 115). This circular is preserved in AFM and published in BI XXIT, p. 168.

17 On January 6th, 1826, Father Champagnat, fearing the worst, drew up a will in favour of Father Courveille and of Father Joseph Verrier, director of the Minor Seminary of Verrières, a former fellow-student and a Marist aspirant when in the Major Seminary (OME, doc. 42, pp. 116-118).

18 It doesn't seem that Father Dervieux was really rich but he did have the help of benefactors, notably Miss Fournas who, in 1832, after his death, diverted her generosity towards Father Champagnat (AA, p. 318). At his death, Father Dervieux didn't leave enough money even for his burial. The parish took care of it (Cf. Biographie, by Jacques de Boissieu).

prudence and gentle firmness. Unfortunately, an opposite tactic was adopted. The initial breaches of Rule were severely put down, a procedure which aroused discontent and fuelled discouragement. Levity and bad will kept on increasing. Father Courveille thought that the best way to halt the trend was to use vigorous remedies.

He therefore began to issue severe threats, to impose weighty penances and even to expel some subjects. This line of action, made the problem worse rather than better, for the Brothers were not used to being driven by force. They therefore saw the treatment as a roundabout way of compelling them to withdraw, and they were very angry. The final straw was an assembly called by Father Courveille. He first delivered some stinging reproaches to the Community, and went on to say that he wasn't the least bit worried how things turned out. He announced that he intended to sever connections and ask the Archbishop to appoint him to a parish. This declaration gave rise to a widespread discontent and grumbling. It extinguished the last flicker of hope and shook the courage in the hearts of many elderly Brothers, hitherto proof against the general contagion.

Each one now gave free rein to his thoughts and words, looked to his own future, laid his plans and told others what these were. This one intended returning home and was informing his parents; another would apply to a different Congregation; a third had in mind this or that trade; all, in fact, were either getting ready to leave the Congregation or resigned to doing so; and this was a Congregation that was dear to them, but in which they no longer found that peace, union, happiness and satisfaction, which they had enjoyed in former times.

The one exception, in these crucial circumstances, was Brother Stanislaus 19. He proved himself capable, steadfast and devoted. He struggled single-handed against the Brothers' discouragement and against the excessive rigour and imprudence of Father Courveille; only he kept his confidence; only he stood faithful to the Institute; only he proved himself a worthy son of Father Champagnat. Night and day, he kept watch by the Founder's bed and lavished every attention on him. It was he, who went to the parish priest of Saint-Chamond, informed him of the sad state of affairs in the Community, and of the threats of creditors; by his urgent and tearful importuning, it was he, who persuaded that

19 For Brother Stanislaus, see BOF, pp. 47 ff. In 1854, Brother Francis, Superior General, wrote a short but touching biography of Brother Stanislaus (CSG 11, pp. 178-184).

priest to take over the debt. His were the wise advice, the exhortations and the entreaties which led the Brothers and novices to remain and ended their plans to abandon the whole project.

Brother Stanislaus wasn't afraid even to remonstrate very humbly but equally firmly, with Father Courveille, on account of his harshness and the methods he used in dealing with the Brothers. He particularly blamed him for revealing to the Brothers his plan to desert them and take up a parish. Father Courveille instead of toning down his attitude and admitting his mistakes, coldly replied: "I wasn't the one who ran up the debts; if things go wrong, too bad; I shall not answer for the future. Yes, if Father Champagnat dies, I shall leave and so will everyone else." It is certainly true that all would have been lost, had Father Champagnat died. But God, having chosen him to found and establish the work of the Brothers, watched over his life; he restored him to health and strength, contrary to all human expectations.

The moment there was an improvement in his condition, and the Brothers once more had hope of his recovery, they felt relieved and joy flowed back into their faces. On hearing from Brother Stanislaus everything that was happening in the house, Marcellin earnestly begged Father Courveille to be more paternal in his direction of the Brothers, to show himself more kindly and above all, not to expel on such slight pretexts subjects who, despite their defects, might one day become worthy Religious. But matters had really reached a point of no return. On both sides, attitudes were extremely bitter. The Brothers had lost all confidence in Father Courveille and he, in turn, was dissatisfied with everybody and everything. Convinced that most of the subjects lacked the qualities requisite for becoming Religious, he wasn't the least disturbed to see them abandon a vocation for which he believed them unsuited. Besides, taking an extreme view of the excellence and duties of the religious state, he expected of mere novices, a degree of perfection that one would be happy to see gracing men grown old in religious observance. He imposed a yoke 20 beyond human endurance and dismissed anyone who shirked it. Yet, as soon as it was certain that Father Champagnat was out of danger, spirits grew calm; hearts regained confidence; gaiety, joy and happiness supplanted the confusion and grumbling which had held sway for three weeks; order and discipline re-emerged; people were resigned

20 Lk. II, 46.

to bear the burden in the hope that soon everything would change and take on its pristine spirit.

The scene that took place when Father Champagnat first made his appearance again in community, serves to give us some idea of the attachment and affection that the Brothers had for him and of the pleasure and happiness that his recovery gave them all, a recovery that had been so much the object of their longings and of their prayers. He could hardly stand up, but, having learned that one of the novices was to be severely reprimanded during the Chapter of Faults which was due to take place, he asked Brother Stanislaus, who was with him, to take him by the arm and help him into the Chapter-room. When he made his entry and all eyes fell on him, there was an indescribable explosion of joy. The whole assembly suddenly rose as one; their eyes lit up; happiness beamed on every countenance; all the Brothers turned in his direction and shouted; "It's Father Champagnat! It's our good Father!" A burst of applause and tears of joy combined to give expression to the extreme pleasure with which every heart vibrated. The solemn and impressive Chapter ceremony was interrupted and then abandoned. Father Courveille, who was presiding, and was witness to the demonstrations of affection for Marcellin and to the scant notice accorded to himself, slipped away from the Chapter and did not return. The good Father spoke a few words of encouragement²¹ to the Brothers, restoring confidence to their hearts and finally dissipating all their fears.

The crisis which we have just recounted, had no repercussions outside the Novitiate House. In fact, the illness of the Founder produced no problem or upset in the establishments.

A few days afterwards, a postulant²² came along to ask for admission to the Community and was taken up to Marcellin's room. Father Courveille, who was there at the time, gave him a detailed examination and drew such a frightening picture of the obligations of religious life, that the young man, disheartened by what he had just heard, was inclined to give up his idea. Father Champagnat had not said a word during the interview, but he

²¹ In 1833, Father Champagnat recalled these events in a letter to Father Cholleton: "I reassured my children; I told them to have no fear; that *I* would share their misfortunes; that we would eat together, the last morsel of bread" (LPC 1, doc. 3D, p. 84).

²² The reference is to Benoît Deville (Brother Benedict) AA, p. 87. This is the same Brother Benedict who, six months after the death of Father Champagnat, asked Mr Ravery to make him a copy of the portrait of Father Champagnat which he had painted the day after his death (Cf. SMC, Vol. 1, p. 60).

observed the postulant closely. He detected on his face his unfavourable reaction to the exaggerated account of the duties of life in religion. He called aside the young man, who was moving off.

When he was alone with him, Marcellin invited him to visit the chapel and in order to have the chance for a conversation, despite the trouble he had walking, took him along himself. It needed some time to climb the forty 23 steps leading there, and although he leant on the hand-rail and paused a while at each landing, he was quite out of breath when he got there. After adoring the Blessed Sacrament, he showed the statue of the Blessed Virgin to the young man, and said: "See that august Virgin! She is our Good Mother and she will be yours if you come to live in this House which is consecrated to her; she will help you to overcome the difficulties of religious life." Then, as they left the chapel, he went on to say: "Is it possible to claim that the yoke of Jesus Christ is harsh and difficult to bear? No; the Divine Saviour, who is Truth itself, assures us that his yoke is sweet 24 and that happiness and consolation are the reward of the bearer. I assure you that you will experience more satisfaction, joy and contentment in the service of God, than could be had from all the pleasures of the world. Give it a try and you will see. Religious life has nothing hard in it for men of good will. Don't be afraid; I promise you the protection of our Good Mother. She will care for you as her child. I'll expect you here in a day or two; don't let me down!"

Hearing these words, the postulant felt all his fears vanish; his heart overflowed with joy and courage. "Yes", he answered, "I shall come; you have my word for it!" A few days later, he joined the novitiate and, as Father Champagnat had predicted, he experienced few problems and great consolation. To obtain the gift of perseverance, he often went to pray at the feet of his Blessed Mother, who never ceased to protect him as her child. That young man never wavered in his vocation and became a worthy religious.

As soon as Father Champagnat was able to move out of doors, the parish priest of Saint-Pierre came to get him and transfer him to his own presbytery. He was afraid that he might not be well enough cared for at the Hermitage or that the poverty of the

23 Between the first and third storey, where the chapel was from 1825 to 1836.

24 Matt. II, 30; I Jn 5, 3.

House might prevent them from providing what was necessary. So, he wanted to be personally responsible for the little services called for by Father Champagnat's condition. His care and consideration were enough to overwhelm Marcellin and he continued to show himself the protector and benefactor of the Brothers, till the time of his death. He was a father to the Brothers and a friend of their pious Founder. In this way, he made it clear that any trouble he had caused them in the past, was due to ignorance and to being misinformed ²⁵.

²⁵ For the rest of the difficulties and the financial arrangements with Father Courveille, see Avit, fascicule des renvois, p. 337.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The virtue of Father Champagnat is subjected to new trials because of the unfortunate behaviour of Father Courveille and the withdrawal of several Brothers.

The events of the Hermitage just recorded, did not manage to cure Father Courveille of his ambition or fill him with better feelings towards Father Champagnat, but seeing that he was unable to alienate the affection of the Brothers from their Founder, he adopted other means to achieve his aims. One such means, was to write *I* to the Archbishop to disparage the good Father and to ruin that prelate's opinion of him. Amongst other things, he accused him of too easily accepting all kinds of subjects, the majority of whom would withdraw after inflicting great expense on the House; of neglecting to form the Brothers to piety and the duties of their state; of employing them too much at manual labour; of failing to educate them adequately ²; finally of being too kind and too indulgent, with the result that he let discipline and regular observance deteriorate.

Although all these accusations were not given full credence at the Archbishop's house ³, it was nevertheless thought necessary to examine the charges, so as to ascertain what truth there was in them. For this purpose, it was decided that Father X ⁴ would pay a visit to the Hermitage. He arrived there while Father Champagnat was convalescing at the house of the parish priest of St Peter's. As soon as he heard of the visit, he went up to the Hermitage to pay his respects to him and to give him a full

¹ This letter has not been found again in the AAL or in Archbishop de Pins' papers (Cf. OM 2, doc. 757, p. 793, note 2).

² On the contrary, Father Champagnat took good care to train his Brothers, especially by holiday courses which were the admiration of Inspector Dupuis (Cf. AA, pp. 98-99, and RLF, p. 107).

³ The Archbishop had a certain distrust of Father Courveille. On August 25th, 1825, he had been recommended to take things more calmly and "to limit himself, for the moment, to the work of the Marist Brothers, any other attitude being inopportune" (OME, doc. 38, p. 108).

⁴ In the text of the second edition, the author identified the Vicar General who made the visit, as Father Cattet.

statement of how matters stood. Father X, who was prejudiced, received him coldly and bombarded him with questions and critical comments. After that, he made a most minute inspection of the House and conducted an examination of the Brothers and novices, testing them on religious knowledge and on the chief elements of primary teaching. He was a harsh examiner and concluded that the Brothers were not sufficiently well-trained.

It was plain to everybody that he was dissatisfied and, in addition, he made no effort to hide his bad mood; he complained vociferously and, wherever he went, laid blame on anything that was not to his liking. Before leaving the House, he repeated to Father Champagnat the reproaches he had already made in detail at any time that he had had the opportunity. He directed him to dedicate more time to the education of the Brothers and forbade him to undertake any new constructions and to spend so much time on temporal affairs.

Were the complaints of Father X justified? We believe not. They centred on two chief points: the instruction of the novices was neglected; Father Champagnat gave too much time to material matters and was ruining his Congregation with spending on constructions and repairs ⁵. It is true that the studies were not very advanced, but the novitiate is not a place for training in the sciences; it is for formation in virtue. The young people then in the House, were from the mountain regions and most of them could neither read nor write when they arrived. It was quite impossible for them to acquire in a year or two, the knowledge that they would need and that was prematurely expected of them. As regards the question of constructions and repairs, since the Founder was without funds, he was really forced to carry them out himself with his Brothers and novices, when such works became imperative.

But although Father X had sided with Father Courveille in the matters we have just raised, it was soon known at the Archbishop's palace what should be thought of the latter's denunciations and complaints against Marcellin. A few days after that visit, divine justice itself intervened to avenge the persecution of the innocent and to halt the troubles of every kind that were put in his way. Father Courveille, who viewed everything with a

⁵ The reproach of excessive building was often levelled against Father Champagnat. However, candidates kept arriving in large numbers (Cf. OME, doc. 65 [1], p. 151). By the time he died, he had received some 500 postulants of whom 280 were Brothers and 49 had died as Brothers (Cf. AA, p. 316).

jaundiced eye, who complained of a lack of piety and regularity in the House, and who believed that the Brothers and novices were not perfect enough, fell into serious faults. He drew down on his head that fearful judgment of our divine Saviour: "If anyone scandalizes one of these little ones, it would be better for him to have a millstone tied around his neck and be thrown into the sea." After that shameful fall, he went to make a retreat at the Trappist monastery of Aiguebelle, in order to put his conscience in order. However, far from opening his eyes to the depths into which his pride had hurled him, he persisted in his foolish aim to be in sole commando. He wrote a letter complaining that he was being denied the respect that was his due, and concluded it by asserting that he would return to the Hermitage only on the condition of being given a formal promise of holding total authority for the future and of being treated as Superior 6.

Meanwhile, his fault had become known, and the Archbishop advised Father Champagnat and Father Terraillon to write a joint letter telling him to remain at Aiguebelle, if he felt at home there and, in any case, not to think of returning to the Hermitage 7.

It is not hard to understand the extreme pain that Father Champagnat suffered from this episode. However, God had other trials in store for him. About this time Brother John-Mary 8 left

6 OME, doc. 171 [24], p. 473.

7 After the volume appeared, Father Favre, Superior General of the Marist Fathers, wrote to Brother Francis on September 17th, 1856, to express his disagreement with the passage on Father Courveille who was still alive and a Benedictine at Solesmes (OM 2, doc. 757, p. 763). Brother John-Baptist immediately, in a second edition, modified his text, thus: Father Courveille, who detected faults everywhere, who complained that the house lacked 'piety and regularity and who considered that the Brothers and the novices were not perfect enough, was himself compromised in a matter which there is no point in recalling here.

Shortly afterwards, he went to make a Retreat at La Trappe, Aiguebelle; but far from focusing dearly on his wrong-doings and recognizing what was reprehensible in his conduct, he reinforced his self-love and his foolish claim to be sole Superior. He therefore wrote a letter in which he complained bitterly that he was denied the honours due to him; he ended by declaring that he would return to the Hermitage, only if given a formal promise to be recognized as first Superior of the Brothers, to be treated as such and to be accorded full authority and freedom to govern the Community in his own way. Meanwhile, the Archbishop having got wind of the affair, advised Father Champagnat and Father Terraillon to write a joint letter, telling him to remain at La Trappe, if he felt at home there and, in any case, not to think of returning to the Hermitage.

8 Brother John-Mary, LPC 2, pp. 292-301 and OME, doc. 166, p. 443.

the Institute, or rather, was dismissed from it; yes, Brother John-Mary, the first to join him at La Valla, the first whom he withdrew from the world and one whom he loved and esteemed in an altogether special way. That Brother, finding the Rule not severe enough, asked permission to join the Trappists.

Father Champagnat left no stone unturned in trying to dissuade him but his advice and his warnings fell on deaf ears. He walked out on the establishment at Bourg-Argental 9, of which he had charge, leaving the two hundred children to the care of two young Brothers; he went off 10 without awaiting a replacement and even though he knew that there was no Brother, at the time, adequately trained to succeed him. After three weeks at the Trappists' he was sorry for what he had done. He went and threw himself at the Founder's feet, earnestly asking the favour of being re-admitted to the Institute. Father Champagnat welcomed him with joy and even eagerness, thinking him permanently healed of his illusions: little did he know!

Brother John-Mary, who had combined, at first, considerable tact in school-management and the direction of a Community, with great piety and solid virtue, came to grief, in the end, through pride and lack of submission. He took it into his head to imitate St Louis Gonzaga in everything, and with incredible blindness a punishment no doubt, for his pride - he failed to see that one is not called upon to imitate everything the saints have done. Possessed by the idea of a chimerical perfection, he carried everything to extremes 11: he engaged in fasting which ruined his health; wore hair shirts; took the discipline; practised poverty and an indifference that made him look ridiculous; and kept solitary and silent in order to be always united with God. Father Champagnat drew on all the resources of his tireless charity and

9 In the Annals of Bourg-Argental, Brother Avit relates the facts, as follows: "After a year, Brother John-Mary conceived the whim of going to La Trappe. He went off without a word and left the two classes, with their 200 children, in charge of his fifteen-year-old subordinate" who was Brother John Baptist (Cf. AFM, 213.85, p. 4).

10 For a rough chronology of this escapade, see LPC 2, p. 300 and note;

OM 4, p. 294, note 2.

11 Inspector Guillard made an official visit of the Bourg-Argental school on April 23rd, 1822. In the report, presented to the University, he remarked, according to Father Colomb's references, that "the first Brother whom I saw yesterday at Bourg-Argental had been a grenadier in the Imperial Guard and that on Holy Thursday he remained kneeling on watch before the Blessed Sacrament from eight in the evening till eight in the morning" (OME, doc.

19 [5], p. 74).

even invoked his authority, in order to free him from his illusions and restore him to the right path. But the self-will and the pride which permeated him, made him ignore, or rebel against, the admonitions, the wise advice and even the authority, of his Superior. He soon paid the price for his obstinacy.

The life of constraint which he led, and the protracted meditations he engaged in, affected his mind, producing a nervous condition. This was so troublesome that, in certain attacks, he could bear neither himself nor anyone else and ill-treated anyone who happened to be near or cross his path. At other times, with those whom he met, and especially with the young Brothers, he indulged in incredible levity and frivolity. Whenever he was overcome by this spirit of levity, he couldn't control himself and was unable to observe silence or the restraint appropriate to his religious state, so that, even during prayers, he played about, upsetting the Brothers. The situation reached a stage where he caused constant chaos in the House, and Father Champagnat, who had tried so hard to keep him, was forced to send him away ¹². In carrying out this stern measure, which deeply grieved his heart, he closed the door on this unfortunate Brother with these sobering words, which the Little Brothers of Mary should never forget: "This is the treatment that will be given to all who leave the path of obedience to follow their own wills."

The departure of Brother John-Mary was followed by that of Brother Stephen Roumesy ¹³, who was just as dear to Father Champagnat and no less useful. He, too, was one of the first Brothers. In the beginning he was pious and attached to his vocation and had done much good in the establishments to which he had been sent. Words could not do justice to his zeal for the christian education of the children or to his charity towards the poor and the orphans. These qualities had won him the respect and admiration of everybody.

But virtue soon degenerates into vice when it is not regulated by obedience and it was the very capacity he had for those works which proved his undoing. Some time previously, Father Champagnat, who was overburdened with work, had withdrawn Brother Roumesy from teaching and had summoned him to the Mother House, where he was put in charge of the work and temporal affairs. Being removed, unexpectedly and against his will, from tasks for which he felt a special attraction, he was so grieved

¹² AA, p. 66.

¹³ LPC 2, pp. 288-290.

that he fell ill. Besides, he made a very poor fist of the work entrusted to him. It wasn't that he lacked the ability, for he had rare gifts in temporal administration; it was simply because he didn't enjoy it, and was hankering after his former occupations.

While this was going on, a priest 14 with whom he had had frequent contact, formed the plan of founding a Congregation whose chief purpose would be the education of orphaned and abandoned children. He had long since informed Brother Roumesy of his plan and suggested to him that he become head of the Community which was to be founded 15. The Brother, who was very taken with the idea, spoke about it to Father Champagnat, earnestly requesting to be allowed to follow the attraction he felt for that kind of life.

The good Father replied in these terms: "Brother, if Providence had wanted you to be a member of that new Community, it would not have called you into ours. God wills you to remain where you are and the change you have in mind is a temptation of the devil and you should resist it. To leave a holy vocation, even if the reason is to embrace a more perfect one, extraordinary signs, *I* would even say miracles, are required to assure us that it is the will of God; and those proofs need to be acknowledged as such, not by the subject himself, who feels attracted to a new kind of life, but by his Superior, for the actions of a religious need the stamp of obedience, if they are to be pleasing to God. Anyone who deviates from this rule to follow his own will, becomes the plaything of the devil, is deluded and lost."

When this wise advice made no impression on the Brother's determination, Father Champagnat warned him: "Brother, I forbid you to think deliberately of abandoning your vocation. If you continue to entertain this plan, God will withdraw his protection from you and leave you to your own devices; you will become blinded, you will lose your vocation and come to a bad end."

After this prohibition from the Founder, the Brother became sad and melancholy and a few days afterwards slipped away without informing Father Champagnat. He made for the house of the priest who had influenced him and was given a warm welcome. That very day, they set about their project. However, "unless the Lord builds the house, in vain do the builders

14 That priest was Father Colomb. Cf. Acts of Archbishop de Pins' Council, of March 1st, 1826 and March 15th, 1826, quoted in LPC 2, p. 290.

15 LPC 2, p. 290.

labour. "16 It wasn't long before a misunderstanding arose between them and two years had hardly elapsed when the whole undertaking had to be abandoned. As Father Champagnat had predicted, Brother Roumesy led a wretched life; it was a series of tribulations, afflictions and every kind of grief.

The loss of those two Brothers was a tremendous blow to Father Champagnat, for they were the only ones he had, capable of helping him in the government of the Institute. In fact, those two Brothers, being seasoned Religious and having considerable teaching experience in addition to great talents as administrators and Superiors, had just reached the stage of rendering great services to the Congregation. It was then they allowed themselves to be trapped by the illusions of self-love and both lost their vocations through the same cause, namely, disobedience.

Our Lord, wishing to test his servant's virtue, did so in regard to what he held most dear. The two most capable subjects, the only ones on whom he could unburden the duties of administration, deserted him at the same time, to throw themselves into the world. The more indispensable these Brothers were to him, the more care he had lavished on their education and instruction, the more deeply he felt their loss. But God, who wished Marcellin to place all his confidence in him alone, allowed these trials to teach him to trust in his Providence alone.

At that same period, the good Brother Louis suffered a violent temptation against his vocation. His aptitude for study and the love that he had for Our Lord led him to want to study Latin and become a priest so that he could procure greater glory for God and unite himself more frequently with Our Lord Jesus Christ. Father Champagnat, whom he consulted on the matter, assured him that it was a snare of the devil who, resentful of his virtue, was misleading him with a desire of a more perfect life, in order to hinder the good he was doing. "My dear friend," the Founder continued, "to love Jesus Christ and win souls for him, it is not necessary to be a priest. In your holy vocation, you can study your divine Saviour, you can love and imitate him, as perfectly as in any other state, and even more easily. Nor can you accomplish greater good anywhere else, for there is no more excellent work than that of teaching catechism to little children, training them in piety, preparing them for their First Communion, and preserving their innocence." In spite of this sound advice, his

16 Ps. 126, 1.

temptation intensified and he would have yielded had he not been a child of obedience.

Marcellin, who knew his perfect docility, seeing him constantly preoccupied with this thought, called him to his room and said to him: "Brother Louis, I am convinced that you are in your vocation and that God wills you to remain there. I therefore forbid you to think about studying Latin." Although this command went against the grain, Brother Louis, in his humility, accepted it with submission. It's a remarkable fact, (and ought to be seen as a fruit of his obedience), that from then on he was free from any such temptation.

"The obedient man," says the Holy Spirit, "will speak of victory." 17 Brother Louis experienced this truth. Not only did he triumph over that enemy and regain the peace and the tranquillity of soul which he had lost; even more, he was blessed with a love and a taste for his vocation; with a surge of fervour and the consolation of grace; and so he advanced rapidly in the path of perfection and in the practice of all the virtues of his vocation.

The obedience of Brother Louis, then, preserved him in his vocation, showered him with happiness during the remainder of his life and won him the grace of dying the death of the just, as we shall see later on; by contrast, the pride and disobedience of the two other Brothers, caused them to lose their vocations, made their lives wretched, and launched them on a course full of hazards for their salvation.

17 Pro 21,28.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

*Father Champagnat allows the Brothers to make vows.
New foundations. Importance of the Rules concerning relations with
seculars.*

The departure of the two Brothers and the temptation experienced by Brother Louis convinced Father Champagnat of the need to bind the Brothers to their vocation by vows. These would stabilize, as far as is possible, the inconstancy of human nature. From the very beginning of the Institute the Brothers were required to make promises I of fidelity to God and to their vocation. These promises, of course, were not vows; however, the importance attaching to them, the prominence given them and the religious dispositions in which they were made, were all very conducive to binding the Brothers to their vocation and anchoring them in the Institute. The following is the act of consecration, as written by the hand of the pious Founder 2: "All for the greater glory of God and the honour of the august Virgin Mary, Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

We, the undersigned, certify and declare that we freely and willingly consecrate ourselves to God in the lowly Association of the Little Brothers of Mary, for five years, beginning from this day.

We do so in order to work unceasingly, through the practice of all virtues, at our sanctification and at the christian education of country children. We therefore intend:

1. To seek only the glory of God, the honour of the august Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ and the welfare of the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church.

2. To undertake to teach gratuitously, all the poor children whom the parish priest may send us; to instruct them and all the other children confided to us, in catechism, prayers, reading,

1 Promise made by first Brothers (Cf. A. Balko, FMS 1978, No. 31, p. 412 and No. 32, p. 424).

2 For the text itself, see OME, doc. 52, p. 137. For the differences introduced by Brother John-Baptist, see the article of F.A. Balko: note 1, above.

writing, and the other branches of primary instruction, according to their needs.

3. We undertake to obey without question our Superior and all those who are appointed by him to lead us.

4. To observe chastity, according to our promise.

5. To share in community, everything we have."

Each Brother signed this promise, kneeling in the presence of the assembled Community. Obviously, it contains, in principle, all the obligations of the religious life, a fact which Father Champagnat was careful to point out to the Brothers, before he allowed them to make it. When this promise was first proposed to the Brothers in 1818, Brother Louis 3, whose conscience was extremely timorous, and who rightly observed with scrupulous exactness whatever he promised God, was daunted by the obligations which were to be contracted, and refused to sign. This was despite the advice of Father Champagnat and the friendly encouragement of the other Brothers.

Brother John-Mary was surprised and even scandalized at this refusal and asked Father Champagnat what he thought of Brother Louis and what would become of him, fearing that he might go off the track and lose his vocation. "I know Brother Louis", the Founder assured him. "He is a sound Religious and firm in his vocation; if he has been unwilling to sign the promise, it is because of his extremely delicate conscience; he will sign in due course and meanwhile, will be no less faithful to its commitments." He then added and even repeated twice: "Brother Louis is an excellent young man; he has kept his baptismal innocence; he is a strong soul and will never trifle with duty; I vouch for him and for his perseverance." What great praise! It redounds even more to the recipient's credit in that his conduct throughout a lifetime never belied it, but bore it out in every detail. When Father Champagnat forbade him to think of entering the priesthood, he put an end to the temptation and warded off its return, by as king at once to make his profession - a favour that he was granted.

To the very end, Brother Louis was an outstanding model for his Brothers, in humility, self-denial, fidelity to Rule, attachment to the Institute and especially in his great love for God. Shortly before his death he revealed to a Brother, in whom he confided

3 Cf. BQF. pp. 9-10.

completely, that divine love had relieved him of frightening assaults; that during meditation and after Holy Communion, his heart was so aflame and filled with indescribable delights, that he was quite enraptured. "So you make your meditation on the love of God?" said the Brother. "Not only that," he told him, "but, in all my other exercises, I can scarcely think of anything else; besides, love satisfied me fully and I wish for nothing more henceforth than to contemplate and love our Lord." These were the dispositions in which he died on the 3rd of August, 1847, after a long and painful illness, receiving Communion on every possible occasion.

The first vows were made by the Brothers, at the close of the 1826 Retreat. They were of two kinds: temporary vows, usually made for three years, and perpetual vows. Because the vow of chastity might give rise to some difficulties, the subsequent custom was for it and the vow of poverty to be made only at perpetual profession. The Novices, after the two years of probation, were admitted only to the temporary vow of obedience.

At first, the vows were made without any ceremony; the Brothers taking the vows, did so after Holy Communion. A special form was drawn up in a register to record the vows and this was signed kneeling by the Brothers concerned.⁵

In spite of the trials of every kind, to which the Institute was prey during that year, it continued to prosper and expand. The subjects who had left or had been dismissed while Marcellin was

⁴ In October 1840 (Cf. AFM, AA, Ms. p. 231).

⁵ Declaration signed by Brother Bartholomew (Cf. AFM, R.V.P. 1, p. 10).

Bartholomew (Br.). "I, the undersigned Brother Bartholomew, born Bartholomew Badard, lawful son of John-Mary Badard and Jean-Mary Teillard, both living, a parishioner of La Valla and aged twenty five, testify and declare that, by the grace of God, I was admitted on May 1st, 1819, to the house of La Valla, novitiate of the Society of Mary; that on September 8th, 1819, I had the honour of being clothed in the holy habit of the Brothers of that Society, having humbly requested it of the Reverend Father Superior; that afterwards, with the permission of the same Superior, (whose signature below, signifies as much), on October 5th, 1828, in the Hermitage Chapel, after Communion at Holy Mass, I willingly and freely, though privately, made the three perpetual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, to the Superiors of the said Society of Mary, according to its Statutes and aims, having already made vows for a term of three years on October, this 10th, 1826; in testimony of which, I have signed this declaration in the presence of Brother Francis and Brother Lucian who have also signed, October 22nd, 1829, at Our Lady of the Hermitage. Champagnat, Superior of the Marist Brothers; Brother Bartholomew; Brother Francis; Brother Lucian". Cf. OME, doc. 66, p. 152, doc. 67, p. 154.

ill, were replaced by others who were animated with better dispositions. Three new Houses were founded after the Retreat. They were: Saint-Paul-en-Jarret, Mormant and Neuville-sur-Saône 6, Mr Tripier, a man of faith and a pious christian bore all the expenses of the foundation at Neuville 7. When the Brothers took up residence, he took the Brother Director aside and told him not to hesitate to approach him in case of need; he undertook to come to their assistance, and was not willing to stand by while they suffered; he would be upset, he said, if, through timidity, they did not avail themselves of his readiness to ensure that they wanted for nothing.

The Brother Director took full advantage of the generous offer. In any need, he had recourse to Mr Tripier. Sometimes it was for community wants; at other times, it was to obtain for poor children: books, school materials, or even clothes. These requests for charity never fell on deaf ears. One day, having been asked by the Brother Director for five hundred francs, the generous benefactor counted out and placed on the table, five rolls of a hundred francs. He then joined his hands in prayer, and raising his eyes to heaven exclaimed: "My God, I thank you for the grace of using for charitable purposes money which you have given me. I know that of myself I am incapable of any such act." Then, speaking to the Brother Director who seemed taken aback by the language, he explained: "Yes, Brother, it is a great grace, given me by God, that I am able to donate this money to you. I consider it an outstanding favour that divine Providence has put me in a position to distribute my wealth in alms and to use this base metal which ruins so many, for the relief of my brothers, the poor. How many, richer than I, give little or nothing, because they have not received the valuable gifts of detachment and generosity!" He concluded: "My God, grant me the grace to acknowledge your goodness to me and to be worthy of it, so that you are not forced to withdraw it." This incomparable man 8 was the father of the poor and shared with them his very large fortune. Towards the end of his life, he had to rely on his family to meet his needs. Besides, he had put to such good use, God's grace of distributing generous

6 1833 Statistics (Cf. AA, pp. 133-136).

7 Neuville, LPC 2, pp. 603-604, and AA, p. 78.

8 On August 9th, 1837, Father Champagnat wrote to Mr Tripier following a dispute about the Brothers' school at Neuville: "That our school at Neuville was in need of a man like you whom nothing could deter and who could forestall and overcome difficulties" (LPC 1, doc. 131, p. 265).

alms, that when he died, there was not enough money left to pay the funeral expenses.

Father Champagnat made frequent visits to the establishment of Neuville. These reflected his affection for the Brothers and the satisfaction and pleasure that he had in seeing Father Durand, the parish priest⁹, who was a close friend and adviser. This former Superior of the Minor Seminary of Alix, was a priest of great learning, rare piety and profound judgment. Father Champagnat remarked of him, that no one else had given him such sound advice or had so thoroughly understood his work. No

⁹ Durand (parish priest), LPC 2, p. 210.

wonder that he was consulted in all important matters concerning the welfare and future of the Institute 10.

Fully familiar with the duties of the religious life, Father Durand was a wise and prudent Director for the Brothers. He steered a sound course between rigorism and laxity. His judicious and thoughtful mind, perceived, with marvellous clarity, the favourable or unfavourable outcome of a line of action. "Keep to your Rule", he often reminded the Brothers, "and remember that you can accomplish no good without it. Even if you were to work miracles, you will be bad religious, unless you observe your Rule. A pilot who has neither map nor compass, is sure to lose his way and be sadly shipwrecked; likewise, a Religious who neglects his Rule, will fall into the snares of the devil and will certainly not persevere. Have no confidence in those who easily break the Rule; don't expect them to last for, whoever abandons the Rule, abandons religious life."

On two or three occasions, which, he had deliberately contrived, Father Durand noticed that a Brother, who seemed to have some good points, was careless about his Rule and easily fell into laziness. "That subject won't last", he predicted to the Brother Director, "and he will come to a bad end." A few days afterwards, having come upon that Brother eating a piece of fruit between meals, he warned him: "Your lack of mortification will lead to the loss of your vocation, and as a result of your laziness, you will, one day, beg for your bread." "I have no thought of giving up my vocation", retorted the Brother, slightly nettled, "and even if that happened, my parents are well able to support me." "In spite of what you say", the parish priest persisted, "I tell you that you will have to live as a beggar." Events soon proved him right. The Brother gave up his vocation; in no time, he squandered a fortune of thirty thousand francs and, at the end of his days, was obliged to live on alms.

The Rules regarding visits and those governing relations with seculars, seemed to Father Durand so essential and so important that he believed a Brother could not persevere in his vocation if he did not observe them. One day, meeting a Brother in the street who was taking a walk alone, he went up to him and said: "Brother, I would sooner see a wolf than to see you by yourself." The Brother strove to justify himself, so the priest added: "People

10 Father Champagnat also consulted him on practical problems. He wrote to the parish priest of Neuville, on the dwelling of the Brothers (LPC 1, doc. S, p. 36).

could accuse you of all sorts of crimes and you would have no defence, being unaccompanied, contrary to your Rule." During that year, there were some aberrations concerning visits and outings. Father Champagnat was informed that in several establishments there had been rather large gatherings; that the Brothers of two or three houses had met, by arrangement, for a picnic in the country; and that others, too readily and without permission, were leaving the House unaccompanied or travelling alone. He warned all these Brothers and wrote to them in fatherly tones to recall them to their duty and to the observance of their Rule; his conciliatory approach had little effect. Deeply grieved by that conduct and rightly fearing that a breach of the Rules in such an important matter might have fatal results, he decided to take firm steps to end the abuse. As soon as the Brothers arrived at the Mother House for their holidays, he announced a Chapter assembly. Having roundly condemned the abuse that was developing, he required the offenders, with the whole community present, to declare, in Chapter, the year's faults.

The strong reprimands which he addressed to them, made a vivid impression on the minds of all present and each Brother declared that, for the future, he would faithfully observe the Rule on this point, as well as on every other. The disorder was totally eradicated and the matter would have ended there, if bad will hadn't taken a hand. There were two or three Brothers, whose worldly spirit and love of independence, (offshoots of their dealings with seculars), had undermined the foundations of their vocations. These were hurt at this public reprimand, and, lacking the virtue needed to bear this small humiliation, grumbled openly against Father Champagnat and even taxed him with tyranny in their regard.

One of them, who had been a pious and capable Director du ring several years, displayed particular irritation; he accepted with bad grace the penance imposed on him; he failed publicly in respect to the Founder; and, allowing himself to fall victim to his bad spirit and his pride, he asked to withdraw and, in fact, abandoned his vocation. When he was leaving, a companion from novitiate days who had tried to help him, took him aside and asked him: "My friend, have you really thought about what you are doing? Don't you know that vocation is crucial in the matter of salvation?" Receiving an affirmative reply, he continued: "How then, does it happen that, having been brought into the Society by Providence, you leave it, at the instigation of the devil?" "What do you expect me to do?" was the reply. "I have made up my

mind; any other course is impossible..." The questioner insisted that other courses were open to him if he wished, but was told by the recalcitrant that this was not so; that he had completely lost his vocation; and that he felt an invincible power dragging him away in spite of himself. "Is it the devil that is driving you?" he was asked. "Devil or not, *I* must go", he replied, "because *I* suffer terribly here, and *I* can remain no longer." He went on to say that he knew and understood that he was on the way to hell; that even though he was convinced that he was following such a path, he could not recoil; that not even the conviction of being headed for the abyss could make him turn back. These words prompted the other to exclaim: "Poor man! your blindness and your hardness of heart, make me shudder." "Well might you shudder", he was warned, "because the same fate could happen to you. As long as *I* was faithful to the Rule, I loved my vocation just as much as you do; now my hate for it matches the love I had." "So, you admit that you did wrong to violate the Rule?" he was asked. "Of course I do. I have never denied that", was the admission. "Why, then", queried the other, "do you blame the Father Superior, when he corrects you? And why do you cast yourself into the world, instead of repenting of your fault and atoning for the evil you have done?" "I am withdrawing and returning to the world", came the stark reply, "because God has abandoned me and I am a reprobate." Saying these words, he turned away and walked towards the door. During the entire exchange (of which only the substance is reported here), his face, his tone of voice and his whole manner, were frightening. The Brother who tried to win him back was filled with terror in mind and heart.

This unfortunate renegade went away in spite of all that was done to keep him, proving once more by his behaviour, just how right was St Bernard, who said: "You will more frequently see seculars converted than you will lax Religious return to virtuous living." 11 He verified, too, Cassian's assertion: "It is easier to convert a great sinner than a lukewarm Religious." 12 Why? Because, as St Augustine says: "God rejects careless souls that flout their commitments and spurn grace." 13

11 Letter 96 to Richard, Abbot of Fontaine, PL 182, 229.

12 Brother John-Baptist attributed this saying to Cassian. Saint Alphonsus Liguori, in "The Nun made holy", attributes it to Saint Gregory (Oeuvres ascétiques, chap. 143).

13 Commentaries on the Psalm 103.4. PL 37, 1378.

At the Retreat of 1827, Father Champagnat founded two new Houses: Saint-Symphorien-d'Ozon, at the request of the parish priest, Father Dorzat who met the expenses of the establishment; and Valbenoîte, whose founder was the parish priest there, Father Rouchon. He himself had tried to set up a Congregation for the education of youth; but having learned that Father Champagnat had already started one for that purpose, he suggested that the two Communities should merge. With this in view, in May 14, 1822, he came with about ten of his subjects, to visit Father Champagnat at La Valla. However, when the two sets of Brothers met, it was clear to both parties that union was out of the question. The novitiate at La Valla contained simple and uneducated young men who were coarsely dressed; the building, the furniture, the food, were all of poor quality; everything reflected privation and sacrifice. The Brothers of Valbenoîte, by contrast, were cleanly and elaborately dressed¹⁵, seemed well-educated and had all the proprieties and the courtesies of social grace. So, having seen the La Valla Brothers busy building, and having inspected the dormitory, the kitchen and the dining-room, they went home without raising the question of the union¹⁶.

Now, five years later, Father Rouchon, came to ask Father Champagnat for Brothers, because his own, having fallen out amongst themselves, had all gone off, leaving the schools empty. The good parish priest paid all the expenses of the new foundation, and four Brothers¹⁷ were sent to Valbenoîte.

¹⁴ Brother John-Baptist, who arrived at the end of March 1822, was therefore an eye-witness (Cf. OME, doc. 166 [36], p. 452).

¹⁵ "The Brothers of Valbenoîte... adopted a particular costume at first for Sundays and Feast days. The basis was an aristocratic-style pair of breeches and a long coat (lévite) reaching to the knees. For going out, a cape and a top-hat" (NCF, p. 216).

¹⁶ In 1824, Father Rouchon tried again to get the Brothers of Father Champagnat to join his own subjects (Cf. AAL reg. délib. 5, pp. 5-6, and OME, doc. 23, p. 82). .

¹⁷ AA, p. 81, and LPC 2, pp. 634-637.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Father Champagnat completes the Brothers' costume. He adopts, for the teaching of reading, the new pronunciation of the consonants. Objection of some Brothers to the cloth stockings and to the new method for teaching reading.

In the year 1828, Father Champagnat completed the details of the Brothers' costume. Back in 1824, with the arrival of Archbishop de Pins to take charge of Lyon, he had given the Brothers, the soutane, the small cloak, the three-cornered hat and the white rabat. When they made their vows, he added a woollen cord and, for those making final profession ¹, a brass cross set in ebony.

At this time, he decided that the soutane, which had previously been buttoned, should be fastened with hooks and eyes to about half way down, and sewn for the rest. There were several reasons behind the change, the chief one being that a soutane styled in this way was more modest and more appropriate to the religious state; it was easier to keep in state of cleanliness, for the buttons would wear and fade then become soiled and disfigure the soutane; finally, being sewn down to the hem, the soutane covered the legs completely whereas buttons used often come undone, with the risk that the Brothers' modesty in front of the children might be somewhat jeopardized.

The foot-wear ² had remained the same, and the Brothers used to wear worsted or cotton stockings and each looked after his own needs. However, Father Champagnat soon perceived what abuses this freedom might give rise to in the Institute. In fact, there were considerable drawbacks in the use of these ordinary stockings:

1. The Brothers' store could not undertake to supply them and for that reason uniformity in that item of their dress, became impossible.

¹ On the occasion of pronouncing perpetual vows.

² The French "chaussure" is taken in a wide sense here, one that is rare to-day. According to the Petit Robert: A piece of clothing which surrounds and protects the feet".

2. In leaving the purchase in the hands of the Brothers, there was the danger, despite all precautions, that they might deviate from the humility, simplicity and modesty becoming their way of life. Experience showed that such irregularity was all too real, for some Brothers had already taken the liberty of having some made of either silk or floss silk ¹³, many bought poor quality ones; others received stockings as gifts; quite a number was at a loss what to do about getting them.

3. There was another equally serious disadvantage: the knitted stockings could be mended only by women, and so their use entailed more frequent access by women to the houses of the Institute or, at least, increased communication with them because of the need for their help.

Such were the main reasons leading Father Champagnat to give his Brothers, monastic or cloth stockings ⁴. However, to allow for existing attitudes, and to proceed with prudence in the matter, he did not withdraw those in use, all at once. He was satisfied with establishing the principle that cloth stockings were to be worn; he provided each Brother with a pair; he was instructed to wear them on Communion days, and was not to approach the holy Table with woven stockings.

These changes in costume were followed by a modification of teaching method. Hitherto, in teaching the children to read ⁵, the Brothers had followed the system in vogue, spelling the words according to the old pronunciation of the consonants. Father Champagnat, in fact, was convinced that this method increased the difficulties of teaching to read, and he adopted the new way of pronouncing the consonants, doing away with the old style of spelling. The Brothers were not used to that way of teaching reading and unanimously rejected this new idea.

Having explained the indisputable advantages of the new method and pointed out the shortcomings of the old one, Father Champagnat, seeing that the Brothers were not convinced by his arguments, put to them the idea of trying out the new method. When they had given it a genuine trial, over a year, they would

³ Fleuret (Floss silk): "Thread made from the coarsest part of the silk". (Larousse Encyclopedia).

⁴ BI XXI, p. 537, No. 6.

⁵ Brother Paul Boyat, *Quelques aspects de la pédagogie des Petits Frères*, BI XXIX, pp. 101-103; also P. Zind, *Sur les traces de M. Champagnat*, vol. 2, pp. 76-79.

know from experience, he suggested, whether it was the preferable method and a definitive decision could be made at the next annual holidays.

Meanwhile, the Founder, distrustful of his personal views, used the interval to consult widely on the question. Those consulted, after careful examination of the question, were in unanimous support of the new pronunciation of consonants, as being more rational and better calculated to speed up the progress of the children. The Brothers, who had reluctantly agreed to try out the new method, did not really give it a fair trial, and were only partially satisfied with it. Father Champagnat, in due course, called the meeting to decide on the issue. One after another of them arrived with a host of objections, which they canvassed all the more vigorously for their belief that they were perfectly justified.

Marcellin listened to the objections and to the remarks made by each, then showed the irrefutable superiority of the new method before deciding that it must be adopted. It was pointed out by one Brother that nearly all found the method defective. How, he asked, could it therefore be considered better than the other? In any case, could they adopt a practice which the majority opposed?

Marcellin answered him in these terms: "Brother, there are circumstances in which votes should be weighed rather than counted. You Brothers Director, who don't have to teach the lower classes, and are moreover prejudiced against this method, have given it neither serious study nor fair trial. The small number of Brothers who have put it into effect, speak highly of it and don't complain of the difficulties you refer to. On the contrary, they point out its superiority and capacity for accelerating the progress of the children. Competent and experienced people whom I have consulted, express that view too. Therefore, it is a wise course we follow in adopting this method against the majority opinion, given that it is a prejudiced majority and one judging without full knowledge of the facts."

Yet it was less the new method than the matter of the cloth stockings which was on the Brothers' minds. As several Brothers complained about that foot-wear and loathed wearing it, a few fanatics, not noted for their religious spirit, exploited that repugnance. They strove to turn the Brothers against Father Champagnat and compel him to sanction the use of ordinary

6 Recalls the adage: *Vota non sunt numeranda sed ponderanda.*

stockings. They prepared their case beforehand, establishing the defects of the cloth stockings.

In their opinion, these had every conceivable fault: for some, they were too warm and made the feet perspire excessively; for others, they were not warm enough and so, gave rise to colds; most found that they were uncomfortable, hurt their feet and made it impossible to travel any distance; a few thought they didn't suit them, and made them the butt of sarcasm from seculars; even the price, seemed a sufficient reason for dispensing with them - being much dearer than the others, their use must be against poverty. The Brothers urged these reasons earnestly and persistently, whether in private conversation, in talking with Father Champagnat, or in meetings held on the matter.

After hearing each one's objections, Marcellin made his reply. "My friends", he contended, "don't you see the contradiction in the case you present? They cannot, at the same time, be too warm and too cold. The price is only an apparent difficulty, since, although the cloth variety is dearer, it lasts twice as long, making it cheaper in fact and more in harmony with the spirit of poverty.

But even if the cloth stockings were really the dearer ones, the shortcomings of the others are so considerable that I would never agree to continue with them. Besides, it is clear to me that the principal reason or, to put it more frankly, the only reason, which leads you to clamour for knitted stockings, is that they look better on you; it is, if I may say so, that they are more worldly. But isn't it shameful, I ask you, to reject cloth stockings for such unworthy motives; so unworthy, that you cloak them over and that they make you blush. Right through the year, I have prayed for light on this matter; I have examined and weighed the for and against of the two kinds of footwear; I have consulted wise and enlightened people; I have even made a point of trying the cloth ones myself and have worn them on my travels; well, I have to report that everything confirms me in my plan to maintain them.

I believe it is God's will that we wear them. I have therefore made up my mind to adopt them." Marcellin's declaration seemed to settle the question of the stockings, since the great majority of the Brothers had appreciated his reasons and had followed his directive. But two or three rebellious characters, who had already decided to leave the Institute no matter how the debate ended, were riled by the decision of the Founder and the acquiescence of the Brothers. They put their heads together and decided to set up a group within the Community to protest against the decision. Their first step was

to enlist a few of the young Brothers; then they turned their attention to a few of the senior men; finally they tried to get the chaplains on their side. So adept were they at influencing their minds and at highlighting the supposed difficulties of the cloth stockings, that one of the chaplains ⁷ agreed with them and promised to support their case with Father Champagnat. That was a distinct triumph for the intriguers, who did not hide their joy and believed that they had won the day.

Taking advantage of the prestige given them through the authority and the character of the priest who had espoused their cause, the most brazen of them, the instigator of the conspiracy, fulminated against the cloth stockings. During their recreations, they formed groups everywhere in which they spoke of nothing but the soutane's hooks and eyes, the stockings and the reading method. They were in the process of discussing how they might force Father Champagnat to reverse his decision, when they got news that the Vicars General, who were at Saint-Chamond, were to visit the Hermitage next day. Their plan of action was drawn up at once and agreed upon: They would present a petition to the Vicars General, asking them to ensure that established customs were maintained. Having drawn up the petition, they had it signed by all whom they had won over. Fearing, however, that the signatures were too few, one of the ring-leaders, approached each of the Brothers while they were at study and urged them to sign the petition he had in his hand. In this way, he secured many signatures, for some signed without even reading the contents; and, unfortunately, the Brothers in charge, did nothing to hinder the circulation of the petition which turned up at every table and was presented to every Brother.

One of the senior Brothers, outraged at the conduct of the rebels and deeply upset by the turn events were taking, left the room, gathered a few of the most pious and devoted of the Brothers, and asked them: "Aren't we going to do anything to put a stop to the spirit of rebellion and independence which is rearing its head and threatening to overrun the Community? Are we going to allow a few insubordinates to throw the house into confusion and lead the Brothers astray? Aren't we obliged to set ourselves

⁷ It is hard to identify this chaplain. We can make some deductions, but without certainty from several documents (OM 1, doc. 196, p. 472; LPC 2, p. 469; OME doc. 11, p. 47; LPC 2, p. 101; OME, doc. 160 [11-161 pp. 381-383]). Would Father Pompallier have supported the rebels in 1829, in view of the following references from Father Colin (OME, doc. 165 [3], p. 421 and notes)?

against such abuse and to protest against that spirit of revolt? If you want my advice, I think we should seek to put a stop to this scandal."

The Brothers listening agreed that the harm was serious and must be halted. They thought that they should first of all go and declare their submission to the Founder, let him know how hurt they were by the conduct of the dissidents, and ask him what line of action they should follow to end the disorder. So, they went off together to see him in his room, and told him: "Father, we are deeply grieved at what is happening in the house; we have come to express our regret and assure you of our entire submission in all things and especially in the matters of the cloth stockings, of the soutane with hooks and eyes and of the new method of reading; and as the others intend to present the Vicars General with a petition asking for the preservation of the status quo, we beg you let us draw up a counter petition."

Father Champagnat was extremely gratified by the fine dispositions of those Brothers and by their approach to him. He expressed his satisfaction with them, praising their good spirit and submission, and after a moment's reflection, he said to them: "Leave me by myself for a few hours to examine before God what I should do. You pray, too, so that the Holy Spirit may enlighten me and inspire me with the advice I ought to give you. I shall send for you after my reflection." Meanwhile, the Brother who had instigated the move we have just described, met an old Brother who had let himself be swayed and who had written and signed the petition. "What!" he challenged him in a tone of authority. "Don't you blush for your behaviour? Aren't you ashamed to take the side of the rebels, you, a senior Brother with the responsibility of setting an example of docility and perfect submission? Do you want to break our good Father's heart? If you knew what grief you cause him, you wouldn't act this way. I warn you that you will render an account to God for the scandal you are giving." The guilty Brother was thunderstruck by these words, having let himself be implicated only through his excessive good nature and simplicity. "Does what we are doing, then, really upset the Father Superior?" he inquired. "Certainly it does", he was assured, "for he can neither eat nor drink. Didn't you notice that he was not at lunch?" "Where was he?" came the question. "He was in his room", was the reply, "weeping over the scandal you are giving." The good Brother was startled by this conversation and wasted no time setting things right. He went at once to Father

Champagnat, cast himself at his feet, begged his pardon and declared himself ready to make any amends necessary. A few hours afterwards, he asked pardon of the community assembled in the refectory for the evening meal, and promised again, entire submission to the will of his Superior.

This unexpected change and public reparation took everybody by surprise, especially those who had signed the petition; but instead of being moved by it, the leaders only laughed; they treated the action as that of a weak and contemptible character, and became more and more entrenched in their feelings of insubordination and revolt. However, this conversion brought about a rift in their party. Those who had let themselves be trapped through weakness, especially those who had signed in ignorance, broke away from the rebels; several even asked public forgiveness. At the same time, word was received that the Vicars General had been called suddenly to Lyon and would not be coming to the Hermitage.

That is how matters stood, when Father Champagnat, having reflected on the situation for a day, summoned the select group who had promised obedience. On their arrival, he said to them: "It was only after long prayer to God, that I decided last year to change your style of footwear; since then I have again prayed, reflected and consulted wise people; now, the effect of all this, as well as my own trial of the stockings, has tended to strengthen my resolution. Today, I am so convinced of having done God's will in these matters that nothing will induce me to change. The way that the Brothers have just behaved towards me has hurt me deeply, but I was never the least bit tempted to yield to their pressure; what is more, *I* have decided to dismiss all those who will not submit.

Here, then, is what I want you to do. You are to set up an altar in the body of the chapel, against the wall on the south side; you will decorate it carefully and place there a statue of the Blessed Virgin 8, surrounded by candles. Keep the chapel door closed so that no-one notices these preparations. This evening, at half past eight, when we go to the chapel for our visit to the Blessed Sacrament, have all the candles lighted on the altar. As soon as all the Brothers have entered, one of you is to ask me, in a loud voice and on behalf of the rest, for the cloth stockings, the soutane fastened with hooks and eyes and the new reading

8 Now at Rome, in the General House.

method. Put your request, in writing and show it to me before you read it out." All was carried out as directed, and so discreetly that no-one else in the house knew of the preparations for the ceremony. In the evening, after the reading of the subject of meditation for next day, the Community, as usual went to the chapel to adore the Blessed Sacrament. All were surprised to see the altar and its lights. Each wondered what the idea was and what was going to be done. When the Brothers had adored the Blessed Sacrament, Father Champagnat, who was kneeling on the altar steps, stood up and turned towards the Brothers. A senior Brother then came forward, knelt in front of him and put forward the request in these terms:

"Reverend Father, profoundly grieved at what is going on in the house, and wishing always to walk the path of obedience and perfect submission, we present ourselves humbly before you. We do this to express our sorrow at the scandals which have recently taken place amongst us. We want to make clear our attitude of unwavering docility to all your directives. Therefore, prostrate here before our Lord Jesus Christ and in the presence of Mary, our Blessed Mother, we ask you to give us the cloth stockings and the soutane with the hooks and eyes; we promise to wear them all our lives. We also promise to follow in our teaching, the rules that you have laid down, and in particular, to use the new pronunciation of the consonants. Finally, in these matters and in all others we promise entire conformity to your will" The Brother concluded his reading and Father Champagnat announced in a firm voice: "Well! I ask those who want to be good Religious and true children of Mary, to come over here beside their Blessed Mother." Pointing to the altar of the Blessed Virgin to which they were invited to go, he repeated: "Let all the children of Mary come this way beside their Mother." In a flash, there was a rush in the direction of the altar, with Brothers crowding against each other at Mary's feet. The result was that only a few Brothers remained on the other side. There was such surprise and consternation, that some didn't understand where they were to go. But then Father Champagnat added: "The place for the children of Mary is here, beside her altar, and that for rebels is there against the wall". In an instant, there were only the two rebels remaining. Sitting beside each other, they cast malevolent eyes on the scene that was unfolding before them.

Father Champagnat then spoke to them directly, asking them whether they wanted to remain there, and was coldly informed

that they did. Next day, both 9 were sent away; that day, too, all the Brothers, who had been drawn into the protest, asked pardon before the whole community and showed great sorrow for their fault. However, it needs to be said that of all those who signed the petition, only two persevered in their vocation; all the others gave up the religious state and left the Institute.

The perversity, obduracy and blindness of the two Brothers who persisted in their revolt and were dismissed, surprises us and perhaps prompts us to reflect on how they could come to behave in that way. These two Brothers, and most of those they won over and who later lost their vocation, were able subjects: they had long been the consolation of the Founder and the edification of their Brothers, because of their piety, their zeal for the christian instruction of children and their attachment to their vocation. The

9 Probably they were Brother Augustine (Cossange), Cf. AA, p. 65, and Michael (Marconnet), Cf. LPC 2, p. 401. Cf. also, AA, p. 86.

one cause of their downfall was neglect of the Rules concerning relations with seculars.

These Brothers were among those who, the previous year, had incurred a severe reprimand for the frequency of their excursions and visits. Their dealings with the world, their excessive visiting, even between communities, subtly weakened their piety, and their zeal for perfection, causing them to lose the taste for prayer, the love of their religious state and esteem for its spirit. These Brothers had almost imperceptibly acquired the defects of the company they kept. Their thoughts and feelings became secular; their actions and conduct reflected those of society. Is it any wonder, then, that they were so reluctant to accept the cloth stockings? When religious spirit is gone, when one no longer values the religious state and has ceased to practise its virtues, how could one be prepared to wear its garb? One abyss leads to another, according to the Prophet 10. The first faults of these Brothers were slight but they led to more serious ones which, in turn, landed them in rebellion, blindness, stubbornness and all the scandalous conduct we have recounted.

"For a Religious", Father Champagnat maintained, "even necessary dealings with the world are never without danger; they are one of the greatest sources of religious shipwreck; they are a reason for the disappearance of religious spirit from communities and for the entry of worldly attitudes with their train of varied abuses and vices; it is by such dealings that dangerous friendships and connections are formed, that the heart is corrupted, that the mind is filled with worldly views and that time and devotion are frittered away." It was Marcellin's deep conviction of that truth, which led him to frame those truly wise and prudent Rules governing relations with persons of the world. In commenting on these Rules, to which he attributed particular importance, he used always warn: "Be faithful to them if you want to keep the spirit of your state and your vocation; for you cannot violate them without putting both those treasures in jeopardy." There is one fact which we must record here in confirmation of the Founder's view. It is this: amongst the Brothers Director who have so far had the misfortune of losing their vocation, there are more than eighty per cent whose departure can be attributed to no other cause than the violation of those particular Rules.

10 Ps. 42,8.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Further prosperity of the Institute. Father Champagnat makes efforts to gain government authorization. The events of 1830 intervene in the process. Confidence and calmness of the Founder.

He reassures the Brothers. Government investigation of the Mother House. School at Feurs closed; that of La Côte-Saint-André, opened.

The commotion recorded in the previous chapter, did not penetrate beyond the community precincts, and did not impede the development of the Institute, which continued to receive candidates and to set up new schools. That year, two Houses were founded: Millery 1 and Feurs 2. At this time, the Civil Authorities of the Department, who had always been well-disposed towards the Institute, gave public witness of their sympathy and of their appreciation of the successful way in which the Brothers ran their schools. Mr de Chaulieu 3, who was then Prefect of the Loire, wrote 4 to Father Champagnat to inform him that the Council-General, at his instigation, had voted a grant of 1500 francs, by way of assistance to the novitiate of the Little Brothers of Mary. That show of kindness was all the more gratifying to the Founder for the fact that it had never entered his head to make overtures for it. The help was continued, without needing to be requested 5, until 1830.

Father Champagnat had had in mind for some time, to apply to the Government for the legal authorization 6 of the Society. The

1 Brothers were requested at Millery by the parish priest, Father Desrosiers and by Mayor Thibaudier. The latter had bought an old house and donated it to the vestry-board on condition that it be used for the Brothers and their school (AA, p. 90).

2 OME, doc. 19 [15], p. 77.

3 AA, p. 89 and 79.

4 This letter is not in the archives.

5 On this matter, see Father Champagnat's letter of April 11th, 1829, to the Prefect of the Loire (LPC 1, doc. 12, p. 47) and the two rough drafts to the parish priest of Charlieu (LPC 1, doc. 13, pp. 49-52); see, especially, RLF, pp. 68-71.

6 Steps to secure legal recognition began in 1822 and concluded in 1851 under Brother Francis. 1822: authorisation of a rector (Cf. RLF, p. 21); 1851: Government Decree, No. 3072 (Cf. CSG II, p. 449).

patronage he had just received from the Council-General and from the Prefect of the Loire, led him to believe that the time was opportune to take up this important issue. The changes in the laws governing primary instruction, brought about by the famous Ordinances 7 of 1828, made such authorization essential, if his subjects were to be exempt from military service. Up till that time, primary instruction had been under the jurisdiction of the Bishops and it had been no trouble to secure the dispensations necessary to exempt the Brothers from conscription; besides, the Institute, which did not boast a lot of members at the time, had only a few postulants needing exemption.

Father Champagnat drew up his petition and framed the statutes of the Congregation, for the purpose of submitting them to the Royal Council of Public Instruction. Having readied the documents, he took them to Archbishop de Pins of Lyon, who had just been created a French peer 8, and who undertook to lobby the Government on the matter. Because this distinguished prelate wielded great influence with the Heads of the Department for Public Instruction 9, and enjoyed the full confidence of the king, his negotiations promptly met with complete success. The Ordinance 10 giving approval to the Congregation of the Little Brothers of Mary and to its statutes, was drawn up and even presented to the king for his signature, when the events of 1830 put a sudden stop to the successful outcome of proceedings.

Accustomed as he was to judging all things in the spirit of faith, Father Champagnat wasn't the least bit frightened, still less discouraged, by the events of this period. While others were

7 These Decrees, which Charles X had been forced to sign, deprived the Bishops of much of their power in relation to teaching and restricted their freedom to recruit for the minor seminaries. Primary teaching was not greatly troubled by the decrees. But the problem of military service for Brothers without a Teacher's Certificate was increasingly real for unauthorised Congregations (Cf. LPC 1, p. 24 and RLF, p. 61).

8 November 15th, 1816.

9 The Minister for Public Instruction was then Vatimesnil (Cf. RLF, p. 71).

10 While the law had to be voted on by the two Chambers, the Decree was a decision to be made by the Head of State. In 1825, Charles X had to accept a decision from the Chambers through which the king was no longer empowered to give new Congregations authorisation by his Decree (Cf. RLF, pp. 57-58). On May 24th, 1830, Father Cattet wrote to Father Champagnat: "I have received a letter from Paris, which indicates that the Decree for your Congregation has been drawn up and only awaits its turn for the king's signature" (OME, doc. 83 [2], p. 174).

fearfulll and predicting the worst, he remained calm, full of confidence and serenity. "Don't be anxious", he wrote to the Brothers 12. "Don't be perturbed; fear nothing either for yourselves or for your houses. It is God who allows and controls all events, who directs them and turns them to his own glory and to the good of his chosen ones. The wicked have only the power that God grants them. He says to them, as he says to the waves of the sea: 'Thus far shall you go, but no further.'" 13

Some Brothers asked the Founder whether it would not be a good idea to take precautions in case of surprise and to be provided with secular clothes. "The right way to prepare", he said, "is to have no fear, to be wise and circumspect in your relations with the people and with the children, to have nothing whatever to do with politics 14, to keep closely united to God, to redouble your zeal for your perfection and for the christian instruction of the children and, finally, to place all your confidence in God. Your religious habit is a safeguard for you, and not a danger; don't resort to secular dress; it can no more preserve you from harm than a spider's web. You probably notice that many people are anxious, distraught and fearful about the future of the Society and of religion; don't be swayed by their views or frightened by what they say to you; recall the words of the gospel: 'The very hairs of your head are numbered and not one of them will fall

11 At this time, writes the Duke of Broglie (in his *Memoirs*) the hunt began against soutanes, birettas, Jesuits, Capuchins, Brothers of Doctrine and even the poor Sisters of Charity; processions were pelted with stones, mission crosses were overturned and dragged in the mud: it wasn't very pleasant for a Bishop to venture from his cathedral. No priest would have dared show himself in the street, in soutane; the newspapers jested that dealers in old clothes couldn't keep up with the demand from this unexpected clientele of ecclesiastics forced to change their dress... The stranger, against whom a beggar hurled the terrible cry: "Get the Jesuit!" was very nearly seized and thrown into the water... How many buildings, how many houses broken into and plundered on the pretext of searching for arms which might have been hidden there by the Jesuits..." (Thureau-Dangin, *Histoire de la Monarchie de Juillet*, t. 1, pp. 248-249, Plon-Nourrit et Cie. Paris, 1888).

12 Two letters of Father Champagnat to Brother Anthony (August 15th, and September 10th, 1830) LPC 1, doc. 16 and 17, pp. 56-57).

13 Provo 8, 29; Ps. 89.10; Rm. 8, 28.

14 "It must in all justice, be said, in addition, of the Marist Brothers that no political consideration ever diverted them from the aim of their Institution; their history is a pledge that the Brothers will be able to persevere in that line of conduct" (Reg. des délib. du Conseil général de la Loire, August 25th, 1838, in RLF, p. 186).

without the permission of your Heavenly Father 15'; don't forget, either, that you have Mary for protectress and that she is as terrible to the enemies of our salvation, as an army set in battle array." 16

Far from allowing the Brothers to put aside the religious habit, on the feast of the Assumption 17 he gave the habit to a few postulants who were in the novitiate. When he wrote to the Archbishop, as usual, to ask permission for the clothing ceremony, his letter greatly surprised that venerable prelate and his Vicars General. "What an admirable man Father Champagnat is!" they said. "While everyone else shakes with fear, he is not the least afraid; other communities go into hiding and disperse or dismiss their novices, while he, in broad daylight and without a care for the threats of the wicked or the social confusion of revolutions, has only one concern: to enlist new subjects."

However, at the same time that Father Champagnat was preparing to give his postulants the religious habit, there was considerable agitation in the country. Bands of idle workmen roamed the streets of the neighbouring towns, singing impious and revolutionary songs, while insulting and threatening respectable people. Several times, they prepared to go up to the Hermitage to knock down the cross from the spire and to do away with other religious emblems adorning the house. One Sunday afternoon, some people ran in haste to warn that such an attack was imminent. The advice of one of the chaplains was that Father Champagnat should send the Brothers out of the house so that they would not witness the scandal the assailants might cause. "If you like", he volunteered, "I shall take them for a stroll in the woods until evening."

"Why should you take them for a walk?" replied Marcellin. "What have they to fear here? We shall sing Vespers and commend ourselves to the Lord; let men do their worst; they can do us no harm without the permission of God." The Brothers, in fact, chanted Vespers peacefully and were not in the least disturbed.

However, alarming stories were doing the rounds among the public and these were of a type to compromise 18 the community.

15 Matt. 10, 29-30; Lk. 12, 6-7; 21, 18.

16 Canto 6, 3.

17 Eighteen days after the "Three days of Glory", that is the last days of the July 1830, Revolution.

18 G. Michel, Une synopse des 3 témoignages: Jean-Baptiste, Avit et Sylvestre (Cf. BI, XXVIII, No. 208, 1968, pp. 94-113).

It was said that the house was an arsenal, with cellars full of arms. The assertion was even made that the Brothers had been seen doing military drill, at night in the dormitories and in the courtyards. The rumour also went abroad that a certain marquis was hidden in the house and that he was the inspiration behind the Brothers' plans for a counter-revolution; and that it was he who taught them how to use arms.

These calumnious stories came to the knowledge of the Government and a house search 19 was immediately ordered. This was carried out by the Public Prosecutor, with the assistance of a troupe of police. When the door was opened, the Prosecutor asked: "Isn't it true that you have a marquis here?" The Brother porter, who was a good simple soul, replied: "I don't know what a marquis is, but the Father Superior will tell you whether there is one; please wait a moment while I call him." "Yes, yes", insisted the Prosecutor, "you are hiding a marquis here", and instead of waiting in the parlour, he set out after the Brother who came upon Father Champagnat in the garden, and announced: "There is a man here, Father, as king for a marquis." The Prosecutor butted in to declare: "Your Reverence, I am the Public Prosecutor!" "A great honour certainly for us", answered the priest. Then, noticing the police surrounding the house, he added in a firm and deliberate voice: "You are not alone, I see, sir. I know what you want. Well, you must make a thorough search to find out whether we are harbouring nobles, suspected persons and arms. You have probably heard that we have cellars; let us begin with those!"

He led the Prosecutor and two police straightway to the washing-house and a small cellar with a well that supplied water for the whole house. "Have a good look at our cellars, gentlemen", he invited, "and see if there is anything here to alarm the Government." The Prosecutor gathered from the words, and the tone in which they were delivered, that the reports about the house were pure inventions. He therefore wanted to cut short the visit, but Father Champagnat insisted: "No, sir, you must see everything! Otherwise, the rumours will persist that we are out of order."

At this juncture, the Public Prosecutor said to the police: "Follow the priest and continue the investigation!" For his part, he returned to the parlour. Father Champagnat took the police to every corner of the house. Each time they entered a room, he would say: "Have a good look to see if there are any weapons!"

19 In April, 1831 (Cf. AA, p. 97 and MEM, p. 47).

Reaching a locked bed-room, he asked for the key, which was not available because its occupant, the chaplain, was away. The gendarmes wanted to call a halt. Father Champagnat was adamant, remarking, as he sent for an axe to break open the door: "If we don't inspect this room, they will say that it is the one concealing the weapons and the marquis." The door was soon opened, revealing nothing but a poor bed, a small table and a chair.

The investigation being completed, Father Champagnat graciously offered the Prosecutor and the police some refreshments which they gladly accepted, apologizing profusely for the unpleasant duty they had just carried out. The Prosecutor assured Father Champagnat: "Have no fear, your Reverence: *I* promise you that this visit will prove advantageous to you." And noticing, as he left, an unfinished building, he exhorted him to complete it. "There is not much encouragement to finish off such works", retorted the priest, "when we see the crosses stripped from them." The Prosecutor withdrew, with renewed assurances that his visit, instead of harming the house, would help it to flourish. In fact, a few days later, he wrote an article on his visit, in the Saint-Etienne 20 newspaper, contradicting all the vexatious reports which had been circulating. The article sounded the praises of the house and of its Religious.

With his mind at rest on this matter, Marcellin turned his attention to preparations for the annual Retreat. Most of the parish priests were against the Brothers' leaving the schools, wanting them at least to take their holidays and make their Retreat, in their respective houses. Their idea was to prevent badly-disposed persons from trying to replace them by lay teachers, in their absence. Marcellin believed that the events which had just happened and the stormy times being experienced, might disturb some Brothers and be a cause of laxity and temptation against their vocation. He rightly judged that a fervent Retreat 21

20 Probably "Le Stéphanois". The Series is incomplete, but "L'Ami de la Religion" of September 1st, 1831, published an article which very likely summarizes prosecutor Valentin-Smith's article (Cf. FMS, No. 29, 1978, pp. 389-390).

21 "Events did not prevent the Venerable Father from preaching the Retreat to the Brothers. The parish priests tried to dissuade him, pointing out that the weather was bad and that malevolent municipalities might exploit the Brothers' absence to replace them with lay teachers" (AA, p. 100). Did that Retreat really take place? Father Champagnat's letter to Brother Anthony, makes it seem doubtful (LPC 1, doc. 17, p. 58, and OME, doc. 84 [2], p. 175 and note 1).

was the best means of arresting the harm, of reviving sentiments of piety and of religious spirit, of restoring each Brother to his primitive fervour, and thereby ensuring the success of the schools. The Retreat was therefore held in the usual way.

At the close of the Retreat, as was the custom, Father Champagnat announced the transfers he thought necessary, without being daunted by any difficulties they might cause or by any possible threat they might pose for the existence of the schools. His chief preoccupation was to look after his Brothers and he would have preferred a hundred times to see a house closed than to tolerate abuses or to expose a Brother to the danger of losing his vocation. By this wise and prudent policy, he had the consolation of not losing a single one.

There was a general restlessness in the minds of the people and the country was in a state of turmoil but the schools continued to flourish and the Brothers encountered no difficulty, except at Feurs 22, from which they were sent away. One of the Brothers at that house, breached the Rule by being slightly too free with a child, and was accused of serious faults. The false accusation spread through the parish and was used as a pretext by the enemies of religion, to launch an attack on the establishment. The Mayor, who was a disciple of Voltaire, began by annoying the Brothers in every conceivable way. He proceeded to cut off their allowances, forcing the children to pay fees, and expected the Brothers to follow his wishes in matters contrary to the Rule. It being impossible for the Brothers to meet his demands, he had the school closed. The Brothers withdrew from Feurs during the Holy Week of 1831.

So it was, that the violation of a Rule and the irregular conduct of a single Brother were the first and principal cause of the ruin of that house, and were more damaging to the Institute than the persecution of the wicked and the attacks of the impious.

We have verified here, the truth that the Rule is the guardian and mainstay of religious houses and that its violation inevitably leads to their ruin. Terrible truth! It should instil fear into all Religious who flout the Rule. These should remind themselves: "Who knows whether these infractions of Rule may lead to the ruin of this house?" We do know for certain, that it was disregard for a Rule, which caused the destruction of the first school lost by the Institute.

22 AA, p. 102.

The closure of the establishment at Feurs, was amply compensated for by the foundation, at about the same time, of La Côte-Saint-André 23. Father Douillet 24, director of the Minor Seminary of that town, had formed the project of founding a Congregation of Brothers for the education of children. He had even already brought a few young men together in a house, purchased near the Seminary. But, in his deep humility, he believed that he lacked the virtue and the competence to bring such a difficult work to a successful conclusion. Besides, the Government had caused him some problems after the events of 1830. He therefore spoke to Father Champagnat, offering him the little establishment he had started. Marcellin travelled to La Côte-Saint-André to discuss the matter, and a conclusion was reached without any difficulty. It was agreed that the Brothers of Mary would take charge of the schools of the town and of the small primary boarding school near-by; that the postulants who were in the house and had been responsible for the schools till this time, should all go to the Hermitage to make their novitiate and be employed afterwards, as their Superior might direct 25.

Prior to this interview, Father Douillet already thought highly of Father Champagnat's virtue and ability; but that opinion was greatly enhanced by seeing him at close quarters and conferring with him. In visiting together the house of La Côte, they walked up and down for a while in a large room where the postulants were gathered. On the way out, Father Champagnat summed up each of them accurately, remarking: "The young man in such a part of the room is a very poor subject." He was, in fact, the least promising of them all. Father Douillet said later in regard to the incident: "I was absolutely astonished to hear him assess my young candidates with such accuracy, for he seemed to me to be taking no notice of them and yet his verdict on each was perfectly exact."

23 La Côte-Saint-André, LPC 2, pp. 552-555.

24 "Father Douillet's plan was to found a religious teaching Congregation for the diocese of Grenoble. With the backing of the authorities of the department, he had even secured a royal decree, signed by Charles X, elevating his establishment to the status of Teachers' College for the whole of the department of the Isère. The events of 1830 had prevented the implementation of that decree" (AA, p. 101; LPC 2, pp. 190-199; NCF, pp. 324 H, 408 ff).

25 We don't have the text of the agreements exchanged between Fathers Champagnat and Douillet, but the latter's letters suggest that Brothers would be sent into the diocese of Grenoble in numbers matching the novices it provided. Father Douillet reproached Father Champagnat with not keeping to that.

Under the direction of the Brothers, the foundation of La Côte-Saint-André received fresh impetus. The boarding school increased rapidly and became a nursery of postulants for the novitiate of the Hermitage. In this regard, the establishment of La Côte-Saint-André was a distinct boon for the Institute.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Father Champagnat takes new steps to obtain legal sanction for the Society. Plan to unite with the Brothers of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux. Progress of the Institute despite widespread difficulties. Printing of the Rule.

Father Champagnat believed he should now apply again to the Government to obtain legal recognition¹ of his Institute. The number of Brothers subject to the law of conscription, was becoming greater every year, and since the passage of the law 2 of 1833, on primary education, it was impossible to exempt them from military service³, unless the y had a teacher's certificate⁴.

He therefore revised the Statutes of the Society, modifying them, in conformity with the new law. A petition to the King was drawn up⁵, and this was presented to His Majesty by a Deputy who had the Society's interests at heart.

The Statutes⁶ were examined and approved by the Council of the University. As to the authorization, Mr Guizot⁷, Minister of Public Education, answered in the King's name, that there was no justification for granting it⁸. While Father Champagnat was seeking Government approval, he had the community say fervent prayers for this important intention and he too prayed fervently to Our Lord for its success. He announced to his Brothers, with

1 OME, doc. 93, note 2, p. 198.

2 AA, p. 137.

3 Not everybody did military service, only those who drew an unlucky (mauvais) number. The service could last 6, 7 or 8 years (Cf. RLF, p. 99).

4 With a teaching certificate, it was possible to sign a ten-year teaching contract and be exempt from military service (Cf. RLF, p. II and 16).

5 On January 28th 1834, Father Champagnat wrote to His Majesty, Louis-Philippe, King of the French, asking for authorisation of the Society (Cf. LPC I, doc. 34, pp. 98-104).

6 The year 1834 closed with no progress beyond the approval of the Statutes. The Minister, Guizot, had no intention of recognizing additional teaching Congregations (Cf. RLF, p. 113).

7 LPC 2, pp. 269-272.

8 On February 28th, 1834, the Royal Council of Public Instruction approved the Statutes of the Congregation, but the Royal Decree was not granted (Cf. CSG I, p. 278).

his characteristic spirit of faith and total confidence in God: "I am sure that divine Goodness will hear our prayer and come to our assistance; if it does not grant us the authorization, it will give us some way of exempting our subjects from military service and safeguarding them". His confidence in God was rewarded. He did not gain authorization, as we have just seen, for it was God's wish to grant him this favour in a more perfect way that would have then been possible⁹; and yet his confidence had its reward: for divine Providence showed him a sure means of exempting his Brothers from military service.

At the very time that the Government refused to authorize the Institute, Father Champagnat quite providentially became acquainted with Father Mazelier¹⁰, Superior of the Congregation of the Brothers of Christian Instruction, of the diocese of Valence, whose novitiate was at Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux. This Congregation, though not having many members, was authorized by royal ordinance of 11th of June, 1823, for the former Province of Dauphiné. That included the Departments of Drôme, Isère and Hautes-Alpes.

From their very first exchange, the two worthy Superiors were clear about two matters: firstly, that their Congregations had exactly the same goal; secondly, that an amalgamation would be easily arranged and could be only to the advantage of both Societies. Father Champagnat expressed his view on the question, to Father Mazelier, as follows: "We have subjects; you have authorization; by coming to a mutual understanding, we can achieve something." From then on, a few plans of union¹¹ were put forward, but in an affair of such moment, time was needed for reflection. While awaiting complete clarity on God's will in the matter, the two Superiors promised mutual help. Consequently, Father Mazelier was quite willing to share the benefits of his authorization, with the Little Brothers of Mary, by taking over those subjects who were eligible for conscription; he laid down

⁹ On June 10th, 1851, Brother Francis obtained that legal recognition. Decree, No. 3072: "The religious society dedicated to teaching and called the Little Brothers of Mary, with its centre at Notre-Dame-de-l'Hermitage-sur-Saint-Chamond, is recognized as an establishment of public utility... For this reason, it enjoys all the civil rights attaching to such establishments..." (Cf. CSG II, pp. 450 and 458).

¹⁰ LPC 2, pp. 380-393; and RLF, p. 280.

¹¹ On November 4th, 1836, Fr Champagnat invites Fr Mazelier to visit the Hermitage (Cf. LPC I, doc. 72, p. 175; also, LPC 1, doc. 66, p. 163; and BI No. 178, 1960, pp. 177-179).

the condition that they remain at Saint-Paul till they obtained their teacher's certificate or had taken up a post which, according to the law, guaranteed them exemption from military service. Father Mazelier rendered this invaluable assistance to the Institute for almost ten years, that is, until the amalgamation of the two Societies 12.

This union, so profitable to both Institutes, was not only prepared for by their association over a period of ten years but became a sort of necessity to satisfy the feeling of affection, esteem and attachment generated by that association. At the time when the union was finally settled, the two Congregations were two friends, two brothers, who were so united, who loved each other so much and who had such a need of each other, that life apart became unthinkable. It was a union which contributed marvellously to the spread and development 13 of the Institute, preparing the way for the union with the Brothers of Viviers 14 and thereby opening up the whole south of France to our labours. In this way, the failure to obtain authorization was a blessing for the Congregation, leading as it did, to the agreement formed with Father Mazelier. The Founder had asked the Brothers' prayers to secure the authorization, and had prophesied: "I am sure that God will hear us, either by granting what we ask or by giving us something better." How right he proved to be!

It should be noted that the rejection of Marcellin's request for authorization was a consequence of the principles espoused by the Government which emerged in France from the July Revolution. That Government was essentially hostile to religious Congregations, especially those engaged in teaching. The law of 1833, relating to primary education, was expressly designed to control them, to subject them to the University, to sap their influence, halt their progress and, in the end, remove them imperceptibly from the field of teaching. This accounts for the

12 The union effected in 1842 between the two Congregations was an "ad intra" arrangement (Cf. CSG 1, pp. 533-536). That union did not affect basically the problem in the eyes of the military administration.

13 Brother John-Mary (Bonnet), (LPC 2, p. 292, supported by Brother Paul, BQF, p. 129), co-Founder with Father Fièrè of that Congregation, skilfully brought about the fusion which was to be so fruitful. The 40 or so Brothers at the time of the union in 1842, grew to 60 in 1843, to 98 in 1847, to 188 in 1852 and exceeded 300 in 1856, the year of Father Mazelier's death (Cf. Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, BI No. 183, 1861, p. 765).

14 The union with the Congregation of the Brothers of Viviers took place in 1844 (Cf. CSG 1, pp. 563-567).

petty, arbitrary persecution, the annoyances of every kind, the demands, the red tape, and the systematic opposition of the Government which hampered and, sometimes hopelessly so, the foundation of new schools.

After 1830, the Brothers were required, in a number of places, to take part in National Guard Service ¹⁵. They had to leave their children and give up their schools in order to go through military drill and mount guard. There were districts in which these frustrations went on for several years. Any school which did not boast a certificated Brother, had to be closed. Competence, devotedness, experience and age were not considered; and the certificates, which were rigorously demanded for opening or running a school, were the monopoly of the University; to obtain one, was incredibly difficult ¹⁶.

¹⁵ LPC 2, p. 46.

¹⁶ To meet the requirements of the University, Fr. Champagnat arranged periods of training at the Hermitage and, later, at Grange-Payre (Cf. LPC 2, p. 574 and LPC 1, doc. 313, pp. 566-570).

It was chiefly during the years immediately following the events of 1830, that the vigour of opposition intensified ¹⁷. When the Government became settled and was formally recognized, it could see that its own interest was best served by desisting from such a policy and adopting instead, a line of action that was less arbitrary and more conformable to justice and to the religious spirit of the country.

Notwithstanding all these obstacles, a few new houses were founded. In 1832, the school of Peaugres, in the Ardèche was opened and that of Marllhes ¹⁸ was re-opened, after being closed since 1820. In 1833, Viriville was founded and in 1834, SaintGenest-Malifaux, Sury and Lorette in the Department of the Loire. The year 1835, saw Terrenoire Pelussin and Sorbier opened in the Loire ¹⁹, likewise.

Part of the Government's intention in framing the law of 1833, was to fetter the religious Congregations and to halt their influence in the teaching of youth. That law had a sequel that they didn't in the least anticipate. Its godless teacher-training colleges soon filled the country with mercenary and, in many cases, irreligious, teachers. These sometimes became the enemies of the parish priests, the scourge of the parishes and the source of revolutionary principles. When the presence of such teachers came to be known, there was an almost universal rejection of them. The people turned against them on all sides, and clamoured for Brothers ²⁰. No sacrifice was considered too great to have them.

In one instance, it might be the parish priest who wrote asking for Brothers so that he could remove the children of his parish from the teachings and the scandals of a wicked teacher; or again, it might be the mayor, urged on by his Council and all his subjects,

¹⁷ At the level of Saint-Etienne District (arrondissement) Council and of the General Council, the hostility went on tilt 1832. It waned in 1833 and gradually disappeared completely. On August 27th, 1840, the Saint-Etienne District Council unanimously expressed their desire that the Brothers of Mary obtain legal recognition (Cf. RLF, p. 232).

¹⁸ AA. pp. 122-123.

¹⁹ LPC 2, index of place names.

²⁰ In 1837, Fr Champagnat founded 6 new establishments and placed several requests on a waiting-list. We give two examples of his replies: To Crozier, parish priest of Coutouvre: "We wish that we could satisfy everyone but the field is too vast for the number of workers" (LPC 1, doc. 123, p. 253 and note, p. 252); to Mr Jovin Deshayes, Mayor of Saint-Jean-Bonnefonds: "We have too many problems to be able to give you Brothers this year, but your request has been noted and we shall take the earliest opportunity to reward your zeal for the religious education of youth" (LPC 1, doc. 140, p. 279).

who would write to Father Champagnat asking him to accept the town school which was completely run down, because the teacher spent his time at anything except class work; in most cases, though, it was the parish priest and the mayor, together with the entire population, who unanimously appealed for Brothers, sending deputations for this purpose to Father Champagnat, and offering to make any sacrifices necessary.

One day, a large township sent the Councillors to beg Father Champagnat to give them three Brothers. The good priest, who had no subjects available at the time and had told the visitors as much ten times at least, was at a loss to terminate their importunings. Finally, he picked up from the table, a newspaper in which there was an article attacking the Institute. Amongst other things, it purported to show that the Brothers were ignorant people and, therefore, completely incapable of conducting a school and giving primary education to children. "Here", said he, handing them the paper, "read this article and decide whether you have the right idea about the Brothers; it will show you how unqualified they really are." The Councillors asserted their complete indifference to what the article might say, insisting that they wanted Brothers since, no matter what they might be like, they would do a far better job than their own Voltairian schoolmaster.

The mayor of quite a large town, a member of the General Council of the Department of the Rhône, was withdrawing one time in sadness after failing in a request for Brothers. He noticed a Brother in the yard, who was busy making mortar, and pleaded with Father Champagnat: "You tell me that you have no Brothers; there is one, and I'll be satisfied to have him; please give him to me!" And he went on at once: "Don't tell me that he is no good in the class-room; he will certainly be better than our teacher, for he will take care of our children and not set them a bad example."

Another mayor, accompanied by the parish priest, having begged most earnestly for Brothers, finally said: "We will not leave this room until you grant our request; and since you have no trained subjects, give us a novice, even your domestic; we absolutely must have someone to take over the position and deliver us from the godless master with whom they want to saddle us." ²¹ In this way, God thwarted the designs of the wicked, drew good from evil and a law, designed to remove Religious Congregations

²¹ A vacancy was provided by the Inspector.

from primary teaching, induced the towns to call for members of these Congregations so as to entrust their children to them.

We have reached a stage in its history when the Institute, from every point of view, was enjoying remarkable prosperity ²². Vocations were plentiful; piety and regularity reigned in the houses and were held in honour in the novitiates. The schools flourished and Father Champagnat heard the Ecclesiastical authorities on all sides sound the praises of the Brothers' good spirit, devotedness, exemplary lives and zeal for the christian education of children. Emphasis on study was stronger in all the houses, and each year, despite the strictness of the examining body, quite a number of Brothers obtained their certificates.

Every year the annual Retreat was the scene of many professions. The first Brothers had now reached middle age and were possessed of experience, competence and authority. These, they put to good use in forming others to piety and the virtues of their state; besides, they were able to promote regularity, peace and union in the houses. The Brothers loved their Superior, as their Father. Their vocation was dear to them and they reinforced one another in the spirit of the Institute, thoroughly mastered their teaching method and lived a life of harmony, made possible by virtue and the family spirit.

We have made a point of recording here the precise state of the Institute at that time, for just then it was confronted _with a danger greater than any so far mentioned: its very existence was threatened. For several years, Father P., ²³ who was a chaplain at the Hermitage, had disapproved of Father Champagnat's conduct, blaming and criticizing his administration and his guidance of the Brothers. According to him, the Institute was doomed to destruction under Marcellin's control; he was so thoroughly convinced of this, that he felt in duty bound to inform the Archbishop of his beliefs and fears.

"Father Champagnat", he warned the Archbishop, "is a pious and virtuous man. However, he is bereft of the qualities needed to govern a community with success. He cannot carry on a correspondence; he is incapable of educating his Brothers; he is inept at dealing with school managers; and he doesn't know how to run a suitable novitiate. Besides, these things don't concern him

²² The Statistics show 82 Brothers for 1833 (AA, p. 133) and 171 for 1837 (AA, p. 206). Also LPC 1, pp. 310-312, in regard to foundations, as at November 27th, 1837.

²³ Fr. Pompallier, LPC 2, pp. 432-434.

very much, since most of his time goes into building and clearing the mountain side. The result is that the Brothers are not adequately formed in piety and in the virtues of religious life and they lack the learning essential to teachers. Moreover, many other items are neglected." The only solution, he thought, was to remove Father Champagnat from his position as head of the Society and amalgamate his Brothers with those of Saint Viator 24, founded at Vourles, near Lyon.

He displayed such sincerity in what he said, and evidenced so much zeal and devotedness for the Little Brothers of Mary, that his words convinced the Archbishop. Father P. was instructed to discuss the matter with Father Querbes 2, Superior of the Brothers of Saint Viator. At the same time, Father Champagnat was summoned to the Archbishop's Palace and told: "You see that you have not been able to obtain authorization and that the Government is so badly disposed that you will never get it. On the other hand, as your numbers are growing and you are unable to function without this authorization, it is my wish that you unite your Brothers with those of Saint Viator, who are already authorized. Father Querbes will gladly agree to the union and will look after your Brothers." 26

Father Champagnat, taken aback by such a suggestion, coming like a bolt from the blue, made this reply: "Your Grace, my Brothers and I are in your hands and you can do with us as you please. As to the fusion which you propose to me, I don't believe we need it to avoid military service, seeing that Providence has already furnished us with a way out of that problem 27. Such a union, in my opinion, would be the ruin of our Society and probably also of the Brothers of Saint Viator. I say this because the two Congregations have an entirely different spirit, place their members differently 28, were founded in different circumstances and have quite dissimilar Rules. It would be the end of our

24 On this matter, see: OME, doc. 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 117, 119, 124; and LPC 1, doc. 30, p. 82.

25 LPC 2, p. 438.

26 OME, doc. 71, p. 156; doc. 170, p. 462.

27 Brother John-Baptist is summarizing events here. In 1830, Bishop Devie of Belley had thought that the Brothers of the Hermitage would be able to have themselves approved through the Statutes of Brothers already approved (OME, doc. 77 [1], p. 166). The close contact between Champagnat and Mazelier, dated from 1835. The effort to unite with the Clerks of Saint Viator, began at the end of 1832 or the beginning of 1833 and ended in 1835.

28 A Clerk of Saint Viator was allowed to go alone into small parishes. He lived with the parish priest.

Brothers and would force them back into the world, if they were asked to give up their Rules, their costume, their teaching method and their way of life, in order to take up that of another Congregation, no matter which one. Knowing the situation, as *I* do, your Grace, I cannot in conscience support the proposal. If you insist, *I* shall not oppose it, but bow to your will, as is my duty; yet *I* fear for the consequences." The Archbishop did continue to insist. He tried to refute the reasons advanced by Marcellin, and, when he failed to shake his feelings on the matter, he sent him away with an exhortation to reflect further. There were several more attempts on the part of one 29 of the Vicars General, but without success. There was a stay of proceedings but, for some time, the attitude of the Archbishop's Palace towards Marcellin, was far from friendly. "This good Father Champagnat", went the report, "is a holy man but too obstinate in his ideas, and harms his Society by his unusual way of acting."

Some time afterwards, when he was better informed, the Archbishop viewed the possible union in a different light and acknowledged that Father Champagnat had been right in resisting it. Having met him in the secretary's office, the Archbishop made him stay for dinner, and in the course of the meal admitted to him: "Father Champagnat, *I* must admit that you gave proof of sound judgment in opposing the union of your Society with that of Saint Viator. *I* congratulate you on the way you behaved in the matter. If it had gone ahead, *I* would be a very angry man to-day, and *I* have to confess that my advisers on this question, gave me a false picture of your Institute." How often afterwards did the venerable prelate, seeing the development of the Congregation, give thanks to God that the union had not come about! "The Society of Marists", he repeated on several occasions, "gives me more consolation than any other Institute in my diocese. How sorry I should be now, if we had not preserved that Society, exactly as it was founded." For a long while now, Father Champagnat had cherished the plan of making a revision of the Rules with the help of the principal Brothers, and then having them printed. From the very beginning his overall plan for the Congregation was clear and its chief foundations were set in place. The promise which was signed by the Brothers, is evidence of this. That document contains all the principles that constitute a Society; the aim and the spirit of

29 Cholleton. OME, doc. 119 and 124, as well as LPC 1, doc. 30, p. 82.

the Institute are plainly spelt out there; there, too, are the poverty, obedience and chastity, which are the essence of the religious life. However, the elaboration of those basic principles, the specific means, that is the Rules, to reach the aim, to invigorate and perfect the spirit, to practise these virtues, to ensure uniformity of conduct and establish community life - all these were the fruit of time and experience. The first Rules 30, therefore, were few in number, and the Founder implemented them only on a trial basis. He was well aware that what the mind conceived and what seems perfect in theory, quite often becomes impossible to carry out. For this reason, he wanted to find out by experience, what could be constantly observed, before adopting it on a permanent basis.

In the early days, he gave only a few general Rules, and these were briefly expressed. They regulated the Brothers' exercises of piety; their conduct in relations amongst themselves, with the children and with the public; and their principal activities throughout the day. Each year afterwards, he supplemented these with the details which time, circumstances and the expansion of the Institute, showed to be either necessary or useful. Although he might have long meditated on a particular Rule, he had the principal Brothers analyse and approve it, before he would include it. He would gather them for this purpose and discuss each article with them. Moreover, he took each of the senior Brothers, in turn, into his room, as king them privately for their opinion, and wanting to know the difficulties or the advantages they saw in regard to a Rule that was to be adopted or that had been for some time on trial. It was only after seeking the opinion of each and having heard and weighed their comments, that he accepted the articles under discussion.

He followed the same procedure for the class-room regulations and the teaching method. His purpose in all this was, in the first place, to clarify his own ideas by availing himself of the wisdom and experience of the Brothers; besides, he wanted to adopt or to impose Rules only when they would be observed voluntarily and with entire good will.

When these Rules had been in use for twenty years by way of trial, and when the increased number of houses made it difficult to keep the manuscripts accurate and uniform, Father Champagnat decided to have them printed; but before taking this step, he thought it prudent and even necessary, to subject them

30 The archives of the General House have a copy of those first Rules.

The copy is from the school of Saint-Sauveur-en-Rue (AFM, 361.1-1).

to a fresh analysis. With this in view, he called together a number of the most capable Brothers and a selection of the senior ones.

For more than six months, he spent several hours each day with them on this project. Every article was discussed and examined separately, a single article sometimes absorbing several sessions.

On occasion, when he had heard each one's comments on the advantages or otherwise of a Rule, he asked for time to reflect further and to pray, before deciding. For example, before finally adopting the article allowing the beverage at table to be half wine and half water, he needed several weeks to consult God and to examine in his sacred presence what he should do; he was afraid that the proportion of wine was too great, especially as it had previously been less ³¹.

Having completed the discussion of all the Rules and decided on them, he submitted them to wise and experienced persons so that they could examine them and give him their opinion. They made a close study of the document and found nothing to correct.

It did seem to them, however, that it lacked certain details and so was incomplete. There was a reason for this: Father Champagnat had thought it unwise in this first edition to insert a host of detailed Rules which might be in common use but which needed to stand the test of time and experience before assuming the force of law and definitive approval. His policy was to adopt a measure only after a long trial and when sure that its practice would not only be beneficial -but also possible in every house.

Consequently, he preferred to leave the Rules incomplete, (as he stated in the Preface), than to enshrine in them items already practised and worth conserving but which could need some adaptation before receiving the seal of final approval. It was not even his intention to regard as permanent, the Rules which he adopted at that time and put into print.

On his death bed, he spoke to Brother Francis, his successor, in the same vein. He was empowered to conclude the tasks and, in collaboration with the General Chapter to decide the Rules of the Institute irrevocably. His jurisdiction applied to the Common Rules, to the Rules of Government and to the Rules for the conduct of schools and for teaching method. Twelve years after Father Champagnat's death, the task was accomplished ³².

³¹ "The wine served at table will be mixed with two thirds water" (Manuscript Rule, 1830. AFM, 361.2. 1, bis).

³² That would be undertaken by the General Chapter of 1852-53-54. There is an excellent study of the evolution of the Rule by Brother Pedro Herrera, a Spaniard (AFM at Rome and at Notre-Dame-de-l'Hermitage).

The printing of the Rule was a source of immense joy and consolation to the Founder. This Rule ensured stability in the Society; it gave a special boost to regularity, making the Brothers more exact in the discharge of duty and strengthening them in their vocation. "Now", he reminded them, on one occasion, "it will be easy for you to study your Rule, to meditate on it, to become thoroughly familiar with it, to know exactly what it requires of you and form yourself to observe it faithfully. You all have a copy now and you should make it your reference text." In sending the Rule 33 to the Brothers, he wrote them this letter 34: "My very dear Brothers, it is in the sweet names of Jesus and Mary that I ask you to accept this Rule which you have so long desired and which I send to you to-day, with such joy. I do not suggest that each article binds you under pain of sin but I assure you that you will savour peace in your holy state only to the degree that you follow the whole Rule very faithfully. Fidelity to your Rule, by obtaining for you the grace of perseverance, will guarantee you an eternal crown." The Brothers received the Rule with the utmost pleasure and they were resolved to observe it faithfully all their lives.

33 The Rule was printed and sent to the Brothers in January, 1837. Printed in 18 format, it also contained various prayers, the ceremonies for taking the habit and making the vows as well as the letter of Saint Ignatius on obedience (Cf. LPC 1, doc. 89, p. 203; and AA, pp. 209-212).

34 This letter was published in CSG 1, p. 13; see also, OME, doc. 89, p. 203.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

*The Society of the Marist Fathers is approved by the Holy See.
Father Champagnat's contribution to that undertaking.*

In that same period, God granted Marcellin the greatest consolation he could wish for, that is, the authorization of the Marist Fathers, by the Holy See. However, to grasp the full impact of this event, we need to go back in history a few years. After the unfortunate Courveille commotion, Father Terraillon, who was not happy at the Hermitage, and who doubted the viability of the Brothers' work, asked to withdraw and, in fact, left on All Saints' day, 1826, despite the efforts of Father Champagnat to retain him.

His departure placed Father Champagnat in a painful situation.

This second departure set tongues wagging in public, giving rise to all sorts of conjectures to explain why those two priests left.

Besides, Marcellin could not attend single-handed both to the formation of the Brothers and the administration of the Society ¹.

Even more distressing, was the fact that the work of the Marist Fathers in the diocese of Lyon, was seriously set back by what had happened ².

Nevertheless, placing his total confidence in God, he laboured with renewed courage, to make good the losses he had just sustained. After lengthy prayer and reflection, he decided to write to the Archbishop for someone to assist him in administering the Society's affairs. At the same time, he paid a visit to Father Gardette ³, Superior of the Major Seminary, to acquaint him with the state of affairs and to ask him to urge the Archbishop to grant his request. He also turned to Father Barou, Vicar General, for support in his cause and wrote him the following letter ⁴ on the subject:

"Very Reverend Father, I write to you with great confidence, to share my troubles with you and to inform you of the difficult position in which I am placed. I am alone, as you are aware, a

¹ LPC 1, doc. 4, p. 34.

² OME, doc. 160 [11], p. 381; LPC 1, doc. 7, 8; and LPC 1, doc. 11, p. 45.

³ LPC 1, doc. 3, p. 32.

⁴ LPC 1, doc. 7, p. 39.

fact which causes serious uneasiness even to people who love our Society and generously support it. The public, which almost always pronounces judgment without full knowledge of the facts, blames me for the departures of Fathers Courveille and Terraillon. All this certainly saddens me but does not discourage me, because I expected such trials, and expect even greater ones. May God's holy name be blessed! *I* am still firmly convinced that God wills this work, but, alas! he may perhaps wish it to be established by others. The extremely deplorable episode of the one who seemed to be leader of this work, constitutes one of the fiercest efforts invented by hell to destroy an undertaking from which it feared so much harm. The mere recollection of that sad interlude, makes me shudder.

In brief, Very Reverend Father, this is my position. We now have sixteen establishments, which must be visited at least every three or four months to make sure that everything is going well, that the Rule is observed, that the Brothers' lives are in keeping with their state, that they have no dangerous dealings with the world, that they give solid religious instruction to the children and train them in piety. These visits, moreover, are indispensable to make arrangements with the mayors on the temporal administration of the houses and the collection of school fees. We have more than two thousand children in our schools and that seems to me to be a fact that calls for serious attention. At the next vacation, we shall have more than eighty Brothers here; accounts, correspondence, payment of debts, in fact the whole spiritual and temporal administration rests on my shoulders. No one man can do this adequately!

Now that you know my position, I hope that you will come to my assistance and give me someone who views our work with a favourable eye and who is satisfied to receive only board and clothing. Father Séon 5 would suit us admirably because he is sympathetic to our aims, has an income of his own and is capable of doing us much good. In conclusion, *I* earnestly recommend myself to your prayers, for more than ever *I* understand the truth of that saying: 'Unless the Lord builds the house, in vain do the builders labour.'"⁶ Having enlisted the powerful support of these two eminent ecclesiastics, so influential with the Archbishop, he wrote to this

⁵ Fr Séon, LPC 2, p. 469 H.

⁶ Ps. 126, 1.

prelate a letter redolent of the deepest humility and the most complete confidence in God. Here is some 7 of what he wrote:

"Your Grace, the comparative failure of our work up till now, so far as the priests are concerned, makes me reluctant to come before you in person and pour out my woes. However, the quite fatherly kindness which you extended to me on your arrival in the archdiocese encourages me to beg you, in the names of Jesus and Mary, not to abandon a work that you have already protected and honoured with your good-will. *I* am more convinced than ever that this work is the will of God: Satan's efforts to destroy it are proof of this. But, alas, *I* have every reason to believe that God wants other men to establish it. Be that as it may, my whole confidence is in Jesus and Mary. *I* am saddened to find myself the only priest here - saddened, but not discouraged, because he who sustains me, is called the God of Strength 8. Father Barou and the Superior of the Major Seminary have, no doubt, acquainted Your Grace with my situation. I am confident that you will be deeply moved by it and not abandon me." In Marcellin's letter to Father Barou, he made mention of Father Séon 9. This was because he had had the opportunity of meeting this priest, who was a lecturer in the College of Saint-Chamond, and had found him disposed to enter the Society and devote himself to the service of the Brothers. Father Champagnat was afraid that the diocesan authorities would take a dim view of any request to have the services of this priest, whose zeal and ability made him seem ideal to compensate for the loss of the two others. He therefore paid a visit to Father Barou, letting him know his views on Father Séon and the latter's stated willingness to go to the Hermitage.

"Very Reverend Father", he said to him, "I have no doubt that God wills the Congregation of the Brothers. This is conclusively proved by what Providence has done for it. I am likewise convinced that he wills the Society of the Fathers. The unfortunate affair of Father Courveille and Father Terraillon's loss of heart, far from weakening my conviction have only strengthened it.

However, since I seek in this matter, as in every other, only the will of God, I submit my thoughts and feelings to you, determined

7 With regard to the draft (LPC 1, doc. 7, p. 39), there are a rather large number of discrepancies in expression and the amount of detail, but the meaning remains substantially unchanged.

8 Deut. 7, 9; Ps. 7.12; 24,8; 71,7.

9 Fr Séon was from Tarantaise and had done his studies in the college of Saint-Chamond (Cf. LPC 2, p. 469).

to follow your advice. If you believe that God wills the Society of the Fathers, let me have Father Séon; if, on the other hand, you don't believe that the Society is part of God's plans, please tell me, and *I* shall not give it another thought."

Father Barou heard Father Champagnat out attentively and with much kindness before answering: "This is a matter of very great importance. Let us ask God to make his will clear to us." They both knelt down, therefore, and prayed very fervently for some time. When they rose again, Father Barou declared: "You will have Father Séon. I shall raise the matter with the Archbishop, this very day." Recounting this incident twenty-five years afterwards, Father Barou revealed: "While I was praying as earnestly as I could, I suddenly felt inspired to say to Father Champagnat: 'Continue to work at the establishment of the Society of the Fathers; I believe that it is God's will' How glad I am today, to have given him that advice, when *I* see the enormous blessings God has showered on that Society and the good that it brings about."

Father Séon, a pious and devoted priest, full of zeal and a man of total integrity, fitted in very easily with the spirit of Father Champagnat. He was always perfectly one with him, and assisted him greatly in the formation of the Brothers and in the administration of the temporal affairs of the Society. Some time later 10, as a result of his good example, he was joined in the Society by Fathers Bourdin, Pompallier and Chanut. The firstnamed was only a deacon when he arrived at the Hermitage and had to surmount considerable obstacles in order to persevere. On ordination, he was offered several distinguished posts; these, he generously refused, preferring the poor, humble and hidden life of the Brothers at the Hermitage 11 to all the temporal gains promised him elsewhere. A nucleus of priests was formed in the way we have described. Within a few years, together with the pious group who gathered around Father Colin, Superior of the Minor Seminary of Belley 12, they constituted the foundation of the Congregation of the Marist Fathers.

10 Fr Etienne Séon arrived at the Hermitage on May 30th, 1825 (OM 1, doc. 175, p. 438); Fr Bourdin, in the following December (OM 1, doc. 185 [4], p. 453; Fr Pompallier, in September, 1829 (OM 1, doc. 196 [3], p. 472); Fr Chanut, probably du ring 1831 (OM 1, doc. 238 [3], p. 531).

11 Letter of 1829, transcribed in CSG I, p. 150.

12 It was there that the first 20 Fathers held their first Chapter in 1836. Those of the diocese of Belley were almost equal in number to those from the diocese of Lyon (Cf. OM 1, doc. 403 [2], p. 922).

Father Colin and Father Champagnat worked in concert, then, each in his own way to recruit subjects for the undertaking. They would have liked to establish a unified government and a form of community life; but, the restoration of the diocese 13 of Belley in 1823, left them in different dioceses; they therefore had to proceed prudently in order to gain the consent of both administrations, without which they would do nothing. Before 1830, the question of that unified control had already been raised.

In fact, Father Champagnat, aware how much it was needed to strengthen the project and to secure the allegiance of subjects, was for setting it up in secret, without reference to the ecclesiastical authorities. Father Colin, who would have none of this, argued as follows 14:

"We have never tried to promote the Society secretly, keeping our Superiors in the dark and we shouldn't begin to do so now. Let us aim unequivocally for our goal. Nowhere, does our effort meet greater opposition than in Lyon. This is how God wills to put it to the test, but we must not be discouraged in any way. You should send off a petition to your diocesan Superiors and, if you wish, I'll help you couch it in the most suitable terms."

Marcellin therefore made new and most urgent entreaties to the diocesan administration, requesting full liberty to live in community with his confreres and for them, to follow their own Rule and to choose a common Superior. He made several trips to Lyon to promote his cause and wrote many letters to the Archbishop and to his Vicars General. In reading these letters 15, you could be forgiven for thinking at times that Marcellin was carried away by zeal for the glory of God and by devotedness to the Society of the Marist Fathers. But then you recall that his expressions reflect his open character and the complete confidence he showed in his ecclesiastical Superiors, from whom he kept nothing secret. In one of his letters, he points out to Father Cattet, Vicar General:

"The interest you have always evinced in our Society, encourages me to importune you further, begging you to foster its development even more. At a time when associations, whose avowed aim is the promotion of evil, are allowed free rein, why is it that those whose goal is the glory of God, experience

13 From the time of the 1801 Concordat till 1823 when it became a diocese, the Department of Ain was part of the diocese of Lyon.

14 February 13th, 1830 (Cf. OME, doc. 77, pp. 165-166). Brother John Baptist changed the text slightly.

15 Several of these letters have been lost.

insurmountable difficulties? *I* have now been committed to the Society of Mary for fifteen years without doubting for a single instant that it is a work willed by God. Now it is not the Brothers who can be said to constitute the Society of Mary; rather are they a branch, subsequent to the Society itself. The main branch 16 is that of the priests; at least, that has been our constant belief.

In view of this fact, I take the liberty of asking you: Tell me that this work is not of God, or promote its success more and more. Allow me to hark back to the promise you made to give us all the suitable subjects who might be desirous of joining our Society. There are a few available at the moment, having the qualities necessary for our kind of life and capable of rendering us very great service. If you do give them to us, our cup of joy will overflow and we shall bless the Lord for his favour." Father Cattet showed this letter to the Archbishop, pointing out at the same time how well the Society of the Brothers was progressing, and how keenly it was desired to establish and develop that of the Fathers. The venerable prelate promised to make available all those who felt they were suited and who were attracted to the project. He also agreed to let the priests of the Hermitage come to an understanding with those of Belley in order to choose a Superior 17; and he appointed Father Cholleton 18 to replace Father Cattet in dealing with the affairs of the Society.

Although Father Cattet's devotedness to the Society deserved nothing but praise, it was an advantage to be put under the direction of Father Cholleton 19. This man had known and protected the Society since its inception and he was disposed not only to serve it but to join it and vow himself to God in it. Hence it was, that, from the time of his appointment, the Society experienced no major difficulties and travelled an untrammelled path till it was finally established.

16 The text given here by Brother John-Baptist, is quite different from the rough draft in our archives (LPC 1, doc. II, p. 45). For example, the sentence, "The main branch is that of the priests; at least, that has been our constant belief" does not appear in the original document.

17 The fact is not in any way corroborated by contemporary documents. They show rather that the Lyons authorities were intent on maintaining the autonomy of the Hermitage group in naming Champagnat their Superior. See OM 2, p. 803, note 2; also, OME, doc. 89 [3], p. 188 and doc. 90, p. 190.

18 In February, 1833 (Cf. OM 1, doc. 146, p. 383).

19 Letter of Marcellin to J.C. Colin, March 1st, 1833: "We ought all to offer great thanks to God for having given us Fr Cholleton to guide and direct the steps to be taken in establishing the Society. It is an admirable help of Providence" (OME, doc. 115 [3], p. 239).

The events of 1830, which occurred at this stage, made it even more imperative to have that unified control, so long desired, and prepared for on both sides with the same zeal, devotedness and generosity. The Fathers who were at the Hermitage went off to Belley to seek an agreement on the matter with their confreres. Following a Retreat of a few days, Father Colin was elected Superior. This new step delighted Father Champagnat ²⁰. He had been working towards it for several years and with such ardent zeal that Father Colin, who longed for it just as much but was more calm about it, had often urged Marcellin to moderate his efforts ²¹ and to allow Providence to act. But his dynamic character and his unlimited devotedness to the Society of the Fathers gave him no respite; besides, it was for him a matter of conscience to toil relentlessly and with the utmost vigour for the project; he had, after all, promised God to devote to it, his labours, his health and, if necessary, life itself.

While he was so busy securing interested subjects from the Archbishop and the permission to arrange with the Fathers of Belley to establish the unified control just referred to, he was gently chided by one of the Brothers. "You take too much trouble about this", was the observation. "God does not ask so much of you; your zeal has adequate scope with the Society of the Brothers, and Providence seems to have designed you exclusively for that work." "My dear friend", Marcellin replied, "God alone knows how much I love the Brothers, and he is my witness that I am ready to give my blood and my life for them. Yet the organization of the Fathers seems to me to be much more important ²² than that of the Brothers and I am so committed to it that I would, if necessary, sacrifice all we have in order to ensure its success; I would give my labours, my strength and my very life.

I don't know yet the designs of Providence regarding the Society of the Fathers. However, I am so thoroughly convinced that it is willed by the Divine Goodness, that no matter what difficulties intervene and no matter what happens, I am

²⁰ Father Champagnat had been elected Provincial Rector of the Lyon group of Fathers, on December 8th, 1830 (OME, doc. 88, p. 181). That appointment had been confirmed by the Administrator Archbishop (OME, doc. 90, pp. 190-191 and doc. 101, p. 212 and doc. 102, p. 214).

²¹ On September 10th, 1830, Fr Colin wrote to Fr Champagnat to express his doubts about the choice of place and date of the assembly to elect a central Superior (OME, doc. 84, [2], p. 175).

²² These letters have not been preserved.

determined to work with all my strength and till my dying breath, for its success."

"Do you know, Father", the Brother interjected, "that if your preference for the Fathers were known, the Brothers would be jealous."

"That would be wrong of them", rejoined Father Champagnat. "All the good Brothers, all those who truly love Jesus and Mary, all those, in a word, who have the spirit of their state, share my views and feelings on the matter. Besides, both Brothers and Fathers are willed by God and he will bless them both and bless them all the more if they increase their love for each other, and are more closely united and more ready to be of service to each other. From the moment that God granted me the grace to devote myself to the Society of Mary, my sole desire has been to see it set up and prospering in all its branches. All my past efforts have been directed to its success and, please God, *I* shall pursue that same goal till death." The election of a leader or the establishment of a "centre of unity" as it was called at the time, (since the leader was not strictly speaking, a Superior, and since the Fathers of the Hermitage and of Belley remained dependent on their own Ordinaries), was a vital step for the success of the work and a starting point for rapid progress. It is true that Father Colin exercised over the members of the Association, nothing more than an authority of guidance and advice. Yet, the effects of his authority were far-reaching and valuable. The future of the Society as a result, seemed full of hope and its official establishment was now only a matter of time, and a time whose duration could at this stage, be easily predicted.

Some of the Fathers belonging to Belley, were employed as teachers in the Minor Seminary of that town, while the others conducted missions in the country. Those at the Hermitage were not fully taken up with the formation of the Brothers. They were, as well, engaged in preaching in the neighbouring parishes and in giving missions.

The Brothers' way of life and their Rules could not be suitable for the Fathers with their different goal and ministry. Marcellin, therefore, saw the need to establish the Fathers in a distinct community. For this purpose, he offered the land and residence of Grange-Payre 23, near Saint-Chamond. The Archbishop and

23 Brother John-Baptist gives a simplified account of the unravelling of events: The Fathers went to Valbenoîte at the end of 1831 (Letter of Novem-

Father Colin approved of the scheme and it was about to be implemented when it was waived in favour of a proposal put forward by Father Rouchon, parish priest of Valbenoîte 24. He had acquired a former Benedictine monastery with its gardens and out-houses and offered to bequeath it to the Society, provided the Fathers would settle there and help him meet the parish pastoral needs. The Archbishop placed the curates elsewhere and the Fathers took possession of the house and became the parish priest's auxiliaries 25. Father Séon was appointed Superior of the Community of Valbenoîte. Fathers Bourdin and Chanut went to Belley as humanities' teachers and were replaced at the Hermitage by Fathers Servant and Forest. These in turn were succeeded by Fathers Matricon and Besson, both of whom did so much for the Brothers 26.

For his part, Father Colin was striving to have the Society approved by the Holy See. In 1823, equipped with letters 27 of recommendation from the Archbishop of Lyon and the Bishops of Belley and Grenoble, he travelled to Rome to request this favour 28. He submitted to the Congregation for Bishops and Regulars, the object of the Society, its history and basic Constitutions. After a lengthy and searching examination 29, all was approved. A few days afterwards 3°, on the 11th of March,

ber 7th, 1831, OME, doc. 100 [1], p. 211). On May 15th, 1833 Miss Foumas bequeathed her Grange-Payre property to Marcellin (OM 1, doc. 321, p. 720). On September 8th, 1834, Fr Champagnat, finding the situation of the priests at Valbenoîte hardly in keeping with their state offered to Fr Cholleton to make the house of Grange-Payre available (LPC 1, doc. 45, pp. 120-124). On October 13 th, 1835, Fr Rouchon, parish priest of Valbenoîte, set up a Universal Society together with the Marist Fathers (OME, doc. 136, pp. 286-292).

24 On the presence of the Fathers at Valbenoîte (OME, doc. 107 [1], p. 225; and doc. 160 [23 and 24], pp. 387-388); Fr. Rouchon, (LPC 2, pp. 445-448); Valbenoîte, LPC 2, pp. 634-637.

25 Letter of November 13th, 1832, OME, doc. 107, p. 225.

26 Fr Matricon, LPC 2, p. 375; Fr. Besson, LPC 2, p. 91.

27 Letter of June 23rd, 1833, OME, doc. 116, p. 239.

28 In fact, according to what he wrote to Fr Champagnat on February, 27th, 1834, H...the aim of my journey was solely to consult about our undertaking" (OME, doc. 127, p. 267).

29 That examination lasted more than two years: Letter of September 4th, 1834, OME, doc. 129 [4], p. 271. Letter of November 13th, 1835, OME, doc. 139 [4 and 5], pp. 301-302. Letter of December 29th, 1835, OME, doc. 140 [31 p. 305. Letter of January 28th, 1836, OME, doc. 142, p. 310; doc. 143, p. 312; and doc. 144, p. 315.

30 Letter of April 11th, 1836, OME, doc. 145 [1], p. 317.

1836, His Holiness Pope Gregory XVI, issued a Brief authorizing the Society of Marist Priests and entrusting to them the Polynesian Mission. There is no way to describe the joy, happiness and consolation felt by Father Champagnat, when the news broke.

He had prayers of thanks humbly offered to God for the enormous favour, and then wrote to Father Colin to ask could he make profession. He pointed out in reply 31: "You know that the Brief of Approbation authorizes us to elect a Superior General.

Meanwhile, I have no slightest desire to consider myself such or to act in that capacity. I agree to continue till the election to be the focus of unity, but I shall certainly receive no vows. That does not mean that I am not greatly edified by your dispositions. I can only wish that all our confreres thought and acted as you do; I hope that God will eventually give them that grace." As we have seen, the modesty of Father Colin would not allow him to consider himself as Superior 32, even though in the eyes of his confreres, that authority belonged to him as Founder and as the one freely chosen to exercise it. Besides, it was time to sort out the issue. To implement the Brief allowing them to choose a canonical Superior General 33, the Fathers gathered at Belley. The election took place at the end of a Retreat and, when Father Colin received the majority of votes, he was obliged to acquiesce and see the will of God in that vote by his confreres. Father Champagnat was elected as Assistant 34 to the Superior General. Some of the Fathers had seen him as a possible Superior General, but they realised that the responsibility of the Brothers made too many demands on him to allow him to govern the branch of the Fathers simultaneously. This was particularly the case in the initial stages when there was so much to be done for both groups.

During the same Retreat, the principal priests bound themselves by vows, to the Society. Father Champagnat, who had been one of the first to ask to make them, stood out for the fervour

31 Letter of June 24th, 1836, OME, doc. 147 [1], p. 328. The passage is reproduced with minor touching up in style.

32 Letter of January 19th, 1836, OME, doc. 141 [2], p. 308, in which Fr Colin puts forward Fr Cholleton as Superior of the Society.

33 OM 1, doc. 402 [7] and 403 [19].

34 There was only one Assistant elected on September 24th, 1836 (OM 1, doc. 402 [21]). It was, in the first round of voting, Fr Pierre Colin; but, at his brother's request, a second ballot was held (OM 2, doc. 684 [3 and 4] which yielded the name of Fr Terraillon (OM 1, doc. 416 [4] and APM, reg. 1, p. 8). Fr Champagnat was named Assistant at the same time as Father Maître pierre and Pierre Colin at the 1839 Retreat (APM, reg. 1, p. 12; and OM 2, doc. 757, p. 807, note 1).

and joy with which he pronounced them 35. Now the Society was definitively constituted, by the approbation of the Holy See, by the election of its leader and by the vows of its first members. Before dispersing, the Fathers drew up plans for the Polynesian Mission 36 and they decided that the principal House of the Institute, would be at Lyon 37.

When all matters had been dealt with, Marcellin set out again for the Hermitage, to prepare for the Brothers' Retreat. It was he who had always, on these occasions, given the conferences on the Rule and on the duties of the Brothers. It is true that his conferences were always full of interest. However, this year, they were even more moving, more instructive and more soul-stirring than usual. Those dealing with the happiness of the religious life, with the vows, and with zeal for the christian education of youth, were sheer delight and produced a deep and lasting impression on the Brothers.

As we have said, in giving its authorization Rome had confided the Polynesian Mission to the Society. Father Pompallier, chosen to head the mission, was made a Bishop 38 at the same time, and prepared his departure for the end of the year 1836. He was joined 39 by four priests and three Brothers to share his labours and sacrifices. Father Champagnat, whose whole life had been dedicated to the salvation of souls was consumed by a holy envy of such a wonderful vocation. He asked Father Colin to let him be part of that favoured group of missionaries setting out for Oceania. He wanted to devote his last days and his title remaining strength to the instruction and sanctification of non-christians. Though greatly impressed by Marcellin's zeal and devotedness, Father Colin reasoned with him 40 that he could do more good in France than was possible in Oceania; that his particular mission was not to go in person to evangelize those peoples but to prepare, for that task, apostles full of zeal and the spirit of sacrifice.

35 September 24th, 1836 (OME, doc. 151, p. 338).

36 Brother John-Baptist is mistaken. The arrangements for the Polynesian Mission had been made prior to the September meeting and the minutes of the latter, make no mention of it (OM 1, doc. 403).

37 For this important decision, see the documents indicated in OM 4, p.

594, section 366.03.

38 See, OM 1, doc. 378 [2]; 382; 383; and 390.

39 With Bishop Pompallier there went, on December 24th, 1836: Father Servant, Bataillon, Bret and Chanel; Brothers Marie-Nizier, Michel and Joseph-Xavier (Chronologie de 1976, p. 71).

40 No such letter has been preserved. It must have been question of an oral response (OM 2, p. 808 note).

Obedience did not permit Father Champagnat to insist and his humility led him to believe that he was unworthy of the favour.

Though he was resigned, he did not manage to conceal the strength of his longing.

Sometime after this, while talking with Father Douillet, Director of the Junior Seminary at La-Côte-Saint-André, the conversation turned to the mission of Oceania, and Marcellin exclaimed: "Ah! if only I were younger and stronger how gladly I would go and harvest that vineyard; but, since I am feeble and good for nothing, I am not wanted." This incident caused Father Douillet to comment: "It was quite clear to me that he burned with zeal for the salvation of souls and longed for the martyr's palm." He did not have the satisfaction of consecrating his last days to the salvation of the peoples of Oceania. but he made up for it by preparing Brothers to be effective catechists in that region. In the short time left to him, he despatched twelve 41 of them to the missions. Besides, he seized every opportunity of having prayers said for the success of that endeavour, and he laboured incessantly to inspire the Brothers with every virtue needed to be a good catechist.

"My dear Brothers", he reminded them, in a conference on the subject, "we owe great thanks to God for having chosen us to carry the light of the gospel to those people in darkness; that favour will turn out to be a source of blessing for the Institute. If we measure up to the designs of God for us, he will grant us, in turn, everything necessary to carry out that difficult task; he will lavish on us zeal, the spirit of sacrifice, the virtues and holiness; these are the only efficacious means of procuring the salvation of souls.

Yes, I say without hesitation, and the very thought is a great source of joy and consolation to me, one day the Institute will have its martyrs: priests and Brothers put to death by the people they go to instruct, giving their lives for Jesus Christ 42. Ah, what

41 In fact, 9 Brothers set out in Fr Champagnat's lifetime: December 24th, 1836: Brothers Michel Colomban, Marie-Nizier Delorme and Joseph-Xavier Luzy; September 9th, 1838: Brothers Marie-Augustin Devret, Florentin Françon and Elie-Régis Marin; June 15th, 1839: Brother Attale Grumaud; February 12th, 1840: Brothers Claude-Marie Bertrand and Ammon Duperron (BI 1, p. 468).

42 The prediction was soon fulfilled. Fr Peter Chanel was martyred in 1841 and canonized in 1954. Other priests and Brothers also gave their life for their faith: "Dear Brothers", wrote Brother Francis on August 1~t, 1848, "in giving you the list of deceased for this year... I have the consolation of pointing out to you that we have a martyr amongst them: our dear Brother

a happiness to die for such a sacred and beautiful cause! But, *I* repeat, only fidelity to God will merit such graces. Let us, then, remember that Providence, in entrusting the mission of Oceania to the Institute, has given us the task of winning the salvation of all those primitive people, who sleep in the shadow of death ⁴³; don't make the mistake of believing that the task devolves only upon the lucky ones chosen to travel to those distant lands; it is the responsibility of the whole Institute. It may not fall to our lot to consecrate our labours, our strength and our health to that work; we are, in such a case, even more obliged to promote its success by our prayers, by our good example and by every sort of virtue.

Let each one, therefore, consider himself responsible for the conversion of those peoples and ask it from God in constant prayer. If we are solid Religious; if we observe our Rule well; if we strive to acquire all the virtues of our holy state of life; if we maintain close union with Our Lord, saying frequently to him, 'Thy will be done ⁴⁴', then he will grant us the salvation of many of those uncivilized people.

It is possible that, on the Last Day, some of our most virtuous Brothers, who to all appearances were concerned only with their own salvation, will be seen to have done more for the conversion ⁴⁵ of non-believers than those especially chosen for that mission. Let me sum up for you what *I* want to say: firstly, one of the chief intentions that we ought to have in all our exercises of piety, is the conversion of sinners and the salvation of the peoples whom the Holy See has entrusted to us; secondly, we must work without respite to acquire the virtues that will make us good catechists and worthy of the grace of being chosen for such a sublime vocation."

Amongst those missionaries who were part of the first contingent, three had been formed and prepared by Father

Hyacinth; he set out in 1845 with Bishop Epalle and was massacred last year by the savages of the island of Saint-Christoval, together with two priests of the Society. You will find the details of their martyrdom, in the Annals of the Propagation of the Faith, and you will realize how sublime their death was and how we ought to envy them". (CSG 1, p. 137).

⁴³ Lk. 1,79.

⁴⁴ Matt. 6,9; Lk, 11,2.

⁴⁵ This intention is expressly indicated in the extract from the Brothers' Rule which Fr Colin included in the 1833 Summarium (Ant. Textus, 1, p. 81, n. 100).

Champagnat. They were: Fathers Pompallier 46, Servant and Forest 47. He also had the joy of seeing all the confreres whom he had, with such difficulty, brought together and kept together over a period of ten years, consecrate themselves to God and bind themselves to the Institute by vows. Including himself, there were ten of them, namely 48: Fathers Séon, Bourdin, Pompallier, Chanut, Servant, Forest, Matricon, Besson and Terraillon.

The last named of these was appointed parish priest of Our Lady of Saint-Chamond 49, a few months after leaving the Hermitage. Valuing his talents and his exceptional virtues, Father Champagnat did all he could to induce him to return to the Institute. On receipt of the approbation from Rome, Marcellin said to him: "You have no longer any reason to doubt the future of the work and its success. God wills it, since the Church approves." Then, in a half-serious and half-joking tone, he added: "God has given you a vocation to do this work, and you must answer his call or risk unpleasant consequences. If you enter the Society and make your vows, *I* shall answer for you salvation, but if you are unfaithful to your first vocation, you'd better look out!"

During the return from Belley after making his profession, Father Terraillon taunted him: "See, I have made my vows; my salvation is now up to you; don't forget your promise!" "To make vows is one matter", retorted Marcellin, "but to answer for your salvation is another altogether, because the essential thing is the keeping of the vows. So, if you keep your vows, you will be saved. I answer for you salvation, on that condition."

Soon after that exchange, the coach was making slow headway and one of the Fathers was prompted to exclaim: "Hopeless coach! Hopeless horses! Hopeless coachman! Ah! We'll never get there!" The driver heard this, turned around and humorously quipped: "Hopeless parish priests!" This remark made all the priests burst into laughter, and they looked at Father Terraillon, the only parish priest amongst them. "The 'hopeless' is for you", Marcellin teased,

46 Father Pompallier had indeed received a Marist formation, but being appointed Apostolic Vicar before the 1836 Chapter, he did not have to make vows in the Society. He had, however, signed a declaration of spiritual membership of the Society of Mary (OM 1, doc. 404, p. 930). For Fr Servant, Cf. OM 4, p. 353).

47 Fr Forest left for the Missions, only in 1841 (OM 4, p. 282).

48 See the report of the general Retreat of the Marist Fathers for the election of Jean-Claude Colin as Superior General, and for the first pronouncing of vows (OM 1, doc. 403, pp. 920-929).

49 April 9th, 1828.

"since you are the only parish priest here. There doesn't seem to be much hope for your salvation, then, while you have your parish. My advice is to get rid of it at the first opportunity!" He did, in fact, give it up willingly, a few months later ⁵⁰.

Father Terraillon who had always been a pious priest and full of zeal for the glory of God and for the salvation of the souls in his care, was a model of fidelity to Rule, of humility, of simplicity and obedience, when he became a Religious.

⁵⁰ He resigned on November 20th, 1839 (OM 4, p. 356).

CHAPTER TWENTY

Foundation of new schools. Further efforts by Father Champagnat to obtain legal authorization for the Society. His health deteriorates and he decides to appoint a successor.

God continued to bless the Brothers' novitiate in a special way. Vocations increased daily, and each year saw new establishments founded 1. For example, in 1835, the Providence Denuzière 2 was started at Lyon, Saint-Didier-sur-Rochefort in the Loire and Génas in the Isère; in 1836, Saint-Martin-la-Plaine was founded in the Loire, Sémur-en-Brionnais in Saône-et-Loire and Saint-Didier-sur-Chalaronne in the Ain; in 1837, it was Firminy and Perreux in the Loire, Anse in the Rhône and Thoissey in the Ain.

Since the Institute's numbers had increased considerably, Father Champagnat saw the need to put up further buildings 3 in order to accommodate the Brothers suitably during the Retreat. Even the chapel had become too small and he built a large one, together with a new wing. Bishop Pompallier blessed the chapel 4, at the Retreat of 1836. As usual, the Brothers did some of the work for these constructions. Although he had heavy administrative tasks, Father Champagnat was at the head of the workers and even spent much of the day building. On completing this final major construction, which brought the existing design into the form of a perfect rectangle, Father Champagnat had a presentiment of his approaching death and exclaimed: "This is my last building!" He was right.

For some time now, the Government had shown itself less hostile towards religious Societies. Father Champagnat, in greater need of legal sanction than ever, decided to resume his efforts of 1829 and 1834, in order to secure that boon 5. In August 6, 1836,

1 For these houses: see RLF, pp. 131-134.

2 Read: Denuzière, un orphelinat, LPC, 2, pp. 588-589.

3 He completed the court-yard of the Hermitage, as we see it to-day.

4 Description of the chapel by Brother Francis (AA, pp. 185-188).

5 He took this matter in hand only from 1834. Till then the Archbishop had been largely responsible (OME, doc. 33, p. 101).

6 On August 24th, or 25th, 1836, departure of Fr Champagnat for Paris with Bishop Pompallier and Fr Chanut. On September 4th, Fr Champagnat

he travelled to Paris for that purpose, hoping that Mr Sauzet 7, Deputy for Lyon, who was then the Minister for Public Instruction, would readily accede to his request. Unfortunately, when he reached Paris, the Minister had been changed and Marcellin was forced to return to the Hermitage without even presenting his petition.

In 1838, provided with letters of recommendation from the Archbishop of Lyon and the Bishops of Belley and Grenoble, he returned to Paris 8 to try and bring the matter to a happy conclusion. Mr de Salvandy 9 was the Minister for Public Instruction at that time. His initial reaction to Marcellin's request seemed favourable. While he pointed out that the proceedings might be somewhat protracted 10, he gave Marcellin to understand that the outcome would certainly be successful. In intimating this, he 11 could not be credited with the straightforward frankness of Mr Guizot 12, who had told Father Champagnat unequivocally in 1834: "You are wasting your efforts seeking authorization at this time; you can't possibly be granted it." Mr de Salvandy, as was clear later, never had any intention of allowing Father Champagnat's request. Yet, instead of openly admitting this, he preferred to exhaust the Founder's patience by raising a thousand difficulties, by subjecting him to a labyrinth of arbitrary formalities impossible to fulfil, and by laying down conditions, whose acceptance would spell the ruin of the Congregation 13.

His first ploy to thwart the petition for authorization was to ignore it and allow it to languish in the ministerial files. Father Champagnat soon realised the tactic, and he wrote to the Brothers on the '23rd of January 14: "It seems that progress will be very

handed Mr Delebecque, division head of the Ministry of Public Instruction, the documents concerning a request for legal authorization (Cf. RLF, p. 153).

7 Mr Sauzet was at that time Minister, not for Public Instruction but for Justice and Worship (from February 22nd to September 6th, 1836). It was he who presented the documents to the Minister (Cf. RLF, pp. 141, 144 and 153).

8 On January 15th, 1838, accompanied by Brother Mary-Jubin (LPC 1, doc. 169, p. 334).

9 LPC 2, pp. 462-466.

10 For this period, see LPC 1, pp. 333-340; and the letters to Brother Francis as well as the diary kept by Fr Champagnat, pp. 335, 338, 349, 354, 361 and 369.

11 For the intervention of Mr de Salvandy, see: RLF, pp. 147-148 and 163 ff.

12 LPC 2, pp. 269-272.

13 LPC 1, doc. 174 and note 3, p. 395.

14 AFM, 111.31.

slow. That makes no difference, for we are thoroughly determined not to give up until we have got our wish. The Minister has informed us that our request will be presented to the Council of State, remaining there more than three weeks; even if it took three months, we would persist to the end. From morning till night 15, I work on this business. What countless overtures 16, what running about, what innumerable visits! You just can't imagine it. For a month and a half, since I arrived, have done nothing but hurry from one person to another. have spent the last two days making use of a carriage, in order to secure an interview with the Minister, but without success. If he's not in Council he is absent altogether! Oh! what a process this is! And how costly for you would be well aware that the carriage is hired by the minute!"

When the Minister could not decently defer the audience any longer, he received Father Champagnat and excused his delay in the matter, on the pretext that some documents were still missing. These having arrived a few days later, there was now no question of presenting the case to the Council of State; it was to go to the Council of Public Instruction 17. Undoubtedly, the Minister had been silent about this Council so that Father Champagnat would have no time to see its members and enlist their support for his cause, as he had done for the Council of State. He was therefore taken completely off guard by reference to the Council of Public Instruction or that of the University.

"I have just come back from the Ministry", he wrote, "where I was told that on Friday, the 2nd of March, my request will go before the Council of the University. I am in the throes of inquiring just what this Council is, having never heard tell of it previously. I have been told once more that the process will take three weeks. I replied that I didn't mind if it took a month." 18

At the end of a month, affairs were no further advanced than on the first day, and the Founder wrote: "It is impossible to tell you to-day what stage we've reached. There is no actual objection of any significance, only a complete standstill in the Government offices." A few days later, he added: "There is still a stalemate and I am at a loss to know how to accelerate proceedings. In spite of my anxiety and continual travelling, my health is good; I have

15LPC 1, doc. 174, p. 351.

16 See the diary kept by Fr Chanut and Fr Champagnat, RLF, pp. 138 ff.

17LPC 1, doc. 170 [22], p. 336.

18 LPC 1, doc. 174, p. 352.

no other problems; there is only one thing on my mind, but that is quite enough to turn everything sour; it is the deadly slowness of the proceeding on authorization. What are we going to do about conscription this year 19? May God be praised in all things!"

He had good reason to be worried about conscription, since he had four Brothers that year who came under the law. Counting on authorization, he had not secured their exemption by sending them to Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux 2°. Now that such authorization was not forthcoming, those Brothers were in danger of having to absent themselves from religious life, if they were drafted into military service. At length, after many delays and postponements, the matter was submitted to the Council of the University. The good Father had made so many visits and had invoked the influence of so many persons of note to win over the members of the Council, that these pronounced in favour of the request, by a large majority.

This was the crucial decision; so, as soon as it was known that the Royal Council of Public Instruction had approved the matter, it was believed that success was certain. Ministerial functionaries, deputies and many other people in high places, assured Father Champagnat that his affair could meet no further difficulties; that the Minister would immediately present the decree of authorization to the King for signature. Mr Lachèze 21, Deputy of the Loire, who in association with a number of colleagues, had worked hard to obtain Government authorization, said after the favourable vote given by the Council of the University: "I would wager ten to one that the case will succeed."
22

In fact, the authorization depended on the Minister alone and, if he'd had the slightest good will, he could have granted it; but, he was completely devoid of good will, as was known later. In 1849, under the Ministry of Mr de Falloux, negotiations were resumed, and the request was once more submitted to the Council of the University. Its decision was the exact opposite of what it had been in 1838, a fact which prompted the remark from one of the Heads of the Ministry: "In 1838, your cause was lost because the Minister was not in favour; to-day, the Minister is on your

19 LPC 1, doc. 179, p. 364.

20 LPC 1, doc. 172, p. 345.

21 OM 1, pp. 79 and 81.

22 LPC 1, doc. 183, p. 373.

side but the Council is against you and that will probably be your downfall." 23

Despite the fine assurances tendered him on all sides, Father Champagnat was never entirely confident of succeeding in his request. "They tell me", he wrote, "that there will be no problem with the decree, that I can safely leave and that the authorization will follow me promptly. I find it difficult to believe them. More than ever, I say: t Unless the Lord build the house, 241 for I am thoroughly convinced that things will happen in God's good time, neither sooner nor later. If this decree were to prove harmful to our salvation, I should prefer that Our Saviour deny it to us.

Nevertheless, I am doing everything possible to bring about success because I know that Providence works through human instruments, in such circumstances. Pray, pray, I repeat; for it is prayer that will enable us to seek and to do in everything, only the will 25 of God." Mr de Salvandy, surprised, to see that the authorization of the Brothers was meeting no great obstacles in Paris, sought them out at whim, in the provinces. He informed Father Champagnat that, before drawing up the decree of authorization, he wanted to have the opinions of the Prefects of the Departments of the Rhône 26 and of the Loire. Hearing this, Marcellin, quite undaunted, left Paris to visit these two functionaries and enlist their support. After two months, their documents arrived at the Ministry and thanks to the exertions of every kind on Marcellin's part, they both reported favourably; but the rate of progress did not quicken in the slightest.

When beaten on that score, the Minister raised a difficulty of a quite surprising nature. With a hypocritical show of zeal and good will for the Institute of the de la Salle Brothers, he claimed that the Brothers of Mary might prove detrimental to their work, especially if they were all owed to establish themselves in large towns; he therefore could not agree to their authorization unless they gave an undertaking not to make foundations in townships whose population was greater than eighteen hundred 27; in any

23 The judgment on Salvandy needs to be more nuanced. See RLF, pp. 179-180 and LPC 2, pp. 464-465.

24 Ps. 126, 1.

25 LPC 1, doc. 183, p. 373.

26 He did so, first of all, in writing (RLF, pp. 170 and 173).

27 It was the Prefect of the Rhône who made a suggestion of this nature (1200 inhabitants) for most of the teachers were unwilling to go into the small parishes (RLF, p 173).

case, he wanted to find out from the Superior General of that Congregation, whether the new Institute would be harmful to his Brothers. To hem in the Institute with such very narrow scope, confining it to small localities, which would not normally have the required resources, was not only a policy that was contrary to its object; it was to effect the ruination and the death knell of the Institute, under the guise of giving it the right to exist.

Father Champagnat was well aware of this fact, and therefore plainly told the Minister that he would never accept authorization at such a price ²⁸. "It is true", he explained, "that our Institute aims to provide the benefits of primary education for the children of small towns and that most of our schools will be opened in such places; yet there are two important reasons that make it necessary for us to have access to more important localities: the need to centralize our schools; and to acquire indispensable resources.

"As for your argument concerning the de la Salle Brothers, I believe it is entirely groundless, since they are present in only one tenth of the districts of the Kingdom and they can set up only free schools." These judicious and accurate representations did not deter the Minister ²⁹ from canvassing the opinion of the Superior of the de la Salle Brothers. Father Champagnat himself sought that opinion and was surprised to find it bore some resemblance to the Minister's own.³⁰ But Mr de Salvandy had already thought up another kind of difficulty, even though he could well see that the two Congregations would not be mutually harmful; and that even together they would not be able adequately to meet the demands for Religious teachers on the part of numerous populations ³¹.

Rightly believing that Marcellin set great store by the statutes of

²⁸ In fact most of the Institute's schools were in parishes of more than 1800 inhabitants.

²⁹ Minister Salvandy had a plan prepared for parishes of 1000 inhabitants (RLF, p. 213).

³⁰ Brother Anacletus, Superior General of the Christian Brothers, ended his letter to Fr Champagnat with the words: "My sincere wish is for the success of your work which is so useful to small parishes" (AA, p. 252 and RLF, p. 181). Fr Champagnat's thoughts were particularly directed to "country parishes, poor and poorly provided for". The first two schools, La Valla and Marthes, were in localities of more than 2000 inhabitants.

³¹ In his letter to Bishop Pompallier of May 17th, 1838, Fr Champagnat mentioned 38 or 39 establishments and 70 requests (LPC 1, doc. 194, p. 392).

his Congregation and would not be willing to give them up, he suggested to him: "If you were to adopt the statutes of a Religious Society already approved, I would have less difficulty in granting you authorization." "Our statutes", he was told, "can not be a barrier to our authorization, because they were approved by the Royal Council of Public Instruction."

The Minister who didn't know about that, was lost for words; and seeing himself under pressure, claimed that he was unable to proceed before consulting the General Councils of the Departments of the Loire and of the Rhône. This was equivalent to declaring that he would grant nothing, for he exercised complete influence over the members of those Councils and their opinions would conform to his desires. However, the Council of the Loire supported the authorization, while that of the Rhône opposed it ³²; that was a sufficient pretext for the Minister to reject the request.

Father Champagnat accordingly made up his mind to leave Paris. The decision was marked by deep regret at having accomplished nothing. Before his departure, he wrote ³³: "I'm sure you want to know how things are progressing. Alas! I know very little; or perhaps, it's better to say I know the full story, so that what used to be a suspicion on my part, is now a certainty: they will grant us nothing! I am deeply grieved but not discouraged, retaining my boundless confidence in Jesus and Mary. Sooner or later, we shall obtain our authorization; i'm certain of that! Just when it will be, we don't know. Meanwhile, the really important thing is for us to do our part to the utmost in conformity with God's will; after that we can possess our souls in peace and leave the rest to Providence. God knows better than we do what is good for us. I am quite convinced that some delay will do us no harm."

On his death bed, Marcellin said to the Brothers gathered around: "It was not God's will to grant me the consolation of seeing the Institute gain authorization; it was a favour I did not deserve; but rest assured that you will not fail to get it and that you will have it when it is absolutely necessary." These words can easily be seen as a true prophecy, for everything turned out as he predicted. The refusal to approve the Society, far from being prejudicial, redounded to its benefit. If approval had been given at that time, it would not have been full and entire, as it later

³² The Prefect of the Rhône had no great reason to recognise as a public utility, an Institute responsible for only 4 schools in his Department.

³³ LPC 1, doc. 197, p. 400, lines 18-28: minor touching up by Brother John Baptist.

was. As regards the time when it finally came, it was precisely when the Institute could not possibly do without it, because of the provisions of the 1850 Education Act 34.

To round off this subject, we need to say a few words on the manner in which Father Champagnat lived while in Paris. During his stay 35, he resided at the Seminary of the Foreign Missions, where, as he put it, he was extremely happy on account of the regularity and good spirit prevailing in the House. "I am very much edified," 36 he wrote to one of the Brothers, "at the good example I constantly witness and at the generous devotedness of those intending to go to the Foreign Missions. What extraordinary charity reigns amongst them! They are cheerful, but without a trace of levity or frivolity. Any delay in their departure irks them but does not discourage them." If the Founder was greatly impressed by the pious and virtuous conduct of these priests, they were no less so by his own, while amongst them. For them all, he was a model of regularity, piety, humility, modesty, charity and mortification. He observed the rules of the house as much as his business in the city would allow. He rose in the morning with the Community and was present at meditation, at the spiritual reading, at the rosary and at all the other exercises of piety. Any time that he wasn't out on his quest, he was to be found in his room reading and praying. After spending six months in Paris, Father Champagnat knew just as little about the monuments and sights of the great city, as if he had never been there. "I am often asked", he says in one of his letters, "to visit places of interest in the city, but I cannot go; nothing gives me any pleasure, nothing has any interest for me, except what may help along my assignment; besides the will of God, I seek nothing else." 37

34 In fact, this law (The Falloux Law, March 15th, 1850), which was intended to be favourable to a religious education, proved eventually more troublesome for unauthorized Congregations than the Guizot Law; particularly, in regard to forming communities dependent on a religious Superior (CSG, II, p. 432).

35 There were two visits to Paris in 1838: January to the end of April; May to the end of June.

36 Letter to Brother Antony, March 24th, 1838 (LPC 1, doc. 183, p. 373, lines 39-44), with the text slightly changed.

37 Letter to Brother Francis (LPC 1, doc. 182, p. 370, lines 15-18), with modification of text.

He did visit a few churches to which his piety attracted him, such as Our Lady of Victories 38, and Our Lady of Good Hope 39 in which St Francis of Sales prayed. Apart from that, his calls were confined entirely to seeing Ministers and other persons with whom he had business. His only concern was the glory of God and the advance of his Institute.

When he had a few spare minutes, he would go off to the Deaf and Dumb Institute 40, in order to become familiar with their method of teaching and then be able to pass it on to his Brothers.

Speaking of his plan to visit that school, he explained: "I shall go there on every opportunity, for I must make the best use of my time at Paris, turning it to the advantage of those poor children, who are little favoured by nature but are nonetheless just as dear to Jesus Christ and have been equally redeemed by his Blood." 41 At the Seminary of the Foreign Missions, the pious Founder was looked on as a saint. Father Doubois 42, its Superior and a man of considerable merit and virtue, commented to a Brother some time later: "Your Father Champagnat is the most virtuous man that I know. What troubles he has endured, what countless visits he has made, to obtain the authorization of his Community.

He has not been successful but his merit is not less on that account. I have never seen humility, mortification, or resignation to God's will, to compare with his. Our young priests were so charmed and edified by his piety, that they vied with one another for the happiness of serving his Mass."

38 The parish priest, Fr Desgenettes, who, in 1836, was inspired to consecrate his parish to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and then to found the Archconfraternity of Our Lady of Victories. The Brothers were members of this, from October 28th, 1839.

39 Cf. LPC I, doc. 196, 1.45, p. 398. The prayer of Saint Francis de Sales, linked to Our Lady of Good Hope, was recited for more than a century at the Hermitage, during the visit to the Blessed Sacrament which preceded the midday meal. Fr Champagnat said it with contagious fervour (MEM, p. 97).

40 Fr Champagnat had sought the care of the deaf and dumb of Saint-Etienne, but the city had opted for the Christian Brothers (LPC I, doc. 321, p. 588). Brother Mary-Jubin went with him to Paris on the January 1838 trip, so that he could learn the method of teaching the deaf and dumb (LPC I, doc. 183, p. 374). Moreover, Fr Champagnat was in touch by letter with Baron de Gérando, who had published, in 1824, a work on the deaf and dumb (LPC 2, pp. 249-251).

41 Letter to Brother Francis (LPC I, doc. 176, p. 357; and doc. 196, p. 398);

and to Brother Antony (LPC I, doc. 183, p. 374).

42 LPC 2, p. 200.

On leaving Paris, Marcellin went to Saint-Pol-en-Artois 43, to arrange with the authorities for the opening of a new school in that town. This was something that had been recommended to him by the Minister for Public Instruction 44 at the very time that he was speaking of authorizing the Society for small centres only.

To show up the inconsistency of the man, Marcellin readily accepted the suggestion 45. There was the added advantage of showing clearly that our Brothers, far from harming the work of the de la Salle Brothers, were satisfied to supplement them in places where they could not go. In fact, the authorities of Saint-Pol had first approached them only to find that they faced so many prior demands that there was no hope of an affirmative reply for at least ten years. This school was opened a few months later 46, as also were those of Roche-de-Condrieu in Isère and of Yzieux 47 in the Loire.

Father Champagnat had never really regained full health after his 1825 sickness. For several years, he continued to have a pain in the side, causing him great suffering whenever he had to work strenuously or walk any distance. To this affliction, there was later added stomach trouble which soon developed into a clear case of gastritis. This had no doubt been brought on by his daily privations and his prolonged fasts. We have already seen that, in the frequent journeys which he had to undertake it was common

43 The sub-prefecture in question was 700 km from the Hermitage. Following the Minister's request (LPC 1, doc. 195, p. 395), Fr Champagnat went to the spot (LPC 1, doc. 197, p. 400). Brother John-Baptist, first Director of that establishment, was an outstanding success (Cf. The newspaper, "L'Ami de la Religion", No. 103, p. 377).

44 More precisely, by Mr Delebecque, Salvandy's head officer, deputy of Pas-de-Calais, from which he came (LPC 1, doc. 221, p. 436; and LPC 2, pp.

169-170).

45 This was a town of some 3800 inhabitants (LPC 2, p. 615).

46 The school was opened on November 14th, 1838 (LPC 1, doc. 221 and 222, pp. 436-440), with 30 pupils (LPC 2, p. 615 and CSG III, pp. 526-527).

At the end of the scholastic year prizes were distributed at an official ceremony. The children gave displays in all aspects of primary schooling: grammar, geometry, the metric system, geography, use of the Globe and drawing. They carried out their tasks with an ease and an assurance which amazed the large attendance ("L'Ami de la Religion", No. 103, p. 377, quoted in RLF, p. 178; see also, LPC 1, doc. 221, p. 436). Fr Champagnat set out for Saint-Pol on June 24th, 1838. He used the occasion to make a pilgrimage to Amettes, birth-place of St Benedict Labre. This is a point which Br Louis-Mary mentions much later in his circular of December 15th, 1862.

47 To-day: Izieux, nearest the Hermitage.

for him to spend whole days without taking food. Besides, his spirit of penance and mortification, led him to choose the commonest and poorest food at table. This style of life soon brought his gastritis, to a chronic state which left little hope of cure. Even before his journey to Paris, he had frequent attacks of vomiting and could not retain certain foods, besides, food of any kind exhausted him and his stomach was continually full of whitish mucus which he got rid of by expectoration or constant vomiting. His wearisome visits in Paris and the frustrations of every kind that he endured, ended up ruining his constitution and exhausting his little remaining strength. The result was that, on his return, it was quite evident that the end was fast approaching.

Reverend Father Colin was the first to notice the seriousness of Marcellin's condition and to become anxious about it. He rightly believed that a Brother should be elected as successor before the Founder's death. In this way, tranquillity would be preserved amongst the Brothers and there would be no upheaval. In fact, Father Colin's wisdom, good judgment and experience, had long since convinced him of the insurmountable difficulties that would be encountered in attempting to combine the Brothers and the priests, under the same Rules, the same government and the same Superior. There was a number of reasons contributing to his conviction: in the first place, the differing goals, educational background and occupation required correspondingly different Rules and way of life; then, too, the administration and direction of each of the branches was more than enough for a single person; besides, he was well aware that, to govern the Brothers wisely, one would need to have their spirit, would need to be respected by them and enjoy their sympathetic support, and would need to know school life and to be familiar with the Rules of the Institute and its members; he could see that no one could meet all these demands, no matter how virtuous and capable, unless he had been brought up with the Brothers, lived amongst them and practised their way of life.

Accordingly, while he wished the two branches to have some bond of union for the purpose of mutual aid and support and for the maintenance of those family traits and feelings which resulted from their common origin, he believed it imperative for the good of all, that each branch have its Rules, its government and its Superior. Later, this assessment of the situation would be thoroughly endorsed by Church authorities.

Father Champagnat however had laboured all his life with a single Society in mind. He saw this union as a guarantee of the

preservation of religious spirit amongst the Brothers. Father Colin's idea, therefore, was not particularly congenial to him and, while he supported his desire for the election of a Brother to succeed him, he still entertained the hope that the Brothers would remain more or less dependent on the Superior General of the Fathers. Such was his hope till his dying day, as his Spiritual Testament makes clear.

Father Colin, who was in a better position to sense and to see the disadvantage of uniting the two Societies, missed no opportunity of pointing out the dangers of such a move for both parties; to make clear to Marcellin that he should not count on the priests to direct his Brothers, he wrote to him: "Alas! I am full of fear at the thought of the void you will leave, if the Lord calls you to himself; but from that fear springs an inspiration: to suggest placing the branch of the Brothers in the hands of the Archbishop of Lyons. This, it seems to me, would be to their advantage.

Mention the idea to the principal Brothers and let all pray to God to enlighten you on this important matter." 48 It had never been Father Champagnat's intention to establish a Diocesan Society. On the contrary, he had always declared that he wanted his Congregation to embrace all dioceses 49; he therefore didn't need much reflection to reject the proposition. His desire was for the Brothers to be ruled by the Superior General of the Marist Fathers; in the event of that being impossible, he wanted them to be governed by a Brother. 50

However, Father Colin could see Marcellin's strength decreasing daily, and he took it upon himself to approach the Archbishop, to inform him of Marcellin's state of health and request the necessary powers to have a Brother elected to succeed him. The Archbishop authorized Father Colin to carry out the election, so he went to the Hermitage at the time of the annual

48 In 1833, Bishop de Pins had appointed Fr Cholleton in charge of the Society of Mary for the diocese of Lyon, to the great satisfaction of Fr Colin (OME, doc. 115 [3], p. 239). In 1840, Fr Cholleton refused the canonry offered him by Bishop Boland and entered the Marist Fathers' novitiate (LPC 2, p. 135).

49 "All dioceses come within our scope" (LPC 1, doc. 93, p. 210 and doc. 112, p. 238).

50 Brother Francis, although elected Director General and having full responsibility for the branch of the Brothers, continued to submit his plans to Fr Cholleton and to ask his advice (CSG I, pp. 338-340). We also see Fr Cholleton preside at the close of the Retreat in 1840 and receive the Brothers' vows (Chronologie de 1976, p. 90, quoting AFM, AA, manuscript, p. 231).

retreat; there he explained to Father Champagnat, the urgency of the step for the good of the Community and for his own peace of mind. It was decided that the election would take place at the close of the Retreat.

On the eve of the election, Father Colin assembled all the Brothers, non-professed as well as professed, in the community room and, after an instruction appropriate to the occasion, he traced the procedure for the election 51. In concert with Father Champagnat and the professed Brothers, he decided:

1. That the Superior, to be elected would be chosen from among the professed Brothers and that only these would be both electors and eligible for election.

2. That the one elected should raise no objections but be submissive to God's will as manifested by the wish of his confreres.

3. That each elector should vote by ballot for three Brothers who, before God, he believed the best equipped to carry out the duties of Superior General.

4. That of the three Brothers securing the most votes, one should be named Superior General of the Brothers, by the Superior General of the Marist Fathers and his Council; the two others would be, by right, his assistants and councillors.

5. That the Superior should be elected for life 52 but that he might be deposed in the cases provided for by the Constitutions.

6. That anyone known to have influenced voters, either directly or indirectly, on his own or another's behalf, or to have intrigued in any way whatsoever, should be disqualified from any part in the election.

7. Lastly, the Brothers were encouraged to call on the help of the Holy Spirit and the protection of Mary. They were to pray fervently to know God's will in the important choice they were making, to divest themselves of any human consideration, of any self-interest and of any trace of ambition or intrigue.

51 Brother Avit gives a more complete account of that election (AA, pp. 285-292).

52 In fact, Brother Francis handed in his resignation, for health reasons, to the 1860 General Chapter.

The election ceremony began with the singing of the *Veni Creator* and the Mass of the Holy Spirit, attended by the whole Community. Then Father Colin, in a short but moving speech, urged the Brothers once more to make a wise choice. He concluded with this prayer of the Apostles. "Y ou Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show us which of these you have chosen." (Acts, 1,24).

After this exhortation, the professed Brothers, to the number of ninety-two, went off to the Chapter-Room and proceeded to meditate for half an hour. Each then wrote on a ballot paper the names of the three Brothers he believed best suited to govern the Institute. Father Champagnat gathered the votes which were counted by the scrutators. Brother Francis received eighty-seven votes, Brother Louis-Mary, seventy and Brother John-Baptist, fifty-seven. Father Colin, with those results known, withdrew to consult Father Champagnat and the other Fathers. Before long he returned to the Chapter-Room and, in the presence of the whole Community, declared Brother Francis, Superior General 53 of the Brothers and Brothers Louis-Mary and John-Baptist, his Assistants.

The Brothers responded at once by acknowledging Brother Francis as Superior. They offered him their respectful homage and promised him entire obedience. To conclude the ceremony, the Magnificat was sung and a mass of thanksgiving was offered, with all the Brothers receiving Holy Communion. That election took place on October 12th, 1839. It was held just in time and should be seen as a sign of divine protection for the Institute, whose Founder, ripe for Heaven, would die in the Lord, some few months later.

53 Brother Francis was elected with the title Director General, as Brother Avit says (AA, p. 286); and he signed: Director General, Brother Francis. It was in the 3rd Session of the 1854 Chapter that the decision was made: "The head of the Institute will henceforth be called Reverend Brother Superior General" (AA, AFM, manuscript, p. 270); Fr Colin definitively renounced his title in relation to the branch of the Brothers.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Establishment of the novitiate at Vauban. Father Champagnat's sickness worsens. Re puts in order the temporal affairs of the Institute. his general confession and holy viaticum. Speech to the Brothers on that occasion. Various matters of self-reproach.

Although Father Champagnat felt his vigour ebbing away and his sickness worsening every day he couldn't bring himself to husband his strength and take some rest. So we see him, a few days after finishing the Brothers' Retreat, on his way to La-Côte-Saint-André, together with another priest, to preach a Retreat to the boarders ¹. He was so weak, so much in pain and so exhausted, that the very sight of him aroused a feeling of deep sympathy. The expression of kindness, of piety and of holiness which radiated from his face, made such an impact on the students of the boarding-school that most of them wanted him as their confessor. They didn't tire of looking at him in admiration; and they could be heard remarking to one another: "This priest is a saint!" His talks and his advice produced abundant fruits of salvation; and in more than one mind his memory lingered long as might a balm of piety and virtue.

After the Retreat at La-Côte-Saint-André, the Founder travelled to Autun ² at the request of the Bishop of the diocese, Benignus du Troussel d'Héricourt ³. He had purchased the castle of Vauban ⁴ as a novitiate for teaching Brothers and wanted to entrust it to the Little Brothers of Mary ⁵. Father Champagnat was to discuss the matter ⁶ with him. The Bishop handed over the

¹ "In November, 1839, the good Father, though very worn out, came to give a Retreat to the pupils, helped by Father Chavas... He travelled on foot as usual, in a spirit of poverty and mortification" (Annals of Côte-Saint-André, AFM, 214.43, p. 12).

² LPC 2, p. 534.

³ LPC 2, pp. 501-503.

⁴ LPC 2, pp. 641-642.

⁵ Letters of Fr Champagnat to the Bishop, prior to the opening of the novitiate (LPC 1, doc. 208, 240, 258, 268).

⁶ A letter of Bishop de Marguerye, successor of Bishop d'Héricourt informs us that the episcopal archives of 1855 contained some agreements (Annals of Vauban, AFM, 212.54, p. 3).

property of Vauban to the Society with only one condition: a novitiate was to be established there and schools would be set up in all those parishes of the diocese which would cater for the needs of the Brothers as required by rule. The Bishop was very edified by the humility, modesty and simplicity of Father Champagnat; he was likewise pleased with the discussion, with the Founder's attitude and entire conduct; hence, after signing the title deeds of the property of Vauban, he threw himself on the Founder's neck and embraced him tenderly, exclaiming: "Thanks be to God! Behold me now entirely Marist!" A few months later, Father Champagnat went to Vauban, accompanied by a few Brothers, in order to take possession of the house and inaugurate the novitiate. The opening took place on December 8th, 1839, feast of the Immaculate Conception. Partly because of this fact, partly because of the Founder's special devotion to that glorious privilege of the Mother of God, the novitiate was placed under the patronage of Mary, conceived without sin.

This was the last foundation made by Father Champagnat. It was, in many aspects, different from the first. He remarked as much, with mingled feelings of apprehension and gratitude to a senior Brother who was with him there: "What a difference, Brother, between this house and the poor cottage at La Valla, which served as the cradle of the Society! See how true it is that the hundredfold is given to those who follow Jesus 7. For the few trifles we have abandoned, God bestows castles on us. But, isn't there the danger that in such a house we allow a decline in our humility, modesty and poverty. I fear the possibility and it is a source of anxiety to me. One thing alone reassures me - we didn't wish for this house, we didn't do anything to secure it, and we accepted it really at the strong instance of the Bishop." Having said this, he accompanied the Brother Director 8 on a tour of inspection and had any luxury items removed, as well as any object that could damage the spirit of poverty. When the house itself had been inspected, it was the turn of the feed-sheds, the barns and the stables. Casting a glance at these, he exclaimed:

"Ah, Brothers, these are what really suit us; in them we could be modestly housed, as our profession requires." Then, turning towards Brother Director, he reminded him: "Never forget, Brother, that we are children of Bethlehem, the Little Brothers

7 Matt. 19,29.

8 Brother Cassian, (AA, p. 312).

of Mary. Carefully safeguard within you, and strive to inspire in your novices, the dispositions of Jesus and Mary in the stable of Bethlehem and in the humble house of Nazareth." ⁹ Those various journeys, in which he suffered mysteriously, ended up sapping his strength and undermining the little health he had left. How could it be otherwise? After all, he often spent almost entire days without taking any food, since his stomach could retain nothing. "Take care of yourself and eat heartily", he would say to the Brothers who were with him, "for you need to do so, if you are to preserve your health and to undertake the work of God with courage. As for me, it seems that food and I have fallen out; for it is no help to my health or my strength; instead, it tires me and lies like a load on my stomach. I can't stand the taste or even the sight of it - a sure sign that I am at the end of my course." He suffered very much during the winter. His only food consisted of some broth, a little milk or some very light food, of which he could take nothing but small quantities. Even then he was often unsuccessful in retaining it. In spite of his suffering, he would not dispense himself from the community Rule. Hence, he continued to rise with the Brothers, at four o'clock, offer the Community Mass, go to the dining-room for meals, though most of the time he ate nothing, attend recreations and go to work. His whole joy and consolation were to be with the Brothers, to pray with them, to work with them and to be with the community.

Not long before he was confined to bed, he still went to help some workmen who were quarrying stone ¹⁰, although he was so weak that he could hardly walk; seizing a tool with his customary vigour he set to work until it dropped from his hands. The Brothers and the workmen who saw this and who had begged him not to work but simply to look on, were moved even to tears. One of them took him by the arm to support him and help him back to his room. From that day, he no longer went to work, and left the house on a few rare occasions, without travelling very far.

On Ash Wednesday 11, he was seized with a violent pain in the back, which was with him till his death. It became so acute, when he lay down, that he found it almost impossible to remain in bed.

⁹ In 1855, the novitiate of Vauban was closed and replaced by that of Hautefort (BI XXI, p. 392; and CSG VII, p. 278, and XIII, pp. 458-459).

¹⁰ Probably a reference to the rock-cutters (LPC I, doc. 172, p. 344).

"There will be no need to bring other workers for the rock". (LPC I, doc. 174, p. 351).

¹¹ March 4th. 1840.

During the winter, his legs had occasionally become swollen, but now the swelling intensified and never abated. At no time did he lose his calm or his cheerfulness, being always resigned to the will of God. Without fear or gloom, he observed the progress of pain and deterioration throughout his limbs. Watching, one day, the Brother 12 who was massaging his legs to reduce the swelling, he said to him, with a laugh: "Many a time after my death, you will recount how you rubbed my legs. I am very grateful to you for this act of charity, for it is not a pleasant service to render a corpse and especially a sinner." Despite the back pain and the swollen legs, he still followed the community exercises as much as possible.

Marcellin performed with great fervour, the devotions of the Month of St Joseph, to obtain the grace of a happy death. Every day, he said the Litany of the Holy Spouse of Mary and, when he could no longer do so alone during his last days, he asked one of the Brothers to recite it beside his bed. On the feast of this great saint, after giving Benediction, he declared that he would never again do so on that feast.

He had now a clear presentiment of his approaching death, and, putting all other preoccupations aside - even praiseworthy ones - he directed his attention entirely to what could help him die a holy death. He first put in order all the temporal affairs of the house, taking any necessary steps to ensure for the Brothers, peaceful possession of the property belonging to the Congregation, all of which had hitherto been held in his own name.

So that there would be no slip in such an important matter, he sent for a notary 13 and other persons qualified to advise him as to the surest way of effecting the transfer. He examined the matter at length with these, and had a long conference with his principal Brothers, before deciding to hand over by legal deed, all the goods of the Institute, to the Brothers of his Council, who were constituted into a civil society by the notary 14. Besides, he made a will in favour of those same Brothers as his sole heirs.

Shortly after these arrangements were finalized, he received a visit from Father Maîtrepierrre 15, whom he asked to remain for

12 Probably Brother Jerome (LPC 2, p. 305).

13 Mr Viennot, a notary who later became a Marist Father and ironed out with Archbishop de Pins, all the inheritance problems of the Fathers (OM 4, pp. 359-360).

14 On March 23rd, 1840, before Jean-François-Noël Mioche, notary of Saint-Chamond (AFM, Fr Champagnat's Will, 136.2).

15 In 1839, Fr Maîtrepierrre moved in at Puylata (Lyon) to help Fr Colin in daily administration (OM 3, pp. 429-430).

a few days to help him make a general confession. This was made, in fact, with fervent dispositions of compunction and sorrow; his delicate conscience discovered blemishes even in his holiest actions, and considered as a defect or imperfection, what a less virtuous person, would have seen as something worthy or at least indifferent.

Fear of God's judgment sometimes troubled the serenity of his soul; but his great confidence in the merits of our divine Saviour quickly quietened his fears and restored his tranquillity.

On Holy Thursday, he wished to say Mass at Grange-Payre 16; when an effort was made to dissuade him, he persisted, saying: "Let me go, for it will be for the last time, and, if I put it off, I shall not be able to go and say good-bye to those good Brothers and their children." He went on horseback and, after celebrating Mass, he wanted to meet the boarders, whom he addressed as follows: "Children, God has bestowed a great gift on you, in these pious and virtuous teachers, who constantly give you good example and instruct you soundly in the truths of religion. Put their instructions to wise use, follow their advice and imitate the fine example they set you. Think often of the great love Jesus Christ has shown you; of his death for you; and of the eternal happiness he prepares for you in heaven. Don't forget that sin, which is the supreme evil, can rob you of your eternal happiness. Fear sin, therefore, seeing it as your chief enemy; ask God every day, for the grace not to commit any.

This grace will be yours and you will save your soul, if you are very devoted to the Blessed Virgin, saying a prayer such as the Memorare every day, to place yourself under her protection. Yes, children, if you have great confidence in Mary, I promise that she will bring you to heaven."

On arriving at the Hermitage, he announced: "I have seen Grange-Payre for the last time, and am glad that I made the visit; it gave me enormous joy to see those little children and to exhort them to goodness." He was quite weak and suffering a lot, when the vigil of the Month of May came. Nevertheless, he wanted to inaugurate the devotions himself and to give Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament; but he was so exhausted from it and felt so ill, that he exclaimed, on returning to his room: "That's the end for me; I feel that I am going fast!" Brother Stanislaus arrived just then and, seeing him more cheerful than usual, Father

16 From 1834, la Grange-Payre had become a pre-novitiate; it received aspirants who were too young to go directly to the Hermitage novitiate (PCI doc 132 [30], p. 267.

Champagnat asked him: "What makes you so happy, Brother?" "During the May Devotions", he replied, "which we have just carried out, the thought came to me that Mary may be touched by our prayers, and restore you to health before the end of the month which honours her." Father Champagnat disagreed, predicting that the end of the month would be very painful for him and that great sufferings awaited him; but he pointed out that he counted on the help of Mary to enable him to bear them with patience and resignation.

He was quite right for, at the end of the month, his sufferings became excessive, but, thanks to the protection of the Blessed Virgin, in whom he had full confidence, his patience and resignation were more than equal to the challenge. Next day, one of the senior Brothers came to see him, and chatted with him for a while, before declaring: "Oh, Father, how important it is that God leave you amongst us for some time yet! What will become of us, and who will be able to direct the Society, if Almighty God takes you away from us?" 17

"My dear Brother", the Founder replied, "don't trouble yourself about that! Is God short of men to do his work? The Brother whom you have chosen to succeed me, will do better than I. Man is only an instrument or rather he is nothing; it is God who does everything. You, at least, should understand this truth, you who are quite senior and who witnessed the beginnings of the Institute. Has not Providence always looked after us? Was it not God who brought us together and helped us surmount the obstacles along the way? Was it not he who provided us with the means to build this house? Who blessed our schools and made them prosper in spite of our lack of talent? Was it not Providence, in one word, who did everything for us? Now if Providence has taken care of the Society so far, why would it not do so for the future? Do you think that God will cease protecting it because one man has been removed? No, don't be deceived; I assure you again that men count for nothing in this work. God will bless it, not because of the men who direct it, but because of his infinite goodness and his designs of mercy on the children confided to us."

He spoke to Brother Stanislaus in almost identical terms when that Brother was weeping and lamenting, from sorrow at losing

.7 And yet, Brother Francis had been elected six months previously, as Brother Avit said: "Although he was highly esteemed by all, Brother Francis, lacked the character, the initiative, the drive and the dynamism of Fr Champagnat" (AA, p. 327).

him and from fear of the harmful effect of his death on the Institute. "Poor Brother", he gently reproached him, one day, "how little faith and confidence you have in God! Did you imagine that the prosperity of the house depends on me? Well, I assure you even now, that after my death, things will proceed better than at present, and that the Society will advance more rapidly than ever before. One day you will recognise the truth of what I am saying, and then you will understand that it is not in men that we must place our confidence but in God, who is all and does all."

In his deep humility, the Founder here uttered a prophecy which the Brother was to see verified in every detail. When Father Champagnat died, there were forty-five houses 18 in the Institute; Brother Stanislaus died thirteen years later: there were then two hundred and fifty. But the Brothers weren't the only ones to fear the effect of the Founder's death on the progress of his Institute. All who came to see him spoke in the same vein, and assured him: "God will certainly restore you to health because your Community stands too much in need of you." "God has no need of me", Marcellin rejoined. "I am convinced that I am more of a hindrance than a help to my Society and that it will make better progress after my death."

On the third of May, he celebrated Mass for the last time. He himself announced, after making his thanksgiving: "I have just said my last Mass and I'm pleased that it was the Mass of the Holy Cross 19; for it is by this Holy Cross that we have been saved and that our Divine Lord Himself left the world."

From this time onwards, his suffering increased daily and gave him hardly a moment's respite. The pain and the sorrow that his sickness caused the Brothers, troubled and concerned him more than his own sufferings; to see them plunged in grief, caused him to weep and to conceal from them, as long as he could, just how ill he was. At last, feeling that his strength was ebbing away, and noticing that his sickness was such as to indicate the imminent approach of death, he called Brother Stanislaus and calmly confided to him: "I wish I could delay further the request I am going to make, because of the pain it will cause all of you. But that is not possible, for I feel I am going fast. I therefore want to be anointed this evening. Make the necessary preparations in the community-room, so that all the Brothers may assist at the ceremony. I want to see them all together, to say farewell to them

1848 establishments, not counting the Hermitage and Oceania (AA, p. 317).

19 In 1840, May 3rd was the feast of the Finding of the Holy Cross.

and speak some words of comfort to them." While this final act was a source of great consolation to the Founder's paternal heart, it was a painful occasion, and, at the thought of seeing his Brothers for the last time, that heart was wrung with grief.

At five o'clock, when all the Brothers and postulants had gathered in the community-room, where everything had been prepared for the ceremony, he entered clothed in surplice and stole. His weak state, his suffering and his sickly appearance moved the Brothers to tears. He sat down in an arm-chair, joined his hands and remained in deep recollection for a short time, to prepare for the reception of the last sacraments. First, he received the anointing of the sick. A Brother came forward to remove the Father's stockings, but he insisted on doing so himself. He then received holy viaticum in an attitude of humility, respect and love. When the ceremony was over, he remained for a few moments as if lost in thought, adoring and thanking Jesus Christ with that piety and lively faith with which he invariably celebrated Mass. The solemnity of this occasion made those dispositions more intense and striking. Then, looking up and letting his gaze wander over the Brothers, he spoke these words to them, in a tender voice that was weak but full of deep feeling:

"My dear Brothers, remember your last end and you will never sin 20. I understand now, and you will too, one day, when you are in my condition, that the Holy Spirit has good reason to promise us that, if we think of our death and its sequel, we shall never commit sin and never become attached to the world and its goods.

Alas! At death we shall have only one regret and that is not having done enough for God, for the salvation of our soul and for the possession of heaven.

My friends, this is the last time we gather here all together.

What I recommend 21 to you above all, before I leave you, is that you love one another 22. Keep in mind that you are Brothers, that Mary is Mother of you all, and that you are called to the same inheritance, which is heaven. Love one another, then, as Jesus Christ loves you and as Mary, our Mother, loves you. As proof of that love, bear with one another, show kindness to one another, come to the help of one another; never forget that it is the practice of charity which will make your religious life a time of consolation, a true heaven on earth. You must be so united, so

20 Sir. 7,40.

21 Fr Champagnat emphasized this point again in his Spiritual Testament.

22 John 13,34.

given to mutual tolerance, so bent on making one another happy, that you may verify these words of Holy Scripture: 'Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity.' 23 After charity, the virtue I desire most for you, and earnestly encourage you to practise, is obedience. It is not that I have any complaints about any of you in this respect. On the contrary, I am pleased to say that I have always found you perfectly willing to obey; my wish, then, is that you accord the same docility to my successor. In obeying, you are always sure of doing the will of God; for a Religious, obedience is the highway to Paradise and if he does not leave this path, he will reach it without fail. Oh! How happy you will be at the hour of death and what a reward will await you, if it can be said of you: 'He was obedient all his life.'

Ah! My children, how good it is to die in the Society of Mary! I find it to-day, I can assure you, my greatest consolation. So, be faithful to your vocation and, for that purpose, observe the Rule. Obedience to the Rule will ensure your perseverance, will give you a love for the duties of the religious life and make them easy. Love your vocation; preserve it; it is the means God wishes to use in order to save you; you will be saved, in fact, if you have the happiness of dying in the Society of Mary. I have assisted at the death of many Brothers. Not one have I found who, on his deathbed, repented of having become a Religious, regretted having persevered in his vocation; or was sorry to be facing death in the habit of a Brother of Mary."

At these words, his voice faltered and his strength failed and he couldn't go on. After a short interval, he resumed: "My children, that's all I can say to you. I conclude, therefore, by asking pardon, here in Our Lord's presence, for all the bad example that I may have given you. I can't recall ever having deliberately offended anyone but if I did so, I sincerely ask his forgiveness."

The Brothers, who had listened with rapt attention were stirred to their very depths with emotion, both because of his words to them and because of the pitiable sight that he made.

When they heard him beg their forgiveness, they all fell on their knees sobbing and choking back their grief. A chaplain 24 who was present at this heart-rending display, called out: "Oh, Brothers, it is we who ought to beg the venerable Father's pardon!" But

23 Ps. 132,1.

24 The chaplains at that time were Fathers Matricon and Besson.

they were so deeply affected and so sunk in grief, that they didn't hear him and remained as if oblivious of reality. Father Champagnat himself was deeply affected and moved to pity, though he strove valiantly to hide the feelings of his heart and though he evinced a manly courage. The tone of his voice and the tears that he could not prevent running down his cheeks were proof enough of how deeply touched he was by the grief of the Brothers. To cut that grief short, he withdrew to his room. There, despite the severity of his suffering, he remained long in prayerful converse with Our Lord.

He received the last sacraments on Monday, May 11th. On the days that followed, his sufferings continued to increase, his back pain becoming so intense that he could hardly remain out of bed for two hours at a time. The day that he was anointed, a novena was begun to St Philomena 25 for him. The completion of the novena saw some improvement in his condition, giving rise to hopes of a happy outcome; the swelling in the hands and feet abated; the pain in the back, which had caused such suffering since Ash Wednesday, disappeared; the result was that Marcellin was able to leave his room, and go to the chapel to adore the Blessed Sacrament as well as to the sacristy to inspect a newly installed press 26. "You will be happy", he suggested to the Brother Sacristan, "now that you have a clean and convenient place in which to store your vestments." "Yes, Father", lamented the Brother, "but I would be much happier, if it were going to be put to your use." He was told that such would not be the case; but that it would be of use to others, which was all that mattered.

As he was returning to his room, he noticed a Brother busy making a kind of recess in the wall, which could serve as a hiding place for those who like to keep out of view. He sent immediately for the Brother in charge of the work and advised: "I suggest that you keep a special eye on that Brother and on those who work with him. Be sure that you always know where he is and what he is doing and never leave any young Brother with him." He went on to point out the necessity of supervision in such a house, where there were so many young men whose virtue needed that external support, if they were not to falter. On another occasion, having

25 That holy, obscure figure of the catacombs was the object of deep devotion, especially as a result of the importance given her by the Curé of Ars.

The present liturgy accords her no official devotion because of the lack of historical information about her.

26 This press is still in the sacristy at Our Lady of the Hermitage.

noticed a few Brothers working sluggishly in the field, he warned the Brother Director: "Make sure that the novices keep busy and don't waste their time; laziness is one of the worst vices and is perhaps the one which does the most damage to Religious. I have to blame myself for not having insisted enough on work and for having been too easy on the lazy." This self-reproach was certainly not justified, for it is well known how he liked to work and how he wanted to see everyone about him, occupied; but this scruple is a clear indication of his great detestation of laziness, which he regarded as one of the most dangerous threats to the Brothers.

His severe sufferings, did nothing to diminish his piety and religious sentiments, as sometimes happens in serious illness. Instead, his fervour and lively faith intensified. It was his desire and his request to have people speak to him often of God; he wanted someone always to be at his side to inspire feelings of love and of confidence in Our Lord and help him express these in prayer. He took particular delight in hearing Brother Francis and was greatly consoled to have him near. In their numerous conversations, the Founder used to open his heart to him, revealing his desires and his regrets. His deep humility made him fear that he had not always done all that God asked of him or had not done it well enough. Then like the Prophet-king, he would be overwhelmed with fear of the judgments of God. But before long his heart would fill with confidence and gratitude, as Brother Francis sensitively evoked: the special graces which God had given him; and the good which God had allowed him to accomplish in founding the Institute, a good which the Brothers he left behind had the responsibility to perpetuate.

One day, the pious Founder had an uneasy sense of guilt about a good work that had been proposed to him but which he had not carried out. He reproached himself for not having done so and feared that he would have to render an account to God for his failure. The work in question, concerned a sort of farming settlement²⁷ to be set up, for the benefit of foundlings or orphans.

²⁷ The idea of a farming settlement sprang from Villeneuve-Bargemont, a politician of christian socialist persuasion. He believed that much uncultivated land could be handed over to families or religious communities who would care for orphans and train them in some farming task, thus slowing up the exodus to the cities. Fr Champagnat might have seen in the offer made him at the end of his life, a sign from the Lord to execute outside of classroom and workshop, what he had been forced to give up because of moral considerations, when association with orphans had been harmful to the postulants. He had already received an offer for a similar project in a diffe-

A worthy inhabitant of La Valla offered his house and vast property for the purpose; others had likewise promised to contribute to the project, making available necessary resources. Father Champagnat would have liked to see those people to talk over the matter and to bring it to a conclusion. Brother Francis, to whom Father Champagnat confided his anxieties and his longings, reassured him with these words: "Father, you ought to put your mind at rest and have no regret for not having begun that project before this. You had to devote all your time to founding the Institute, to organizing it, to governing it, and to the formation of the Brothers. Moreover, since that farming settlement plan was completely different from your own undertaking, you did well not to commit yourself to it, before being able to think it over carefully; even more, the Congregation of the Brothers demanded all your strength, all your care and preoccupation so that you could hardly have given any attention to anything other than it, without impeding its progress and perhaps, even, jeopardizing its future. I think you have been prudent, therefore, in leaving the establishment of that settlement to someone else, inspired by God and provided by him with the necessary means." These reflections restored the Founder's tranquillity and he never raised the matter again.

One other matter which troubled him, and he mentioned it to Brother Francis, was that he could have been more devoted in visiting the sick Brothers. In this case too, the timorous conscience of the Founder and his tender love for his Brothers raised a groundless scruple in his mind; for the sick Brothers had always been the object of his concern and he had done everything possible to provide relief for them. He had put up a building expressly to provide a well-appointed infirmary; a dispensary, equipped at great expense, furnished all the necessary medicines; several Brothers had been trained to look after the sick, whose every want they cared for with meticulous attention. As soon as any Brother fell sick in an establishment, the kind Father had them come or sent someone to get them, so that they could receive the best of care under his watchful eye.

Learning one day that a Brother was ill, and being unable to have him brought to the Hermitage because of the nature and seriousness of the complaint, he exclaimed, with tears in his eyes:

rent region (Bresse) but it had not been able to be carried through (OME, doc. 115 and 116, p. 237 ff; also, OM 1, doc. 273, p. 594).

"Ah! How frightened I am that this Brother may be let suffer; how I wish he were here to be looked after; I would give all that I have to relieve him." The sick Brothers were always in his thoughts. He visited them; he had prayers said in community for them; he saw that they were looked after day and night; he lavished on them every . kind of care; and after all that, he reproached himself with not having done enough for them! Such is the way that the Saints treat and judge themselves. St John the Almoner, having given all his goods to the poor and deprived himself of everything to assist them, believed that he had not done enough for them. The fear that God might reproach him with having neglected anyone or left him to suffer, kept him awake at night.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Spiritual testament of Father Champagnat. Advice given by him to different Brothers. Visits to him and consolation he enjoyed. His piety, his fervour and his love for God intensity through sufferings. His agony, death and funeral.

Despite his sufferings, Father Champagnat never forgot the presence of God and spent his time either at prayer or in spiritual conversation with the Brothers who came to visit him or to attend to him. Once he was confined to bed, he had pictures of Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin and St Joseph, placed within easy view. He used their images to sustain his piety and his love for them; and he constantly invoked their names and called on their help. The Brother whom he had asked to put the pictures in place, having brought one of the Blessed Virgin in a gilt frame, found that the Founder would not keep it. "Brother", he explained, "we are poor and that picture does not suit this place; take it and bring one that is less striking and less ornate." Not satisfied simply to keep up a stream of short, fervent prayers he faithfully and fervently performed all the exercises of piety, giving clear responses to the rosaries said at his bedside when he had lost the strength to say it by himself. The same was true of the Litany of St Joseph and of the other prayers recited at his request, throughout the day. Every day he asked someone to read out a chapter of the Imitation of Christ, which he then discussed with the Brothers who were present. He said his Breviary until he was no longer able to hold the book. It fell from his hands one day and he wanted to continue his prayer soon after.

It took a formal prohibition to make him give up the recital of the Divine Office.

The slight improvement that had been noticed in Father Champagnat's condition, following the novena to St Philomena, did not last; his sufferings and vomiting became more intense than ever. At that point, he sent for Brother Francis and Brother Louis-Mary, and explained to them: "My dear Brothers, as I have not much longer to live, I would like to make my Spiritual Testament now so as to give my last advice to the Brothers; that will help

them and give them pleasure". Brother Francis agreed that it would be a considerable pleasure to the Brothers and make them very grateful but expressed concern that it might overtax the Founder.

"No, no", he insisted. And looking at Brother Louis-Mary, he added: "My dear Brother, you will write down what I want to say. I shall give it to you just as I wish it to be worded and passed on to the Brothers." Then he gave expression to the thoughts, the counsels and the exhortations which are found in his Spiritual Testament, and almost in the same order. Each sentence was repeated, giving the time to note and reproduce easily, a perfect replica of his thoughts and his very words. The completed version was submitted to him and when it was read out, he commented: "Those are indeed my sentiments and what I wish to say to the Brothers. You will assemble them in my room and, after the prayers for the indulgence at the hour of death, I want you to read my testament to them in my presence. It will be an enormous consolation for me to see my good Brothers and to give them my last advice." The last sentence was spoken with great emotion and he appeared touched to the very depths.

The chaplains and the Brothers having gone to his room after night prayers, as he desired, the indulgence prayers were said; then, with Brother Francis supporting the Founder's head, Brother Louis-Mary read the Spiritual Testament, expressed in these words 1:

"Spiritual Testament of Joseph Benedict Marcellin Champagnat 2, Prieur, Superior and Founder of the Little Brothers of Mary.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: Amen.

Here, in the presence of God, with the Blessed Virgin and St Joseph as heavenly witnesses, desirous of recording for all the Brothers of Mary, the last and dearest wishes of my heart, I summon all my strength to make my Spiritual Testament, in terms of what I believe most in accordance with the will of God, and most conducive to the good of the Society.

1 We preserve the form, (capital s, hyphens, etc.), of the text given by Brother John-Baptist. See, OME, doc. 153, pp. 343 H. The Spiritual Testament is kept in the APM, and is edited according to the original version in OM 1, doc. 417, pp. 952 H.

2 In the Baptismal Certificate, which served also as Birth Certificate, the christian names have the order: Marcellin, Joseph, Benedict.

In the first place 3, I humbly beseech all those whom I may have offended or disedified in any way, albeit I am not conscious of any wilful offence on my part towards anybody, graciously to grant me pardon, pressed by the boundless charity of Christ, and to add their prayers to mine, as king of God in his goodness to overlook the sins of my past life, and admit my soul to the embrace of his all-loving mercy.

I die with sentiments of grateful and respectful submission to the Superior General of the Society of Mary, and in the closest bonds of union with all its members, especially the Brothers, who in the designs of Providence were to come under my care, and who have always had a special claim on my affection.

I desire that absolute and perfect obedience should always prevail among the Brothers of Mary: that those under authority see in their Superiors the representatives of Jesus Christ, and render them willing and implicit obedience, being ever ready to sacrifice at need their own will and judgment. Let them remember that the obedient religious will speak of victories 4, and that it is mainly obedience that forms the base and buttress of a community. With hearts thus disposed, the Little Brothers of Mary will submit blindly to the guidance, not only of the Major Superiors, but also to all those whose duty it is to lead and direct them. They will let this truth of faith sink deep into their minds, that the Superior takes the place of Jesus Christ, and that when he commands, he should be obeyed as if it were Christ himself commanding.

Also, dear Brothers, I beg of you with all the love of my heart, and by all the love you bear me, keep ever alive among you the charity of Christ. Love one another as Jesus Christ has loved you 5. Be of one heart and one mind 6. Have the world say of the Little Brothers of Mary, what they said of the first Christians: 'See how they love one another!'

That is the desire of my heart and my burning wish, at this last moment of my life. Yes, my dearest Brothers, hear these last words of your Father, which are those of our Blessed Saviour: 'Love one another 7!'

3 This section: "In the first place... special claim on my affection", is at the end of the Testament in the version written by Brother Francis (OME, doc. 153, pp. 340-347).

4 Provo 21,28.

5 John, 13,34.

6 Acts, 4,32.

7 John, 13,34.

so, to these pure spirits also, pay a special homage of love, respect and confidence.

Dear Brothers, love your vocation, be faithful and steadfast to the end, with manly courage. Remain true to the spirit of poverty and detachment, and let the daily observance of your holy Rule preserve you from ever violating the sacred vow by which you are bound to the fairest of all the virtues, and the frailest. There are difficulties in leading the life of a good religious, but grace sweetens all their bitterness. Jesus and Mary will come to your aid, and besides, life is soon over and eternity never ends. Oh, what consolation we have, when about to appear before God, to remember that we have lived in the favour of Mary, and in her own Society. May it please that Good Mother to preserve you, give you increase and bring you to holiness.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the imparting of the Holy Spirit be with you always ¹⁰. I leave you trustfully within the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, until we all meet again in eternal bliss.

This is my full and final will for the glory of Jesus and Mary.

The present Spiritual Testament shall be delivered into the hands of Father Colin, Superior General of the Society of Mary.

Declared at Notre-Dame de l'Hermitage B, the eighteenth of May, eighteen hundred and forty.

Joseph Benedict Marcellin CHAMPAGNAT, "Priest of the Society of Mary and Superior of the Brothers" ¹².

This document was listened to with utmost attention and deep emotion. When the reading was over, the good Father added a few words to reinforce what had just been heard. Then the Brothers knelt down and asked his pardon, begging him to remember them before God. "How could I forget you!" exclaimed the pious Founder, his voice vibrant with emotion and tender affection. "That is impossible!" Brother Francis, having asked for his blessing on all the members of the Institute, present and absent, as well as on future members, he gave it very feelingly. With hands joined and eyes raised to heaven, before they lingered on his Brothers, he pronounced the usual formula very fervently, in feeble but deliberate accents. Then the Brothers recited for him three *Hail Marys*, the *Memorare* and the *We fly to your patronage*. Brother Superior gave them a sign to withdraw after that, because

¹⁰ 2 Cor. 13,13.

¹¹ Brother John-Baptist makes no mention of witnesses.

¹² The title does not match the original (OME, doc. 153, p. 346).

he was afraid of tiring the patient. Each departed with tears in his eyes and a heart overflowing with emotion.

When the Brothers had gone, the Founder seemed very pleased with the whole proceedings. "I am grateful to God", he commented, "for the inspiration to make my Spiritual Testament. I am indeed glad that all the Brothers may know and read my last counsels and final wishes; that will strengthen them as well as delight them; besides, it is a consolation which I owe them because of the attachment they have for me." In fact, their affection could not have been greater. There was no pause in the prayers that all of them offered for him. Moreover, every other community in the country had been asked to contribute its prayers. On Thursdays, those Brothers who were reasonably close to the Hermitage, visited him without fail, to show their sympathy with him in his sufferings. Those who lived there, considered themselves happy to be able to sit up with him and to wait on him. They taxed their ingenuity looking for ways of alleviating his sufferings and of giving him pleasure.

The Brothers and the novices were at great pains to avoid making the slightest noise near his room; although the corridors had been carpeted, they all took off their shoes in his vicinity. Father Bélier 13, a missionary from Valence, who was spending some time at the Hermitage, was amazed at the attention, care and affection lavished on Marcellin. "Ah! It's certainly true", he remarked, "that the Religious receives a hundred-fold 14 even in this life. Here we have a saint going to Paradise, but no prince of this world was ever more assiduously looked after, in his last moments." Besides, there was nothing artificial about the attitude of the Brothers towards their beloved Founder; you could see that their hearts impelled and guided them. But, it must be said, that the same kind of affection is still bestowed on all the Brothers who die in the Institute; and it was the Founder himself, by word and example, who taught the Brothers how they should treat the sick members of the Society.

13 Fr Bélier had entered this Society of Missionaries which was for the diocese of Valence, what the "Chartreux", founded by Bishop Fesch, were for the diocese of Lyon. "Fr Bélier came to the Hermitage with Fr Mazelier to visit the dying Fr Champagnat. Fr Mazelier left before his death; but Fr Bélier stayed on and wrote a short account of the death to Fr Mazelier. This influenced Fr Mazelier to accelerate the union of the Brothers of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux with those of the Hermitage" (AA, AFM, manuscript, p. 442).

14 Matt. 19,29.

We ought to add that Father Champagnat was not a difficult patient. He made no secret of his great sufferings, but in his still greater resignation, he kept repeating: "My God, your will be done!"
 15 He took things as they came: the bouts of pain, as well as the slight relief that was provided for him; he was always resigned, cheerful and happy. Once, he noticed that the Brother sitting up with him was sleepy; he advised him: "Sit in that chair and sleep awhile. I shall call you when I need you." The Brother was soon fast asleep. Some time after, Marcellin wanted his help and called him but couldn't make him hear. When he did wake up, the Founder smiled at him and said: "I have been calling you for over an hour, as loudly as I could." Then he continued in his cheerful vein: "Ah! I see now why you didn't hear me; I wasn't using your correct name." In fact, he had made a mistake, using a wrong name for the Brother.

The same Brother came another night to sit up with him and was jokingly reminded: "We must avoid a repetition of the other mishap, eh?" The good Brother reassured him and even took precautions against being overcome by sleep; but they didn't succeed, and before long he was deep in sleep. The Founder had a bad night and called him for a long while without being able to wake him. Fortunately he was heard by a Brother in a neighbouring room, who came to attend to his needs. When the sleeper awoke, he was embarrassed at his failure and at seeing a replacement, but the Founder soon put his mind at rest with the kind remark: "You are obviously on good terms with your God, Brother, and have a peaceful conscience, for you sleep very soundly. Go to bed and think no more of your slip." The Brother who had filled in, was Brother Jerome, whom Father Champagnat especially loved for his excellent character and his simplicity. He was expert at supporting the Founder while raising him, at changing his bed linen and at discerning and satisfying (as far as it was his role) any needs that he had. The Founder, therefore, preferred his help to that of the other Brothers, though he always showed himself pleased with those who attended to him.

No matter what suffering he was going through, he always gave an extremely friendly welcome to the Brothers who came to see him and never failed to speak a few words of consolation and encouragement to them. "Brother", he counselled one of them, "observe your Rule well; instruct your pupils carefully in the mysteries and truths of Religion; if you fulfil those two duties,

15 Matt. 6,10; Lk 22.41.

you will have much consolation at death." When another Brother asked him for guidance on how to perform his actions well, he was told: "Think only of what you are doing at the moment, or of what you would wish to have done at the hour of death."

Another, who was inclined to be scrupulous, came to discuss some problems of conscience: "Scruples weaken the love of God and of perfection; a conscience should be timorous but not scrupulous. Don't waste your time in useless examination, always churning up the same material; busy yourself with acts of faith, hope, charity and others, any single one of which will make you more pleasing to God and take you further along the path of virtue than all the worry you go in for. Scruples ruin and destroy hope which is a theological virtue. Since God is our Father, nothing displeases him so much as lack of confidence."

So it was, that even with his sufferings, he kept instructing and consoling his Brothers. If it happened that their intensity prevented him from conversing with the Brothers and answering their questions, he was greatly grieved. One day he was very unwell and unable to speak to a Brother Director who had come. The moment he felt better, he sent for the Brother and was told that he had already gone back to his establishment. "How sorry I am", he exclaimed, "that I couldn't speak with him to encourage him and lead him to carry out zealously the wonderful mission that God has entrusted to him. What marvellous merit is amassed by the Brothers who teach! What an immense reward their zeal will receive!"

He had been conversing for a short while one time with Brother Francis, when he turned towards him and asked how long they had been together; having got the reply that it was more than twenty years, the good Father turned away, raised his eyes to heaven and, in profound recollection, seemed to offer a fervent prayer. "Father", continued Brother Francis soon afterwards, "it is my firm hope that if you must separate from us in body, you will always be close to us (and we to you), in mind and heart and that you will continue to be our Father."

"Oh, yes", came the reply, "if I have any influence with God and the Blessed Virgin, I shall use it all for the benefit of the Society." Then, with an affectionate glance at Brother Francis, he sympathetically observed: "Poor Brother, I pity you, for the government of the Institute is a heavy burden; however, the spirit of zeal, the spirit of prayer and confidence in God, will help you bear it. Remember that sacrifice is the only means of being useful to others and procuring the salvation of souls."

Brother Louis came in to see him at this juncture and Father Champagnat, gripping his hand, exhorted him: "Come, Brother, do everything in your power to help Brother Francis; work harmoniously with him; there will be many problems, but keep up your confidence; God will be with you for it is his work you are doing; helped by him, you will overcome all the obstacles that the enemy may put in your path; besides, do not forget that you have the Blessed Virgin who is the resource ¹⁶ which the house relies on; her protection will never fail you."

Another time, he confided to Brother Stanislaus, who was almost always at his side: "My good Brother, I cause you a lot of trouble; I'm very sorry for that, but I'm consoled by the fact that God will repay you a hundredfold for all that you do to help me. How good God is to take account of all that we do for our neighbour and to reward it himself. What a powerful incentive. to make us practise charity and render service to our Brothers. So try to be of use to your Brothers as long as you can. I particularly recommend you to encourage ¹⁷ the novices and to meet often with the new arrivals in order to make them feel at home. Vocation to the religious life is a great grace; that is. why the devil makes such strenuous efforts to give young people a distaste for it, to sap their courage and to cast them back into the world where salvation is so difficult."

Meanwhile, the Father's sickness grew daily worse. His stomach could retain nothing, not even the lightest custards. A devouring fire seemed to consume him; vomiting became more frequent and caused him extreme sufferings. He now brought up only matter mingled with blood and sometimes in the form of hard, sizable lumps. This made him exclaim: "Where can so much corruption have come from, and what can have kindled such a fierce fire within me?" He would add at once: "God be blessed! May his holy will be done!" or "My God, have pity on me. I offer you my sufferings; give me your grace and then send me whatever sufferings you wish." The only relief he obtained was from drinking iced water (which he did through obedience) and the application of the ice to his stomach.

¹⁶ This is the same expression as he used in his letter of May 27th, 1838, to Bishop Pompallier: "Mary - the total resource of our Society" (LPC 1, doc. 194, p. 393).

¹⁷ Something which Brother Stanislaus did very well: "He usually took recreation with the postulants or with the young Brothers and he had the knack of meeting up with those who were wavering and needed his help" (BQF, p. 52).

In the midst of his intense suffering, he would very much have liked to receive the Holy Viaticum again. "There is still time", he would often say. "I could receive Our Lord a second 18 time, if it weren't for the nausea." Indeed, it seemed that the incessant vomiting would continue to deprive him of that favour, but everything is possible to faith and love. Constantly pre-occupied with the thought of Holy Communion and a longing for it, he exclaimed after a profound meditation: "I believe I shall be heard and that my good angel 19 will win me the grace of receiving Our Lord once more; bring me a picture of the Guardian Angel; I shall ask that heavenly spirit for this wonderful favour." The picture was brought and attached to the bed curtain; Marcellin gazed fixedly on it and having prayed fervently for some time, he felt that his prayer was heard and that he could receive Holy Communion once more. In fact, the vomitings having completely ceased, he became calm and peaceful, as though there were nothing wrong with his stomach. After maintaining that condition for over an hour, he cried out: "My prayer is heard! I can receive Communion! Ask the chaplain to bring me the good God." He received Our Lord with sentiments of lively faith, tender piety and extraordinary devotion. His looks, his movements, his posture, all reflected the profound respect, the unlimited confidence and the burning love which were his.

After receiving Holy Communion, he recommended the practice of silence, as indispensable for a community to preserve recollection and the spirit of prayer. He once again exhorted the Brothers to flee idleness and to be constantly occupied, assuring them that, at the hour of death, they would have great remorse, if they had not spent their time usefully.

He remained in this quiet state, without vomiting, for more than an hour; the sickness then resumed, more violently than ever. However, in receiving the Bread of the strong, he had acquired new strength and new courage to support his sickness.

18 "One who has received Holy Viaticum can do so a second time and even more often, during the same sickness, if the danger continues; but eight to ten days must elapse between the Communions. If, after an improvement in health, the sick person again becomes dangerously m, he can be given Holy Viaticum even though the previous occasion was within eight days" (Bishop T.M.J. Gousset, *Théologie morale*, Edition, 1848, t. 11. p. 141).

19 Fr Champagnat had a very great devotion to the Guardian Angel. He urged the Brothers "to make every effort to inspire the children: with this devotion" (1837 Rules, Ch. 4, art. 14, p. 50); he recalls the importance of this devotion, in his Spiritual Testament.

On the evening of that same day, which was Sunday, the 24th of May, Father Colin, Superior General of the Society, came to the Hermitage; Father Mazelier, Superior of the Brothers of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, arrived the next morning. "Ah, what a happiness it is", exclaimed Marcellin, when he heard the news of their arrival, "to be visited and helped by such fine priests!" He spoke for a long while with Father Colin; recommended the Brothers to his care, and finished the exchange by asking pardon, in great humility, for any inadvertent failures on his part. Father Colin, who was extremely moved and edified, replied with great affection and encouragement.

The visit by Father Mazelier was a double source of joy for Marcellin: it gave him the opportunity to enlist the support of the visitor for his Brothers; and it brought hope of consolation for himself from the words and prayers of this holy priest. In the course of their meeting, Father Champagnat made this appeal: "I recommend to you those Brothers of mine who come under the Conscription law." "For my part", replied Father Mazelier, "I beg you not to forget mine, when you are in heaven." They both kept their word. Father Champagnat did not merely pray for the Brothers of Christian Instruction; he adopted them as his children. Father Mazelier continued his services to the Brothers of Mary. His esteem and affection for them increased to the point where he offered his own Brothers to them, so as to make a single, united family.

The feast of the Ascension 20, which was celebrated that same week, stirred happy memories in Father Champagnat's mind. That, you will recall, was his baptism day and he spoke about it a great deal and with deep gratitude. He had a keen desire to die on the very day of the feast or within the octave. However, in his humility, he was afraid to tempt God by asking him for such a favour.

Because of his love of poverty, his attachment to the Brothers, and the desire to cause them as little inconvenience as possible, he felt that it would be a good idea to transfer to the infirmary. "Brothers", he explained to those around him, "I have a suggestion that I wish to put to you, because I believe it comes from God. I want you to take me to the infirmary so that I may have the consolation and happiness of dying in that room in which so many Brothers have died and made their departure for heaven; besides, it will be easier to look after me there; you won't have to run

20 May 8th. 1840.

so far to bring me what I need, for I notice that you go to far too much trouble for me." As he continued to insist, Brother Francis offered his opinion:

"I believe that in your condition, it would be unwise to transfer you to the infirmary. God's will is for you to remain in your room and, this being the case, he will give you, too, a share in the merits of the Brothers. As for the question of inconvenience, there would be just as much in the infirmary, because of the Brothers who sleep there and who might be disturbed." "Quite true", the Founder agreed. "Well, whatever you wish!" Then he went on: "Since I can't go to the infirmary, let me at least be put on an iron bedstead." ²¹ One was brought immediately to satisfy his desire; besides, it facilitated the change of bed linen. On this modest bed he was to breathe his last.

His sufferings went on increasing. No position brought him relief; no remedy was of any avail. At the beginning of the month of Mary, he had foretold that his suffering would be intense before it was ended. His prophecy was fulfilled. However the acuteness and constancy of his pain did not hinder his union with God: he offered one prayer after another of love, confidence, resignation and contrition; or, he addressed short invocations to the Blessed Virgin, to St Joseph, to his Guardian Angel and to his patrons. His gaze was constantly on the pictures attached to his bed curtains: Jesus, Mary, St Joseph and the Guardian Angel; at times, he would take his profession cross and kiss it with great devotion. He wanted it always to be on the counterpane of his bed, so that he could press it to his lips; frequently he would free his arms of the blankets and feel for the cross, take it and kiss it.

On Monday, the first of June, Father du Treuil, parish priest of St Peter's at Saint-Chamond, came to see him. He bent over to embrace Father Champagnat, who protested in embarrassment: "Oh, Father, I'm not in a fit state to be embraced by anyone!" The parish priest was deeply moved by his humble and resigned attitude; he spoke a few words of deep affection to him, words calculated to boost confidence in Jesus and Mary. He ended with the reassuring remark: "Our Lord will come again to visit you

²¹ Iron beds were considered inferior in quality to wooden ones. "Brother Castus was a geometrician, mechanic and a handy-man. It was he who constructed most of the iron beds made of bars; these served the community for many years; he really invented them, for at that time their like was not found elsewhere. The iron for the beds was given to the Founder by the Terrenoire factory, that is by Mr Genissieux, its Director" (AA, p. 276).

and to give you strength." "I would dearly love that", was the reply, "but my vomiting puts it out of the question." "Not at all", asserted the parish priest. "Communion is still possible as long as you have a few moments of respite after receiving." This short conversation was followed by a veritable contest in humility, each begging the other for a blessing and advancing reasons why it should be that way. In the end, Father Champagnat prevailed; the priest 22 gave him his blessing and withdrew, after commending himself to Marcellin's prayers.

On the Tuesday, he was visited by a great number of priests. Father Janvier 23, parish priest of Saint-Julien-en-Jarret, who had long been a close friend, would not leave him without receiving his blessing. Father Champagnat told him several times: "Ah! if you knew what a happiness it is to die in the Society of Mary, you would not hesitate to enter it." Father Champagnat blessed him and, then urged him: "Come, you must be a Marist! Do you promise me that you will?" "To keep him happy", the good priest narrates, "I was obliged to give my promise."

The nearer his end drew, the more ardent his charity became, the more he longed to see and possess God; his last days were a succession of acts of love and fervent outpourings of prayer to Jesus and Mary. He thought only of heaven; he spoke only of heaven and of the happiness of dying a Religious. "Soon", he declared, "I shall see all those good Brothers who have gone before me and whom I believe to be saints." Someone reminded him not to forget the Brothers he left behind when he met those in heaven, pointing out that such Brothers would need his intercession with Mary more than ever. "No, I shall never forget you", he assured them, "and if I have the happiness to be with Mary, I shall pray to her so insistently for the Brothers of the Institute, that I shall not give up till she has obtained mercy for them." He continued: "I am confident that all who persevere in their vocation and have confidence in that Good Mother, will be saved." He would often repeat: "How happy I am to die in the Society of Mary!" Then,

22 Thiollière du Treuil, who had succeeded Fr Dervieux in 1832. A letter of Cardinal Donnet to Brother Louis-Mary on December 24th, 1864, quotes du Treuil: "The scene I have just witnessed in a room of the Hermitage Mother-House, will remain irremovably impressed on my heart" (OME, doc. 175, p. 495).

23 He was one of the group who had made the Act of Consecration at Fourvière, but he left almost immediately for U.S.A., where he remained for 10 years (OM 4, p. 302).

he would break into warm expressions of gratitude for so great a grace.

To die in religious life is most certainly an inestimable favour. The saints regard it as a sign of predestination. The reason given by St Bernard is that it is very difficult for a Religious to persevere in his vocation till death, if he is not one of the elect. Many canonized Religious have shared Father Champagnat's view on the happiness of death in Religion and have expressed such a view in their dying hours. "What I have always most desired during life", said the great Saint Thomas Aquinas on his deathbed, "is now my reason for keenest gratitude. My God, I thank you for having preserved me in the religious state and given me the grace to die in it. This is one of the greatest graces you have granted me. It overwhelms me with joy and I already experience an unalloyed happiness." 24

On Thursday, the fourth of June, Marcellin was filled with desire to receive Our Lord one last time. Remembering the words of the parish priest of St Peter's, he was strongly confident that God would grant him this favour, which he fervently asked through the intercession of St Joseph. His prayer was heard, in fact the vomiting having abated, Holy Viaticum was brought to him. On the Friday, his sufferings were intense. The internal fire which consumed him, combined with the vomitings, gave him so much pain that he fainted more than once. The doctor 25 couldn't understand how he was able to go on so long in that hopelessly stricken state. "I can't make out what can possibly be sustaining him and delaying his death", he admitted. Ten days previously he had forecast the end within twenty-four hours.

In the midst of his long martyrdom, the Founder maintained his steady converse with God; he continually glanced at the pictures of Jesus, Mary and St Joseph, and not being able now to say their names, he greeted them with his hand which was held up for him, and directed towards each picture. At last, it became clear on the Friday evening, that the end was close. A large number of Brothers was praying fervently in his room, and wanted to spend the night there for the consolation of receiving his

24 Brothers John-Baptist draws on Bareille's History of Saint Thomas Aquinas; "My son,... don't be worried. What has always been the object of my desires, is now the cause of my gratitude. God takes me out of this life as a simple Religious... Have no regrets, my son; I already feel a happiness without alloy". (4th edition, pp. 367-368, Louis Vives, Paris, 1862).

25 It is difficult to know the doctor's name, since the account books make no mention of payments to the doctor.

blessing and being present at his death; but he wouldn't hear of it and was still strong enough to prevail upon them to go and rest.

Only Brother Hippolyte and Brother Jerome remained with him.

During the night, he continued his aspirations to Jesus, Mary and Joseph. At about half past two, he remarked to the Brothers that their lamp was going out. "Excuse me, Father", one of them explained, "but the lamp is burning well." "But I can't see it", he protested. "So bring it closer." This was done without any improvement in the situation. "Ah", he said, with a dying voice, "I understand that it is my sight which is failing; my hour has come; thanks be to God!" He then whispered a few more prayers and soon his agony began. It lasted for more than an hour but was mild and peaceful. The vomiting had stopped, for nature was utterly exhausted. At twenty past four, his breathing slowed up and became more laboured and then spasmodic. The Brothers were at that time assembled in the chapel for the singing of the Salve Regina 26. The Litany of the Blessed Virgin was immediately begun, and during its recital, without effort or struggle, the pious Founder fell asleep in the Lord.

His death took place on Saturday, June 6th, the vigil of Pentecost. He had declared several times during his sickness: "I would like to die on a Saturday, but I don't deserve that favour, while I do hope for it from Mary's kindness." Not only was he given that grace, but also another: he died at the time, which for thirty years he had devoted to meditation and to union with God. It was during the prayer which followed the Salve Regina that the Mother of Mercy led him from exile to the fatherland, and showed him Jesus, the fruit of her virginal womb.

His death plunged the community into deep sorrow, but the prolonged suffering of the Founder had prepared them for this painful sacrifice. Besides, they were so convinced of his holiness that their feeling of grief was mitigated by the firmness of their belief that his sufferings had been transformed into an immense weight of glory. After his death, he was shaved and washed then dressed in soutane, surplice and stole; his profession cross was put in his hand and he was placed on view in an armchair in his own room. At his side, was a small table with his breviary, his biretta, pictures of Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin, and two lighted candles. He was extremely pale but not at all distorted; his face still had its manly features and that expression of

26 From 1831 onwards this hymn began the community's day (AA, p. 98).

kindness and dignity which had given him, in life, such influence over minds, and had captivated hearts.

No difficulty was experienced in his presence; the Brothers were quite at ease there and loved to gaze on him and kiss his feet. They came, one after another, to contemplate in love and confidence, the dear remains of their tender Father. They took turns in groups of six to recite the Office of the Dead and the rosary, beside his body. Throughout the day, all visited him several times. On the very day that he died, his portrait was drawn by an artist ²⁷ especially summoned for the purpose. Sunday evening, his body, clad in priestly soutane, was put in a leaden coffin and enclosed in a strong oaken one. The body was still perfectly supple.

Before the leaden coffin was closed, a heart-shaped ²⁸ leaden plaque was inserted, in the presence of Father Matricon, chaplain, and of Brothers Francis, John-Mary, Louis and Stanislaus. On it was inscribed: The Bones of M.J.B. Champagnat, 1840. The funeral ceremony took place on Monday, June 8th; almost all the priests of the district and the leading citizens of Saint-Chamond were present. ²⁹ The coffin was carried to the vault by the professed Brothers, taking turns. Wrung with grief, they mingled their tears with the prayers they offered for the one they mourned.

²⁷ John-Joseph Ravery (1800-1868). He was the one who had done the paintings which adorned the chapel of Our Lady of the Hermitage and the large canvas showing the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin (AA, p. 185). ²⁸ This plaque was found again at the exhumation in 1890 (CSG VIII, p. 10).

²⁹ See the list in AA, pp. 325-326.

CRAPTER TWENTY-TRREE

The Brothers show their attachment to Father Champagnat by fervent prayers for the repose of his soul and by their entire submission to his successor. The Brothers of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux and then those of Viviers, join the Marist Brothers. Institute makes constant advance.

Novitiate established at Beaucamps. Institute gains government authorization. Revision, examination and final approval of the Rules by the General Chapter. Current state of the Congregation.

As soon as Father Champagnat was dead, Brother Francis wrote a circular letter I to the Brothers to announce the sad news. "My dear Brothers", he said to them, "on Saturday, June 6th, at half past four in the morning, our venerated Father Superior fell asleep peacefully in the Lord after a mild death struggle lasting three quarters of an hour. On this sad occasion, we invite you to join your tears and hopes with our own. Let us weep for a loving Father, a worthy Superior and Founder, a holy priest², our mainstay, our guide and our comforter. Yes, we weep, because death has carried off one who was so well able to share all our difficulties, who so skilfully guided our steps along the path of salvation. His life of penance, of labour, of good works, zeal and devotedness, has been brought to a close by a long and painful sickness. His death, like his life was full of edification, and we are quite confident that it was precious in God's sight³. Let us take consolation and courage, my⁴ very dear Brothers, from that thought! We have lost a protector on earth; but he will be more efficacious and more powerful in heaven with Mary- to whom he entrusted us all at his death. It is our task now to take up his last, touching advice and to follow it with care; it is up to us to make him live on in each one of us, by imitating the virtues which we admire in him." Brother Francis then indicated the prayers to be said in each house, for the repose of the soul of the beloved Founder.

1 CSG 1, pp. 41-42.

2 "Holy Priest"; the Circular adds: "...of Mary." 3 Ps. 115,15.

4 "My." Brother Francis writes: N.T.C.F. (Our very dear Brothers).

Faithfully heeding the advice of their new Superior, the Brothers did not let their deep affliction on the death of their Founder, degenerate into discouragement. They understood that the best way to show their love and filial piety towards their tender Father was not to give themselves up to a sterile grief; it was to imitate his example, preserve and perpetuate his spirit and continue his work. The high esteem they had for his virtue, did not prevent them from offering fervent prayers for the repose of his soul, for they knew that in comparison with the infinite purity of God, even the holiest actions are flawed; and that, because of human frailty, the lives of the most pious and most perfect of men, are not without imperfection.

When Father Champagnat died, there were a lot of people who had doubts about the future of his work ⁵ and its stability. Would the Brother chosen to succeed him be equal to that onerous task?

Would the Brothers really accept his authority willingly? Would the Rules of the Institute be clearly enough defined and its government firmly enough exercised, to ensure its survival and its development? Were the Brothers sufficiently attached to their vocation and adequately grounded in virtue? Were they experienced enough to govern themselves unaided? Would they preserve the spirit of the Founder, adhere to the principles he had given them and tread the path he had traced out for them?

Such were the questions being raised. Time has provided answers that redound greatly to the credit of the Brothers. Indeed, they were full of esteem and respect for the Superior whom they had chosen; they gave him their total confidence and made it their prime concern to give proof of their perfect submission. They yielded in all things, with perfect confidence, to his direction and fatherly care, each one applying himself zealously to his own perfection and to the discharge of his duties with maximum devotedness. There was perhaps never a period when piety, good spirit, love of the Institute and fraternal union shone more resplendently in the Society, than during the holidays and retreat following the death of Father Champagnat. At that time, three new establishments ⁶ were made: Saint-Lattier in the Department of

⁵ Fr Colin (amongst others) echoes these doubts, writing to Brother Louis-Mary on May 26th, 1841: "The public, which is watching you closely to see how things go after the death of Fr Champagnat, will certainly withdraw its confidence, if it sees that you are having trouble." (Letter of Brother Louis-Mary to Brother Francis, May 26th, 1841, AFM, 51.020.11).

⁶ LPC 2, Cf. répertoire, at these words.

the Isère, Digoin in the Saône-et-Loire and Carvin in the Pas-de-Calais.

Filled with the spirit of the pious Founder and eager to adopt his way of governing the Brothers and of doing good, Brother Francis made no change in what had been done or in the manner of doing it. This wise conduct won him public esteem, caused his government to be loved and his authority to be Universally accepted by the Brothers; it was clearly seen with great satisfaction, that under the new regime, there was no change in the mode of administration; that Father Champagnat lived on and continued to act, in his successor 7.

One of the first acts of government on Brother Francis's part was to complete the union of the Brothers of Mary with those of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux 8. Father Mazelier, seeing that ms Institute could make no progress for lack of subjects, was the first to press for the conclusion of the plan. Father Colin played a large part also by his wise advice, in smoothing out the difficulties which seemed to stand in the way of a fusion that was so much needed by both Congregations. The chief problems sprang from the fact that Father Mazelier 9 wanted to be able to send a single Brother into the small parishes and to have a Brother Provincial responsible, under the Superior General, for the government of the Provinces. These were two things that Father Champagnat had never wished to allow and which were contrary to what had been practised in the Institute till then. Yet, since a cooperative spirit reigned on both sides; since both sought only the glory of God; since the union was desired and requested earnestly by the members of both Communities; and since, moreover, it was impossible at that time to pronounce definitively on the manner of appointing to positions and on the Government and Constitutions of the Institute, it was considered sufficient to lay down in principle and to agree, that 10:

1. The united Brothers would have one and the same goal, Rule and government.

7 On receiving Ravery's portrait of Fr Champagnat, Brother Francis jotted in his note-book: "Be his living image" (AFM, Carnet No. 1, p. 41).

8 CSG 1, pp. 533-536; and AFM, 221.121.

9 Cf. LPC 2, pp. 390-391 and BI XXIV, pp. 176-178. A few years later, Fr Mazelier retired and finished his days as a Canon at Valence. He died on June 26th, 1856, at Bourg-de-Péage, his birth place.

10 The reference is to a quite small recording of what was decided in two votes: one, of the Hermitage Council, October 20th, 1841; the other of the Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux Council, November 29th, 1841 (CSG I, pp. 530-536).

2. The Brothers of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux would recognize the authority of Brother Francis and obey him in all things; they would adopt the costume and the Rule of the Brothers of Mary; in a ward, the two Congregations would now be only one and have only one leader 11.

It was on this basis that the union was concluded and put into effect. In April, 1842, Brother John-Mary 12 was sent to assume possession of the house of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux and to take charge of the novitiate. As had been anticipated, the union caused no practical difficulties and was advantageous to both parties. There weren't many Brothers of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, but they were all Religious who were endowed with outstanding piety and solid virtue 13. They had long since been Marists at heart, so that they easily adjusted to the new Rule which they adopted; and the spirit of their new Institute was immediately congenial to them. .

The union with the Brothers of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux was followed by that with the Brothers of Viviers. This Congregation, founded in 1803 by Father Vernet 14, Superior of the Major Seminary, didn't have many members. The zeal and the effort which he put into his work seemed to have very limited success.

The very structure of that Institute went a long way to explaining the non-success. The Brothers were committed to the Institute merely by the choice exercised through their free will. This was an arrangement that Father Vernet had noticed in the Company of Saint-Sulpice and decided to introduce into his own Congregation of Brothers; however, it was the reef on which the budding Congregation foundered. In fact, once their novitiate was finished, the Brothers found themselves again in contact with the world in the course of their duties and gradually lost their first fervour; their inconstant will needed the support of vows, which alone could give it stability. Otherwise, it was defenceless, so to speak in the face of temptations and discouragement and in the midst of the difficulties inseparable from teaching. So, it became powerless to preserve them in their vocation.

11 In fact, the same Superior General, Fr Colin; the same Provincial, Fr Cholleton; and the same Director General, Brother Francis.

12 His life is told in a small book separate from the series, BQF (Cf. LCP 2, pp. 292-302).

13 In BQF, the life of Brother Paul, (p. 129), who was co-Founder with Fr Fièrè of the Brothers of Christian Instruction of Valence.

14 LPC 2, pp. 506-510.

Accordingly, the majority of the most gifted Brothers, obtained their Teacher's Certificate and cast aside their religious state to plunge once more into the world. These departures brought groans of disappointment from Father Vernet, shattered his hopes, and convinced him of the necessity of vows. In this situation, he hit on the idea of imitating Father Mazelier's lead and joining his Congregation to that of the Little Brothers of Mary, who had vows; together with a Rule and a properly-constituted government.

With this in mind, he wrote several letters to Father Cholleton, seeking his help in negotiating the union. However, he died before it could be brought about. Bishop Guibert¹⁵, to whom he entrusted his Institute at his death, brought the matter to a happy conclusion in the first months of 1844. The union was effected on the same terms as that with the Brothers of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux.

¹⁵ Fr Vernet died in 1843. Bishop Guibert, at Viviers then, was much more desirous of that union. It was effected without difficulty, on April 15th, 1844. Brother Francis, Director General, chose Brother Bernardine as Director provincial, master of novices (LPC 2, pp. 510 and 647).

Although the Brothers of Viviers were less well prepared for the union than the latter, most of them were as pleased about it; for they could see that their Congregation did not have what was needed to work efficaciously for the glory of God and to ensure the complete security of its members for the future. The Brothers of Viviers 16, in joining the Brothers of Mary, in adopting their costume and their Rule, strove at the same time to acquire their Spirit; soon the union of hearts that resulted was stronger than the legal links which formed them into a single Congregation.

It is quite possible that these fusions of three religious families under a single Head, with the same Rule and the same government, constitute a unique happening in monastic history; in any case, the fortunate effects which followed, are a wonderful tribute to the Providence directing the events. One would naturally have expected these amalgamations to inject into the Congregation some potential for bad spirit and the seeds of division. Instead, they were a factor for peace, for charity and for increased power in doing good. There was unprecedented sympathy and charity amongst the Brothers; more piety, good spirit and regular observance in the Houses; and the Province of Midi, which grew out of the unions, was always renowned for its docility, its devotedness and its love of the Institute.

The Bishop of Viviers wanted to have a novitiate in his diocese and bought a large house at La Bégude 17, near Aubenas, for the purpose. It proved a nursery of excellent subjects for the Institute.

The novitiate of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, which previously had housed very few vocations, gradually developed and soon had so many postulants that extensions were necessary. Such was the success of those two novitiates, that the Brothers spread throughout the south of France within a few years, establishing more than a hundred foundations in the process.

The novitiate of the Hermitage, centre of the life of the Institute and of its authentic spirit, had not only supplied the principal subjects to form the Province of Midi; it had, as well, founded a great number of establishments in the Departments of

16 Vote of the Hermitage Council, August 17th, 1843 (CSG 1, p. 553) and Act of Union of the Brothers of Viviers and those of the Hermitage (CSG I, p. 564).

17 The novitiate was opened on May 3rd, 1844, with about 20 novices (Annals of Viviers, AFM, 221.222, p. 45, and 221.224, pp. 61-63).

the Loire, Rhône, Isère, Saône-et-Loire, Ain, Haute-Loire, Puy-de Dôme, Oise, Pas-de-Calais and Nord.

A novitiate was founded in this last-mentioned Department in 1846, by Madame the Countess of Grandville 18, a woman of outstanding piety and virtue, who. paid all the costs with a generosity that only a christian spirit can inspire. Her initial plan was to establish an ordinary school for the children of Beaucamps, a small town in the district of Haubourdin, near Lille. It was in the centre of Lille that she lived, and her inexhaustible charity made her that city's visible Providence. She was able to judge by the good do ne at Beaucamps, what might be able to be achieved in other parishes of the country, whose needs were even greater.

Her discerning mind told her that the only way of accomplishing such good, was to found a novitiate and she didn't hesitate to make all the sacrifices entailed 19. She had a vast house constructed as well as a chapel, and made them both over to the Institute, with

18 BI IX, pp. 361-368; and CSG II, pp. 496-498 and 111, p. 303.

19 BI II, p. 496; AFM BEA 660.

a property yielding 1800 francs revenue. This was to ensure the upkeep of three Brothers responsible for the school of the parishes of Beaucamps and Ligny. That novitiate, entirely her doing, gives the generous benefactress a large share in the work accomplished by the Institute and puts the Little Brothers of Mary forever in her debt.

The advance of the Society was not retarded even by the events of 1848. The Brothers, solely occupied with the education of the children in their care, enjoyed the good will of all parties and were in no way disturbed. The elections of December 10th, entrusted the government of the State to Prince Louis-Napoleon.

This fact allayed fears about the future of the country and presaged the era of security on which France was now entering.

Lovers of good order experienced a religious upsurge, and when Mr de Falloux, an eminently religious figure, was made Minister for Public Instruction and Worship, the clergy and all good Catholics took advantage of the fact to call for freedom of teaching. After extraordinary efforts, they achieved success with the law of March 15th, 1850.

This law 20 allowed freedom to secondary education and gave those religious Congregations which were approved by the State and devoted to primary education, the right of their subjects to apply for admission to certain tertiary institutions, the freedom to make their own appointments, and the exemption from military service. Those Congregations not approved, faced insuperable difficulties and the impossibility of doing good 21. The General Council²², seeing our Congregation in that troublesome position, did not hesitate to renew the steps already undertaken twice, (under the reign of Louis-Philippe and since the death of Father Champagnat), to obtain legal authorization. Bishop Parisis of Langres, was quite willing to present, in person 23, the request to

20 This law was called the "Loi Falloux" although Vicount Falloux was no longer Minister for Public Instruction at the time it was promulgated.

21 In particular, the placement of teachers depended on an Academic Council (AA, AFM manuscript, pp. 368-369). Brother Francis, relying on a letter from the Minister Villemain in 1842, by which he accepted personally the principle of an extension to the Loire Department, of the decree of Saint-Paul, valid for the Departments of the Drôme, of the Isère and of the Hautes Alpes, continued to place his Brothers as though Superior of a Congregation with legal recognition; but he drew some reaction from Inspectors. There was one rather litigious scholastic year, 1850-1851 (CSG 1, p. 501).

22 This word Régime is used for "the General Council of the Institute." 23 On January 30th, 1851, Brother Francis had sent to Bishop Parisis, representative at the National Assembly, the request intended for the Minister

the Minister for Public Instruction and he was able to arrange that it be examined first amongst a number of similar ones and be treated separately.

The Minister gave it an enthusiastic reception and was gracious enough to present it himself to the Superior Council²⁴. On the favourable report of Mr Portalis, first President of the Court of Appeal, the Council voted unanimously in the affirmative and adopted it without discussion. A few days later, it was sent to the Council of State, together with the favourable verdict of the Superior Council and the draft of a decree for the legal authorization of the Institute and for the approval of its statutes. All the indications were that the Council of State would readily grant the request; but that didn't happen. Strong opposition was made and a lively exchange went on for more than three hours. Mr de Crouseilhès, Minister for Public Instruction, spoke up for the Brothers' case but no conclusion was reached and the discussion was adjourned for a week.

However, good Catholics, and all who had supported the law of March 15th, 1850, redoubled their efforts to have the application for authorization approved. This was not only because of their interest in the Congregation of the Little Brothers of Mary, but even more, because there was an opportunity to have the Government sanction the right to approve, by a simple decree, religious Congregations dedicated to teaching within the terms of this law. Considered in that light, the question was of extreme importance; Catholics, therefore attached the utmost significance to it and exerted themselves to the limit in order to ensure the triumph of the Brothers' cause and of the principle that it involved. Thanks to their persevering zeal, this principle was indeed recognized by the Council of State and the key clause of the Decree of Authorization of the Institute, was adopted, with all the benefits that could be desired. The religious character of the Congregation was accordingly recognized and its civil existence established for the whole of France, without any restriction whatever. It had the right for its subjects to apply for admission to certain tertiary institutions, exemption from military service, the right to receive legacies both for the schools and for the

of Public Instruction and the supporting documentation for authorization (CSG II, pp. 443-44).

²⁴ The reference is to the Committee for the Interior whose most influential members were Vicount de Montesquiou, secretary, and Pérignon, president (CSG II, p. 59).

Society and the right to acquire and own property. Three days later 25, the Decree was signed by the Prince President of the Republic.

So it happened that, just as Father Champagnat had promised on his death-bed, the authorization came in the nick of time, at the very moment it was absolutely necessary; and it was granted with much more favourable conditions than would have been possible, at the time when he applied. There is no doubt that his prayers and those of so many good Brothers who, we hope, are enjoying eternal glory with him, have won this favour from God. "Rest assured", said the excellent Brother Lawrence on his deathbed 26, to the Superior General, setting out for Paris to promote the petition for authorization, "rest assured; when I am up there with Father Champagnat, the two of us will find some way of settling this matter." Given the outstanding piety and virtue of Brother Lawrence, we were entitled to believe that his thought had come from a holy inspiration of God, and was meant to alert us to the visible protection we might expect from our Founder, in this emergency.

There was another matter of equal importance which had been exercising the minds of Brother Francis and his Assistants for a long while. That was the revision of the Rules and their final acceptance by the body of the Institute. We have already noted that Father Champagnat thought it inadvisable to include in the first edition of the Rules a host of articles on details that might already be practised. He thought these needed the sanction of time and experience before being definitively adopted; it was his intention that even the printed Rules, except for the fundamental Constitutions, could be revised and modified. This was to be done, where necessary, by the General Chapter, meeting after his death.

To carry out this task, the General Council implemented three measures:

1. They put in writing all the traditional practices which, though not spelt out in the printed Rules, had been established by Father Champagnat himself and constantly observed by the Brothers.

25 On June 20th, 1851 (CSG, pp. 440-450). The Circular of July 3rd, relates the steps taken by the Founder to achieve that end and those which had just been successfully concluded (CSG II, pp. 56-74).

26 Brother Lawrence died on February 8th, 1851 (CSG II, p. 70 and p. 62, note).

2. They made a close examination of all the writings, notes and instructions left by the Founder on the Rules; from these, they gleaned whatever was calculated to clarify or explain certain points of Rule, to give them coherence and fill them out.

3. They arranged and classified all this material, dividing it into three parts under the titles: Common Rules, Rules of Government and School Guide.

When this was completed, discussed and thoroughly examined, the Superior General summoned a General Chapter in order to submit the work to it. The Chapter members were to study, discuss it and, if they saw fit, modify it; they would then fix and definitively adopt the Institute's Rules, form of government and method of teaching. The thirty members of the Chapter were chosen and appointed by all the professed Brothers.

The Chapter members assembled at the Hermitage towards the end of May, 1852²¹. After a Retreat of three days, the Chapter was opened by a Mass of the Holy Spirit and a procession to the tomb of Father Champagnat. Having taken cognizance of the work prepared by the General Council, the capitulants considered that it was impossible to study and discuss it all in a single session; they decided that there would be three sessions, one for each part of the work. The first session was given to the Common Rules; the second, to the School Guide; and the third, to the Constitutions and the Rules of Government. They applied themselves assiduously to the study and discussion of the Rules submitted to them and, being convinced that these faithfully reflected the will of their pious Founder and contained his principles and his spirit, they adopted them just as they were, with a few minor modifications.

This was inevitable, since the capitulants were solid religious, sincerely devoted to the Institute. Most of them had received their training from Father Champagnat. They had thoroughly imbibed his spirit and held unswervingly to all that came from him. They understood that their first duty was to keep intact the Rules given by the Founder, to preserve the customs established by him and to perpetuate his spirit amongst the Brothers. There was some discussion, even lively discussion, concerning certain points of detail, but the capitulants never deviated from that line of action: on that important goal there was total unanimity in the Chapter. All had but one desire, one wish, one preoccupation: to preserve the Institute in the way that their beloved Father had founded it.

27 On May 31st.

The capitulants, understandably, wished to let the Brothers know how they felt about this matter and how they had proceeded in their investigation of the Rules of the Institute. This is how they did so, in the preface to the Constitutions 28:

Very dear Brothers, we believe it worthwhile to point out to you that the Rules and Constitutions are not ours: they are our beloved Father's. They may not all have been written by his hand, but they are still his, for we have gleaned them from his writings or from customs that he set going amongst us. They are the faithful expression of his will, and enshrine his spirit, that is, his way of practising virtue, of training and directing the Brothers and of doing good amongst the children.

Yes, this Rule is, in all its aspects, the work of Father Champagnat; it is he who prescribed the exercises of piety which we are committed to each day; he established all the practices of virtue, the vows and the other means of sanctification which we dispose of in our holy state; it is he who mapped out the details of the way the Brothers should relate to one another, to the public and to the children; he taught us how we should behave in community, in order to be good religious, towards the children, in order to be wise and pious teachers and amongst the public, in order to edify them and to spread everywhere the good odour of Jesus Christ 29.

He it was who imparted to the Institute, its spirit, its character, its object; he determined its exterior features: the Brothers' costume; their food; their mode of life; their dwellings and furniture; their method of teaching; their government by a Superior General, elected for life, helped by Assistants 30 and Visitors, and represented in the house by Directors and Sub Directors. It was not our role to pass judgment on those principles, still less to add or retrench; all we had to do was to take them and accept them, just as they were left to us by Father Champagnat; their elucidation and their application were the only

28 Brother John-Baptist gives faithful extracts from the "Letter to the members of the General Chapter" in the "Constitutions and Rules of Government" Pénissé, Lyon, 1854.

29 2 Cor. 2,15.

30 The Brothers of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux and others called for a less centralized government. In addition to Assistants, some wanted Provincials, resident at the Province Centre. The function of the Visitors was more concerned with pedagogical than pastoral issues and, what is more, visitation of the schools was only one part of their responsibility (AFM, Actes du Chapitre Général de 1852-54).

goal of our reflections; and let us repeat: most of the clarification was furnished by the Rules and the writings passed to us by Father Champagnat.

Our task, therefore, was confined to collecting, arranging, explaining and completing these different teachings; it consisted, above all, in identifying and accepting for ourselves and for all our Brothers, the precious heritage of our Father; after all, our most important and most sacred duty is to pass on that heritage precisely as we have received it; in this way, you in turn can bequeath it to those who come after you.

Before disbanding, the Chapter agreed to the Superior General's request to elect a third Assistant. This was Brother Pascal. In the course of the Chapter, Reverend Father Colin, who had come to the Hermitage to encourage the Chapter participants and help them with his advice, took the opportunity of letting them know that it was impossible to unite the two branches of the Society of Mary, under the same Superior. He expressed his satisfaction at the good spirit which had prevailed in the Chapter, and went on to say 31:

31 Most of the extract is a textual reproduction of the original It is interesting, however, to note certain omissions: admiration for the Hermitage

"My dear Brothers, I must tell you that I was gripped with anxiety, as I saw the deteriorating state of Father Champagnat's health; I was not at all clear on what would become of your Congregation; but God, in his goodness, saw to its continuance, provided for everything and inspired your pious Founder to have a successor named in his lifetime. Although he did accede to my urgent prayers and have a successor appointed, you are aware that he constituted me the depositary of his authority and of his last will. This would have allowed me to intervene in your affairs, but I understood that the only outcome would be to confuse your government, and that I ought therefore to leave everything in the hands of your Superior General and his Assistants. .

Indeed you have good reason to be pleased with their administration, for they have governed the Institute with wisdom. All this has had the effect of convincing me more and more that God's will is for you to govern yourselves. In the early stages, since you were like newly-born children, you needed to be guided by the Fathers and surrounded by their many kinds of care; now that you have become adult, you can manage by yourselves; in a word: you must be emancipated. Be assured, my dear children, that the Fathers cannot now, with prudence, involve themselves in your administration; they are not familiar with your customs; they could only hinder your government. After a lot of prayer and reflection, I must tell you that it seems impossible to me to have the Brothers and the Priests depend on the same Superior. God's will became patently clear to me, while I was visiting Rome. When I presented the Cardinal Protector of our Congregation with the document I had written on uniting the two branches under a single head, he repeated several times that it could not be done. In this connection, he quoted me the scriptural text: 'Thou shalt not yoke the ass with the ox.' ³² So, my dear children, God's will is for you to have your own Superior, chosen from amongst yourselves and governing you in all matters. However, don't think that I am severing all relations with you and having nothing to do with your affairs; on the contrary, I shall never miss an opportunity of being of service to you, if I am able. My intention is that the Brothers

site; the Society of Mary, as modelling itself not on previous Congregations but on the primitive Church and on Nazareth, the characteristics of the Society, as humility, simplicity and modesty; its very insignificant beginnings, prelude to a world expansion which that Chapter must prepare for, since a slight carelessness might give rise to a torrent of devastation (AFM, Actes du Chapitre de 1852, pp. 122-125).

³² Deut. 22,10.

and Priests remain always united and I plan to include an article in our Rule to perpetuate that union which is a fruit of our common origin."

This communication 33 of Father Colin caused no surprise, for all the Brothers had known for a long while that Rome had refused to authorize the union of the Brothers and Fathers under a single leader.

The new edition of the Rules was welcomed by the Brothers with great pleasure; they experienced a fresh surge of courage and confidence; their attachment to their vocation and to the Institute received a great fillip from seeing the Rules and Constitutions finally approved, and the form of life of the Institute and its future, henceforth apparently assured.

Following on the authorization by the Government and the holding of the General Chapter, the Institute prospered in a remarkable manner. When Father Champagnat died, there were only forty-five 34 houses; to-day there are more than three hundred 35. Those three hundred houses accommodate more than fifteen hundred Brothers, who are engaged in giving Christian education and religious instruction to fifty thousand children.



33 Fr Colin had been saying for 10 years, that such was the Holy See's point of view. However, friendly relations would be maintained but no bond of dependence (Cf. OM 1, pp. 13 and 14). In 1854, Brother Francis assumed the title of Reverend Brother Superior General. In 1863 the General Chapter, at the request of the Holy See, was presided over by Fr Favre, Superior General of the Marist Fathers (Cf. AFM, Actes du Chapitre de 1862-1863).

34 48 schools in addition to the Hermitage and Oceania (AA, p. 316).

35 In 1856.

PART TWO

CHAPTER ONE

Description and character of Father Champagnat. His sentiments concerning sadness and holy joy. His efforts to shape the character of his Brothers

Father Champagnat I was tall in stature, with an upright and dignified carriage; his forehead was broad and his facial features strongly marked; his complexion had a brownish tint; a grave countenance reflected a reserve and earnestness which inspired respect and often even, on first acquaintance, timorousness and a certain apprehension. ² Such a reaction was short-lived, however, giving way to confidence and affection after one listened to him for a few minutes; for beneath that slightly harsh and somewhat stern exterior, he concealed the happiest of characters. He was endowed with an upright mind and a deep, sure judgment, his heart was kind and sympathetic, animated with noble and lofty sentiments.

Marcellin's disposition was bright, open, Frank, resolute, courageous, enthusiastic, constant and equable. Those precious gifts and those fine qualities, perfected by grace and enhanced by deep humility and all-embracing charity, made him extremely lovable to his Brothers and to all who came in contact with him.

¹ The passport dated 22nd August 1836 shows: height 1.79m.; hair brown; forehead without hat; eyes grey; mouth average; face longish; complexion pale. (Cf. AFM 141.15).

² Brother Sylvester notes the impression made on him by "the lofty stature, full of majesty; his kind but reserved manner; his countenance which commanded respect; his hollow cheeks, his slightly projecting lips verging on a smile; his piercing and searching eye; his strong and resonant voice; his speech pronounced clearly and free from curtness and verbosity..." (MEM, p. 84).

God, who destined him to form teachers of youth, gave him the character most suited to teaching; this was in order that his Brothers might, in this matter as in all others, copy his example and use him as a model of the virtues and good qualities indispensable for a teacher who is to do good among the children.

Father Champagnat owed much of the success in his ministry and in the foundation of his Institute, to his bright, open, friendly and considerate character with its ability to resolve situations of strife. An unassuming affability, a straight-forwardness and impression of kindness radiated from his face, gaining all hearts and disposing minds to accept without difficulty and even with pleasure, his opinions, his instructions and his reproofs. The inhabitants of La Valla remarked of him that one couldn't help following his advice and his wishes, because he was so kind and went about things so well. His Brothers expressed the same sentiments. One of them exclaimed on a certain occasion, as he left the Founder's room: "If anyone else had given me such a reprimand, I should never have put up with it, but even while he drove home the truth about me, his correction was so effective, that I became in no way angry with him; in fact, I love him more than before." When someone asked him ³ what the Father had said, he replied: "I shall take good care not to tell you that, for it would add up to a confession; I can tell you that his words certainly stung me and that the way he handled the matter softened any bitterness from the correction and won my heart."

The most admirable feature of Father Champagnat's character was his equanimity. Contradictions, trials, exertions, the responsibilities of administering a numerous community, (often in great need), frailty, sickness, nothing could ruffle his peace of soul or the calm of his countenance; he never complained, never showed any sign of sadness or discouragement. Instead, he carefully concealed his troubles and weariness, constantly bled to ring the courage of his Brothers. "My friends", he would often tell them, "do not forget that it is for God we are working and that the rewards he prepares for us are eternal. If we had a lively faith in those truths, how could we ever yield to sadness. Would we dare complain when called on to make a sacrifice or to endure some difficulty in our work? People in this world work harder than we do and sometimes sing all day; they do so because of the few coins they earn, and we who are earning paradise, can

³ It is Br Sylvester, author of "Mémoires" (MEM, p. 90).

we be sad and discouraged? May God preserve us from being so faint-hearted and lacking in virtue!"

Once, he and a Brother were walking to a destination. Since the latter looked sad and even complained a few times, Father Champagnat, who knew he was a melancholic type, kept trying to encourage him and cheer him up. "Isn't it true, Brother", he suggested, "that it is a very long way?" "Yes, it is", he retorted, "and I can't get to the end of it soon enough!" "The end will come", Marcellin countered, "and you will be sorry that you haven't borne your weariness in patience." "I could do that", argued the complainant, "if only I had some water to drink; my thirst is killing me."

"If it weren't thirst", insisted the priest "it would be something else. In this world, suffering dogs us everywhere but the one who puts up with it and doesn't fear it, suffers least. Can't you see that you double your woes and forfeit their merit in giving way to your bad mood? Let us sing a hymn to the Blessed Virgin; that will help us endure the thirst and the other difficulties of the journey."

Saying this, the good Father intoned the hymn, *Memento salutis auctor*, which he sang right through on his own; he repeated three times the second verse, *Maria, Mater gratiae*. Some time afterwards, they came to a private house which he entered and asked for some refreshment for the Brother; as for himself, though he was very tired and had a piercing pain in the side, he would take nothing, not even a drop of water.

Resuming the journey, he said to his companion: "Now that you are thoroughly refreshed and are no longer thirsty, aren't you sorry that you didn't resign yourself to that slight discomfort? Well, be more courageous in future and keep your bad humour in check; it not only weakens and destroys the fine sentiments of the soul but aggravates the difficulties of life, making them unbearable. More than anyone else, you need to guard against sadness; for your natural bent and your character incline you towards it."

In Father Champagnat's opinion, people prone to sadness and melancholy are suited neither to religious life nor to teaching. Hence there was no defect that he battled more than that one. "Sadness 4", he explained in an instruction, "causes four great evils:

4 Text based on PPC, Part 3, Tract 4, Ch. 1, "The great evils of sadness."

1. It kills piety, because it darkens the understanding and dries up the good sentiments of the heart; because it destroys confidence in God and keeps the soul in a continual state of anxiety and terror. For a soul which allows itself to be dominated by damaging sadness, nothing is so difficult as prayer: this constitutes a veritable martyrdom or rather a kind of indescribable hell.

2. It gives rise to temptations and helps them survive. There are two kinds of men with whom the devil does as he likes: the lazy and those who give way to sadness and discouragement. Don't ask me which temptations they experience, for they have them all. Religious of a sly and melancholy disposition who love to be alone and out of sight, nearly always have their minds filled with perverse thoughts. Like loves like; and the devil, who is a spirit of darkness, loves people of a sullen and gloomy character. That enemy of salvation, who is himself eminently unhappy, delights in the company of those who are sad, and as soon as he sees them yield to this dangerous feeling, he uses all sorts of temptation to fill their minds and attack them. Hence, a great saint has said that of all the weapons of the devil, grim sadness is the most to be feared. All those whom the devil causes to fall into sin, he seduces by sadness and discouragement, and if these weapons are denied him, he is powerless to do harm.

3. It puts a rift between minds and destroys fraternal charity. Sadness gives rise to anger, impatience, spitefulness and trouble; it makes a man suspicious, touchy, unmanageable; it troubles the mind, disturbs the reason and makes its victim intolerable to all. So, a single Brother subject to this vice, is enough to disturb the union of a house and to sow discord amongst all those, whose unhappy lot it is to live with him.

4. It scandalizes one's neighbour because it gives the impression that one is unhappy in the service of God and that the practice of virtue brings only bitterness. In seeing a Religious under the influence of sadness, people of the world say: 'See how they suffer; you can see from his face that he doesn't love his state and that he stays in it only by force and because he doesn't know what else to do.'

"One day it came to Father Champagnat's notice that a young Brother was suffering from sadness and hadn't spoken to anyone for some time. Having sent for him, he began to question him: "Isn't it true that you don't like your vocation?" "Excuse me, Father, I have always loved my vocation." "Then it must be your Brothers that you do not like?"

"I have nothing against the Brothers and no reason to complain about any of them."

"Is it, then, your employment which is not to your liking?"

"My employment doesn't seem difficult to me and I find it rewarding enough."

"So it is the house or the locality that you find displeasing?"

"No, Father, there is nothing which displeases me." "Why is it, then, that you are sad and have nothing to say?"

"I don't know what it is that bothers me and I am sad in spite of myself."

"That is not quite exact; it is true that you are naturally inclined to sadness, but this defect is greatly aggravated because you neglect to struggle against it. In giving in to sadness, you create the impression that nothing pleases you and that everything in religious life is a burden to you; so true is this, that amongst the people you live with, some have assured me that you are not attached to your vocation and have no love for your Brothers; others say that you are unhappy with the house or your employment. Hence, in displaying this sad demeanour, you provoke all sorts of damaging speculation in your regard. I am therefore forced to conclude that you are not suited to religious life, if you don't remedy this defect, for you would be a bad example for Brothers and children and a source of unhappiness to those who live with you."

Once, the life of St Francis of Assisi was being read in the dining-room. Father Champagnat used the occasion to give the Brothers an intense instruction on holy joy of soul. "Brothers", he commented, "the great saint whose life we are reading, gives us rare examples of virtues; but there is one deserving our special attention, namely the care he took to avoid sadness and maintain holy joy. He gives the following reasons:

1. The devils are powerless against those who keep themselves in peace, confidence and holy joy. 5

2. This holy joy in the soul is a torment to the spirits of darkness: they envy a Religious his vocation, the benefits he receives from God and the rewards in store for him.

3. Sadness is for devils; Religious should rejoice, since they are children of God.

St Francis used to add that joy and gladness ought to be the unvarying dispositions of Religious. I wish these dispositions for

5 Text based on PPC, Part 3, Tract 4, Ch. 6, "The joy of a good conscience."

you all and you should fear nothing so much as sadness and bad humour; apart from sin, there is nothing worse, nothing more dangerous."

To keep alive amongst the Brothers this joy of soul and this attractive cheerfulness befitting a Religious, (qualities which he strove to inculcate), Father Champagnat allowed them to participate in games during recreation⁶ and he preferred to see them playing innocently rather than conversing or strolling. "For young Brothers", he contended, "a game during recreation is best." He took part himself sometimes in games with the Brothers. However, in games, as elsewhere, he was always dignified, reserved and temperate, though cheerful and affable.

Some Brothers in one of the houses complained bitterly about the frivolity of a young Brother, alleging that his only thought was to enjoy himself and that his childish behaviour was not conducive to religious gravity and decorum but upset the good order of the community. "This Brother", he questioned, "does he keep busy? Is he tidy? Does he cook well?" "I have no complaints about his cooking", was the Brother Director's reply.

"And what about the exercises of piety?"

"He is not too bad at those, much the same as the rest of the community; my only criticism is his excessive attachment to games, his frivolity and his rowdiness. A single example, amongst many possible ones, will show how serious these defects are in him. The other day, having played around for a long while with the wheelbarrow in the yard, he wheeled it into his kitchen and through the school before taking it upstairs to the study-room."

The good Father, who knew this young Brother thoroughly and esteemed him highly for his frankness and docility, defended him in these terms: «I am sorry that it was only to the study-room that he took the barrow; if he had taken it to the garret, I should have given him a picture. I prefer to see him enjoy himself in that way than mope about bored. I can't see what harm his barrow escapade caused. You used to enjoy yourselves too, when you were young. I believe that the fault is entirely on your side. Instead of joining the young Brother in some harmless game or some diverting activities to help him pass the time, you leave him to himself; you are busy at study or talk over serious questions; are

⁶ After lunch, if there are no children to supervise, the Brothers take their recreation together in the garden; they may work at gardening; the same applies at the end of the afternoon class. (Rules of 1837, Ch. 2, art. 27, p. 23).

you surprised that he plays with the barrow? Please don't make a crime of it, still less abandon him to himself at the risk of souring his attitude to his work and his vocation. 7"

The pious Founder considered cheerfulness and holy joy of soul a mark of vocation. "One who is cheerful and contented", he claimed, "demonstrates simply by his disposition that he loves his holy state and that he is happy in it, finding no difficulty too great.¹¹ The moment he saw young Brothers giving way to boredom or dejection, he left no stone unturned to help them conquer that temptation; he had a special gift for dispelling it and bringing relief to those who were under its sway. Many Brothers found by experience that a few minutes' talk with him, was all that was needed to dissipate all thoughts of sadness and discouragement; some even maintained that the very sight of him was enough to free them from this troublesome temptation.

A postulant, 8 with very promising qualities, having stayed two or three days, sought out the Founder and asked to leave, giving as the reason that he was weary of things, and that there didn't seem any way he could adjust. «I have, in fact, noticed", the Father remarked, "that you suffer and are not happy. To be a good Brother one has to be happy and joyful; if you don't succeed in that, I won't keep you; but I don't want you to leave while you are sad; otherwise, you might discourage the young postulants of your region who are preparing to join us. In a few days, if your trouble has passed, I shall allow you to return to your parents, should you wish to do so." After adding a few cheerful words, he sent off the young man, quite pleased.

Two or three days later, the postulant returned to announce: "Father, I am no longer troubled so much; I am almost at peace and I think I can leave now."

"My dear friend", answered the Father, "why should you go home, if you are satisfied? You can see now that the sadness you felt was only a temptation; instead of returning to the world where it is so difficult to be saved, you ought to begin your novitiate to-day in good earnest. If you follow my advice, I promise that you will become a good Brother and save your soul."

«I was thinking along those lines too", the young man admitted, "but two things still make me hesitate: the first, is that I fear a return of my troubles when I am not with you; the second,

7 The Brother is Br Sylvester (AA, pp. 109-111).

8 It is Br Firmin, who died at the age of 73, (CSG XIII, p. 325; Notices nécrologiques, vol. 2, p. 72).

is the expense involved, which will be a waste if I fail to persevere."

"Set your mind at rest", assured the Father. «I promise to take care of you and not to give you an appointment, until you are perfectly happy and established in your vocation. As to the expense, you won't have any; and, if you can't settle down and are obliged to withdraw, I won't ask you to pay anything." Then, opening his desk, he took the young man's purse containing two hundred francs and placing it apart in a small drawer, said with a laugh: "There is your money; I have not touched it; no one will touch it, and, if you have to leave, I shall return it to you just as you gave it to me."

The postulant, delighted with such kindly treatment, withdrew in a happy frame of mind. Several days later, he came back to see the Father and with beaming countenance informed him: "You can do what you like with my money, for the trouble has completely passed. At this point, I have only one fear, that of not persevering and of becoming unworthy of the great grace God has given me in calling me to this holy vocation."

Cheerfulness, holy joy and decorum are likewise necessary, if the Brothers are to succeed with the children, and an unattractive character is one of the greatest obstacles to doing good. In fact, to win over the children, and to secure their attention, we must please them; now, it is chiefly by exterior good points such as a courteous and attractive manner, as well as by a character that is cheerful and open, kind and obliging, equable and temperate, that one captures their respect and attention and gains their confidence.

"Kindness of character", declares St Ambrose, 9 "is something that everyone finds appealing; and if it is accompanied by pleasantness of manner, by reasonableness in commands, by affability and courtesy in speech and by prudent reserve in conduct, no one can gauge the extent of its influence on the heart." Accordingly, nothing is so highly recommended to us by the saints as those exterior qualities, essential to working effectively for the salvation of our neighbour. "The servant of God", says St Augustine, "should be reserved, balanced, prudent, affable, honourable and blameless, so that people who see him, exclaim in admiration: 'There is no doubt that anyone with so excellent and perfect a character, is a man of God.'" St Gregory of Nyssa, in describing the outstanding virtue of St Meletius, Patriarch of

9 St Ambrose, *De officiis ministrorum*, 2.7, PL 16.118C.

Antioch, gives special praise to a certain way he had of being cheerful, approachable, friendly and dignified, enabling him to win all hearts.

St Francis Xavier 10 sent one of his confrères to catechize the infidels, and wrote to him: "Make sure your manner is pleasant, bright and serene, being careful to avoid those long faces which frighten and drive off everybody; as it is, they are already easily turned away from what is worthwhile, unless it is made attractive and requires no effort."

The same saint instructed all the Religious of the Company of Jesus at Cochin: "Be on guard against making your conversation too serious, that is, harsh or pretentious, giving the impression that your aim is to be feared and honoured; instead, cultivate frankness and ease of manner by a face which radiates holy joy and by words which reflect friendliness." St Vincent de Paul II gave the same advice to members of his Congregation, saying:

"There are people who by their smiling and unassertive manner, please and win over all who see them; others by contrast, display a sad face and a tense disposition, a lack of feeling and an anxiety which are frightening and upsetting." "A catechist", continued that great saint, "should work at acquiring engaging and courteous ways which sway hearts; if he does not, he will produce no fruit and will be like a piece of dry land, yielding nothing but thistles."

Thoroughly convinced of this truth, Father Champagnat was moved to battle relentlessly against defects of character; for he felt that if he succeeded in training his Brothers on this important point, he would remove the greatest obstacle to their success and to the good that they were called to accomplish amongst the children. "My dear friend", he explained to an old Brother who was surprised at the persistence with which he corrected certain seemingly slight exterior faults, "if you were called to sanctify yourself as a Trappist within a monastery, I should take less notice of your defects of character, because I admit that they don't damage your perfection much and don't stop you from being a good Religious. They can, however, repel the children, make your presence distasteful to them and so, impede the good that you are capable of doing. If our vocation requires us to work for the sanctification of our neighbour, it is not enough to please God

10 St Francis Xavier, Instructions by Father Barzes, who must have set out for Ormuz, Goa, in April, 1549. BAC, 101, 323.

11 L. Abelly, La vie du Vénérable Serviteur de Dieu, Vincent-de-Paul, BK 3, Ch. 12, p. 194. Florentin Lambert, Paris, 1664.

by purity of conscience; we need, as well, to attract men by a likable character and by gracious speech combined with a pleasing manner of dealing with the world." This was a frequently-recurring theme in the Founder's instruction. "I don't like Brothers", he declared, "whose presence frightens the children; but I do value those whose cheerful character and gentle, affable manner betoken a contented and virtuous heart. To edify the children, to lead them to God one must be truly pious and solidly virtuous, but that is not enough; in addition, there must be something pleasing and captivating about one's character and manner.

Now the character best endowed for doing good, is that which is at the same time cheerful, open, considerate, friendly and constant; it cannot be such unless the heart is humble, charitable and respectful. Humility and charity are the foundation and principle of all the good qualities which captivate and win the affection and esteem of men. Notice that I have a reason for placing respect for the child, on a level with charity and humility: not only is it a natural derivative from those two virtues; there is no greater need in education both for the master and the pupil, than the mutual respect which they owe each other. There is not one of you who denies this truth in relation to the respect due to the teacher; you all wish and demand that the children respect you and you believe that it would be impossible to educate one who would refuse to do so. Now, it is just as impossible to bring up a child well, if you do not respect him. But why is it necessary to respect him?

My answer is:

- 1) Because you want him to respect you: for here, as elsewhere, you must set the example for what you insist on from the children.
- 2) Because the child resembles you; like you, he is a child of God, a member of Jesus Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit.
- 3) Because he is innocent, and innocence and virtue are things which most deserve our respect and veneration.
- 4) Because you will not gain his esteem, his confidence and his affection, except by the respect you show him and your courteous treatment of him.
- 5) Because your respect for the child will keep him in the path of duty and cause him to avoid most of the faults inseparable from his youth and his levity.
- 6) Because this respect is a safeguard for your virtue, a defence against your own weakness and against the dangers you

may meet in your teaching and in your constant dealings with the children.

7) Because this respect constitutes your strongest check in a moment of irritation and anger and is therefore the most effective means of preventing mistreatment and any punishment or reproof that was unjust or too harsh.

8) Because, without this respect and the wise prudence which should always govern you, the kindness, the consideration, the affability, the gentleness and the goodness which should always characterize your dealings with the children, would be nothing more than a base and guilty adulation, demeaning you and even provoking the scorn of your pupils.

If you now ask me what are the faults most opposed to the respect owing to the child, I shall answer:

1) Rudeness and harshness, giving rise usually to mistreatment.

2) Levity, involving lack of reserve and dignity, with the result that words are used carelessly and numerous statements are made which leave a bad impression on the child.

3) Any familiarity which might lead the child to deviate from the limits of respect which he owes the teacher or to fail in docility and be less faithful to his duties.

4) Particular friendships and natural attachment; the caresses and other signs of affection that result from those friendships. A Brother who is excessively kind, allowing himself base familiarities, debases himself just as much as one who is harsh, brutal and unjust in his treatment of the children. A teacher who is endowed with good judgment, who is interested in his reputation, understands his dignity and, especially, who wants to do good and warn off danger, never puts a hand on children either to caress them or to chastise them.

5) Inconsistency, in the way of treating the children and of teaching. If we change our conduct from one minute to the next, punish everything one day and pardon everything on the morrow, do things now in one way, now in another, then we make it clear, that we don't understand the importance of the work of education; that we are ignorant of the principles which assure its success; and that we carry out in a merely secular way, the most excellent and most noble of ministries.

6) Weakness of will or of character, which glosses over the faults of the child or doesn't dare to correct them. It is no sign of love or respect for the child to permit him to live without discipline, to wallow in his defects and do what he likes. To carry

on this way, especially for a religious teacher, is cruel and extremely harmful to the respect which the child deserves.

7) Finally, lack of dignity is very much opposed to the respect owing to the chi Id; in this case one is careless about many items which harm self-respect; the child therefore forms an unfavourable opinion of his teacher and is inclined to despise him."

To conserve the Brothers in great equanimity, to ward off attacks of bad mood, and to eliminate everything which might wound the mutual respect that should reign between teacher and pupil, Father Champagnat laid down certain wise rules, which forbade: making over-free¹² with the pupils; even playing with them; addressing them in too friendly a fashion; giving them nicknames,¹³ using harsh or offensive terms when speaking to them or correcting the m, and employing corporal punishment. Other rules, equally wise, required the Brothers:

1) To be always poli to with the children and to form them to good manners more by example than by teaching; 14 2) To postpone till the following day, 15 the punishment of serious faults, so as to carry out the correction in a state of calm and so that a spirit of justice, charity and leniency might always accompany it;

3) To raise their hearts to God every time they had to punish the children, to reprimand them or warn them.

The aim of these rules and instructions of the pious Founder, was not simply to see that the Brothers did not act harshly; it was, as well, to give the school a family atmosphere through the sentiments of respect, of love and of mutual confidence which were to animate both teachers and pupils.

12 "They shaH never take a child aside in private, no matter what the reason" (Rules of 1837, Ch. S, art. 22, p. 44). "They shall allow themselves no liberty with the children, such as taking them by the hand, or the like." (Ibid., art. 23, p. 44).

13 "A Brother shall never use the familiar form of address to his confreres, or to the children; he shaH never refer to anyone by a nickname." (Ibid., art. 4, p. 38).

14 Letter to Br Bartholomew, 31st. January, 1830: «I know also that you have many pupils; you will have many copies of your virtues, therefore, for your children model themselves on you; they do not fail to conduct themselves after your example." (LPC 1, doc. 14, p. 53).

15 "Serious faults will be punished only at the beginning of the next session; a start can be made by assigning the culprit a few lines to leam." (Rules of 1837, art. 20, p. 43).

CHAPTER TWO

Father Champagnat's Spirit of Faith.

"Faith", says St Ambrose, "is the foundation I of all the virtues; the more enlightened, lively and strong it is, the more solid and excellent are the virtues which build on it" Father Champagnat was a model of priestly and religious virtues; but all his virtues were rooted in his faith and it was that lively faith which produced, strengthened and developed them. Faith was for him, what it was for the Royal Prophet: a light² which guided all his steps and all his words enlightening all his decisions, all his plans and all his actions.

That lively faith which animated him was the source of the strength and energy which caused his instructions to be so moving and to be listened to with such attention and pleasure. He gave the impression that he actually saw with his eyes, and touched with his hands, the truths of religion, since he was so penetrated with them and spoke of them with such conviction. In conversation and in interviews with Brothers, he often gave voice to those exclamations or to those rejoinders which were inspired by the liveliness of his faith and which went right to the heart, leaving indelible impressions. Here are a few examples:

"What!" said he to a Brother who felt discouraged by some difficulties, "you are not afraid to offer insult to God by losing heart so easily. How can you fear failure when the good God is on your side and you are doing his work?" In his desire to inspire another with sentiments of generosity, after hearing his confession, he pressed him to his chest and coaxed him: "Ah! Brother, we must be saved, but saved for God, and so we must put aside all those fears and anxieties and think only of loving God." To a Brother who was complaining about the difficulties of the religious life he replied: "If you had more faith, you would not be so fainthearted in the service of God and you would not find the

¹ "For faith is the solid foundation of all the virtues." (Ambrose, Psalms, 40, PL 14, 1121 A).

² Ps 36, 10.

difficulties of your state so great. There are troubles everywhere; an men have their cross, but one who carries his for God and meditates on the truths of faith, always finds it light." "My friend", he commented, to a young Brother who found the practices of the religious life a burden, "what gives you the greatest trouble to-day, will one day be your greatest consolation." Before a year had passed, the one to whom he had spoken those words verified their truth from happy experience. "Oh, how pleased I am now", he exclaimed on his death-bed, "to have made a few sacrifices to save my vocation, and to have done myself violence in order to observe my mIe: in this I now find the greatest hope of my salvation."

It was his spirit of faith which gave rise, in our Founder, to that zeal for the glory of God and for the sanctification of souls which consumed him, to that great love which he had for children, and to that holy desire which urged him to consecrate the last years of his life to the conversion of non-christians. 3 "Oh, if only

3 OM 2, doc. 757, p. 808, note.

we knew", he reiterated to his Brothers, "the value of a soul; if we knew, how much Jesus loves children and with what ardour he desires their salvation, we should not find class burdensome and complain about the labours of our state; we should, instead, be ready to sacrifice our lives to procure the benefit of a christian education for those tender children." How often have Brothers accompanying him on his journeys heard him exclaim at the sight of a child: "There is a child, created in God's image, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and destined to eternal happiness; yet it maywell be that such sublime truths are unknown to the child and no one takes the trouble to dispel that ignorance, by teaching./I The good Father would then, if possible, approach the child, speak to him kindly and test him on the catechism.

Father Champagnat's spirit of faith, made him see God always present, and kept him in continual fervour. After the most distracting occupations, he could be seen and heard praying with an emotion and a fervour that would warm the most tepid, and inspire love of prayer in the most indifferent. Accordingly, he could not bear to see anyone praying carelessly or in an unbecoming posture, or making the sign of the cross badly. Many a time he vigorously reproached Brothers whom he had surprised making this sign hurriedly or without attention. "Is that the way/I, he would ask them, "that you make a sign which recalls the most moving and most ineffable of our mysteries? I can't understand how Religious can be so forgetful. What an example you will give to your students and the faithful! What will they think when they see your irreverent performance of an act which should inspire piety and fervour? How will you teach children to make this sacred sign when you are so careless about it, yourself?"

A priest remarked, after visiting the Hermitage: "Nothing impressed me so much or gave me so much edification as Father Champagnat's piety; hearing him pray, you become convinced that he is a saint; it would be impossible to live with him and not be pious. I was present at only one exercise of piety with him, (it was evening prayer), and he inspired me with feelings of devotion that I hope will remain with me for a long while.⁴" That same spirit of faith developed in him a deep respect for pious objects and for everything consecrated to God. If he found

4 "When he prayed out loud..., he did not read the prayer but recited it with ardour, vigour and understanding; besides, you felt that the feelings of his heart came through in his words and you were stirred to piety and devotion in spite of yourself." (MEM, p. 97).

pages of a religious book on the ground, he was careful to pick them up. "See to it", he advised the Brothers, "that your pupils don't drop pages from their books; if any do come loose, burn them, for often the holy name of God and his own word, are written on them. To leave them lying about on the desks or to trample them underfoot, would be to desecrate that adorable name and that divine word. Make sure that you take good care of all the religious objects which are in your houses, such as the crucifix, the images of the saints and the holy water font. They should be suitably placed and should be kept thoroughly clean. Teach your pupils to see to this also in their homes."

This respect was extended to the religious costume of the Brothers, and he was frequently seen to gather and retrieve a piece of cord, an old hat, or any other part of the Brothers' clothing in order to dispose of them suitably. "Your clothes", he reminded them, "are blessed and they are the livery of Mary, so you must respect them and take the greatest care of them. 5 The Brother who has little regard for his soutane, does not value his vocation or appreciate the holiness of his state. It disturbs me greatly every time I see items of your costume lying around. I advise you therefore to put it away carefully. Even the fact that an item is no longer used does not justify leaving it about: everything (no matter how little it costs) which recalls our holy state, should be treated with respect." He asked for the cross 6 and soutane to be kissed before they were put on of a morning. It would be impossible to tell the number of times he made similar recommendations to the Brothers, so imbued was he with the wish to inspire respect for holy objects, and esteem for religious vocation, together with everything related to it.

When we come to his respect for churches, the sacraments and Holy Mass, no words can do it justice. His lively faith in the real presence kept him, as it were, prostrate and overwhelmed before the Blessed Sacrament; it was impossible to assist at his Mass without being stirred to devotion and penetrated with a profound respect for the sacred mysteries. In giving Holy Communion, he pronounced the words: Behold the Lamb of God, in a voice so full of feeling that you would have thought he saw Our Lord and that the divine Saviour was not a hidden God for him. Many people were deeply moved and felt a surge of devotion

5 LPC 1, doc. 107, P.S. p. 231.

6 In the Rules of 1837, on page 107, the prayers to be said while putting on the soutane, the cord and the cross, are given.

when they heard him pronounce so fervently and respectfully, those divine words.

During a voyage that he made in Savoy, 7 he asked to be allowed to say Mass in a country church. The altarcloth and corporal given him were so soiled that he was sickened. "Look", he lamented to a companion, "how they treat Our Lord, who remains on our altars from love of us. They have clean linen for themselves and for their tables, but they leave the adorable body of the Son of God surrounded with disgusting filth. Their houses are tidy and decorated but the church, dwelling-place of the Lord himself, is filled with cobwebs and dust."

The profound respect that he had for Jesus Christ, restrained him from saying a single word in the church, without necessity; besides, he objected to people speaking readily in the sacristy. One day a Brother inadvertently went in there without taking off his hat. "What, Brother", he protested, "don't you take your hat off when you come in here? Surely you know that the sacristy 8 is part of the church and that one's presence there requires respect and reserve?" Since the Brother sought to excuse himself, the Founder went on: "Come now, no excuses! If you had a more lively faith in the presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar, you would not be guilty of such a fault." The Brother who relates the incident, adds: "It is now more than twenty-five years since that reprimand from the good Father, and the impression it made on me is quite undimmed."

At the beginning of the Institute, while the Brothers were still at La Valla and the community had only a small oratory for its exercises of piety, he used often say to the Brothers: "When shall we experience the happiness of having a chapel 9 and possessing Our Lord. I really hope that such a favour will be granted us; but shall we be capable of acknowledging it by our appreciation in an adequate way? For it is a signal grace to enjoy the presence of him who is the beatitude of the angels and saints. That divine presence is as it were hidden and veiled for us in the Blessed

7 Br Avit affirms in his Annals: "It is through inadvertence that Br JohnBaptist places this scene in Savoy." (AA, P. 108). It concerns a journey to la Côte-Saint-André, in which Fr Champagnat accompanied Br Louis-Mary. The event takes place in the parish of Anjou (Isère), 18 kilometres from Chavanay.

8 At this period, the sacristy adjoined the chapel.

9 Br Francis indicates that he made his Retreat for 1820 in the little first storey chapel at La Valla. By then, the desire of Fr Champagnat had become a reality: there was a chapel in the house. (AFM, Cahier No.1, p. 121).

Sacrament. However, it is no less worthy of our respect and adoration." He valued in a special way the happiness of being born in the bosom of the Catholic Church and he never tired of thanking God for the fact He celebrated his baptism anniversary as a feastday all his life and did so with intense feelings of gratitude and joy. 10 He commemorated in the same way, his ordination day.

"My just man lives by faith 11", says the Scripture. That life of faith, was intense in Father Champ agnat. For proof, one has only to read the chapter in the Rule on the spirit of faith; it is the authentic expression of his views, of his teaching, and of the principles which inspired his conduct. By that spirit of faith, which he had in abundance, he saw only God and his holy will in all that happened. 12 "It is God", he insisted, "who directs and controls all events, turning them to the good of his elect. The wicked may try their best, they can do only what God permits them to do, hence, it is not they whom we ought to fear but God alone. We have even more to fear from ourselves than from all men or from hell itself, for we ourselves are our greatest enemies and we do ourselves more harm than the wicked and the whole assembly of devils could do us."

Enlightened by this spirit of faith, he was fully aware of his own weakness, of the nothingness of creatures and the inadequacy of merely human means. So, he relied entirely on God for the success of his enterprises. Of course, he did make use of human means, knowing that these, too, enter the designs of Providence; but he counted on God alone for the result. 13 "We are really wasting our time", he would sometimes say, "if we expect the success of our works from our own efforts, from our talents, from our industry or from men: only God can give us that success; for our part, we are fit only to spoil matters." At holiday time, when he had, after much reflection and in consultation with his Council, fixed the appointments, determining

10 Marcellin, born on May 20, was baptized on May 21, which was Ascension day. He liked to renew his resolutions on the anniversary of his baptism. This, he celebrated each year on the feast of the Ascension, not on May 21. (OME, doc. 1, p. 29, note). On the 3rd May, 1815, Marcellin writes in a note-book: "Today, vigil of the Ascension, vigil of my baptism. I promise once more to fulfil all the resolutions I have made..." (OME, doc. 11 [5], p. 50).

11 Rom 1, 17; Gal 3, 11; Heb 2, 4.

12 LPC 1, doc. 16, p. 57.

13 «I take every possible step to conclude the matter (legal recognition) happily, for I know that Providence expects us to avail ourselves of men's help in such circumstances." (LPC 1, doc. 183, p. 373).

the community and function of each Brother, he would declare: "We have carefully assessed the situation. and taken every precaution so that each Brother may have what suits him best; we believe that we have hit on the right solutions and arranged things well; alas, we must take care not to rely on our own prudence; if God does not come to our aid and bless these arrangements, our work will be futile, and the combinations which we consider the surest, will prove the least successful. Let us, therefore, call on Our Lord to bless our work, for: t Unless the Lord build the house, in vain do the builders labour.' "He would then take the list of appointments, put it on the altar during Mass and, for several days, offer fervent prayers with the whole community to obtain God's protection for the arrangements he had made.

In his instructions aswell as in his advice to individual Brothers, his constant refrain was: "It is through the grace of God and the protection of Mary, through piety and virtue, that you will succeed and do good; take care not to rely on yourself or on the favour and support of men. Of course you should conduct affairs in a way that wins the confidence of the authorities and interests them in your school; but you should expect the prosperity of your house, not from your talents, not from men, but from God."

A Brother Director, giving a report on his establishment assured him that the Brothers enjoyed the affection and esteem of all the influential people in the district and could count on their support. A few days later, the Founder learned for certain, that those same people, whom the Brother believed devoted to the establishment, and on whom he relied for the resources necessary to maintain the Brothers, were plotting the ruin of the school and working secretly for the removal of the Brothers. The good Father, having assembled the Brothers Director that day to discuss administrative matters, took the opportunity to give themall a solid lesson on the worthlessness of human means for doing good. Directing a question to the Brother Director involved, he said: "Brother, didn't you tell me that the authorities and all the influential people of your district were 100 king after your school, that they were all thoroughly devoted to you and that there was no cause to fear for the future of your house?"

"Yes, Father", came the answer, and he launched forthwith into a repetition of the eulogy he had already given on the authorities, not forgetting to mention the fine promises he had received.

"Well, Brothers", the Father continued, "I repeat the advice

which I have given you so many times, namely, to be irreproachable in your conduct towards everybody, especially towards the authorities and others whose cooperation you require to do good, but to count only on God for the success of your schools and your undertakings. The Brother whom you have just heard, put far too much reliance on the people of his parish; for, this very morning I learned that they are doing everything possible to get rid of the Brothers and to close their school. Every time that we place our confidence in men, God withdraws his protection; and then you can be sure that we shall verify the words of the prophet: "Unless the Lord build the house, in vain do the builders labour. 14' Never forget, then, that it is by the help of God alone and not by human means, that we are able to do good."

Taking the Brother aside after the meeting, he explained to him: "Perhaps you were mortified by what I have done; but I thought it was a good lesson for everybody. Besides, I am convinced that God allowed all this, to punish you for your excessive confidence in men. During the year, you have visited them too often in order to win their favour; a single visit to the Blessed Sacrament would have been infinitely more profitable to you. Do not forget that to rely on men, is to lean on a reed, which collapses and lets us fall."

Once, Father Champagnat, seeing the belongings of a Brother who had just arrived from a journey, noticed on a roll of paper the words: Grand means of success. Curious as to what these means were, he untied the roll only to find nothing but flourishes, figures of birds and drawings of every kind. Grieved at seeing the importance given to such trifles, he sent for the Brother, who was responsible for teaching the young Brother. Pointing to all those papers, he remonstrated: "Just look at the grand means of success of the young Brothers whom you are forming; that is what they rely on for their success; little wonder after that, if they do so little good amongst the children. What is the value of all your instruction, if this is the best use they can make of it? In future, put less emphasis on science and more on piety; but, especially, keep on telling your Brothers that it is through virtue and through God's help that we do good and achieve the prosperity of the schools; this is not done by placing confidence in such trifles." Next, sending for the Brother who had the papers, he first reproved him, then took the roll and threw it into the fire before

14 Ps 126, 1.

his eyes, with the remark: "Behold your grand means of success! See how they go up in smoke for smoke is indeed all they are!"

"Faith is a generous virtue", says St Thomas, and, according to St Augustine: "It is bold and valiant." St Leo adds that faith is the strength of great souls. ¹⁵ This virtue had all these features in our pious Founder. It furnished him with that generosity, which would never allow him to recoil before any sacrifice; which moved him to merge his existence with that of the Brothers, to share their privations and to spend strength, health and life for the success of their work. Faith it was which made him daring and courageous causing him to undertake what seemed, to human prudence, qui to beyond the possibilities of success; faith gave him that strength and that grandeur of soul, which enabled him to surmount all difficulties and obstacles and to be undaunted by the events and mishaps of life.

"Father Champagnat", according to a pious priest, who had been his fellow-student in the seminary, "was not a genius, not a scholar, but a man of very ordinary talents; he was, however, a man of faith. From the time that he began his studies, this virtue could be seen to shine in him with all its brilliance and to be the mainspring of all his actions. It was this rock-like faith, which brought him success in everything. God had said to him: 'You will do that', and he did it, with total reliance on him."

May the Little Brothers of Mary never forget by what means their Father accomplished good, and may they resist any temptation to resort to other means. If all the expected success does not always greet their efforts, they should ask themselves whether the true cause may not be forgetfulness of their Founder's spirit of faith and the use of certain means that were foreign to him. The remark is often heard: "How is it possible that so many instructions and so much care lavished on the children, produce such little result? How can it be that with so many means of perfection, there is so little solid virtue amongst the Brothers? St Augustine ¹⁶ gives us the answer in two words: "Fides dormit,

¹⁵ "Faith is a generous virtue. That is the praise St Thomas confers on it. It is bold and strong, says St Augustine; it is, says St Leo, (Sermon for the Ascension), the strength of great souls." (Etienne de Saint-Francis Xavier, Exhortations Monastiques, t. 3, 314, Aubanel. Avignon, 1836).

¹⁶ St Augustine speaks of Jesus, asleep in the boat; "I wish... to exhort you not to let faith sleep in your hearts. You ought not to believe... that sleep closed the eyes of the All-Powerful, in spite of himself, during that ride. If that is the way you believe, Jesus Christ is asleep in you; but if Jesus Christ

it is because faith sleeps." The instructions given to the children and the whole range of means drawn on for our own perfection are not enlivened by the spirit of faith. In winter, when the sap sleeps, the plants do not grow and they produce nothing; similarly, when faith sleeps, the Religious accomplishes no good, either for himself or for others and this is true, no matter what efforts he makes.

is awake in you, your Faith is awake with him." (Evangiles, t. 16, sermon 63, Luis Vives, Paris, 1871).

CHAPTER THREE

His trust in God.

We have already seen in our account of his life, that Father Champagnat succeeded in everything he undertook; and the extraordinary thing is that he did so without any human aid. What was the chief cause of this success? None other than his spirit of faith and his immense confidence in God. "When we have God on our side", he often assured the Brothers, "when we count on him alone, nothing is impossible. This is a truth of faith that we are not permitted to doubt; for the Apostle declares: 'If God be for us, who is against us?' 1 and, elsewhere: 'I can do all things in him who strengthens me.' 2" The life of our Founder furnishes perfect confirmation of that truth. He had such little talent that his parents, believing him incapable of reaching the priestly state, did everything possible to dissuade him from trying to do so. When he had been only a week at the Minor Seminary of Verrières, a definitive decision was taken to send him home, for examination had shown that he must be judged quite incapable of succeeding in his studies and of gaining the knowledge necessary to a priest. The pious young man knew better than anyone else how difficult it was for him to learn, but putting all his confidence in God, he held on and refused to lose courage.

"Since it is God's will", he told his parents, "that I embrace this vocation, he will give me the intelligence and everything else necessary to do my studies. I am going to make a start, and expect his help. This he cannot refuse me because it is he who calls me."

"Give me a trial", he pleaded with the Superior of the Minor Seminary, and, if I don't succeed in a few months, then send me away; but I hope that God will give me the grace to keep up with my classmates, to your satisfaction." His confidence in God was not misplaced: we saw in his life, that though his talents 3 didn't place him in the category of brilliance, he was quite successful

1 Rom 8, 51.

2 Philip 4, 3.

3 AA, p. 25.

in his studies, and that, in the very year which had begun with the possibility of his being sent home, he finished two classes.

Having been ordained and appointed curate at La Valla, he set out to reform the parish and succeeded in doing so, not by his eloquence as a preacher but by his prayers and complete confidence in God. In fact, his instructions were simple, consisting mostly of a reading which he explained and commented on. Yet they produced the greatest of fruits in souls. Priestly activity and the care of his Community took up almost all his time, so that he hardly had time to prepare his instructions. In spite of this, he never mounted the pulpit without having studied and meditated what he should say. Hence the simplicity of his instructions did not come from lack of preparation, but from his distrust of himself and his confidence in God. We can gather this clearly from the following words which he repeated often to his Brothers:

"The word of man can give pleasure and can bring conviction to minds, but it is powerless to change hearts. Of course, we must study religion and prepare our catechetical instructions carefully, because we can't teach others what we do not know. We would be seriously mistaken, however, if we thought nothing more was required for doing good. It is not fine language which inspires piety and wins souls to God. Change of heart is the work of grace and not the effect of eloquence or human talents.

Of what use are the skills of the gardener and of the farmer, if God does not bless their work and give the increase? Let us take care not to rely on our talents; they are useless for doing good; we shall use them in vain and wear ourselves out to no purpose if God is not with us. 'Unless the Lord build the house, in vain do the builders labour'. If the grace and the spirit of God do not animate our words, they will produce only an empty sound, striking the ear but not penetrating the heart.

It is not the report of the cannon which overturns walls or sets buildings ablaze; it is the cannon-ball. Man can make the noise, but grace, portrayed by the ball which alone overthrows obstacles, changes hearts and sets them ablaze with divine love. Only God can give this grace. That is why a' recollected prayer, the Office well-said, a rosary piously prayed, a Mass attended with devotion or a fervent Communion, does more for the success of an instruction than mere knowledge and all our natural talents: for those holy works unite us to God and obtain for us his grace which is everything and accomplishes everything.

There is one truth which I want to drive home to you: no defect harms the works of God more or is more apt to make us

fail, than presumption: faith in our slight talents, which issues in self-sufficiency; besides, I would even dare to say that, the greater our talents, the less fitted we are to do good, unless we have a correspondingly great humility; otherwise, we count too much on ourselves and not enough on God."

On one occasion, a member of his Council suggested one of the cleverest Brothers for a certain difficult post. "No, he would achieve nothing there", was the vigorous retort, "for he trusts too much to his paltry talents; our chief need there is a man who is pious, a humble man who trusts in God more than in himself and his ability."

Then there was the time when someone in his presence praised the natural ability of a young Brother. "It is true", replied the Founder, "that this Brother has talents; but so has the devil, and greater ones at that, a fact which doesn't make him capable of doing good. It is not genius that is needed for the works of God and to form children into good christians, but great devotedness, solid virtue, the spirit of prayer and confidence in God. That Brother's talents are a fatal gift, because they make him vain and presumptuous, exposing him to lose the spirit of his state and perhaps even his vocation." The good Father was not mistaken. This Brother enjoyed great success which puffed him up with pride and made him worldly and disobedient; the outcome was that he had to be expelled from the Institute.

It was the pious Founder who gave all the conferences at the annual Retreats. One year, he began the first conference with this comment: "Dear Brothers, I heard one of you ask whether the priest giving the Retreat is a good preacher; I give you my answer and I ask you not to forget it. If you rely on the preacher's talents and on what I can say to you, for the success of your Retreat, you won't make one at all. Men's words may strike your mind, excite your imagination or make an impression on you for a while; but if God does not touch your heart, that fleeting impression will vanish with the sound that produced it and you will leave the Retreat just as you entered it. The most solid and best-prepared instructions have no lasting effect if God does not speak to the heart; and only his grace can touch you, give you sentiments of compunction and change you for the better. So, if you want to make a good Retreat, pray and put your whole confidence in God; for in this matter, more than in any other, it is true to say: 'Unless the Lord build the house, in vain do the builders labour.' 4"

4 Ps 126, 1.

Father Champagnat's style was very simple but elevated; he had a vigour of expression and a tone of conviction; he spoke in passionate words and with animated countenance: his whole manner denoted a man filled with the spirit of God; and that was what moved the Brothers and made his instructions interesting to them, so that they preferred to listen to him than to the sermons of the most distinguished preachers. The faces of an radiated with satisfaction, when they saw him climb into the pulpit. They never tired of listening to him; his homely instructions, his fatherly exhortations and even his repetitions, were preferred to the most laboured efforts of other preachers.

There is no virtue which Father Champagnat so much recommended to the Brothers, as confidence. S He commented innumerable times on the first two verses of the psalm "Unless the Lord build the house" and his reflections on them would fill volumes.

"Don't be surprised", he used to remark, "to see me constantly coming back to this same point: the fact is that it is the most important point, the only point. Indeed, what is peculiar to man is helplessness, wretchedness and nothingness; he has nothing, he can do nothing, without the help of God. Our weakness and our continual needs are so many reasons for putting our hope in God.

But there is a stronger motive yet to inspire us with unlimited confidence; that particular virtue is the measure of the graces which we receive, since God gives these in proportion to the trust we show in him. He says to us, as he did to the Israelites: 'Alas the land that you tread upon, will belong to you. 6' That is to say, I shall give you all that you expect of my goodness. If you hope from me, for the grace to combat your passions, to correct your defects and to triumph over your enemies, your hope will be realised; if you expect virtue from me, you shall have it; if you desire success in your undertakings, I shall grant it to you; put your trust in me, for I shall be your protector, your friend, your father; I shall bless your every step and fulfil your every desire; I shall give you all you need of temporal goods as well as the goods of grace and of glory; in a word, have confidence in me

5 To Br Francis, he writes: "We are in the hands of Jesus and Mary..." May the holy will of God, be done and let us try to will only what he wills." (LPC 1, doc. 195, p. 396). To Br Dominic: "Put your confidence strongly in Jesus and Mary and rest assured that everything will turn out for the glory of God and the salvation of your soul" (LPC 1, doc. 234, p. 455).

6 Deut 11, 24 (cf. PPC, Part 4, Tract 1, Ch. 16).

and draw from the wells of my mercy, all the gifts and all the favours you wish."

The Founder was quite happy to see his Brothers under the necessity of practising this virtue. «I am not sorry", he wrote to a Brother, "that you have troubles and are persecuted: that will put you in the happy necessity of placing your confidence in God." "You tell me", another letter said, "that death has carried off the greatest benefactor of your school; that is not true; the first of your benefactors is God, who never dies; put your trust in him and you will never want for anything; he has taken away the person whom you miss so much, only to lead you to count on him alone."

When the Founder saw someone giving in to discouragement and lacking confidence in God, he was visibly grieved. "What!" he protested in a letter to a Brother. "You insult God by refusing to trust him? Isn't he powerful enough to help you? Or is it his goodness that you doubt? Was it ever known that anyone who hoped in him was lost or left unaided? If you really knew God, you would not treat him in this way. 7"

On recovering from his illness in 1825, he learnt that the Brothers had yielded to discouragement at that sad time; that several had even planned to withdraw; and that all considered the Congregation as finished, if, unfortunately, he had died. This lack of confidence in God surprised and saddened him enormously. On the very day that he received the details of the regrettable attitude, he assembled the community and delivered a lively rebuke, as the following words testify: "My dear Brothers, when will we have sentiments worthy of God? Hasn't he given us so much proof of his goodness that we have" learnt to rely on Providence, leaving ourselves entirely in his hands? Has he ever let us want for anything since he withdrew us from the world? Isn't it he who has founded this Institute, given us the resources to build this house and increased the number of our schools, and showered them with blessings? Is there any of you who will claim that God has failed to come to his aid at any time since he became a Religious? If, then, no one complains that God is not good to him, how can we refuse to trust God when he puts us to the test? Why fear for the future? Why doubt the success of the Congregation and consider it ruined, just because God chooses to withdraw the instrument he uses to guide it? This community is God's work;

7 The letters referred to in these paragraphs have not been discovered.

it is he who founded it; he has no need of anyone to keep it in existence; he will see to its success without men and in spite of men. Let us never forget: God has no need of us or of anyone else. If our attitudes and thoughts are always worldly, we shaU end up cutting ourselves off from the Institute and losing our vocation; but there will be others to take our place; God will bless them because they will be more faithful, and through them he will continue his work. Moreover, I should teU you, to reassure you and show you beyond doubt how wrong you were to lose courage, that the house is not as heavily in debt as you were led to believe; God has never failed to meet our needs; he has never let us down: hence, we owe very little, and that little, is my responsibility." In the year 1830, he devoted several exhortations to the Brothers 8 to stimulating the practice of this virtue. In one of these, he exclaimed: "It is God who permits all events and who turns them to his glory and to the good of the elect; if we trust hi m, no harm will befaU us; no one in the world can hurt us or cause a single hair of our head 9 to faU, if God does not permit it. God has said to the wicked: 'Thus far shalt thou go and no farther. 10' It is therefore certain, that nothing will happen to us without his permission; that men have over us only the power which he gives them; and that whatever harm their malice can do to us, will turn to our advantage. 11"

A few Brothers asked him at this time whether there wasn't need for certain precautions to provide security in the case of trouble. "The great precaution you need to take", he replied, "is to trust in Providence and redouble your confidence in God. Strive to merit his protection by a greater fidelity to your Rule, by zeal in instructing your children, and by the practice of all the virtues of your state. That precaution is adequate and without it, every other would be useless to put you at ease and preserve you from the dangers you fear. 12"

In several parishes, the Brothers' stipends were stopped, and Father Champagnat was told as much and made aware of the anxiety they felt about the distress that would result. He reassured

8 Letter to Br Anthony ancl to the Brothers of his community, August 15, 1830 (LPC 1, doc. 16, p. 57).

9 Lk 21, 18.

10 Prov 8, 29; Ps 89, 10. Also, letter to Br Anthony, LPC 1, doc. 16, p. 56.

11 Rom 8, 28.

12 Letter to Br Louis-Mary, Jan. 21, 1837. (LPC 1, doc. 86, p. 200; ancl LPC 1, clac 30, p. 84).

them in these words: "Men have cut off your payment, but God, who knows that you need to eat, has not withdrawn his protection; he will take care of you, since it is his work you are doing. He feeds the birds and gives bread to the wicked who blaspheme his holy name and insult his Church. It is quite impossible for him to abandon you and let you lack the necessities of life, if only you place your confidence in him. Now, such confidence should be all the greater, for the fact that he is your sole support and protection. Moreover, when you can no longer live where you are, come to the Mother-House; as long as we have a crust ¹³ to eat, we shall share i t wi th you."

When he was undertaking a good work, only one thing preoccupied him: to know whether it was God's will. If he believed that the work was willed by God, he ceased to be anxious about obstacles or lack of resources, fully convinced that God could set aside obstacles and provide for all their needs. In this spirit, once he believed that time had come to lay the foundations of his Institute, he was not afraid to gather together poor young men without education, to buy a house for them and to furnish it, although he himself was poor and without funds. Everyone assured him that the foundation would infallibly fail. A worthy priest, ¹⁴ later to become an Archbishop, having done his utmost to deter Marcellin from the project, seeing that he could not get him to change his mind, said to him: "You build in vain; you will become the butt and laughing-stock of everyone." "Alas!" he answered, «I am firmly convinced that if God is not with us, we labour in vain, ¹⁵ but, if he wills this work, as I believe he does, he will make it succeed though it lack any element of success. I don't care a whit about the embarrassment of possible failure; I am more frightened of being unfaithful to God than of being despised by men."

When he made a start at building the Hermitage, several people put it to him that it was imprudent to undertake such a construction without financial resources. «I agree", the Father replied, "that it would be great imprudence and extreme rashness

¹³ LPC 1, doc. 86, p. 200; also LPC 1, doc. 30, p. 84.

¹⁴ Fr Séon has preserved the name for us: "Fr Champagnat was building at the Hermitage. Fr de la Croix, then parish priest at Les Chartreux, and to-day Archbishop of Auch, sent the message: 'Tell Fr Champagnat that he is building in vain.' "(OME, dac. 160 [21], p. 386 and note 3). This NicolasAuguste de la Croix d'Azolette was one of the Directors of the Seminary of Lyon, during Fr Champagnat's studies there (OM 4, p. 191).

¹⁵ Ps 126, 1.

indeed, if we relied only on ourselves; but we rely on Providence which has never let us down and has done everything for us: it cannot abandon us since we are doing its work." "But are you certain", he was asked, "that God wills this work?" "How could anyone doubt it", he queried, "after the blessing showered on us and the protection given us? If God did not wish this community, he would not send us so many subjects; he would not bless our schools; and he would not give us the means to survive, as he has done till now. Since he favours this Congregation, it is proof that he wills it; and, if he wills it, he will send us the resources to construct a suitable house."

Others went further, and seeing that he didn't follow their advice, they claimed that pride had turned his head and that before long he himself would give proof of the fact by abandoning his foolhardy scheme and becoming bankrupt. When these hostile remarks reached Father Champagnat's ears, he simply made this calm reply: "Let people say what they like, and let us put our trust in God, who will never abandon us, unless we first abandon him." Those damaging reports would not have troubled Father Champagnat, if they had not distorted the public perception of his work and cut off help that he might have received, help which he so badly needed. Certainly, several rich people who were intending to assist him, directed their gifts elsewhere.

In a moment of urgent need, a Brother approached one of these people, requesting some help. «I shall take good care not to give you anything", was her reply. «I have no desire to encourage your Superior in his follies. What does he mean to do with that enormous house he is building? Before it is finished he will be forced to sell it and abort the whole project. You shall have nothing from me and my advice to anyone would be to refuse you any donation."

When the Brother reported this response to Father Champagnat, he exclaimed: "I have long been convinced that we should not expect anything from men; that God himself wishes to do everything for us: let us therefore intensify our confidence in his goodness, putting ourselves in the hands of Providence. It redounds to his glory to help us, bestowing on us the support which men refuse. Should the whole world be against us, we have nothing to fear as long as God is for us." The good Father's confidence was not misplaced; help came indeed, and from an entirely unexpected quarter, so that the protection of God was all the more discernible.

It can be remarked that Father Champagnat did not like

begging as a means of securing resources; he preferred to leave it to Providence to come to his help as it saw fit. Incredibly, his total confidence in God was held against him as a crime. "See", his censors jeered, "he takes no one's advice; he has such a mania for bricks and mortar that he thinks only of buildings; it doesn't worry him who has to pay, as long as he can build walls to demolish next day and rebuild some other day." Many people were deceived by these calumnious innuendoes, not excluding the Archbishop himself: hearing so often that Father Champagnat was a compulsive builder and spent money recklessly, he believed it. He summoned Father Champagnat, severely reprimanded him and forbade him to build any more.

There was extremely great fear at the Archbishop's palace, that Father Champagnat might become bankrupt. "It is impossible", was the common report, "for him not to be doing badly; he spends large sums and has almost no income; he owes more than he possesses; his creditors will eventually realise his situation and take over his house; then, since all demands will not be met, there will be a public scandal."

At one time, this mistaken view was so prevalent that the Archbishop felt obliged to relieve Father Champagnat of the administration of his House, and he would in fact have done so, had not the priest, with whom he wanted to replace him, declined the task. 17 We must hasten to add that the Archbishop was not under the illusion for long and soon regained his first feelings of confidence and admiration in regard to Father Champagnat. But there were many of whom this could not be said. These viewed matters in the light of human prudence alone and could never understand the good Father's conduct. Believing that his liabilities surpassed his assets, they wondered what would become of the Brothers when he died and how they would manage to pay their creditors.

16 Fr Cattet, Vicar General, writes on Sept. 30, 1829: "You ought to take every means of cutting expenses wisely, especially in the area of repairs or constructions; these should be kept to a minimum and postponed as much as possible... I am sure that you will do only what is strictly necessary henceforth, at the Hermitage and elsewhere." (OME, doc. 65 [3], p. 152).

17 When Fr Courveille's faults were known, there was still a period (May-Aug., 1826) when the Archbishop had in mind to propose to an "ecclesiastic (Fr Coindre) to take charge of the Hermitage Brothers." A letter from Fr Coindre, May 3, 1826, shows that he is against the idea (OME, doc. 44, p. 119). On August 8, 1826, a decision by the Council of Bishop de Pins, shows that the matter is closed (OME, doc. 48, p. 128).

Throughout his life, Father Champagnat never let up inspiring his Brothers with confidence in God, assuring them that he would take care of them and his help never be wanting to them. On his death bed, it was the subject of his last exhortation to them. "Put your confidence in God", he urged them, "and count on him. His Providence will support you, help you, bless you and see to all your needs."

It befitted the glory of that divine Providence to reward such great trust and to show that it was not in vain. This man of faith had always been so opportunely assisted during his life, that he remarked confidentially to one of his friends: «I have never lacked money when it was absolutely necessary to me." At his death, he left to his children more than two hundred thousand francs worth of real estate, free of debt, except for a few thousand francs owing for a property¹⁸ that he had purchased the year he died. And, as if God was determined to reward his confidence to the very end, a generous benefactor discharged that debt shortly after.¹⁹

His unlimited confidence in God kept him in admirable tranquillity and inalterable peace in the midst of the greatest difficulties. "Our Lord", he would insist, on such occasions, "will help us according to our needs; the bigger the obstacles we face, the firmer should be our confidence in him, for the more claim we have to his assistance." A Brother having fallen ill, Father Champagnat had no substitute available and was forced to send the Master of Novices. "What will you do now?" he was asked. "Where will you find a man to take charge of your house?"

"We expect that God will send one," was the Founder's response. "In that case", he was told, «I am afraid you will have a long wait." "Not so long as you think", he insisted. "God has no difficulty in finding men. We can take the first one who passes in the street; in his hands, any instrument is good. Meanwhile, till he sends us someone in his kindness, I shall entrust the post to Brother X. and, although he is only sixteen years of age,²⁰ I am convinced that he will do well and be blessed by God, because he is the only one we have.²¹"

¹⁸ The property of the Patouillard family was bought Jan. 1, 1839 (AA, p. 271).

¹⁹ This great benefactor is Mr Thiollière (LPC 2, p. 494).

²⁰ It was probably Br Louis, in 1822 (LPC 2, p. 399).

²¹ This dialogue can be compared with the one reported by Fr Maîtreperre (OME, doc. 164 [55], p. 417).

A Brother Director was once reluctant to receive a Brother into his community claiming that he was too young. "Take the boy", the Founder urged him, "and I promise that you will be satisfied with him. God, who sends him, will be obliged to bless him; besides it is with nothing that God accomplishes everything. Place your confidence in God and you will see that this young Brother will work wonders." He was not mistaken: the Brother was a total success.

In 1823, while still at La Valla, Marcellin wrote to a Brother, 22 giving him news of the various establishments, before adding: "As far as La Valla is concerned, it seems that we shall have many poor people this year. We shall do our best to feed them. Providence, who sends them to us, knows that we are without resources. I rely on it therefore to give us what is needed for us and for them. Besides, many postulants are entering, but almost all of them are poor and very young. Three of them, however, have reached the age of reason, for they are over thirty; one has trained in business, another is a shoemaker 23 and the third has trained in nothing, but it is with nothing that God accomplishes great things."

To support his community and to feed the poor for whom he took responsibility, Father Champagnat had only his curate's salary. No wonder people asked what friends he drew on to maintain such a large number. "It's beyond me", one of his friends admitted, "what you hope to achieve by filling your house with poor children and taking in so many postulants who contribute nothing; unless you have some privileged access to the public treasury, you will certainly go bankrupt." "Better than that", retorted the Father, «I have the treasury of Providence which meets everyone's needs without ever being depleted." "You must have a well-filled purse", someone else taunted him, "to take care of so much wretchedness." "My purse has no bottom to it", was his reply. "It is the purse of Providence: the more you take out, the more it contains."

As he was blamed for his continual building, he defended himself, saying: "I am blamed because I build, but I am forced to it by the need to accommodate the Brothers. I either have to

22 Letter of Fr Champagnat to Br John-Mary Granjon, Dec. 1, 1823 (LPC 1, doc. 1, pp. 28-30)

23 It seems that the shoemaker did not remain long, unless he became a teacher, for at least till 1826, Fr Champagnat used the shoemakers of La Valla (AA, p. 77).

build or to stop accepting postulants." To the objection that he had no money and was being imprudent in undertaking constructions in these circumstances, he replied: "That is the way I have always done things; if I had waited till I had money before beginning, I should not have laid one stone on another." A friend, on a visit to him, asked him at the time, where he would draw the money to pay for the main building which was under construction. «I shall draw if', came the confident answer, "where I have always drawn it: from the treasury of Providence."

At a time when the community was very large and provisions particularly expensive; one of the Council, who knew that there was no money in the coffers, put the question to Father Champagnat: "Father, this year, we shall not be able to make ends meet!" "You are right", he agreed, "if you reckon only on our own resources; but have you considered Providence? Surely it will help us, since it sends us these young men." "It is right on our part to trust to Providence", conceded the questioner, "but perhaps it would be wise to be more selective in the choice of postulants and refuse some of those who contribute no finance." "Never", was the unequivocal response, "shall I refuse to accept a subject who appears to have a vocation and to be capable of doing good, on the score that he doesn't bring any money. I should prefer to spend money, if necessary, in order to accept a young man who shows promise of becoming a good religious."

Threatened with a law-suit, Father Champagnat summoned the bursar one day. The problem was an urgent need of two thousand francs to meet a debt. He instructed the bursar to take steps to borrow the sum. "Father", he was reminded, "you know that I couldn't find anything last week, and that people flee at the sight of me. It is no use going to Saint-Chamond for the purpose, and I hope you won't ask me to do so." Since the Founder insisted, the Brother replied with a slight touch of pique: "If you are absolutely determined, I shall go; but I can assure you that I shall return empty-handed."

There was no reply, but, when the time for payment drew near, Father Champagnat went up to his room and began to pray. After a few minutes, he was called to the parlour; he made his way there, and, as he entered, a man threw on the table a bag containing there thousand francs, with the remark: "There, Father, is what I thought I should bring you to-day!" The Founder embraced him affectionately and said: "God bless you, dear sir; it is Providence which sends you; I was in dire need and you render me a service that I shall never forget."

The Brother bursar came one day to alert Father Champagnat to the fact that there was no flour and that they would have to think of buying some. Marcellin, opening his drawer, gave him all the money that was in the house at that moment. "But that's only enough to buy two sacks", commented the bursar, "and, with our numbers, the bread wouldn't be sufficient for a fortnight." "Buy the two sackfuls, to start with", he was told. "God will come to our relief before they are finished." Ten days later, the bursar returned to warn that the flour supply was nearly exhausted. "Here", said the Father, "I have just been given enough to buy thirty sacks; I was right, wasn't I, to promise you that Providence would not desert us?"

At the sight of the Society's development, someone remarked to Father Champagnat: "What a lot you could do, with a few hundred thousand francs." "If Providence sent me fifty good Brothers", was his retort, "we could do even more; it is not money we need but good subjects. A community is always rich enough when it has holy Religious, and I constantly ask God for these; as to financial needs, I rely on the word of our divine Saviour. 'Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice and all those things shall be added unto you. 24'

"Marcellin put such small trust in human means that he was skeptical of the success of an enterprise, if he saw it strongly supported by men. Since many people were showing interest in supporting the authorization of his Institute, he wrote in a letter from Lyon, 25 just before setting out for Paris to pursue the matter: "Humanly-speaking everything seems to be going well; however, more than ever I say, 'Unless the Lord....'. I am very afraid that all the support may be slightly harmful to the designs of Providence and that, far from helping our quest, it may contribute to its failure; pray therefore, and have prayers said, for it is from God alone that we should expect everything."

24 Matt 6, 33.

25 To Br Francis, Jan. 10, 1838 (LPC 1, dac. 169, p. 334), slightly different text.

CRAPTER FOUR

Father Champagnat's love for prayer. How carefully he trained the Brothers in this holy practice.

"One of the greatest graces given me by God", the humble St Francis of Assisi used to say, "is the spirit of prayer: for it is through prayer that I have obtained all the favours bestowed on me by divine goodness." Father Champagnat could have echoed those words. God had given him the signal grace of prayer and it was from the practice of prayer that he imbibed the vigorous faith which vivified all his actions, and the unlimited confidence in Providence which ensured that his every need was met. It was prayer which led him to such a high degree of virtue, which led him to win souls for God and brought him to found such a useful work for the Church.

Prayer was his element, and he gave himself to it with so much ease and happiness that it appeared quite natural to him. Besides the community prayers, Roly Mass and the Office of the Church, he spent a considerable time in converse with God. It was for this reason that he rose so early, for, being very busy during the day, he had to encroach on his sleeping time to satisfy his piety and the need he felt to treat with God.

It was in prayer that he conceived and decided upon all his projects. It was by prayer that he began, continued and ended everything he did. «I could never undertake anything", he used to say, "without having long recommended it to God; firstly, because it is easy for man to be deceived and to mistake the views of his own mind and his illusions, for plans inspired by God; and secondly, because we can achieve nothing without the help and protection of heaven."

It wasn't only in important matters that he acted in this way; he did so in every detail of his conduct, always beginning each of his actions by prayer and continuing it in the spirit of prayer. Hence arose those holy practices of piety which he incorporated in the Rule: to begin all the school exercises with prayer; to recommend oneself to God each time that one is obliged to deal with another person, to punish a child or admonish a Brother;

to recite frequent short prayers, to the point where work becomes a veritable prayer, so that the morning meditation is continued, I in this way, throughout the day.

Prayer in all dangers and in all troublesome circumstances, was for him a haven of safety; so, novenas² succeeded one another rapidly; one was hardly finished, when he had reason to begin another.³ He was constantly urging the Brothers to pray and to pray fervently; and he placed such confidence in the effect of prayer that he didn't fear to say on these occasions: «I am certain that we shall be heard and that, whatever happens, things will turn out for the best.»

Fully convinced that prayer is for Religious the most fruitful means of acquiring the virtues of their state, to work at their sanctification and that of people confided to their care, Marcellin wanted the Brothers to give considerable time to it and to have a great number of religious exercises.

Several persons disapproved of his imposing on the Brothers the Office of the Blessed Virgin. They gave as reasons for objecting: 1) Since teaching was very demanding and the Brothers had to speak a lot in class, the recitation of that Office would weaken their chests and ruin their health. 2) Because the Brothers did not understand Latin, that prayer could not be of much use to them.

«I am convinced», countered Marcellin, "that the Office of the Blessed Virgin, far from being an aggravation of their laborious task, is a consolation and a relief for the Brothers. They can chant it in a very moderate tone of voice, and while strolling; they have the satisfaction of being united to so many other religious Congregations and so many of the pious faithful who pay this tribute of praise to Mary. As to the objection that they don't understand Latin. I agree that they don't, but God does, and their

¹ "One should not be satisfied with this half-hour of meditation but try to continue it through the different actions of the day, by remembering the presence of God and practising ejaculatory prayers." (Rules of 1837, Ch. 2, art. 2, p. 15). "Before answering the questions put by parents in regard to their children, they should raise their hearts to God, saying: 'Lord use me to say what is pleasing to you and conducive to your glory' " (Ibid, Ch. 5, art. 18, p. 42).

² Letter to Br Bartholomew, November 1, 1831 (LPC 1, doc. 24, pp. 72-73).

³ P.S. of the letter to Br Denis, Jan. 5, 1838: "When you have finished the novena that you are making, make another, for my intention. Have all the children join in" (LPC 1, doc. 168, p. 333).

prayer is no less pleasing to him, provided the interior spirit and a genuine heart inspire it."

The claim was also made to him that the children drew little fruit from the rosary; that they rattled it off without attention and without understanding what they were saying, so that they were wasting their time. "Did the children who cried out (Hosanna to the Son of David) understand properly what they were saying?" queried Father Champagnat. "Yet their prayer was so pleasing to Jesus Christ that he publicly praised it and declared that it is from the mouth of children that God receives the most perfect praise. 4 If those children have less devotion and fervour than grown-ups, they have more simplicity and innocence, qualities which make their prayer so acceptable to God."

In the beginnings of the Institute, he had established a large number of exercises of piety which, however, he had to let lapse later on; at least, in part, this was because they overburdened the community and could not be carried out by all the Brothers. The discontinued exercises included: the practice of several visits a day to the Blessed Sacrament, 5 with a single daily visit instead; spending the last hour of each year and the first of the next in prayer and meditation; the devotion of the six Sundays in honour of St Aloysius Gonzaga; finally, a few prayers that were tacked on to the ordinary exercises or which one was to recite in private.

Marcellin was particularly attached to the prayers of the Church and preferred them to all others; hence, he was led to carry out the Rogation processions; to celebrate, according to Church rites, the Feasts which had been suppressed by the Concordat of 1801; similarly, he sang the Church liturgy of the Christmas Vigil and of Holy Week. It was he who bore the brunt of the singing, especially in the early days; the Brothers were few in number, and were not really capable of helping him; in spite of this, Father Champagnat sang them in their entirety and with all the solemnity of a large church.

On all occasions, Marcellin recommended the Brothers to pray for the children entrusted to them. "You will do more good", he assured them, "by prayer than by any other means. A Brother who is satisfied with instructing his children, fulfils only half of his

4 Matt 21, 15-16.

5 The Rules of 1837 recommend the practice of the visit to the Blessed Sacrament:

- after the morning class, Ch. 2, art. 19, p. 20; with the children, teaching them how to do it with respect and devotion, Ch. 4, art. 13, p. 37.

- on arrival at the Mother House, Ch. 8, art. 7, p. 56.

duty; if he wants to discharge it all, he ought to pray continually for them, never coming before God without recommending them to him. He should pray particularly for the most wayward, for those whom he finds hardest to form to virtue and for those whose needs seem greatest.

A Brother may not have much natural ability for teaching catechism, for controlling a class and instructing them as he would like; but he can always pray for them, and that is how he will be genuinely useful to them, establish authority over them, win their confidence and secure their attention. The reason is, that nothing is more conducive to making the hearts of the children docile, than prayer; so a number of Brothers has told me that once they made it a duty to pray a lot for their children, they could do what they liked with them."

As for himself, including in his charity the needs of all men, he unceasingly asked God's mercy on them all. He prayed for the pastors of the Church, for the conversion of sinners and infidels, for the children of the schools and, in particular, for the members of his Congregation. Every day, he consecrated his Brothers to the Blessed Virgin and constantly placed before God the needs of each. «I have such an interest in these good Brothers", he confided to someone, "and I so ardently long for their salvation, that I never feel that I have prayed for them enough and I continually recommend them to Our Lord and his Blessed Mother."

On hearing someone mention a young Brother⁶ who experienced strong temptations, the Founder exclaimed: "Oh, the good Brother! I never go up to the altar without recommending him earnestly to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Poor Brother! How I long for God to bless him and preserve him from sin. Every time I pray, I ask this favour for him." What he did for this Brother, he did for all who were in similar need.

The dearest wish of his heart, however, was to inspire his Brothers with a love of prayer, to lead them to understand its importance and benefits and to train them in this holy exercise.

In his instructions, he was always returning to this subject which he called the "main point." It was his view, that to have the gift

⁶ This unnamed individual perhaps replaced Br John-Baptist himself who, in 1839, was Director of Saint-Pol-sur-Ternoise and who was assisted by the young Br Mary-Lawrence. This man was going through a difficult period at that time and Fr Champagnat wrote him a letter full of compassion, April 8, 1839 (LPC 1, cloc. 249, p. 479).

of solid piety is thereby to possess all virtues. Here is how he developed that idea: "If God bestows on you the gift of prayer, he grants you at the same time all virtues, for it can be said of prayer, what Solomon said of wisdom: 'All good things came to me together with her. 7' In fact, it is impossible to converse often with God without acquiring his spirit, without becoming like him by the imitation of his virtues. So I have always noticed that one who had the spirit of prayer, also had the spirit of obedience, of mortification and of zeal; and that he was wholly occupied with the attainment of perfection.

Pious Brothers are the pillars of the Institute and no matter what may be their talents in other respects, no matter what their strength and their health, they are useful everywhere; they spread good spirit all around and God blesses everything entrusted to

7 Wis 7, 11.

them. St Paul has good reason to say: 'Godliness is profitable to all things.⁸' Godliness not only yields virtues, it brings success also in temporal affairs. We most probably owe the blessing of God on the Institute to this or that Brother who is perhaps considered useless because he has few talents or is sick; yet he is extremely dear to Our Lord and his holy Mother because of his solid piety. By contrast, a Brother who lacks piety achieves no good either for himself or for others; he is powerless to accomplish anything worthwhile because he is without the necessary means, which are prayer and union with God. Moreover, long experience has taught me that a Brother who hasn't piety is good for nothing; he is not at home anywhere and is an embarrassment for everyone. You seem surprised by what I say, yet it makes good sense. Without piety, it is impossible to love one's vocation and be dedicated to one's employment; without piety, there is no virtue. Now, a man without virtue, who fulfils his employment badly, acting only from human motives, who is not content in his state, can be nothing more than a burden for his confrères. Instead of being useful to them, he is harmful and frustrates their efforts to achieve good."

Nothing afflicted the Founder so much, as to see some Brothers easily omit their community exercises, something he regarded as one of the most dangerous of faults. He broached the matter in one of his instructions, in these terms: "How can you be at peace, when you miss your exercises of piety? Don't you know that meditation, Holy Mass, the office, the rosary and spiritual reading are the consolation of good Religious and that it is not possible to be happy in community, while neglecting them? Has not experience taught you that neglect of prayer has always been the prelude to your most serious falls and that days on which your religious exercises have been badly performed, have been days filled with faults? I tell you for certain that the most fatal snare which the devil can set to ruin souls is to turn them away from prayer; for the abandonment of this holy exercise infallibly guarantees the triumph of his temptations."

It was Father Champagnat's wish, (and he indicated as much in the Rule), that a Brother unable to perform any one of his religious exercises with the community, should ask for time to do so in private; ⁹ and to justify this Rule, he argued: "When you

⁸ 1 Tim 4, 8.

⁹ "Office will not normally be missed, except through serious illness or by express permission of the Superior" (Rules of 1837, Ch. 2, art. 4, p. 16).

have been unable to take your meals with your Brothers, you don't fail to eat afterwards; and no matter how great your hurry, you find time to give your body the food that is necessary for it. Why would you do less for your soul? Do you value it less?

No matter what responsibilities a Brother may have, he can always find time to carry out his religious exercises; besides, nothing can dispense him from this duty which is his principal one and must take precedence over every other. I have never been able to understand how a Brother can omit his office, his rosary, or some other prayer, alleging that he didn't have time to attend to these exercises. If they can't be said kneeling or in the chapel, let them be said at work, while walking, or during supervision of the children.

I was never once prevented, through lack of time, from performing my religious exercises, whether as curate or on my travels; and never in my life have I heard a priest say that he had no time to recite his office; yet that office is much longer than yours and the duties of a priest are, in some cases at least, much more numerous than those of a Brother."

It was not uncommon, in fact, for Marcellin to be busy all day; but then he stole from recreation or sleep the time for the recitation of his office and for the other exercises of piety. When he was travelling, he spent his whole time: reciting the Breviary and the rosary, engaged in spiritual reading, and, if he were alone, singing some hymns. He even declared that he liked travelling, because it gave him the opportunity to meditate and pray more than usual.

The exercises of piety which he considered the most important and on which he most insisted, were meditation and Roly Mass. Even when travelling, the Brothers were expected to assist at Mass and receive their usual Communion. UA Brother", he maintained, "who has the spirit of faith, will consider it an enormous sacrifice not to be able to attend Mass every day. If a Brother were to miss it through his own fault, in order to give the time to study or to anything else not absolutely necessary, he would show that he has no zeal for his perfection and that he does not love Jesus Christ. Roly Mass, Roly Communion, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, in a word, the Eucharist; there you have the source of grace; there you have the first and most indispensable of all devotions, bringing with it the greatest spiritual wealth and the greatest consolation. Oh! How I pity anyone who does not understand this truth!"

He viewed meditation as so necessary that he believed it impossible for a Religious who neglected it to persevere in his

vocation. He put it this way: "If the land", as the Prophet tells us, "is filled with desolation and wickedness, because there is none that meditates on the law of God, 10 it is likewise true that we can attribute to the scarcity of men of prayer in the communities, the great number of abuses and defects there, and the rarity of solid virtue.

The religious vocation is the treasure that Our Lord describes as hidden in the field. 11 Now, it is meditation which enables us to discover that treasure; 12 meditation reveals its value and its excellence, just as it indicates the means needed to conserve a vocation and make it fruitful. One who does not meditate, will never know the worth of that treasure; he will set no value at all on it and, this being so, at the first difficulty or first temptation that arises, he will abandon the field of religious life with its treasure.

Meditation, prayer, actual grace, sanctifying grace, perseverance in one's vocation and eternal salvation are connected realities that are dependent one on another. Take away meditation, and prayer dries up; if that goes, there are no actual graces; hence, there is no possibility of fending off temptations, of preserving sanctifying grace and, therefore, vocation; for mortal sin, by inflicting death on the soul, sounds the death knell of a vocation and strikes at the very foundation of the all-important matter of salvation. Oh! how many young men can testify to this truth from sad experience!

Just the opposite happens when the eternal truths are faithfully meditated; meditation nourishes a love and taste for prayer by causing us to see its benefits and necessity; prayer, in turn, wins plentiful actual graces; these provide the means to resist temptations, avoid sin, preserve the state of grace, persevere in one's vocation, practise virtue, persist in doing good and so work

10 Lack of reflection is "one of the principal causes of all the evils which happen in the world, according to the words of Jeremiah: 'With desolation is the whole land made desolate because there is none that considers in the heart'... The land is desolate because hardly anyone enters into himself to focus his mind on the ineffable mysteries of religion and the infinite kindness of God" (PPC, Part I, Tract S, Ch. 8, "On the necessity of meditation", p. 302). .

11 Matt 13, 44.

12 "And one who is able to weigh and consider those things well, resolves to embrace them, since he easily forms a proper estimate of all the rest; and knowing perfectly well the value of the precious stone he has found, nothing else matters to him and he sells everything he has, and buys it" (PPC, Part I, Tract S, Ch. 9, "Fruit to be drawn from meditation", p. 306).

out one's salvation. 13 If you ask me, to be truly pious or to be a good Religious is one and the same thing; for a 'good Religious is necessarily a man of prayer and a man of prayer is always a holy Religious. But it must never be forgotten that the only route to solid piety is by meditation on the christian truths."

The good Father was so convinced of the efficacy of meditation that he assured several Brothers: 14 "If you are faithful to your meditation, I answer for your salvation and I guarantee that sooner or later you will become good Religious." There is no exaggeration in such a statement, whose sentiments have been expressed by several saints. St Alphonsus 15 claimed that meditation and sin cannot dwell together; that those who meditate, fall rarely and rise promptly. St Teresa 16 taught it as certain, that a soul which perseveres in meditation will never be lost, despite the enormity and frequency of its falls and no matter how numerous and violent the assaults of temptation from the devil; sooner or later, God will deliver that soul from danger and lead it to heaven."

The objective behind every conference Father Champagnat gave on prayer was to inspire confidence in God. We give some of his thoughts on this subject which was so dear to him: "The more graces we ask of God, the more we obtain. To ask much from men is a sure way to receive nothing; you ask them for a little, if you hope to receive something. With God, we must proceed differently: it is a tribute to his power and goodness, to make great demands on him.

Just as it would be an insult to a rich king to ask him for a cent, so it would be somehow scolding God and slighting his strength and generosity to make only trifling requests of him. No matter how rich a man is, he is poorer by what he gives and his

13 Philip 2, 12.

14 Especially to Br Euthyme (LPC 1, doc. 102, p. 223).

15 "Mental prayer and sin cannot exist together. Experience shows indeed that those who practise mental prayer do not easily fall into God's disfavour; and if they unfortunately happen to fall, provided that they persevere in prayer, they soon enter into themselves and return to God" (Alphonsus Liguori, *La religieuse sanctifiée*, t. 8, Ch. XV, l, VI, p. 407). .

16 "If I have not spared the details... it is in an effort to convey the great mercy of God and the immense favour that he confers on a soul by giving it a bent for generous prayer even though it does not possess all the necessary dispositions. I have also tried to show that, if the soul perseveres, despite its faults, its temptations and the falls of every kind into which the devil would like to plunge it, the Lord, I am quite sure, will lead it finally to the harbour of salvation" (St. Thérèse de Jésus, *Vie*, Ch. 8, 4, BAC 212.50).

gift, no matter how small, lessens his store of riches. Not so, with God! He is so rich, that his wealth is inexhaustible; and so generous that he never tires of giving. It is a sort of necessity for him to do good to others. Besides, what he gives us, he still possesses; unlike men, he enriches us without depriving himself; it could even be said that he increases his riches by showering us with benefits; for the graces that he imparts to us, which were, we may say, buried in the bosom of his mercy, contributing nothing to his external glory, redound to his glory as soon as they come into our hands, as a result of the good actions they give rise to in us.

God has never appeared greater or more lovable in the eyes of men than when he exercised towards them his greatest mercy. David, who knew the heart of God well, said to him: 'You will pardon my sin because it is very great 17 and it will show forth your remarkable goodness.' So this holy king drew his confidence from what is usually a source of discouragement to men: the immensity of their faults and needs; this was because of his exalted idea of God. I conclude by saying that to ask little of God is the way to obtain nothing. Therefore, if we wish to please him, let us ask much, let us ask great things; the more we ask for, the more pleasing to God our request will be, and the sooner our prayer will be heard."

To form the Brothers to piety the Founder did not limit himself to speaking about it often in his instruction. Each Brother was given besides, frequent interviews on this important subject, in which he was required to give an account of his meditation and of his success in all the other religious exercises.

In one such interview, a Brother having reported to him that he found nothing more difficult than prayer and that it was the time when he experienced the most severe temptations, Father Champagnat advised him: "Don't be surprised; the devil knows the great benefits that accrue to you from prayer; he can see that God wants to give you special graces and extraordinary virtues by means of prayer; that explains his fury against you and the temptations with which he assails you. Don't be frightened; don't be discouraged; this trial is a favourable sign. To fight against distractions, to resist temptations, to put up with them patiently, is a prayer and even more; it is a virtue, or rather the exercise of several virtues."

17 Ps 24, 11.

Another Brother mentioned that he found great difficulty in using the time for meditation, which failed to stir any devotion in him. "The reason", explained Marcellin, "is that you are too distracted during the day; that you never recollect yourself; and that you are aware neither of your defects nor of the needs of your soul. If you made your particular examen better, your prayers would improve. See how the holy King David prayed: 'My God, I am a poor man and blind; I am filled with vice ¹⁸ and surrounded by wretchedness; corruption has entered the very marrow of my bones.' He spoke in this way because he was aware of his needs and his awareness sprang from his frequent recollection. You have no virtue and are filled with defects and you say that you are at a loss what to do at prayer! Show God your defects, saying to him: 'My God, behold me here in your presence, with my wandering thoughts, my pride, slothfulness, sensuality and inconstancy. Oh my God, every day I fall into these faults and many others; every day, I offend you by my thoughts, my words, my eyes, my ears and all my senses. Heal, oh Jesus, the wounds of my soul; pardon me my sins. You see that I have neither humility, nor modesty, nor obedience, nor mortification, nor zeal, nor piety; give me these virtues and, above all, give me your holy love.' Carry out that exercise every day and I assure you that you will soon be an excellent Brother and that you will have no further trouble occupying yourself during meditation."

Once, when meditation was concluded, Marcellin asked Brother Lawrence how he had spent his time. The good Brother replied in great simplicity: "You have guessed well, Father. God must have inspired you to question me, as a punishment, for I achieved no good to-day, having forgotten my subject of meditation. However, so as not to waste my time, I imagined St John-Francis Régis ¹⁹ spending whole nights prostrate at the church door to adore Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. I kept looking at that great saint in that posture. 'There is someone', I said to myself, 'who didn't forget his meditation subject. His lasted all night, while I can manage for only a few minutes.' " "Well said, Brother Lawrence", the Founder approved. "That is what you must do any time you forget your meditation subject."

¹⁸ Ps 38, 5-11.

¹⁹ The parish priest of Saint-Bonnet-le-Froid "found him kneeling at the door of the church, his hands joined and his head bare despite the violent cold wind... Régis continued to spend every night in the church although the cold that year was intolerably severe". (Daubenton, Vie, livre IV, Lyon 1803).

Let us end with a word from the pious Founder, one which is a sort of epitome of all his teachings on prayer and which will show us how important he considered piety. "Pious Brothers", he asserted, "are valuable men of inestimable worth; they are the pillars of the Institute; the more of them we have, the stronger the Society will be and the more blessed by God."

CHAPTER FIVE

His spirit of recollection and the care he took to keep himself in the presence of God 1.

Father Champagnat's favourite exercise was the presence of God. He preferred this exercise because it was especially congenial to his natural bent, had an attraction for him, and has been described by God himself as the shortest and most efficacious means of reaching perfection.² "Walk before me", the Lord promised Abraham, "and be perfect." (Gen. XVII,1) David said of himself that "he set the Lord always in his sight that he might not be moved", (Ps XV,8) either by temptation or by the difficulty which he experienced in the practice of virtue. If he had kept this resolution constantly in mind, he would never have offended God, never have become a perpetrator of adultery and homicide.

Not only is the exercise of the presence of God the most efficacious means of sanctification, it is also the simplest, the easiest and the most attractive. It is the simplest because it may take the place of all others; it is the easiest and most attractive because the remembrance of God strengthens the soul and fills it with joy and happiness.

During a retreat, the preacher, as is usual on such occasions, indicated a large variety of ways for performing one's actions well, for correcting one's defects and for acquiring virtue. Father Champagnat, in his eagerness to please God, proceeded to put them all into practice; but before long their sheer number was a hindrance and a trouble to him. So he went to see the preacher

¹ For this chapter, Br John-Baptist has followed the lead of Fr Champagnat, taking much inspiration from Rodriguez (pPC, Part 2, Tract 3, "On the presence of God").

² "The presence of God is the supreme and universal remedy, given by St Basil to conquer all the temptations of the devil and all the repugnance felt by nature; so true is this, that, if you want the easiest and shortest way to perfection, a way which features all the strength and efficacy of all the others, use the presence of God. God himself gave it, in effect, to Abraham: 'Walk before me', he said to him, 'and you will be perfect.' "(pPC, part 2, Tract 3, Ch. 3, "The presence of God and its precious advantages", p. 398).

who was likewise his confessor, and candidly revealed his difficulty. "The means of perfection", he confided in him, "which you have given me are all, no doubt, excellent; but in switching from one to another, I end up doing nothing. Would it be possible to replace them by the exercise of the presence of God? Up till now, that is what I have practised and, if it is adequate, I much prefer it." The preacher did not hesitate to assure him that the presence of God is the most outstanding of all the means which lead to perfection and that even by itself it can profitably replace the others. Very happy with this answer, Marcellin thanked him and withdrew, to become more devoted than ever to this favourite exercise, one which made him feel satisfied and yielded him so much fruit.

St Francis of Sales made the remark that some people are put off rather than helped by the multiplicity of means for advancing in perfection. He compared their situation to that of a traveller who is confronted with a number of roads leading to his destination, and wastes his time choosing which is best. That wise and prudent director, therefore advised concentrating on one spiritual exercise and one virtue, at a time; he claimed that God had not made perfection consist in doing a multitude of activities to please him, but only in the way in which we do them; the true method is to do our little part with love and utmost care.

For example, he suggested applying oneself to the exercise of the presence of God, which was his own favourite, or to that of conformity to the will of God, or again, that of purity of intention, which also appealed greatly to him. "Let us not be like spiritual misers," the holy Prelate adds, "who are never satisfied with the exercises prescribed for them but are constantly on the look out to discover ways of bringing together, if that were

3 "God has not made perfection consist in the multiplicity of acts that we do to please him but in the way we do them, which is nothing more than to do the little we are capable of doing by vocation, doing it in love, through love and for love" (S. François de Sales, *Oeuvres* X 211. Niérat, Annecy, 1898).

4 Cf. S. François de Sales, *Traité de l'amour de Dieu*, Livre VII, Ch. I Lettre à Madame de Chantal, 23.6.1619. *Directoire Spirituel*, art. 8 (récréation), art. 2 (lever). *Conformité à la volonté de Dieu*, Livre VIII, 7; IX, 6. *Pureté d'intention*, Book XII, 7,8,9 (*Oeuvres*, Ed. Annecy, 1898).

5 "Consider, I ask you, those spiritual misers; they are never satisfied with the exercises offered them... They never cease to be in quest of some new means of gathering all the sanctity of all the saints into a single sanctity that they would like to have; the result is that they are never happy, especially as they have not the strength to hold on to everything they try to seize, for he who grasps all loses all" (*Oeuvres*, X, 211, Ed., Annecy, p. 401).

possible, the holiness of all the saints and making that their own. This pursuit never leaves them satisfied, because they haven't the strength to undertake all that they would like to. It is clear, therefore, that our perfection is seriously hampered by that proliferation of exercises, which robs us of the ability to focus with necessary pleasure and peace on doing for God, what we are doing.

Those who, at a feast, peck at the various foods, sampling a little of everything, harm their stomach and bring on indigestion which prevents sleep and keeps them regurgitating all night; in a similar way, souls who want to sample all the methods, and all the means, leading to perfection, follow a false course; for the stomach of their will has insufficient fervour to digest and put into practice so many means; there results in the soul a certain rawness and indigestion destroying that peace and tranquil repose in the Lord, that one thing necessary, ⁶ which Mary has chosen and which shall not be taken away from her."

That advice of St Francis of Sales, being of such importance in the spiritual life and possibly very useful to the Brothers, we thought it quite relevant to include it here; this is even more true since his Rule was followed by our venerable Father and is in perfect harmony with his spirit and his teaching. Like the holy Bishop, whose doctrine he carefully read and practised, our pious Founder constantly repeated: "Perfection does not consist in taking on all sorts of practices, nor in adopting all the means that we find in books; it lies rather in being devoted to those which belong to our state of life and in practising faithfully that virtue to which we are attracted by grace and directed by our spiritual guide."

Father Champagnat's way of practising the exercise of the presence of God consisted in believing with a firm and real faith that God is everywhere present, ⁷ filling the universe with his immensity, with the works of his goodness, with his mercy and his glory. In his instructions, his meditations and even in his private conversation the words that came most readily to his lips were those of the Apostle: "It is in God that we live and move and have our being; ⁸" or those other words of the Royal Prophet: "Yahweh, where could I go to escape your spirit? Where could

⁶ Lk 10, 42.

⁷ "Some try to make this consideration easier by picturing the world filled with God, which it is, and themselves in the middle of that infinite sea of divine immensity, like a sponge immersed in the middle of the sea." (PPC, Part 2, Tract 3, Ch. 2, "Exercise of the presence of God").

⁸ Acts 17, 28.

I flee from your presence? If I climb the heavens you are there; there too, if I lie in Sheol and tremble at the sight of the terrible justice of yours in that place. If I go beyond the seas, your right hand holds me still; no place, however remote, can hide me from your view. You know every detail of my conduct; even more, you discover my thoughts before they are formed; the word is not even on my tongue before you know what I should do. All my actions are known to you and your hand rests always on me. 9" In the midst of the most distracting occupations, this attitude to God maintained him in a state of deep recollection and made prayer extremely easy for him. Everything was for him a motive to raise himself to God and bless him; so, on every occasion, his soul poured out acts of love, praise and thanksgiving.

To a postulant who made the request to remain all his life in the novitiate so as to be more isolated and to think less about the world by not seeing it, Marcellin replied: "There is nothing to prevent your leading a secluded life in any of our houses and in the midst of the children. As for me, I think that I could be as solitary in the middle of Paris as in the Siberian desert. While I was staying in the capital, I did my business and then retired to my room. No one in Paris knew that I was in the city and I took as little notice of Paris and its curiosities, as if I had been five hundred kilometres away."

Another person complained of being unable to pray, and blamed the distractions caused by the memory of what he had seen during his outings in Paris. Marcellin declared that all the noise, all the movement of crowds, to and fro, that whole succession of sights so well calculated to satisfy curiosity, made no impression on him; in fact, that he found it no more difficult to be recollected and united with God in the streets of Paris than in the woods of the Hermitage. 10

This feeling of the presence of God kept his soul in unvarying peace and tranquillity. He emphatically reiterated that we have nothing to fear if we are with God and that nothing can harm us if we trust in divine Providence.

He constantly encouraged the Brothers to practise the exercise of the presence of God. Each year he wished it to be one of those important resolutions usually taken at the close of the retreat.

9 Ps 138, 2-5 and 7-8.

10 Letter to Br Hilarion, March 18, 1838: "I am more alone in the middle of Paris, than at the Hermitage. I can assure you that, should God wish it, I would be happy to live in solitude" (LPC 1, doc. 181, p. 368).

In this regard, he used to quote the saying of St Francis of Sales, that the presence of God ought to be the daily bread ¹¹ of pious souls. By this he meant that just as we nourish the body by a combination of bread and many sorts of dishes, so for the nourishment of the soul, there is no action and still more no religious exercise which should not be accompanied and sanctified by recalling the presence of God.

Marcellin, it can be seen, always trod the path traced by the holy Bishop of Geneva. In the Constitutions for the Sisters of the Visitation, he had made a Rule ¹² that an appointed Sister should remind the rest occasionally during recreation and other community exercises, of the presence of God. She was to say: "Let all our Sisters remember the holy presence of God." Marcellin wished likewise that in recreation the Brothers should converse generally on edifying ¹³ subjects, or should at least be sure to introduce some uplifting words into their conversation. In this way they would not lose sight of the presence of God and would be inspired to perform all their actions for his greater glory.

"Perhaps you will ask me", he said in one of his instructions, \ "why I keep harping on this same subject; it is because it is the basis of the spirituallife. What does that consist of? In the flight from sin and the practice of virtue. Now, the presence of God will cause you to avoid sin; it will give you the strength to practise virtue, to bear with the difficulties of your state of life and inspire you with sentiments of piety. When one is tempted, the very thought: 'God sees me', is enough to banish the temptation. In fact, if we do not dare commit evil in front of men, how could we dare do so before God, if we recalled his presence? ¹⁴ Forgetfulness of God, is the first cause of all wickedness."

¹¹ Cf. S. François de Sales, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Ed. Niérat, 1898, Vol. 7, p. 183 and Vol. 10, p. 271. St Augustine had already made this comparison: "He says that as material food nourishes the body, so the word of God and prayer preserve and nourish the interior man." (pPC, Part 1, Tract 5, Ch.

2, p. 280). .

¹² "The sisters will give a reminder of the presence of Gad, taking turn about, and at intervals during recreation aswell as at its conclusion, announce some spiritual warning" (*Directoire Spirituel*, art. 8, *récréation*).

¹³ "The Brothers will strive to introduce some edifying topic into their conversation so as not to lose sight of the presence of God and so as to perform all their actions for his greater glory" (*AFM*, Appendix to the Rules of 1837, art. 6).

¹⁴ "We certainly place ourselves under a strict obligation to live weU, when we recaU that everything we do, is done before a judge who observes all, and from whom nothing can remain hidden. If the mere presence of a

It was from Sacred Scripture and the holy Fathers, that the Founder had imbibed this teaching. "The land", exclaims the Prophet Ezechiel, "is full of bloodshed, the city overflows with wickedness, sacrilege and idolatry, because men have believed that God could not see." (Ezech. 9,9) "The wicked man does not have God before his eyes, hence his thoughts, his affections, his words and his works are all tarnished, everything in him is spoiled and corrupted." (Ps 10,5)

If we were to keep in mind that God sees us, that he is witness to all our actions, we should rarely offend him. St Thomas says even, that we should never do so. St Teresa 15 adds that we lose our souls only because we believe that God is quite remote from us. St Jerome, 16 referring to God's reproach against Jerusalem that she had forgotten him, remarks that the remembrance of the presence of God banishes all sorts of sins. "What steps can we take", asks St Basil, 17 "to control levity of mind, to avoid distraction at prayer, to combat vices effectively and to avoid all kinds of sin?" He contends that the only way is to recall that God sees us, claiming that the memory of the divine presence is a supremely efficacious remedy against all sin.

Father Champagnat gave a somewhat similar reply to a Brother who wanted an explanation of the little progress he made in piety and of the large number of faults he fell into daily. «I know of only one cause», the Brother was told, "that is your lack of recollection which makes you oblivious of God's presence; all your faults stem from the ease with which you lose sight of God." To another Brother, he wrote: "Your failure to be recollected, does you great harm; so, make an effort to acquire recollection and to recall the presence of God. Then you will manage to control the levity which leads you into numerous faults and which will perhaps cause you to lose your soul. 18"

Reference was made by someone to a Brother who had great talent for teaching. It was remarked of him that his mere presence

serious person can keep us to our duty, what limit will there be to the effect of the presence of the infinite majesty of God" (pPC, Part 2, Tract 1, Ch. 1).

15 Sainte-Thérèse, *Chemin de la Perfection*, Ch. XLIII.

16 Rodriguez attributes this thought to St Jerome, Ez. 8, 12 (pPC, Part 2, Tract 1, Ch. 1).

17 "Who, then, would entertain a bad thought or perform an unworthy act, if he recalled that God is everywhere, that he sees each of our actions and sounds the depths of our hearts?" (pPC, Part 2, Tract 1, Ch. 1).

18 This letter has not been preserved.

in a class was enough to establish order and to make sure that the children worked. This drew the vigorous comment from the Founder: "Oh my friends, this is infinitely more true of the presence of God in a soul. That divine presence is sufficient to instil order in the soul; to impart peace to it; to keep sin at a distance; and to lead the soul to work assiduously at its perfection. "

One day, when visiting the Rouse, Marcellin unexpectedly came on a Brother in fault. The Brother was upset and, throwing himself at the priest's feet, exclaimed: "Sorry, Father, I didn't think you were there." "And, the good God", expostulated the priest, "did you think that he was there? What, Brother, are you willing to do in God's presence, what you would not dare do in mine? As long as you carry on in this way, you will be a Religious in appearance only; your life will be full of faults and devoid of virtue. "

"A further advantage of the presence of God", according to Father Champagnat, " is that it inspires us with great courage and equal zeal to work at our perfection. No sacrifice is too costly when we think of what God has done for us. Who are the Religious who lag behind on the path of virtue? Those who are strangers to recollection, who enter rarely into themselves, who don't observe silence and who have frequent converse with men but little with God; those Religious constantly unfaithful to grace and, like the Jews, deaf to the voice of God except when it is distinguished by claps of thunder, that is when it threatens them with hell. Such Religious, lacking the spirit of faith and forgetful of the fact that God sees them, behave like unreliable servants, who slacken work, lie down or have a good time as soon as their master is absent. Let us take care not to imitate such conduct and, to achieve this aim, let us always recall that we are seen by the One for whom we are working, and that we are constantly under his eyes.

What raised the Patriarchs to the sublime virtues that we admire in them, was simply the thought of the presence of God.

They were so accustomed to this thought that one of their most common expressions was 'The Lord liveth, in whose presence I am. 19'

19 "The saints and the patriarchs of the Old Testament, took very particular care to walk always in the presence of God... They were so accustomed to place themselves in the presence of God, that their most common expression was: 'The Lord, in whose presence I am.' " (pPC, Part 2, Tract 1, Ch. 1).

Another fact which may well serve to strengthen our courage and lead us to perform our actions well is that God accepts our good will and our efforts and does not require success. In this, he is quite different from men, who normally take no account of our good will, paying only for the effective service we render them.

God considers only the disposition of our heart, takes account of our good desires, and showers us with kindness as soon as we do our poor best to please him and to carry out our duties. 20 With an ounce of good will, it is possible to become a holy Religious, to work wonders. If, then, we are poor and without virtue, it is owing to our negligence and because we lack good will. We lack it through a weak spirit of faith, through failure to meditate on the truths of religion and through spending whole days without a thought of God."

"My dear friend", the pious Founder counselled a Brother, who considered the practices of the religious life too difficult, "call to mind often the words of the Apostle: 'It is in God that we live and move and are. 21 Then you would not be so fainthearted, the observance of the Rule would not weigh so heavily on you and you would not be easily overcome by the demon of idleness."

Judging by the way you perform your actions, he pointed out to another, "it is obvious that you give little thought to God and that the motive of pleasing him counts for nothing in what you do."

He wrote to a third Brother: "The great trouble you have in school, your fits of impatience, of boredom and of discouragement are due to your failure to recall God's presence and to seek his glory in what you do. The acts of patience, charity and zeal which you could so often practise but instead neglect, would not cost you so much effort, if you were convinced that God sees you and that your good angel notes down in the book of life all that you suffer and all your acts of virtue."

Father Champagnat wanted the Brothers' practice of the exercise of the presence of God, to take the following form:

1. To keep themselves in the state of grace; to watch over their thoughts, words and entire conduct so that nothing would be said or done against conscience and offensive to God; to combat temptations by the thought: GOD SEES ME.

2. To offer all their actions to God and to seek in all things, the greater glory of God.

20 LPC 1, doc. 24, p. 72.

21 Acts 17, 28.

3. Often during the day and in the watchful moments at night, to say short, fervent prayers. 22

4. To take Our Lord Jesus Christ for model in their actions; to keep in mind his virtues, his suffering, his way of dealing with men and to strive to act as he did, or would have done, in like circumstances.

5. To see God in his creatures, praising him and blessing him for their service to us; to place our trust in Providence, submitting to its designs in all events whatsoever, and to expect from it alone, the help required in all our difficulties and needs.

It can easily be seen that this method of practising the presence of God, is at the same time easy and full of benefit. 23

22 "The subject (of meditation) will be foreseen on the previous evening so that it can be made use of during breaks in the night's sleep... One should not be satisfied with this half-hour of meditation, but try to continue it through the different actions of the day, by remembering the presence of God and practising ejaculatory prayer" (Rules of 1837, Ch. 2, art. 2, pp. 15, 16).

23 This last sentence is also based on Rodriguez (pPC, Part 2, Tract I, Ch. 5).

CHAPTER SIX

His love for Our Lord.

To know, love and imitate Jesus Christ: that is the sum of virtue and of holiness. Father Champagnat knew this truthwell and constantly resorted to the life of our divine Saviour for the subject of his meditations. He had a particular devotion to the Child Jesus and each year prepared carefully for the feast of his birth, celebrating it with all possible solemnity. On Christmas eve, he would have a crib made, to represent that divine birth with its accompanying circumstances; he joined with the community in adoring the divine Child lying in the crib on a little straw and addressed to him the most fervent prayers.

"Oh, Brothers", he exclaimed when talking about this feast, "look at the divine Child, lying in a crib and completely helpless; his tiny outstretched hands invite us to approach him, not so that we can share his poverty, but so that he can enrich us with his favours and graces.

He became a child and reduced himself to this state of abjection so that we might love him and be free from all fear. There is nothing so lovable as a child; his innocence, his simplicity, his gentleness, his caresses and even his weakness are capable of touching and winning the hardest and cruellest of hearts.

How, then, can we not help loving Jesus, who became a child to stimulate our confidence, to demonstrate the excess of his love and to let us see that he can refuse us nothing? No-one is easier to get on with and more pliant than a child; he gives all, he pardons all, he forgets all; the merest trifle delights him, calms him and fills him with happiness; in his heart is neither guile nor rancour, for he is all tenderness, all sweetness. Let us go, then, to the divine Child, who has every perfection, human and divine, but let us do so by the path he took in coming to us, that is, the path of humility and mortification; we should ask him for those virtues, for his love and all that we need: he can refuse us nothing."

The mystery of redemption was another of the special objects of Father Champagnat's devotion. He spent the whole of Lent

meditating on the sufferings of the divine Saviour; and, convinced that such a subject was adequate to occupy the Brothers and to nourish their piety, he gave them no other for their meditations, their spiritual reading and often, for the reading during meals.

Holy Week was even more specially given over to contemplating that ineffable mystery of God's immense love for men; he spent it with the greatest recollection, as it were in a kind of retreat. During the last three days, the liturgical ceremonies were carried out in full with all possible devotion and solemnity. For many years the Founder himself fasted on Good Friday on bread and water and had the community do likewise. There was no recreation taken that day after the midday meal, and deep silence reigned throughout the house; the whole day was passed either attending the ceremonies, reading spiritual works or meditating on the sufferings of Jesus Christ.

The pious Founder turned Holy Week into a time of renewal in piety and fervour both for himself and his Brothers. Many of the Brothers in the establishment, spent this holy time with him; he saw them all privately to encourage them and to rekindle the spirit of their state; and in between the ceremonies, he conducted lectures and discussions on Christ's passion or on the duties of the religious life. It can be said, then, that the week was indeed a holy one, as its name suggests; he dedicated it entirely to prayer, to his own sanctification and that of his Brothers.

However, it was especially in the Blessed Sacrament that he delighted to display his love for Jesus Christ. The intensity of his faith in the Real Presence made one feel that he saw Christ face to face in the ineffable mystery. ¹ As a seminarian, he often asked permission to visit the Blessed Sacrament and he would have spent much of his recreation at the foot of the altar if the Superiors' prudence had not set limits to his piety and fervour.

While he was curate at La Valla, he never failed to visit the Blessed Sacrament after dinner and he made a point of visiting Our Lord before and after each time he was obliged to be absent from the house to visit the sick or to carry out any other business. Before departing, he would pray to Christ to preserve him from

¹ "I loved to see him at Mass, where you would have taken him for a seraphim. At the 11.30 visit, others and myself used to be present when the prayer was recited: 'We greet you, dearest Mary'... Father would put great feeling into its recitation" (Sister Saint-Louis, who was one of the community of Sisters at the Hermitage on the occasion of the 1841 census, and who quotes this testimony from Gabrielle Fayasson, who lived several years at the Hermitage. AFM doc. 140/3, No. 9, p. 21).

every fault and to bless what he was going to do; on his return, he would examine his conduct, thank Our Lord for the graces he had received and ask pardon for the faults committed.

You can be quite sure that he inculcated the same devotion in his Brothers, calling it the first of all devotions. In the first Rules drawn up, he prescribed a visit to the Blessed Sacrament 2 twice each day and not only for the novitiate but for the school communities; so the Brothers took the children to the Church three times a day: before school, in order to hear Mass; and after the morning and afternoon teaching sessions, to adore Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and seek the protection of the Blessed Virgin. He also laid down that the Brothers were to make a visit 3 to the Blessed Sacrament when they were out for a walk; and in the novitiate and other houses where the Real Presence is maintained, they were to visit Our Lord before and after each journey or outing.

"You should never", he told them, "leave a house where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved, without going to ask Christ for his blessing; and when you return home or go into a parish, your first visit should be to Jesus Christ." He attached such importance to these practices, that on several occasions he reproved Brothers for neglecting them. It was much against his will that he was later obliged to reduce the number of these visits, and, till his dying day, he never ceased to exhort the Brothers to the love of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

"It is for us", he reminded them, "that this divine Saviour has remained day and night on our altars for more than eighteen hundred years, enabling us to have recourse to him in all our needs; and nothing is so painful to his divine Heart as our ingratitude for such a favour and our lack of interest in visiting him and asking him for help. If we knew what good these visits did for us, we should be constantly prostrate before the altar.

The saints understood; they knew that Jesus Christ is the source of all graces; so, as soon as they had some problem to deal with, as soon as they had a special favour to ask, they hurried

2 "Then, after school, a visit is made to the Blessed Sacrament, if the parish priest agrees. If there is no visit to the church, the prayers of the visit are said at school. These prayers are: An act for the spiritual communion, the acts of faith, hope and charity, the prayer, 'We greet you dearest Mary' and the angelus" (Rules of 1837, Ch. 2, art. 19, p. 20).

3 The Brothers will always make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament before taking a walk or going on a journey; they shall do likewise, as far as possible, on their return (Rules of 1837, Ch. 8, art. 1, p. 55).

to visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament St Francis Xavier, St Francis Regis and numerous others, spent long hours during the day and much of the night, in front of the altar. These prolonged exchanges with Christ brought to fruition the works they had in hand, led to the conversion of sinners and ensured that everything they undertook would succeed for the glory of God and for their own sanctification."

The Founder was merely echoing the language of the saints when he spoke in this way. These are unanimous in agreeing that visits to the Blessed Sacrament are a source of grace for Christians. "It is certain", St Liguori 4 maintains, "that amongst the practices of piety, there is not one, apart from Holy Communion, which is so pleasing to God and so beneficial to us, as frequent visits to Jesus present on our altars. A quarter of an hour's prayer in his presence often yields more graces than all the other spiritual exercises of the day."

"In the Blessed Sacrament", according to St Peter of Alcantara, 5 "Our Lord has his hands full of graces, which he is ready to bestow on anyone who asks for them." Blessed Henry Suson 6 points out that nowhere does Christ hear prayers more easily than in the Blessed Sacrament. Finally, St Paul teaches us that Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament is the throne of grace and of mercy. 7

Whenever Father Champagnat had a difficult matter to deal with, when he suffered opposition or had some other unpleasant experience, his refuge was Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. At his feet, he scrutinized everything that was to be done and he took no decision, not even the least important, without having first recommended the matter to him. "We are going to submit all that to Our Lord", he would explain on such occasions, "at Mass, at Holy Communion and during the visits we make to him; then we shall see what is to be done." How often it happened, that situations which seemed beyond hope, righted themselves quite suddenly and contrary to any human expectation, once a few

4 "Of all the devotions, the most pleasing to God and the most useful to us, is, after Holy Communion, prayers at the feet of Jesus dwelling in the Sacrament of the Altar" (SAL, Vol. XI, Ch. XVIII, p. 92).

5 The same idea is attributed to Fr Balthazar Alvarez: the Lord appeared to him "with his hands full of graces" (SAL, Vol. XI, Ch. XVIII, p. 92).

6 "Jesus Christ, in the Blessed Sacrament is quicker to answer the prayers of those who visit him and grants them more abundant graces" (Ibid, loc. cit.).

7 Reb 4, 16.

fervent prayers had been offered for the intention, in front of the Blessed Sacrament!

On one occasion, a very important matter was being discussed by some distinguished persons all interested in the project, and no agreement was in sight; even more, the claims being made were such that none seemed likely. When the discussion was at its height, Father Champagnat seemed to pause in thought for a moment; then he got up and went without a word to the chapel; there, he threw himself at the feet of Jesus Christ and, after a few minutes of fervent prayer, returned to the group. At the sight of him, calm ensued and after a few words from him, which seemed very reasonable, agreement was reached and the matter concluded to the satisfaction of all concerned.

One day, a Brother sought out Father Champagnat in his room and, without mincing his words, announced that he wanted to withdraw and that he was so determined that nothing in the world could change his mind. "Why should you leave?" he inquired. «I know of no reason to justify such a decision; in fact, till now I have always believed that you were made for religious life and that it was God who had called you." "That is what I thought, too, for some time", the Brother replied, "but to-day, I am convinced otherwise and for some months now, community life has been unbearable." "You are in the grip of a dangerous temptation", Marcellin assured him. "The devil is jealous of your happiness and foresees the good that you can do; he wishes, with a single stroke, to destroy that good and to cause your ruin. Take care not to yield to his suggestions; otherwise you will regret it all your life and perhaps during all eternity."

Having drawn on every tactic that his zeal could suggest to get the Brother to change his mind, he could see that he was making no impression and that he couldn't even persuade him to take a few days to pray and reflect. "Stay here a moment", he invited him. «I shall return and let you know what you should do." He hurried to the chapel and, in an ardent prayer, begged Our Lord to take pity on the Brother, to rescue him on the edge of the abyss and to free him from the terrible temptation he was experiencing. He had prayed for only a few minutes when he felt his prayer was heard. So he went back to the Brother, whom he found on his knees, and who cried out as he approached: "Father, what a great service you have just done me. The devil who was tormenting me has just left me. I don't know what has happened in me, but I feel such relief that a mountain seems to have been lifted from my shoulders. My ideas are completely changed and

I can't understand how I let myself be misled by such gross illusions.'

"My friend", the Founder encouraged him, "do your best to love Our Lord, for you owe this grace to him. Endeavour to make the good Jesus known and loved; he has delivered you from this temptation and preserved you in your vocation, so that you can do so."

Another Brother, violently tempted against holy purity and unable to shake off the bad habits he had acquired in the world, often came to the Founder to report his unhappy state, and to ask him for some solution to his woes. He tried much advice and many suggestions with hardly any result, before laying down this prescription: 1. He was to offer and consecrate his heart to Our Lord every day during Mass; he would do this, using the Litany of the Sacred Heart, saying after each invocation: I consecrate myself to you. 2. That offering and consecration were to be renewed during thanksgiving at each Holy Communion. 3. During

leisure moments each day, he would make two visits to the chapel to ask Our Lord's blessing.

These practices achieved the desired effect. The temptations diminished appreciably and before long, the Brother was entirely rid of the habits which had so long enslaved him.

We have seen Father Champagnat's deep respect, and tender love, for Jesus in the Sacrament of the Altar. It was these which led him to carry out the liturgy with such solemnity and to observe meticulously the rubrics and diocesan regulations. In this regard, the little community chapel vied with such models as the Metropolitan Church or the Seminary, for excellence in performing the liturgical ceremonies. This was remarked on more than once.

Although Marcellin had a predilection for poverty and carefully established its reign in the community, (as we shall see later), he wanted the chapel and everything connected with divine worship, to be an exception; he wanted the vestments and sacred vessels ⁸ to be not only clean but even rich, as far as the resources of the community would allow.

On his arrival at La Valla, he found the church very dirty and he set to, himself, with a broom to sweep down the walls, getting rid of the dust and cobwebs that covered them; he painted certain particularly unsightly parts, cleaned the candlesticks, the crosses; the statues and all the ornaments; he waxed the altar steps each week, and saw to the cleanliness of the sacristy. He continued these tasks until a Brother was sufficiently trained to take them over. In order to give more solemnity to the liturgy, and to nourish the piety of the people, he taught the children to serve Mass and to take part in other church ceremonies; for the Corpus Christi procession, they were able to incense the Blessed Sacrament and scatter flowers with becoming reverence. So that the children might be able to do all this with the piety possible to them, he gave them a kind of novitiate. They were allowed to serve in the church, only after meriting the honour by irreproachable conduct over a certain period of time.

Out of respect for Our Lord, he scrupulously avoided any expectoration in the church and expected the same of the Brothers, framing a rule to that effect. ⁹ He prescribed likewise that they should appear clean and tidy in church, wearing their religious

⁸ Fr Champagnat wrote to Br Francis, from Paris, March 7, 1838: «I have bought a very beautiful ciborium..." (LPC 1, doc. 175, p. 356).

⁹ "It is fitting to avoid coughing, spitting (into one's handkerchief), or blowing one's nose, in the church" (Rules, AFM, doc. 362.1).

costume, and with their shoes polished. "The deep respect which we owe to the sacred person of Our Saviour", he reminded them, "requires that we be presentable when we have the happiness of appearing in his presence; and we fail to appreciate what reverence we owe him, if we are willing to present ourselves before him in dress that is soiled or careless."

His piety in celebrating Mass was a source of admiration. His recollected countenance, his earnestness, the reverence of his manner, his pious tone of voice full of verve, were all dear indications of the sentiments that overflowed his heart and of the deep impression made on him by the holiness of the august sacrifice which he offered to God. He never let a day pass without saying Mass; sometimes, when travelling, he was known to journey up to eighteen miles and more, in order to have that consolation. Often, on such occasions, he would fast during the entire morning, in the hope of being able to celebrate Holy Mass on reaching his destination.

He travelled once to Gap, and on getting down from the conveyance, he asked the time and was told it was eleven o'clock. He went straight to the cathedral and asked to say Mass. After his thanksgiving, he rejoined his companion, and exclaimed: "What a favour God has bestowed on me to-day! I did not expect to have the happiness of ascending to the holy altar, though I had a burning desire to do so."

On another occasion, he arrived at Bourg-Saint-Andéol, 10 with no hope of being able to offer the Holy Sacrifice, because he didn't have his *Celebret*. Providentially, however, he ran into an ecclesiastic whom he knew in the town, which meant that he had the consolation of saying Mass. After his thanksgiving, he went to express his gratitude to the priest, assuring him that he would never forget the favour which he owed him. "He spoke with such faith and piety", commented the priest who reported the incident, "that twenty years have done nothing to dim the impression he made on me."

After that, it will not be surprising that he so strongly recommended to his Brothers, assistance at Mass and frequent Communion. "The loss you suffer from missing Mass or Communion", he cautioned them, "is an irreparable one, an infinite one and you would be inconsolable if you understood the immense treasure contained in the Holy Eucharist. When your

10 A small town of the Ardèche, about 10 kilometres from St-Paul-TroisChâteaux.

confessor has given you permission to receive Holy Communion, you should never fail to avail yourself of it, unless you have the misfortune to commit what you believe to be a mortal sin. To miss Holy Communion on the plea that you don't feel sufficiently disposed, are without sensible devotion, have been somewhat neglectful or have committed a few slight faults, is an illusion: it is to cure one fault by a worse one."

One day Father Champagnat inquired of a senior Brother, why he so readily missed the Thursday Communion. "The reason is that I am so imperfect and so full of defects", was his reply. "My dear friend", the priest pointed out, "it is precisely because of your imperfection and your numerous faults that I would like to see you communicate often; for the sacrament of the Eucharist is the most efficacious means of correcting your defects and withdrawing you from the state of tepidity in which you find yourself. Christ does not say: 'Come to me you who are perfect', 'Come to me you who suffer, 11 who are in difficulty, who have to struggle, who are weighed down by your imperfections and I shall refresh you.' It is not by refraining from Holy Communion that we correct our faults, become pious and acquire virtue; it is by frequently drawing near to our divine Saviour."

"But", the Brother persisted, «I reap no fruit from my Communion." Whereupon Marcellin explained that Communion is never without fruit provided one is free from mortal sin; that, he explained, was because the sacrament acted in a twofold way: by its own operation, *ex opere operato*; 12 and by one's dispositions in receiving it, *ex opere operantis*. "You must not imagine", he insisted, "that your Communion is fruitless because you do not perceive the progress that you make in virtue; Holy Communion serves at least to keep you in the state of grace and that is no small matter."

Do you consider that the food you take is useless to your body, because your strength and health do not increase? No, indeed; because it is effective in compensating for daily losses and so conserving strength and health. Many complain unjustifiably that they draw no fruit from the sacraments. To resist temptation, to keep out of mortal sin, to persevere in religious life, to fulfil one's employment reasonably well, to be faithful to the exercises of piety, and to bemoan one's defects, are so many fruits of the

11 Matt 11, 28.

12 Cf. St Thomas, IIIa, q. 62, arts. 1-6. Appendix II, chapter VII.

sacraments; failure to recognize this fact and to show our thanks to Christ, is the height of ingratitude.

What do such Religious still need in order to make great progress in virtue and acquire all the perfection that God asks of them? A little more care and effort to pray well; a little more concern for the observance of the Rule; a little more devotedness to one's employment; and a little more love for Jesus Christ. Now, the most efficacious way of obtaining the little which is lacking in all these things, is to assist at Holy Mass with great piety, to meditate on the mysteries of the life of Our Saviour, and to go frequently to Holy Communion: for, never forget that we have everything in Jesus Christ and nothing without him."

Another Brother gave as his reason for missing the Thursday Communion, that he was too severely tempted. Father Champagnat remonstrated with him in these terms: "To stay away from Communion because you are tempted, is to yield the victory to the devil without a struggle; his aim in tempting you so strongly is simply to make you give up Communion. He knows by experience, that he can lead into mortal sin those who forego their divine food which is a supremely efficacious remedy against sin. Haven't you noticed that the devil fills your mind with bad thoughts, that he hounds you relentlessly, on the eve of your Communion, and that he leaves you in peace, the moment you have decided not to receive? Why does he behave this way? Because he abominates Holy Communion, and he does so because he knows that it brings great benefits and is the antidote to sin. The shortest way, therefore, to triumph over temptations and to put a stop to them, is to approach Jesus Christ often in Holy Communion."

But what grieved the pious Founder most of all, was to see Brothers miss Mass or Communion through lack of devotion through indifference, through scant zeal for their perfection or on account of unnecessary travels and social calls. Again and again, he denounced such conduct and his energy and vigour in doing so always reflected the tender love that he had for Jesus Christ, and the deep grief that he felt at seeing Brothers remain remote from the one who is the source of all graces.

It was his love for Jesus Christ, which inspired Marcellin's burning zeal to promote his glory; it was this too, which led him on all occasions to exhort his Brothers insistently, to study that divine Saviour and to make him known and loved. His instructions returned to that point. "To make Our Lord known and loved", he repeated incessantly, "is the aim of our vocation and the whole purpose of the Institute. If we were to fail in this purpose, our

congregation would be useless and God would withdraw his protection from it.

Therefore, keep stressing the mysteries and the life of Our Lord; speak to the children often about his virtues, his sufferings, the love he showed them in dying on the cross ¹³ and the treasures of grace which he left them in the sacraments. The science of religion consists entirely in knowing Christ: even more, it is in him that eternal life consists and the saints in heaven do nothing other than study, contemplate and love Jesus Christ who is their happiness. To impart knowledge of Our Lord, ought, therefore, to be the goal of all your catechism lessons and you should never fail to speak of that. divine Master in any of them. The more you make him known, the more you make him loved, the more you weaken the reign of sin, the more you establish that of virtue and the more you ensure the salvation of your pupils."

In a great number of letters, he reiterated this advice, urging the Brothers to remind the children constantly how much Jesus loved them and how much, therefore, they were obliged to love him.¹⁴

¹³ LPC 1, doc. 24, p. 72.

¹⁴ Letters to Br Bartholomew (LPC 1, doc. 14, p. 53; doc 19, p. 61).

CHAPTER SEVEN

His devotion to the Blessed Virgin.

It could be said that our beloved Father had imbibed this devotion with his mother's milk, for she and his pious aunt I were both very devoted to the Blessed Virgin. They had striven to instil this precious devotion into his heart from his earliest infancy. During his childhood and while he lived in the bosom of the family, his devotion took the form of reciting a few short prayers that he had been taught; but once he had decided to become a priest and when he was actually in the seminary, his piety towards the Mother of God increased perceptibly and he undertook numerous practices to merit her protection and to prove to her his tender affection.

It was then he took the resolution to say the rosary every day, a resolution that he faithfully kept all his life. He loved also to make frequent visits to Mary's altar and it was in these communings with her that he came to understand that God wished to sanctify him and prepare him to labour for the sanctification of his neighbour, through a special devotion to that divine Mother. His motto from then on became: "All to Jesus through Mary, and all to Mary for Jesus.²" This saying reveals the spirit which guided him and was his rule of conduct throughout life.

Looking on the Blessed Virgin as his Mother and as the path which would lead him to Jesus, he placed under her protection, his studies, his vocation and all his plans; he consecrated himself to her every day and offered her all his actions so that she might deign to present them to her divine Son.

¹ Marcellin had a paternal aunt and grand-aunt who were Sisters of St Joseph... (Louise) Sister Therese, withdrew to her brother's place in 1791 (AA, pp. 13, 14).

² The first part of this motto is found frequently amongst many spiritual authors, especially of the 17th century; the second part needs to be interpreted (as used by Grignon de Montfort, for example), in a sense of humility: to pass through Mary for everything one offers to Jesus. Grignon says even: "All for Mary", cf. Commentary of Jean Morin: *Marie et la faiblesse de Dieu, le message spirituel du Père de Montfort*. Ed. Nouvelle Cité, 1988, pp. 266-268.

It was in one of his frequent visits to the Blessed Virgin that the idea struck him of founding a congregation of pious teachers ³ and of naming it after the one who had inspired it. Since he himself felt a special inclination to honour the Blessed Virgin, ⁴ judging others by himself, he believed that the name of Mary would suffice in itself to attract subjects to the congregation which he was intending to found. He was not deceived.

Faithful to his resolution of always going to Jesus through Mary, on leaving the seminary after ordination, he made his way to Fourvières in order to consecrate his ministry to the Blessed Virgin; and each time that business took him to Lyon, he visited the shrine of Fourvières to renew that offering and that consecration, at Mary's feet.

When he was appointed curate of La Valla, he went there on a Saturday ⁵ and wanted his holy ministry to begin on the feast of the Assumption so that Mary might bless its first fruits and herself present them to her divine Son.

That is the way he acted all his life, offering and entrusting to Mary all his plans and works, and he would begin them only after prolonged prayer for her blessing. Every day, during his visits to the Blessed Sacrament he would go and pay homage to the Blessed Virgin. Yet that wasn't enough to satisfy his piety.

In his own room, he erected a small altar on which he placed her statue. There, at all hours of the day, he sent up fervent prayers to her, and often remained long hours prostrate at her feet.

Perceiving that the altar of Mary in the parish church was in a state of bad repair, he had another one made at his own expense, and restored the whole chapel. In the parish of La Valla, at some distance from the village, there is a shrine in honour of

³ This idea is confirmed by Br Francis, writing to the Minister in 1851, as king for legal approval: "Fr Champagnat had untold difficulty in learning to read and write. As a result, he felt the need to train good teachers for the instruction of country children" (AFM, ADL, V. 480).

⁴ Fr Champagnat writes in his letter to king Louis-Philippe, Jan. 24, 1834: "I gave them the name of Little Brothers of Mary, quite convinced that this name alone would attract a big number of subjects. A speedy success, in a matter of a few years, has proved my intuition right, beyond my wildest hopes" (LPC 1, doc. 34, p. 100). He expresses the same idea to Minister Salvandy, Nov. 27, 1837 (LPC 1, doc. 159, p. 307).

⁵ The Register of Approvals for the Archives of the diocese of Lyon gives August 12, 1816 for his appointment to La Valla; it was a Monday. Is it possible that he was aware of his appointment from the time he left Lyon (July 24), and that he went to La Valla as soon as he could, for example, Saturday, August 3 or 10? (OM 4, p. 220, note).

the Blessed Virgin, under the title of Our Lady of Pity. 6 Marcellin visited it often; and several times a week he went there in procession with some pious members of the faithful to celebrate Holy Mass. On the way there, they sang the Miserere Mei, and on their return, the Litany of the Blessed Virgin.

From his very first year as curate, he introduced the pious practice of the month of Mary 7 in the parish church. At that time, it was a little-known practice; within a few years, it was to produce great fruits of salvation both in the whole of France and in the entire christian world. He led the exercise 8 himself each morning after Mass. To promote it, he distributed in the parish, many copies of the booklet, the Month of Mary, 9 and other works calculated to inspire devotion to the august Mother of God. Hence, in a short time, the practice of the month of Mary spread to every hamlet 10 in the parish and soon each family had its place for prayer, where they gathered in the evening before a picture of the Queen of Heaven to beg for her protection, to sing her praises and to meditate on her greatness and goodness.

When he had founded his Institute, the month of Mary became a community exercise; it was even made a practice in the schools and an article of Rule was framed in these terms: "All the Brothers will have at heart the careful performance of the month of Mary exercise and will arrange for the children to carry it out with pleasure and devotion. 11"

He shared the opinion of all the Saints that devotion to Mary is a mark of predestination; it gave him pleasure to repeat this consoling truth in his instructions; that truth most certainly explained his mighty efforts to make this august Virgin known and loved and to inspire his parishioners and the Brothers with unlimited confidence in her protection. Moreover, he was convinced that all the Brothers who have the happiness of dying

6 That is the name given in Marist books to that 15th century sanctuary, because of the statue of the Pietà which was there. The official name is chapel of Leytra.

7 Cf. Br Chagas Costa Ribeira, Month of Mary at La Valla, in 1817 (AFM).

8 Fr Champagnat wrote from Paris to Br Francis, May 20, 1838: "...During the journey, that is, in the coach, I conducted the Month of Mary and said the rosary, with those who were there..." (LPC 1, doc. 193, p. 389).

9 Br Francis said that he Hreceived one personally from Fr Champagnat" (AFM, Mélanges, cahier 1, p. 93).

10 In the case of a population as widely dispersed as La Valla's, it seemed sensible to make use of the church for people from the town and one or other house in each hamlet.

11 Rules of 1837, Ch. 4, art. 11, p. 36.

in the Institute, will be saved. He was often heard to declare: «I am quite sure that Mary will not allow to perish anyone of those who persevere till death in their vocation and leave this world clothed in her distinctive costume." His assertion was founded on the following reasons, which are solid and amply justify his confidence:

1. The religious vocation is, of itself, in the opinion of the saints, a mark of predestination.

2. The Institute professes a special devotion to Mary and numerous practices of piety are prescribed by the Rule, to honour her and merit her protection. "If we see", he argued, "so many Christians obtain salvation because they have faithfully said a prayer to this powerful Virgin or performed some act of virtue in her honour, how could a Brother be lost, when he says her rosary, her office and another prayers in her honour, every day; when he consecrates one day a week to that divine Mother; and celebrates her feast days with particular devotion? Should it happen that someone by a strange perversity should fail to avail himself of all the means of salvation furnished by his holy state, aren't we justified in believing that his Brothers' prayers and good works will obtain his conversion. My belief is that either this will be so, or he will leave the Society. 12"

3. The promise of salvation has been attached to the holy scapular. The Brothers all wear it; but, if Mary preserves from eternal damnation those who do only this, how much more will she preserve from such a fate, those who go further: the Brothers carry her name; wear her costume; live in her house; pay her a tribute of homage every day; labour to make her loved and to spread her devotion amongst the children; and carry out many other works well suited to honour her and merit her protection.

4. The experience of the past confirms the view. "Look at those who have died in the Institute", the Founder invited; "consult the mortuary register and tell me if there is a single one whose death raises any anxiety about his eternal fate. No, thanks be to God, there isn't one; and all those good Brothers died in the most Christian of dispositions giving us the greatest reassurance. We can even add, to the glory of Mary, our good Mother, that most of them left this world with clear signs of predestination."

12 That was also the thought of Fr Colin, reported by Fr Mayet: «I am confident that all those who die in the Society will be saved and that the Blessed Virgin will cause those not of the elect, to leave the Society... because they will be hearts gone wrong. Yes, my confidence runs to those lengths" (OM 2, doc. 425 r13]. p. 136).

At this point, we could relate a great number of incidents in confirmation of these words of the Founder; we shall take only one.

In 1838, Brother Justin, J3 Director of the establishment at Perreux, fell ill with tuberculosis and was soon at death's door. He had no illusions about his condition and prepared to die as perfectly as he could. When a confrère suggested that he should ask God to be cured, his reply was: «I shall take very good care not to do that; I have no need of health and it is enough for me to do God's will. If only you knew how happy I consider myself to suffer a little for Our Lord and to die in order to see him in heaven, you wouldn't talk to me about asking to be cured."

Filled with those sentiments, he spent the last days of his life in constant communing with Jesus and Mary. He had received the sacraments; the indulgence at the hour of death had been applied to him; and, crucifix in hand, he awaited with holy longing, the hour of departure for heaven. Towards midnight on June 23, those who were sitting up with him, noticed that he fell into a state of deep recollection. His answers to their calls and questions made it clear that he was fully conscious.

Since they were aware of his liking for prayer, they didn't disturb him further, simply keeping an eye on him. He had spent about half an hour in this contemplation, when his face lit up and became flushed; he joined his hands, made an effort to rise and several times began to smile. The Brothers at his bedside inquired what he wanted and why he smiled. "I smile", he told them, "because I see the Blessed Virgin; she is there; she is coming to get me."

The next moment he fell asleep peacefully in the Lord, the smile still on his lips and his eyes fixed on the spot where he had claimed to see the Blessed Virgin.

A postulant, whose conduct was far from satisfactory, and whose vocation was so unsettled that he had made several requests to leave, was present at this precious death. The experience changed him completely. Early in the morning of that same day he went to seek out Father Champagnat to assure him of his determination to live and die in the Institute. He begged to be received into it, to be given the name of the Brother who had just died and to be sent to the Mission of Oceania. The change in this

13 Pierre Champalier, born at La Valla in 1814 or 1815. Cf. RI. Vol XXIV, p. 505 and L.P.C. 2, p. 309.

young Brother 14 was a lasting one: from that day, he was a different man and his three requests were granted.

There will be less surprise at this assurance given by Father Champagnat as to the salvation of the members of the Institute, when it is known what he required of the Brothers by way of honouring Mary and meriting her protection. In the mind of the pious Founder, everything in the Institute should belong to Mary and should be used to honour her. To love this admirable Queen, to serve her and spread devotion to her, faithful to the mind of the Church, as an outstanding way of loving and serving Jesus more easily and more perfectly: this was his precise aim in founding the Society.

That is how Marcellin justified his exhortation to the Brothers to look upon Mary as their Mother, their Patroness, and their Model: moreover, he wanted them to have towards her the feelings appropriate to a Mother, a Patroness, a Model and a first Superior. 15 It was on the basis of these principles that the practices which we now record, were established in the Society in order to honour Mary.

First thing in the morning, the entire day is consecrated to her by the singing of the Salve Regina in the larger communities and its recitation in the others.

Each Brother should put himself under the protection of Mary on rising, dedicating himself to her and reciting three Hail Marys; in the evening, before retiring, he does the same.

The Office, the rosary, the saying of the Hail Mary at each hour of the day and other prayers, are the tribute of homage which the Brothers are expected to offer her during the day. All the exercises of piety and most of the community exercises, conclude with the "We tly to your patronage. /67"

Each Saturday is particularly consecrated to Mary's honour. On that day, special prayers are addressed to her in order to obtain, through her intercession, the beautiful virtue of purity. Besides, all the Brothers are required to fast on that day and anyone unable to do so is to seek a dispensation and to substitute

14 This second Brother Justin (Etienne Perret), born at Chamelet (Rhône), in 1814, set out for the mission of Oceania and returned to Lyon to die in 1871 (CSG 1, p. 468 and XIII, p. 305).

15 LPC 1, doc. 23, p. 71 and doc. 260, p. 493. See also, the Spiritual Testament.

16 One of the oldest marial prayers. It appears from the 3rd century (BI No. 213, p. 24).

some prayers or some act of virtue. Saturday is also a Communion day 17 for those to whom it is permitted.

As to her feasts, these are to be observed by all the members of the Institute with holy joy, with devout respect, with love and completely filial gratitude. The Rule requires the Brothers to prepare for them by a novena or by some other pious practice and to fast on the eve. On the feast itself, each one renews his vows and consecrates himself anew to that tender Mother. The five chief feasts 18 are kept as days of obligation, in the novitiates, which carry out the liturgy with the greatest solemnity. Those holy days should be the occasion for all the Brothers of the Institute to honour their divine Mother. This could be by reading some works which treat of her greatness; it could be by instructing the children on the meaning of the feast and on the benefits of devotion to Mary.

There were two complements to all these practices in honour of Mary and to his devotion towards her. The Founder wanted these for his Institute and prescribed them, since he considered them indispensable. The first one was the imitation of her virtues.

He insisted, therefore, that the Brothers' love for Mary should lead them especially to acquire her spirit and to copy her humility, her modesty, her purity and her love of Jesus Christ. The poor and hidden life of the divine Mother and the sublime example she has given us ought to be the rule of conduct for the Brothers; each one should make such an effort to be-like her that all his actions and his entire person are a reminder of Mary, and reflect her spirit and her virtues. 19

The second stipulation was that the Brothers should consider themselves under a particular obligation to make Mary known and loved, to make her widely honoured and to inspire the children 20 with devotion to her.

17 Most of the Brothers received Communion on Sundays and Thursdays. It was very rare to find any who, like Br Francis, did so every day.

18 Assumption, Immaculate Conception, Nativity, Annunciation, Visitation (AFM, Common Rules of 1852, Ch. VI, p. 14, note).

19 "As Brothers and children of Mary, you ought to go to her in all your needs, to renew each day your consecration and devotedness to her holy and delightful service... to do everything in union with her and under her protection" (Rules of the Little Brothers of Mary, arts. 5 and 6, Ch. 12. AFM, 361.1: manuscript of Br Francis).

20 "The Brothers will make every effort to inspire the children with a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin" (Rules of 1837, Ch. 4, art. 14, p. 37).

Here, now, are some of Father Champagnat's thoughts on this important subject.

“ 'Salvation is of the Jews,²¹’ said our divine Lord to the Samaritan woman. My dear Brothers, we can affirm with even greater certainty that salvation comes from Mary. It was of her that Jesus was born; it is through her that he came down from heaven to save men; through her mediation and intervention that he first applied the merits of redemption, in sanctifying St John the Baptist; ²² his first miracle was worked at her request; ²³ to her, from the Cross, he entrusted all men in the person of his divine disciple, ²⁴ to make us aware that she is our Mother and that it is through her that he wishes to bestow his grace on us and apply to our souls the merits of his Passion and Cross.

Now, if it is through Mary's hands that graces are distributed to us and if her intercession is necessary for our salvation, (as the holy Fathers of the Church assure us), we ought to conclude with St Alphonsus, ²⁵ one of the greatest saints of our time, that the salvation of all men depends on their being inspired with a solid devotion to Mary and an unlimited trust in her protection. Should you, therefore, happily instil this precious devotion into the hearts of your children, they will be saved; for, either they will not seriously wander from the path of virtue or they will be led back to that by the one whom the Church calls the Mother of Mercy, the Refuge of Sinners. ²⁶”

So that they might succeed in inspiring the children with this solid devotion to the Blessed Virgin, he wanted the Brothers to take every opportunity to speak to the children about it, and to give special instructions on the subject; they were to reinforce these by well-chosen stories and inject interest into them by the example and practice of the saints. He often recounted such stories

²¹ Jn 4, 23.

²² Lk 1, 44.

²³ Jn 2, 1-11.

²⁴ Jn 19, 25-27.

²⁵ "All the blessings which we obtain from the Lord, we receive through the intercession of Mary, and why? Because, according to St Bernard, such is God's will. But the special reason is drawn from the thought of St Augustine, that Mary is rightly called our Mother, because she cooperated through charity in our re-birth to the life of grace... Holy Church wants us, in greeting her, to give her the titles of our life, our sweetness and our hope" (St Alphonsus Liguori, *Oeuvres dogmatiques*, Vol. VII, p. 298. Ed. Casterman, 1867).

²⁶ At this point, Brother John-Baptist inserts an account of great devotees of Mary. See Appendix I, at the end of this chapter.

himself and had the knack of drawing on them so appositely and applying them so precisely and convincingly, that he delighted his listeners.

Zeal in spreading devotion to the Blessed Virgin is more than a way of leading children to God; it is a source of blessing for the catechist. Father Champagnat kept this thought constantly before the Brothers. To one of them, he wrote: "Do you want God to bless your house, to give you and your Brothers, the spirit of piety? Inspire your children with devotion to the Blessed Virgin." "If you are zealous in making Mary honoured", he promised in another letter, "you will be victorious over the temptations which assail you; you will persevere in your beautiful vocation; you will be happy in your holy state; and the Blessed Virgin will grant you special graces. If the Blessed Virgin is full of kindness to all men how much greater will be her mercy towards those who don't stop at serving her themselves, but who work to make her loved and honoured by others? 27"

It is clear, then, that Father Champagnat did not confine devotion to the Blessed Virgin, to exterior practices; he wanted efforts made to imitate her virtues and to spread her devotion with boundless zeal. However, since those practices are conducive to nourishing piety and meriting her protection; since, too, they are indispensable to any true devotion to Mary, he insisted on their faithful and fervent performance.

We have already seen that there were those who urged him to suppress the saying of the Office of the Blessed Virgin. He would never agree; instead, he frequently recommended the Brothers never to omit it, urging them to recite it with all the piety and devotion within their power. "Remember", he frequently reminded them, "that it is the word of God that you are reciting and that these expressions have been given us by the Holy Spirit so that we may pray to the Mother of God and honour her."

He spoke in the same vein about the rosary, 28 expecting the Brothers to carry it as well as to wear the scapular. "If through some unforeseen event or some exceptional duties", he instructed them, "you cannot say the whole rosary, say two or three decades,

27 Here, the author places a series of incidents in regard to Mary. See Appendix II.

28 "They will always wear their scapular and carry their rosary" (Common Rules, 1852, Part I, Ch. 6, art. 13). "It is not enough to say one's rosary; it is good to carry it by day as a weapon of defence and a powerful help" (Rules of P.F.M., AFM, manuscript doc. 362.1; 262.2 and 362.3).

and if that is absolutely beyond you, say the first three Hail Marys, or, at the very least, take your beads and kiss them before going to bed; in this way, you will never entirely omit that prayer. He who loves Mary is never without some object to remind him of his heavenly Mother and he constantly has with him, day and night, his rosary and his scapular. These are weapons of salvation which defend us when we are tempted and, often enough, all that is needed in order to put the devil to flight, is to take them in our hands or even to recall that we have them."

He met a Brother, one day, who didn't have his rosary with him, because he had changed his soutane. "If you loved the Blessed Virgin", he chided him, "if you knew how useful your rosary can be to you in time of danger, and what blessings come from carrying it with you, you would not forget it so easily."

These accounts should dispel any surprise that Father Champagnat had such great confidence in Mary. His confidence was such that nothing seemed impossible with the help of that powerful Virgin. He was often heard to declare: "If the whole world is against us, we have nothing to fear, provided the Mother of God is for us."

After the events of 1830, since the Congregation was not approved by the Government, the story went abroad that it would be suppressed. In fact, the Prefect of the Loire, whether he had received ministerial instructions or was simply spurred on by the evil inclinations of his heart and his hatred of religion, was preparing to close the novitiate.

In these circumstances, instead of losing his calm and his courage, Father Champagnat, as usual, had recourse to the Blessed Virgin, confiding his community to her.

Having assembled the Brothers, who were now beginning to be anxious, he assured them: "Don't be frightened by the threats

29 On his way to Paris, Fr Champagnat wrote from Lyon to Br Francis, Jan. 10, 1838: «I forgot my rosary; don't fail to send it to me" (LPC 1, doc. 169, p. 334).

30 Mr Scipion Mourgue, Prefect from Sept. 23, 1830 to May 4, 1831, said to the Council General: "This Institution (of the Marist Brothers) is all the less worthy of encouragement, gentlemen, for the fact that it is public knowledge that its members end up with a deplorable ignorance and serve more to ensure that the children will waste their time than to put them on the path of even trivial knowledge... Yet that Institution, in an obstinate sort of way, wants to teach, and I recently had proof of it from their rash resistance to the admission of the mutual teaching method fortunately protected by the firm and enlightened mayor of that town" (RLF, p. 82).

made against you, and put aside all fear for your future; Mary who has gathered us in this house, will not allow us to be driven from it by men's malice. Let us be more faithful than ever in honouring her, in showing ourselves her genuine children and in imitating her virtues; let us redouble our confidence in her and remind ourselves that she is our Ordinary Resource. To merit her protection and to keep away every danger, we shall sing the Salve Regina of a morning before meditation."

This was the only precaution he thought necessary to take; and Mary, in whom he had placed all his confidence, didn't let him down: the Prefect was transferred 31 and the house was in no way disturbed. Afterwards, the singing of the Salve Regina in the morning was maintained and became an article of Rule. 32

Once Father Champagnat had put any matter in Mary's hands, he remained at peace and full of confidence, whatever turn things might seem to take. "Have no fear", he would insist, "appearances are against us but Mary will arrange everything; she will be able to ward off difficulties, and control events, turning them to our advantage." The remarkable thing is that his confidence was never misplaced. Hence, in every need, in all difficult circumstances, he had recourse to Mary; he wanted to be indebted for everything to her alone, after God; it was from her protection that he expected everything and his favourite expression was: "Mary is our ORDINARY RESOURCE.²³"

Invariably, when instructing the Brothers to pray for the virtues and temporal blessing they needed, he would add: "You know to whom you should go for these favours, to our Ordinary Resource. Don't be afraid of calling on her help too frequently: her power is unlimited; her kindness and her store of grace are inexhaustible. Besides, she is responsible for us, being our Mother, our Patroness, our Superior and our source of hope. This community is her work; it was she who brought us all into this house; so she ought to give each of us the virtues she wants us to have 34 aswell as the temporal goods we need."

Devotion to Mary, the longing to honour her, to serve her and to live under her protection were seen by the Founder as evidence of a vocation. "Why do you come to our Congregation, which is

31 May 4, 1831, he was replaced by Mr de Norvias (LPC 2, p. 13).

32 "At 4.50 a.m., Salve Regina, then morning prayer, followed by meditation..." (Common Rules of 1852, Part I, Ch. 9, art. 3).

33 The capital letters repeat those of the 1852 Rules, p. 15.

34 LPC 1, doc. 259, p. 492.

the smallest of all?" he questioned a particular postulant. "Because", came the reply, "your Community bears Mary's name; because I want to bear that name myself and live under the protection of that divine Mother." "That being so", the Founder assured him, "take courage. Mary will bless you; you will be happy in her Society, and you will make a good Religious."

Another young man pleaded to be admitted into the Society, but since he was a stranger and he had no letter of recommendation, the Founder was not willing to accept him. The postulant was deeply upset at this ,unexpected refusal and began to weep, declaring that he did not want to return to the world. This constancy surprised the Founder and reassured him. Having put several questions to the candidate, he finally asked: "Is your purse full? Can you pay the novitiate fees?" The postulant answered that he had only one franc, a reply which prompted the further question: "Do you love the Blessed Virgin?" At this, the postulant wept even more and Father Champagnat asked a second and a third time: "Do you love the Blessed Virgin?" "Yes, Father, I do", he answered in a firm tone of voice, "and that is what brings me here." "Very well, friend", was the Father's comment, "give me your franc; I accept you, but always remember that it is to love and serve Mary that you came and that you have been admitted into the Society. 35"

Let us end this chapter with an outstanding instance of how Mary watched over the Founder. In the month of February 1823, one of the Brothers of Bourg-Argental 36 was seriously ill and Father Champagnat did not want his child to die without seeing him once more and giving him his blessing. The weather was bad and the ground covered with snow, but he was not deterred from making his way on foot to visit the patient, once he heard of his dangerous state. After consoling the Brother and blessing him, he made ready to return to La Valla, despite the efforts to dissuade him because of the great quantity of snow which had fallen that same day, and the blizzard that was still raging. However, drawing on his courage, he chose to resist the pleading of the Brothers and the advice of his friends. He soon had reason to regret that choice.

35 It could be a reference to Joseph-Antony Falque (Br Cecilian) who gave one franc and promised to give twenty later (AFM, Cahier des entrées, R.E. 1, p. 96).

36 According to Br Avit, the reference is to Br John-Baptist (AA, pp. 50-52).

With Brother Stanislaus at his side, he started for La VaHa, across the mountains of Pilat; 37 but they had walked for hardly two hours 38 when they lost their way. As there was no trace of a path, they were forced to rely on luck or rather on the protection of God. A violent wind hurled the snow into their faces, making it so difficult to see that they didn't know whether they were going backwards or forwards. After wandering for a few hours, the Brother became so worn out that Father Champagnat had to take him by the arm to lead him and to help him keep his feet. It wasn't long, however, before he himself benumbed with cold and smothered with snow, felt his strength failing and was obliged to stop.

"My friend", he admitted to the Brother, "we are finished, if the Blessed Virgin doesn't come to our aid; let us have recourse to her and beg her to rescue us from the danger we are in of losing our lives in these woods and this snow." The words were scarcely out of his mouth when he felt the Brother slip from his grasp and fall exhausted to the ground. Full of confidence, he knelt down beside him, (now apparently unconscious), and said the Memorare with great fervour. After that prayer, he tried to raise the Brother again and to get him to walk. They had to ken only a few steps, when they noticed a light shining in the distance; for it was night. They made in the direction of the light and arrived at a house, 39 where they spent the night. They were both quite benumbed with cold, and the Brother especially was a long time recovering.

Father Champagnat declared, on several occasions, that if help had not arrived right then, would both have perished and that the Blessed Virgin had snatched them from certain death. 40

37 The path followed passes along a saddle of the mountain at 1202 metres: "La Croix de Chaubouret".

38 From Bourg-Argental to the Memorare site is a distance of some 10 kilometres.

39 The inhabitants of the house were Joseph Donnet, his wife MarieMagdaleine Despinasse and their five-year-old daughter, Marie-Antoinette.

40 "During my youth, I used to love to visit my Donnet cousins, who always welcomed me. On one of my visits, when I was in religious garb, Mr Donnet proudly showed me the bed in which the Founder had lain. It was very clean and adorned with flowers printed on the main panels (Written account of Br Francis Mary (John Claude Naime), AFM 0144. 0002). Also "Présence Mariste" p. 21, No. 176, 1988.

APPENDIX I

It is through devotion to the Blessed Virgin that the saints, in every age, have sanctified the world. St Vincent Ferrer regarded the spreading of devotion to the Blessed Virgin, as the most efficacious means of instilling a horror of sin and a spirit of penance.

Father Honoré, a Franciscan, renowned for his sermons on the gospel and for the fruits of salvation that they produced, constantly spread devotion to Mary; he taught the people to honour her by various practices, especially the rosary. As he had his critics, who accused him of wasting time, this holy man retorted: "Wait for the end of the mission and you will see the value of devotion to the Blessed Virgin and whether it has been a waste of time to inculcate it into the faithful and to teach them to say the rosary." The mission always ended with a crowd of converted sinners; with a renewal of piety, devotion and the holy practice of religion; and with the people, evangelized by this holy Religious, being completely changed and brought back to the paths of virtue.

It is well known that the Blessed Virgin appeared to St Dominic when he was preaching against the Albigenses and making little headway. She advised him: "Remember, my son, that the means used by the Blessed Trinity to renew the world, was the angelic salutation which is the foundation of the New Testament. That is why, if you want to win over sinners, preach my rosary." The saint, comforted and enlightened by this vision, taught the mysteries of the rosary, instilled devotion to Mary, and in no time converted more than a hundred thousand heretics and a numerous throng of sinners.

St Gregory Thaumaturgus, having been made Bishop of NeoCaesarea, and finding only seventeen Christians in his diocese, turned to the Blessed Virgin, put his episcopate under her protection and asked her to convert his flock, begging her to teach him the right way to instruct them and win them to God. The Blessed Virgin heard the prayer of her faithful servant; she appeared in full splendour to him, in the company of St John the Evangelist. She ordered the latter to explain to Gregory the mysteries of the faith and how to teach them. To cap off all this, she showered such blessing on the Bishop's apostolate that when he died there were only seventeen heretics or infidels in his diocese, which had been full of them at his appointment.

The great secret of St Ildephonsus, Archbishop of Toledo, for converting sinners, was to lead them to Mary; and he was very reassured whenever he saw them persevere in devotion to her whom he called the reparatrix of the universe and the treasurer of all graces. He had a tireless zeal for making her honoured; he spoke of her at every opportunity and even wrote a book in defence of her perpetual virginity. The Blessed Virgin was not outdone in generosity; she granted the holy bishop numerous favours, one of which we recount.

On December 18th, the date on which Spain celebrates the feast of the Annunciation, Ildephonsus had just sat down to say his Office when the Queen of Heaven appeared to him. She was accompanied by a band of angels and held in her hand the book that the saint had written on her virginity. When she had expressed her satisfaction with it, she gave him a magnificent chasuble as a token of her affection, and said to him: "Because you have added to a lively faith and a pure conscience, a great zeal for my glory, I give you this vestment taken from the treasures of my son." This incident is recorded in the Acts of a Spanish Council which set up a feast to commemorate it. It is reported by Mariana, Baronius, Tritenus, St Francis of Sales and many others.

St Bernardine of Siena, began to serve the Blessed Virgin in his infancy and to pray before her pictures for hours on end. One day, that divine Mother appeared to him, and said: "My son, as a reward for the piety and love you show towards me, I am granting you three outstanding graces: vocation to the religious life; a special talent for announcing the word of God and for converting sinners; and solid virtue and great holiness." Shortly afterwards, Bernardine filled Italy with the fruit of his sermons and the reports of his miracles. The most hardened sinners were converted at his word; piety flourished everywhere; and vice made way for virtue. In front of many witnesses, the saint brought four dead to life. Those marvels and the fruits of salvation he brought about, were the reward for his devotion to Mary; his confidence in her enabled him to ask her for a miracle as readily as for a simple grace. Constant preaching had practically silenced his voice, but he turned to Mary and experienced a perfect cure. This saint was born on September 8th, feast of the birth of the Blessed Virgin; on that same feast, he took the religious habit, made his vows, said his first Mass and preached his first sermon; on that day, too, he died.

Father de Nobletz, one of the most extraordinary people of the eighteenth century, who by his simple instructions and his catechesis of children restored piety and the spirit of faith throughout Brittany, owed all the fruits of his labours to the Blessed Virgin. He declared as much, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, a few hours before he died. «I feel bound in conscience», he affirmed on his death bed, "to reveal what great graces God has given me through the intercession of Mary, my divine Mother. When I was studying for the priesthood at Agen, I experienced great affliction. The Blessed Virgin, whom I have always served and loved, appeared to me, consoled me, and gave me this assurance: 'My child, I have obtained three crowns for you: the first, is virginity which you will keep intact all your life even in the midst of the greatest dangers to which your ministry will expose you; the second, is contempt of the world and detachment from all things; the third is ability to be a teacher and master of the spiritual life. As a result, many souls will be saved through you.' "

We need not be surprised after that, at the fruits of salvation produced by this great servant of God.

St Philip Neri made it a duty from earliest childhood, to pass no day without offering Mary some practices of piety. He referred to her only as his tender Mother, his sweet patroness and his delight. He took every opportunity to work at making her loved and at inspiring devotion to her; and every time he spoke of her, his face radiated joy and the hearts of his listeners sweUed with fervour and often even, with the desire to become Religious. He never engaged in conversation, gave a sermon or made a speech, without speaking of Mary.

In his direction of penitents, and in response to those who sought his counsel, he always concluded with a few words on devotion to the Blessed Virgin. "Honour Mary, my children", he would say, "for she is the dispensatrix of graces; if you want to persevere, to serve and honour Mary every day; if you want to be converted, pray to Mary." No one could calculate the number of habitual sinners he converted and rescued from vice, through turning them to practices of devotion, in honour of Mary. Through this pious devotion, he renewed the city of Rome and worked prodigies of grace in all groups, but especiaUy amongst the young.

Father Gonzales Sylvera, of the Company of Jesus, made a habit of commending all his undertakings to the Blessed Virgin. On receiving news that he was to go to the missions of Ethiopia, he strove to win favour with the Blessed Virgin by all sorts of homage and prayers. Every day during the journey, he spent several hours in prayer, commending to her the task for which divine Providence had destined him and begging her earnestly to grant the gift of faith and the grace of salvation, to the infidels. He assembled all the sailors and passengers each day, talking to them about the greatness of the Mother of God and inspiring them with devotion to that august Virgin.

On arriving at the Kingdom of Monomotapa, his journey's end, he intensified his prayers and mortification in order to urge the Mother of God to facilitate his entry into the kingdom and to dispose the heart of the prince to whom he was sent, to hear the truth which he was sent to announce.

Just what was the effect of that devotion and of that zeal for the glory of Mary? In spite of the many obstacles in the way of the conversion of the idolatrous king, the holy missionary succeeded through the protection of her who is all powerful. He baptized the king as weU as more than three hundred of the principal noblemen of the country. What is more, to crown his happiness, having disposed the kaffirs to receive the gospel, he won the palm of martyrdom. You see here, the success and the blessing conferred on the undertakings of those who labour under the protection of Mary.

Father Francis V épèze died in holy circumstances in 1617. In the story of his life, Father de Varasco records that this saintly man was

informed from heaven that demons complain about two kinds of people who cause them considerable losses: those who spread devotion to the Blessed Virgin and those who wear the holy scapular.

After a sermon, one day, a missionary saw a venerable old man come up to him and ask to speak to him on an important matter. "And, what do you want to say to me?" "One!! One..." And his voice gives way. Respect, for the minister of Christ makes him stop short and prevents him from communicating what God has inspired him to say. "Don't be afraid, my friend; speak in all freedom." "What! me? How could I, the most wretched of men, come and remind God's minister of a duty? I could never bring myself to do so", protested the visitor. "Have no fear", the other insisted. "Make yourself clear; in what duty do you find my performance unsatisfactory?" "Minister of Jesus Christ", came the reply, "you complain that your sermons, which are so moving, produce no results for the salvation of souls; I can tell you why." "Tell me then", he was asked. On being informed that he missed out on one essential matter, the missionary called for further explanation. "Oh, Father", he was told, "you forget to speak of the Blessed Virgin; without her, you are wasting your time, for the fruit of the word of God is in her hands."

The missionary, who was a holy priest and burning with zeal to save souls, took the advice to heart. Next day, he delivered a solid instruction on devotion to the Blessed Virgin and the whole town was stirred. Sinners asked to go to confession, and from that day, the mission was a complete success. The missionary often relates this story, as though about someone else, using it as potent proof of the need for devotion to the Blessed Virgin in order to win souls to God and help them make progress in virtue.

APPENDIX II

Blessed Herman, a Swedish Bishop, had the habit of always adding to his sermons, a few words to honour Mary and to inspire the faithful with this devotion. She appeared to St Brigid and asked her to tell the holy prelate that because of his holy custom, she would be a Mother to him, would obtain a saintly death for him and would, herself, present his soul to God.

A teacher, wishing to honour Mary composed hymns about her greatness and taught the pupils to sing them. St Brigid was again called into service to inform the pious teacher that his work would not go unrewarded: Mary would reserve for him in heaven as many crowns as he had written hymns in her honour.

St Antoninus expressly records that the Blessed Virgin came to be present at the death of her faithful servant St Dominic and that she led his soul triumphantly to heaven. She granted the same favour to St Philip Neri, St Francis Regis, St Liguori and many others; this

was to reward them for the zeal that these great saints had had for making her honoured and spreading devotion to her.

St Joseph Calasactius, Founder of the Pious Schools, constantly instilled devotion to the Blessed Virgin; he made it a point of duty to train the children to honour her and to pray to her daily. Once when he was praying with all his pupils in front of a picture of Mary, she appeared to them all and gave them her blessing. She favoured this great saint in such a way, to show him how pleasing to her was his zeal and to reward him for his efforts to spread her glory.

A holy Religious of the Society of Jesus, instigated by a heavenly command, gave up a distinguished role as preacher to teach catechism to little children. As he himself was very devoted to the Blessed Virgin, he strove hard to inculcate it into the pupils. In his zeal, he gave catechism classes in the public squares. During each instruction, he had someone relate a story or miracle of the Blessed Virgin. The people listened to the explanations he added with extreme eagerness and profit.

One day, in the Lisbon market, he asked a number of peasants if one of them would say the Hail Mary. When all of them, either through shyness or human respect, had declined, a six month old infant in its mother's arms, raised its voice and clearly began the angelic salutation which it went through, to the great surprise of all.

The Blessed Virgin allowed this miracle in order to put a stamp of approval on the ministry of her servant and to show how much his zeal pleased her. On his death bed, this good Religious was visited by Mary, who comforted him and filled him with joy and happiness. He expressed the wish to be buried with the pointer he had used for seventeen years, in teaching the alphabet and the catechism. His wish was granted.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Father Champagnat's obedience and his respect for the clergy.

Obedience is the special virtue of christianity; it is the foundation of the religious state; it is the short cut to perfection and the surest way to acquire every kind of virtue. Thoroughly convinced of these truths, Father Champagnat aimed, above all things, at obedience and placed himself unreservedly in the hands of his Superiors. He had such a distrust of his own wisdom; he was so certain that without obedience even the best things fail to please God; and, he had such a deep respect for his Superiors, that a single word from them would have been enough to make him abandon the work closest to his heart: the foundation of his Congregation.

Several times he informed the Archbishop of Lyon and his Vicars I General: "If you believe that this work is not from God, tell me, and I shall abandon it at once: for I want only what God wants and I have no way of knowing what this is, except through you. "

One of the Founder's favourite sayings was that a man is happy and accomplishes good, only where God wills him to be and that God always wills him to be where obedience summons him. That is why he never asked for or even desired, a particular appointment; why he wished to do nothing without perfect submission to his' Superiors, whose consent he always sought.

In his opinion, obedience is extremely necessary to the Brothers, for three reasons:

"1. Because this virtue is the foundation of the religious state and it is the means of communicating to us the graces of state so necessary if we are to be faithful to our vocation. Hence, if you want God to make use of you in order to do good among the children, let yourself be led by obedience; love the task and the appointment given you by obedience. 'Master, we have laboured

1 (OM 2, doc. 757 [5], p. 771). Later, Fr Champagnat uses the same language to Fr Barau, Vicar General, LPC 1, docc. 7, p. 39; to the Vicar General of Lyon, LPC 1, doc. 4, p. 35 and to Fr Cattet, LPC 1, doc. 11, p. 47).

all night and have taken nothing', the Apostles told the Saviour, 'but at your word we shall let down the nets. 27 They did so and caught such a huge quantity of fish that their nets were breaking. Imitate the Apostles; cast your net in the place pointed out by obedience and your work will be blessed; you will have the happiness of attracting the children to God.

Do you realise what happens when obedience causes you to any employment? If you accept it with submission, God immediately bestows on you all the graces which are needed 'to discharge it well; and the more difficult you find that submission, the more abundant are those graces. God will send his angel before you, to prepare the way, to remove difficulties, to dispose the minds of the inhabitants favourably towards you and to give docility to the hearts of the children confided to you; you will discover, at first hand, that there is nothing difficult, let alone impossible, when you walk the path of obedience.

On the contrary, if you follow your own will, if you look for a position that suits your taste, if by dint of pressure you force your Superior to transfer you, you will forfeit the right to count on particular graces; for, remember this sentence of the Imitation of Jesus Christ: 4 'Whoever withdraws himself from obedience, withdraws himself from grace.' Being deprived of the grace and help of God, you will have no success; and where you expected to derive happiness and satisfaction, you will experience only pain and affliction. You will be all the unhappier in this situation because your conscience will reproach you with causing your unhappy state and bringing on your troubles, through failing to obey. You will then have no comfort to expect either from God or from men; not from God, since you are doing your own will instead of his; not from your Superior, to whom you cannot appeal, for he could reply: 'You forced me to give you that task, that appointment; if you don't succeed in it and are unhappy there, you are to blame and you've got what you asked for.' "

He further explained this by the following comparison: "If a soldier, despatched to a garrison, follows the way indicated on his route map, at each stage and wherever he goes, he receives protection, lodging, food and all he needs; but if he diverges from that route, he has no right to any of those helps; he is left to himself; he must travel at his own expense; and he risks being

2 Lk 5, 5-6.

3 LPC 1, doc. 24, p. 72.

4 Bk. 3, 13.1.

captured and locked up as a deserter. Similarly for a Religious: as long as he keeps to the path of obedience, God showers him with graces and shields him with protection; he wants for nothing and is blessed in everything that he does. But if he abandons the path of obedience to follow that of his own will, he forfeits the right to God's help; he is left to his own weakness he falls at every step; he is unhappy and makes everybody around him unhappy too.

2. Obedience is extremely necessary to the Brothers, because they have an obligation to teach that virtue to their children. No one denies that the only way to regenerate society is to give a sound education to children. Now, obedience holds first rank amongst the principal requisites for a good education. ⁵ In this instance, as in all others, it is impossible to give what one hasn't got and a Brother who is not obedient will never inspire his pupils with that virtue; for that very reason, he undermines the work of their education. It is idle to suggest that obedience can be achieved by firmness of character or by physical force; obedience cannot be imposed; it flows from inspiring example. While it is true that exterior order and discipline may be established and maintained by authority and a determined will, the virtue of obedience can be inspired and generated in the hearts of children, only by the virtue itself and the grace which always accompanies it.

3. Obedience is, besides, absolutely necessary to the Brothers, because it is, for them, a duty of state. Without it there is neither progress in virtue nor happiness. Obedience is a duty for the Brothers, a commandment, because they have made a promise, a vow, to obey. A Brother's life, by reason of his vocation, of his vow, is essentially a life of dependence; and in religious life, one who is attached to his own will, who withdraws himself from obedience and follows his own inclinations in what he does, fails in his duty of state and does not fulfil his vow.

Something which must not be forgotten, is that the Brothers owe obedience to those appointed to guide them; that they do not live up to their vow if they do not submit to their Brothers Director. Indeed it is to the Brother Director that you owe obedience, because he is the representative of the Superior, because you depend on him for every detail of your conduct. He who would obey only the Superior ⁶, or only when the Superior

⁵ LPC 1, doc. 31, p. 86.

⁶ "Superior" here, signifies: Superior General.

commands, would hardly ever obey, for the Superior rarely commands personally; many religious have never received a single command from him concerning the details of their exterior conduct.

I conclude from this fact, that a Brother who is not united with his Brother Director and who does not submit to him, fails in obedience and does not fulfil his vow. In such a case, there is no need to ask what progress he makes in virtue; he makes none. He goes backwards instead of forwards. His piety, love of vocation, devotedness to his task, horror of sin and his zeal for the salvation of his own soul, all suffer unbeknown to him. Before long he loses happiness and peace of mind; and then follow: confusion, bad spirit, bitterness of heart, boredom and loathing for his holy state. These replace the happiness and holy joy previously experienced when he was duly obedient.

Here is a truth I hope you don't forget. There are two persons on whom your happiness depends. If you are to be happy in your vocation, you must be on good terms with them both. They are the good God and your Superior. To stand well with God, two things are necessary: to fear sin and avoid it carefully; to be faithful to your exercises of piety and perform them with the utmost fervour. Two things are likewise necessary in the case of the Superior: full and entire openness of heart; and docility. Show me a Religious whose relations with God and with his Superior are in good order and who is not happy in his vocation and his employment. I don't believe such an individual exists. Show me a Religious who relates very little to his Superior, who doesn't open his heart to him and conceals his defects and weaknesses; one who bears some grudge against his Superior, who considers himself mal-treated and who is happy, contented and solidly virtuous. You can search the whole world and you won't find one. For a Religious, obedience, happiness and solid virtue are synonymous terms: whoever does not have the first, will never have the other two."

The Founder's love for obedience led him to seek occasions of practising it. Each time, for example, that he wished to have a reception ceremony for the Habit, he would ask the Archbishop's permission. ⁷ When it was remarked to him that he could do so once and for all, which would save him, repeating the process several times a year, his rejoinder was: "It is true that it would save trouble; but I like to have frequent contact with my Superiors

⁷ LPC 1, doc. 127, p. 259; and doc. 200, p. 405.

and, besides, we should frequently practise dependence and arrange opportunities of exercising obedience." An admirable mode! and one well-calculated to confound independent spirits and proponents of false freedom. Such Brothers find the prescriptions of the Rule troublesome, obliging them, as they do, to have frequent communication with the Superior and to ask his permission to act, in certain circumstances.

Our pious Founder had the deepest respect for the pastors of the Church. This was directed, in the first instance, to our Holy Father, the Pope, whose decisions and counsels he treated as divine oracles. One day, reading to the community an encyclical-letter of Leo XII 8, concerning bad books, he asked the Brothers to remain standing during the reading, to show their deep respect for the Pope's words. It was on this occasion that he laid down for the Brothers the very wise Rule banning the reading of any dangerous work: "Books 9 which - are taken from the children because they are thought to be unsavoury, shall be handed over to the Brother Director, without their being read; he, in turn, if he has the same view of the m, should not examine them himself but pass them to the parish priest."

Once, he saw a Brother engrossed in a book and asked him: "What are you reading?" He was informed that it was a work on the infallibility of the Pope. "By whom is that work written?" was his next query. On being told that it was by Cardinal Maur Cappellary, 10 today his Holiness Pope Gregory XVI, he commented: "Well done! But do you believe in the infallibility of the Pope, Brother?" "Yes" he told the Founder, "I believe in it very firmly." "I do too", he corroborated. "I have never had the slightest doubt on the matter."

In order to inspire the Brothers with a great love for the Church and an entire submission to its august Head, he frequently made the following comparison: HJust as all the light brightening the earth, comes from the sun, so all that enlightens men in the supernatural order, in the order of salvation, comes from our Holy

8 Elected Pope in 1823, Leo XII published, on May 3, 1824, the encyclical "Ubi Primum" which urges the Bishops to watch over the teaching in the seminaries (cf. Leflon, *Histoire de l'Eglise*, Vol. 20, pp. 388-389, 1951).

9 Rules of 1837, Ch. 5, art. 31, p. 46.

10 This book, "Il trionfo della Santa Sede e della Chiesa" is a "cry of hope in the imminent and lasting triumph of the Church. Catholics, the preface said, should learn from the facts, according to Chrysostom's expression, that it is easier to extinguish the sun than to destroy the Church" (*Diet. de théologie*. L. Letouzey, p. 1822, 1920).

Father the Pope. The Pope is to the moral world, what the sun is to the physical world. Without the sun, there would be chaos on the earth; without the Pope, the Church would be reduced to nothingness and there would remain only the dark night of error. The experience of the Protestants, among whom even the existence 11 of Jesus Christ is denied, is a conclusive proof of this.

By remaining united with his pas tors, the Catholic possesses the truth; he stays united to Jesus Christ. The Church to-day is such as the divine Saviour founded it, such as the Apostles established it. If St Peter and St Paul were to return to this world, they would not have one iota to reform in terms of doctrine; they would find the Church such as they left it, that is with the same dogmas, the same moral principles, the same teaching, the same sacraments, the same means of salvation and the same hierarchy. Those same Apostles, 12 I do not hesitate to say, would be pleased and satisfied. They would exclaim: 'This is indeed the Church which 'we established, the spouse of Jesus Christ without spot or wrinkle; 13 she is the same as we left her at our deaths.' "

His respect for the Bishops was likewise profound. On appearing before them, he would fall on his knees and humbly ask their blessing; he did the same on withdrawing. The prelates with whom the dealt were delighted by his humility and spirit of simplicity. They gave him the highest marks of esteem and showed themselves entirely devoted to his work, a fact which constituted one of his greatest consolations.

"Oh! What a comfort it is to be supported by all these holy Bishops", he would sometimes exclaim. "How can we be afraid when we are directed and defended by the successors of the Apostles, by those who are the light of the world, the pillars of truth and the salt of the earth? 14 The Bishops are our fathers; we should look upon ourselves as their children and, at every opportunity, show them marks of deep respect and entire submission. The Brothers must work in absolute harmony with the clergy; to-day, more than ever, that is a prerequisite for doing good." *

11 A reference to liberal protestantism which sometimes casts doubt on the divinity of Jesus Christ.

12 Br Francis informs us these commentaries have their source in an instruction given by Fr Champagnat on the feast of St Paul. (CSG II, p. 231).

13 Ephes S, 27.

14 Matt S, 13-14; 1Tim 3, 15.

* The author inserts a "note" at this point; it is appended to this chapter.

There is perhaps nothing that Father Champagnat so much recommended to the Brothers as respect for the priesthood and submission to the pastors¹⁵ of the Church. This is evident from the Rule and other writings he has left on the subject. He expresses the wish, for example:

1. "That the Brothers look on the parish priest as their father and show him child-like obedience.
2. That in all school matters of significance, they take his advice, especially in the case of an expulsion; that they arrange with him for the distribution of prizes; that they do nothing against his will or which does not have his full approbation.
3. That they accept freely all the poor children that he recommends.
4. That they do not give holidays or leave the parish without advising him. .
5. That they ask his blessing any time they are called to the Mother House or have to go there for Retreat or when they have an ordinary journey to make.

¹⁵ Rules of 1837, Ch. 5, arts. 8 and 15; also Ch. 8, art.. 5.

6. That they invite him frequently to visit the classes and to bless the children from time to time.

7. That they make no visit to the pupils' parents without informing him and inquiring him whether the visit is appropriate and able to bene fit the school.

8. That they make every effort to give the children a high esteem of the priesthood, to inspire them with a great respect for the clergy and a complete submission to the parish priest."

All his life, the Founder called for compliance with these different points. He would have liked the 5th and 6th, to join the others as articles of Rule; but, since some parish priests don't cooperate in them very easily, it seemed advisable not to give them the status of Rule.

In any case, he constantly recommended his Brothers to be very united with the parish priest, to accept his opinions, his counsels, his warnings and even his reprimands; and to support him with all their ability in all that concerns the good education of the children and in all works compatible with the spirit of the Rule: training the children to sing in the church, teaching them to serve Mass and to take part in Eucharistie processions, taking care of them at times of First Communion Retreats and doing all sorts of things in dependence on him and in conformity with his wishes. In a word, he wanted the Brothers to be completely one with the parish priest and to act in such a way as to give him consolation by their school and by their personal conduct.

Such is the spirit which the pious Founder strove to impart to his Brothers, by instruction, by priva to advice, by Rules full of the spirit of God and made expressly for the purpose, and by his example ab ove all. It was in response to requests from the clergy, that all his schools were founded; he would never have agreed to send Brothers into a parish, no matter what advantages the appointment might offer, without the consent of the parish priest.

When Father Champagnat arrived to inspect a school, his first visit was always to the parish priest; he went to pay his respects to hi m, even before seeing the Brothers. On such occasions he could usually judge the quality of the school and the conduct of the Brothers by the attitude of the parish priest and the account he gave; if he expressed satisfaction, that was a proof to the Founder that all was well. In that case, he usually made only a short visit to the Brothers for the consolation that it brought them, and withdrew without even seeing the classes. If some difficulty arose in a house, he was never willing to resolve it without having first seen the parish priest and sought his advice.

It was not uncommon for the humility of the Founder and the deep respect he showed towards the parish priests, to iron out many problems, to alleviate cases of touchiness and successfully conclude seemingly hopeless matters. The last time that he passed through Lyon, after founding the novitiate of Vauban, he insisted on presenting his respects to the parish priest of Saint John's who had charge of the Denuzière orphanage. 16 He was in great pain and someone tried to dissuade him on account of his exhaustion and suffering.

"No, no", he said, «I must go. It is not certain that I shall receive a warm welcome because there have been some problems in the administration of the orphanage; but that is not important, for we have to surmount such small obstacles to do the work of God; besides, my visit cannot fail to give him pleasure." In fact, the reception was very unfriendly at first, even embarrassing the Founder; but he explained things with so much openness, simplicity and humility that the parish priest became a different man entirely and accompanied him to the door with evident friendship and devotedness.

Marcellin carried this respect for the clergy so far that several parish priests believed it to be prompted by timidity and his fear of them. This conviction led them at times to seek concessions from him regarding the financial terms of the establishments; but the pious Founder's firmness matched his humility and his modesty.

He sometimes yielded easily on questions of a purely material order, if it meant accomplishing some good; but he never gave way on what would have been a danger for the virtue of the Brothers or put at risk the spirit of their religious state.

Another recommendation he made to the Brothers, and he even made it an article of Rule, was to hold themselves aloof from any group or school of thought which was dividing the parish. Their sole task being to instruct and educate the children, the Brothers should scrupulously avoid criticizing the conduct of the authorities or becoming involved at all in the affairs of ecclesiastical or civil administration. 17

16 LPC 2, p. 558; Also, LPC 1, doc. 306, pp. 552-555.

17 Rules of 1837, Ch. 5, art. 10, p. 40. This article of the Rules was observed by the Brothers, as the Council General of the Loire testifies: "We ought to say in justice of the (Marist) Brothers that no political preoccupation ever diverted them from the aim of their Institution" (registre des délibérations, August 25, 1838).

A very pious Brother, who was, in addition, a simple one, took it on himself to reproach the parish priest with not being supportive enough of the Brothers and not visiting their school. Father Champagnat learnt of this fault during the holidays, summoned the Brother and said to him: "Who made you, responsible for the conduct of your parish priest, and by what right do you level reproaches at him? Your action is one that a Little Brother of Mary should never indulge in. To-morrow you will set out very early and go to the parish priest and ask pardon, on your knees, for this fault." The good Brother accepted and discharged this penance with much humility; the part he found hardest was the forty-five kilometres he had to go on foot to perform it.

Father Champagnat did not want the dependence he enjoined on the Brothers in regard to the clergy, to be at any time a cause of weakening regularity and community spirit. He therefore laid down what they should do in a case where the parish priest should propose some changes in their way of running the school, or in the way of life proper to the Institute, or should wish to grant them extraordinary permissions. They were to let him know respectfully what the Rule prescribed or allowed in the matter and beg him to allow them to act accordingly. However, since in some cases the parish priest might insist, they should, in order to avoid all dispute, request him to agree to their writing to the Superior General, asking his permission ¹⁸ to comply.

The wisdom and prudence of this procedure is evident. It is well suited to avoid conflict, for by leaving the decision on the problem to the Superior General, it puts the Brothers outside the dispute; it safeguards their union with the parish priest; and it deprives him of any opportunity of exploiting the dependence and submission towards him which the Brothers should always display. The Founder contrived in this way, to give the parish priest all due authority and influence over the Brothers and their school; at the same time, that authority and influence were prevented from damaging the spirit of regularity and uniformity which should reign in all the houses of the Institute.

¹⁸ "Parish priests, who seem to depart from the spirit of the Rules, should be told that their wishes will be met, when permission has been obtained" (Rules of 1837, Ch. 5, art. 11, p. 40).

APPENDIX

To a Brother who asked for guidance on the occasion of the Bishop's visit to the parish, Father Champagnat replied:

1. If the Bishop is preceded by a procession, you should take care to participate, with all your children. Urge them to modesty, silence and perfect orderliness.
2. Go with your confrères to pay him your humble respects at the presbytery. Through the parish priest, arrange the most opportune and suitable time.
3. When you come into the Bishop's presence, kneel to receive his blessing; do the same, on leaving.
4. Having expressed your sentiments of profound respect, give a short account of the state of the school and ask him to be kind enough to visit it and to bless the children.
5. If he agrees, see to it that orderliness, discipline, cleanliness and modesty are evident in your school and in the dress of your Brothers and children.
6. Receive the Bishop at the principal entrance, and accompany him to the room in which the children are gathered under the supervision of the Brother. There, you will have seats ready for him and his companions.
7. Once the visitors are in place, a pupil, whom you have trained for the purpose, will offer him a greeting, thanking him for his kind visit and bearing witness to the sentiments of respect, love, submission and religious veneration, which we owe to our chief pastor, to a successor of the Apostles.
8. Brother and children should then kneel to receive the Bishop's blessing.
9. Accompany the Bishop as he visits the school; after that, show him back to the main door and ask his blessing again before leaving him.

CHAPTER NINE

His Love of Poverty.

Father Champagnat practised poverty all his life. His small inheritance did nothing much more than pay for his fees at the seminaries and support him. The result was that he had no money when he was ordained. As he was completely selfless, at no time while he was curate did he give a thought to laying money aside; all that he had, went to the poor or to supplying the needs of his community.

Although the Brothers lived in a state of great want, he did not hesitate to cast in his lot with theirs and share their privations and poverty. From the day that he came to live with them, he had nothing of his own, practising community life constantly. A Brother who used the term "your" to Father Champagnat in relation to an item of furniture that he had brought from the presbytery, was told sharply: "Don't talk to me of 'yours' or 'mine.'" "This object is as much yours as mine; it belongs to the community, that is, to all the Brothers who need it."

If we are to form an idea of all the privations and sacrifices that community life involved for him, we must give a brief description of the Brothers' life style in those early days. Father Champagnat had no money at all when he founded the Institute; he had to borrow what was required to buy the small house which was to serve as the cradle of his first children. ¹

The young men whom he gathered round him to begin that foundation were even poorer than he was; to support them, he had nothing but his modest salary as curate and the collections made in the parish of La Valla. For eight years, those collections were the principal stand-by of the community.

¹ On October 1, 1817, Fr Champagnat, conjointly with Fr Courveille, parish priest of Epercieux, bought the property by private deed for 1000 francs; the vendor and Fr Champagnat negotiated a new private deed on April 26, 1818 in regard to the same property, but with the price raised from 1000 to 1600 francs; this sum, Fr Champagnat borrowed and paid to the vendor, there and then. There is no mention of Fr Courveille in this new act. (AA, p. 40, and OME, docs. 16 and 17, pp. 67-70).

The food of the house was of the simplest and of the most frugal: coarse bread, cheese, potatoes, vegetables, sometimes a little salt pork², with water always for drink; such was the fare of the Brothers.

All dishes were served unseasoned. This was for two reasons: a spirit of mortification and poverty; the Brothers were all young and not trained to cooking, which, despite their best efforts, they did badly. There were only two items liberally served at table: bread and water; even the simplest of dishes were measured out. The parish priest of La Valla, passing through the refectory one day during dinner, noticed on the table the sole course, a salad. Besides, there was hardly enough to satisfy the eight Brothers at each table. "Poor children", he sympathized with a shrug of the shoulders, «I could carry off your whole dinner in my hand." In the first fifteen years or so of the Institute, wine and butcher's meat were quite unheard of. It was only after 1830 that the Mother-House community began to mix a little wine with the water and to take a small amount of fresh meat. In the other Houses, the Brothers had much the same fare as at the novitiate. Moreover the annual expense accounts of the Brothers give a clear indication of their poor and frugal lives. Here they are, just as they have come to us, written by the Founder in the account books of the Hermitage:

Expenditure of the Brothers of Bourg-Argental, for 1825, 364 francs.

That of the Brothers of Boulieu, 306 francs.

The Brothers of Saint-Symphorien-Ie-Chateau, 518 francs; but they probably had some stock-in-hand, for in 1826, it was only 342 francs and in 1827, 389 francs.

The Brothers of Charlieu, in 1827, was 350 francs; in 1828, 402 francs; in 1829, 462 francs and in 1830, 403 francs.

The Brothers of Mornant, in 1827, 400 francs; in 1828, 425 francs; in 1829, 446 francs.

The Brothers of Saint-Paul-en-Jarret, for the year 1828 was 521 francs and for the following year, 457 francs.

During the same year, 1828, it was 420 francs for the Brothers of Neuville and 457 francs for those of Saint-Symphorien-d'Ozon.

² A comparison can be made with the rural custom of the time. Adolphe Blanqui, researching 86 Departments between 1849 and 1851, concluded: "...There are millions who drink only water and who never, or hardly ever, eat meat or even white bread..." (cf. G. Cholvy, *Société, genre de vie et mentalités dans les campagnes françaises de 1850 à 1880*. Article published in "L'Information historique" No. 4, Sept-Oct 1974, p. 157).

The Brothers of Chavanay: 300 francs, but they had a third Brother only till Easter while the Houses mentioned had three for the whole year.

The Brothers of Saint-Sauveur was also' 300 francs, but the account books note that it"had its stock of wood, ten pounds or so of bacon and fifty pounds of salt. At the same time, the comment is registered that the expenses are heavy; certainly, they were lighter in former years. For Chavanay in 1824, to take an ex ample, they were only 250 francs. We should point out that such costs as heating, lighting and laundry were included in the figures given. 3

Accommodation, furniture and clothing of the Brothers were of the same standard as their food. Their household linen was of the coarsest kind. All the Brothers slept on straw and there weren't any mattresses even for the sick. The Brothers did all their travel on foot, no matter how long and painful the journey. For more than twenty years, no Brother used a trunk to transport his personal belongings; a rough, cloth bag served the purpose. There were no umbrellas, and, in fact, the Brothers did without everything that could possibly be dispensed with.

The wonderful thing is that the Brothers revelled in this poverty; they loved it and practised it generously in a spirit of virtue; they rejected any slightest deviation, as the following examples illustrate.

In one house, a kind woman brought the Brothers a present 'of a sugar-loaf. They didn't want to accept it, on the grounds that such things were not used in the Institute. As the donor insisted and seemed upset by a refusal that mystified her, the Brother Director suggested: "Since you are so willing to do us a service, I would accept a bag of potatoes instead of this sugar-loaf, if you would be kind enough to send us one." The woman went off with the sugar-loaf, and, that same evening, a servant brought the Brothers the bag of potatoes which they wanted.

In an establishment founded in 1825, the Brothers, on arrival, found a cask of wine, put in the cellar by the founders. They were at a loss what to do with it. In the end, they told the founders that it was not their custom to drink wine, and asked them to remove what was in the cellar.⁴

3 AFM, 132.8002-8019.

4 "Mr Tripier, an excellent christian, took care of all the expenses at Neuville and was loud in his thanks for the privilege of using his fortune for that good work. Br John-Baptist, the first Director and eighteen years

In another establishment, a Brother fell sick and, since the local people had a high esteem for the Brothers, they called often to see how he was. During his convalescence, they had lots of tasty and nutritious food sent along. He didn't even take one mouthful. He looked at it all, one day and asked: "What are we going to do with these sweet things, these pots of jam and oottles of quality wine? I don't want them, since I have no need of them." No one could come up with a solution and they had it all sent to the sick in a nearby hospital.

When the House at Bourg-Argental was founded in 1822, Madame de Pleyne undertook to provide the beds; each bed had a good mattress, but the Brothers stored these in the loft, instead of using them. Some time later, the lady's servant, who often brought provisions to the Brothers, had the opportunity of seeing the mattresses in the garret, and informed her of the situation. She went immediately to the Brothers' house to look for an explanation.

"Aren't your mattresses good enough?" she asked the Brother Director, 5 who assured her that they were very good indeed. "Why then, have you replaced them with others?" she persisted. "I'm not sure that they have been replaced", was his reply. HIn that case", she countered, "you are sleeping on straw. But do you imagine that I bought you the mattresses so that you could store them in the attic. I expect you to put them on your bed and leave them there; when they are worn out, I shaH get you others." "We are very grateful, Madam", he gently replied, "but we don't use mattresses." He was told that it was wrong not to do so; that after a tiring day with the children, they should at least have a comfortable bed to rest on for the night. "It is not customary for us to use them", the Brother continued, "and none of us has one." She then said that she would have them removed. HI think that would be best", the Brother agreed.

The lady made further efforts to have the mattresses put on the beds, but without success. Having achieved nothing, she had them taken away, to her great sorrow, and the Brothers were glad to see the last of them.

Another person from Bourg-Argental gave the Brothers six pairs of extremely large sheets of fine, high-quality linen. They

old, availed himself of that generosity without abusing it. It was he who declined the cask of wine which Mr Tripier had arranged to be put in the cellar" (AA, p. 78).

5 Br John-Mary (Granjon), first Director of that school.

considered that they should not use them and they took them along to Father Champagnat to do what he thought best with them.

It can be seen from these incidents, (and there were many more of them), that a frugal life and the spirit of poverty were second nature to the Brothers. They did not regard this kind of life and conduct as a sacrifice but as the fulfilment of a duty; they were convinced that their religious state was incompatible with any other way of acting. If we now add that the Brothers did no more than provide an imperfect imitation of the Founder's example, we can understand what degree of perfection he reached in virtue of poverty.

We should not suppose that it was an easy task for him to form the Brothers to this kind of life. Only by daily example, by reiterated instructions and lessons, by individual advice, by admonitions renewed each day and by carefully checking each detail of their conduct, did he succeed in inspiring them with a love of poverty and forming them to economy.

Every week, and sometimes oftener, he brought together the Brothers responsible for the temporal affairs: the bursar, the cook, the gardener, and those in charge of shoe-making and tailoring. He required an account of how they had spent their time; he taught them how to husband their resources and to put everything to the best possible use; and he issued any admonitions called for by shortcomings declared during the week.

. In the same way, he trained the workmen employed on the building, and the foreman carpenter⁶ was later to reveal: "He gave me such a habit of not wasting timber that I am quite unable to do so; I would search in every corner of the building for a piece rather than draw on one that could be put to better use."

Father Champagnat rarely went to the kitchen, the pantry or the workshops without drawing attention to some aspect of order or economy. It hurt him greatly to see food or furniture spoiled through sheer carelessness. "Apart from offence against God", he asserted, "nothing hurts me more than to see things spoiled or wasted." He often reprimanded the cook, (even imposing a penance on him), for not saving the bits of lard or butter on the dishes after they had been removed from table. Once, when passing through the dining room, he saw some morsels of bread lying under the tables. He sent for the Brother in charge of supplies

⁶ The carpenter who worked at the Hermitage with Fr Champagnat was Mr Philip Arnaud (AA, p. 17).

and delivered this severe reproof: "Why do you let the bread fall on the floor? Don't you know that there are many people who don't have enough of it? It is a failure in poverty, to let God's goods waste that way."

On another occasion, he saw a postulant trample under foot an object that happened to be on his path, instead of picking it up. Father Champagnat sent for him and dismissed him. When some surprise was expressed at the severity of this action, he defended it in these terms: "That candidate is not a mere child; behaviour of such a kind at his age is a sign that he has no judgment or that he lacks a sense of order, economy and devotedness; and that he has joined us only to find a livelihood. On all these scores, he would not suit us. We need thrifty men, with a natural bent for economy and with a love for the spirit of poverty." One of the principal Brothers was required to take his dinner on his knees because he had left a lamp burning unnecessarily for a few minutes.

Reinforcing, as usual, his instruction by his example, he did first, what he asked of others. So, many a time he was seen to pick up a piece of wood, a fruit fallen from a tree or some other object that lay in his path. One day, returning from SaintChamond, he gathered a few ears of corn⁷ that the carter employed at the house had let fall. Every day, he did the rounds of the building, putting an object in place at one spot; at another, closing a window which was not secure and which might be shattered by the wind; then putting away tools that some workmen had forgotten to look after.

Speaking about economy, he used to tell an anecdote, which we think it is worth recounting here, together with the moral which he drew from it.

A man was accused of parsimony and avarice by his servants and even his own children, because he never spent even the slightest sum without real purpose and because he blamed the members of the household for wasting things and using them unnecessarily. To these reproaches the family head would simply retort: «I could easily do otherwise but I don't see who would benefit; I do see who would lose. Later on, I'm afraid, less will be saved and there will be less to give away." Indeed, this excellent christian saved so much that he was able to give generous alms, which came to a complete halt after his death. Instead, his son,

⁷ "Blé de Turquie", that is, maize.

who had no sense of order or economy, was unable even to pay his servants.

"You see", Father Champagnat would explain, "what we experience every day. A Brother who does not spend uselessly can, even with his modest income, keep up a suitable house, help provide for the Institute and promote the vocation of postulants who are unable to pay; by contrast, one who does not practise economy, who doesn't look after things, who buys a thousand trifles which could well be done without, puts his house into debt, lets the furniture go to ruin and can't even pay the Institute for his Brothers' clothing.

Such men make neither good Religious nor good teachers; they spread their lack of order everywhere: in the intellectual and in the material sphere; in spiritual matters and in temporal ones.

Subjects like that are a scourge for the house where they may be, everything deteriorates in their hands and they leave a trail of ruin after them.

For the Brothers, economy is not a mere counsel, it is a duty. Being Religious, they have an obligation to eat and to live poorly and to take care of everything which is for their personal use or which is their responsibility. I therefore say without hesitation, that those who let things be spoiled, (whether these are given by the parish or by the Institute), are guilty of injustice⁸ and have a duty of restitution."

In an effort to develop amongst the Brothers, a great care of their goods, he laid down that anyone who should spoil or break something, even accidentally, was to report the fault to the Superior and kneel in the dining-room during dinner. Those who allowed any article of clothing or any goods for their personal use, to lie around, were likewise required to make up for this fault by a public penance.

Father Champagnat wished all Brothers to learn how to cook and how to run a house with care.⁹ This was required by a spirit of poverty and in order to be self-sufficient; besides, the Brothers' health would otherwise be at risk. "Friends", he would sometimes laughingly remark, "are you prepared to do away with the kitchen and live like angels? I'll take a vote on it. Let's see. Will all those,

⁸ "Those who allow deterioration of goods entrusted to them by the parishes or the Mother House, offend against justice and are bound to restitution" (Rule of 1837, Ch. 9, art. 2, p. 59).

⁹ "The Brothers should preserve all that they have the use of, in a state of great cleanliness" (Ibid, art. 14, p. 62).

who do not wish to eat, stand up?" As no one rose, he continued in the same tone: "Since you don't accept my proposition, but believe that cooking is necessary and is indispensable to you, it must be properly learned; for poor cooks empty the purse and ruin health, since they spend excessively and yet their cooking would undermine a sound constitution."

The Brothers were also expected to learn to sew and be able to mend their own clothes suitably when necessary. Pather Champagnat would not allow this kind of work to be done by outsiders; 10 the same was true of washing stockings and soutanes. He was as king of the Brothers in those matters. only what is normal practice for almost all Religious Orders. These require their members to look after their own clothing. keeping it clean and mending it when necessary.

There were even Bishops, chosen from Religious Congregations, who continued all their life to practice that form of poverty and humility. Here is an example which may edify the Brothers.

St Thomas of Villanova, an Augustinian, was appointed Archbishop of Valencia, in Spain. He would not allow any outlay for the purpose of boosting the poor wardrobe he had as a Religious. He invested only in a supply of needles and thread. a pair of scissors, a thimble and anything necessary to repair his clothes when they required it.

However, these purchases were made indirectly and secretly; they were placed in a box under lock and key, where he also kept his instruments of penance. This box was hidden away in a narrow cell, which was quite unadorned, and which he chose in preference to any other room. It was there he retired to give himself to prayer and the practice of penance; it was there. too. that he mended with his own hands, his linen and worn-out clothes.

This faithful follower of evangelical poverty experienced unspeakable pleasure in such humble work; but when he was engaged in it, he took the greatest care not to be seen. He feared appearing to be singular or causing those who were falsely sensitive on the matter, to take offence. It was partly for this

10 Note, too, that there was at the Hermitage, to look after the laundry, Gabrielle Fayasson, a sister of two Marist Brothers; a little later, there was a community of the Sisters of the Holy Family (six of them at the time of the 1841 Census). In the account books for the Hermitage. from 1826-1842, there are regular entries of sums of money to pay) "the women who wash the clothes".

reason that he forbade anyone in the house to enter his cell. He alone had the key and he kept it strictly locked.

But, one day, he was distracted and forgot to lock the door of his room after entering. One of his closest friends came in on top of him. Because he had urgent business, he went straight to his room and entered without knocking. The Archbishop was in the process of mending a pair of pants. The canon pulled up short with surprise and in a voice full of emotion, asked: "What! Is this the way Your Grace spends his time? It is unbecoming your dignity. The first tailor you meet would mend that for a 'real'; this must stop." As he spoke, he went forward and snatched the garment from the Archbishop's hand.

"Wait a moment", protested the latter with a smile, "let me go on with my work." Then in more serious vein, he added: «I am a Bishop, of course, but I am also a Religious; this means that I have a duty to practise poverty for the love of poverty itself. I am a pastor and for this reason I ought to practise poverty for love of the many poor in my flock. There are two good reasons, you see, for acting the way I do. I could add that I get great pleasure from it. You tell me that the repairs would have cost me only a 'real'; I am well aware of the fact but I reflected that by doing it myself, I shall enable a poor pers on to eat with the 'real' I have saved." This is the way the saints act and speak.

We cannot resist the pleasure of quoting a similar incident, one which is all the more likely to prompt our edification and imitation because it involved someone nearer and dearer to us. Reverend Father Colin, Superior General, was spending some time in one of our novitiate houses. His clothes happened to need mending. He sought out the Brother tailor, as king him for needles, a thimble, cotton and pieces of mate rial. The Brother, who saw what he wanted to do, offered to repair the clothes himself and begged the priest to grant him that favour. "No", came the reply, "just give me what I have asked for; I shall do the rest since I am quite used to this sort of thing." All the entreaties of the Brother were of no avail and he had to give in. The venerable Father then shut himself up in his room and, with his own hands, mended the clothes which were quite worn out.

On many similar occasions, Father Champagnat did likewise.

What Brother, in the light of such example, could consider it beneath his dignity to mend his clothes or to take care of his outfit? Those who really possess the spirit of their state will look upon it as a dut y, to follow in the footsteps of these distinguished men who are our fathers and our models.

Our pious Founder had a great love of poverty and this moved him to take every precaution to ensure that the Brothers held it in honour. That is why he framed those mles which he has left us on the subject; rules, which were so very wise and on which he insisted so much all his life.

Each year, at the Retreat, he himself inquired to see that no Brother had personal possessions; he gathered all the little items which had been bought without permission aswell as any that had been purchased without real need or were of a quality incompatible with the Rule: such things as snuff-boxes, books in fancy binding, expensive pocket-books or pen-knives, science books, drawing instruments, 11 etc. He was equally zealous in repressing abuses which may have arisen in the houses. As soon as he came to hear that the Brothers of an establishment were departing from the spirit of simplicity and poverty, even in small matters or only on a particular occasion, he gave the highest priority' to putting the situation in order. If necessary, he did not fear to undertake long journeys on foot to do so.

He was told that a certain house was due to have a slightly exceptional dinner on the occasion of a gathering of Brothers, with the likelihood of jeopardizing the rules of religions simplicity'. The Founder made his way to the place on the very day of the gathering. After severely reprimanding the Brother Director, he ordered him to serve dinner in accordance with the Rule. He then sat down to table with the Brothers without further remarks. Yet, he was extremely affable during the whole meal and did his best to make everybody happy.

Another time, it was reported to him that the Director of an establishment had purchased a fine table service. He purposely visited that house to see what the truth was. On his arrival, he went straight to the cupboard where he knew the service would be; what he found was quite ordinary and very simple. He asked the Brother Director whether that was all he had in that line and, on being informed that it was, he declared: "I am very glad to find inaccurate, the information that your table service breached the spirit of poverty and simplicity befitting Brothers. I shall now

11 "It is forbidden to take articles from one establishment to another. School books and instruments for geometry or drawing are included in this embargo" (Rules of 1837, Ch. 9, art. 4, p. 60). In the "Continuation of the Appendix to the Rule" in 1841, Br Francis adds: "The Brothers should renew annually, the permission obtained for personal use of articles not in general use: sets of mathematical instruments, telescopes, reliquaries, etc." (CSG 1, p. 64).

know how to answer those who blame you; however, such rumours, although quite false, should make it clear how necessary it is for senior Brothers like you to set a good example: for everything you do is talked about and is necessarily a source of good or evil, depending on your conduct."

A person in great need once approached a Brother Director with a view to selling him a pair of silk breeches. He was so persistent in his pleas that they be bought to help the seller in his plight, that the Brother Director gave in to the temptation and paid five francs for them, though they were worth much more.

During the Retreat, Father Champ agnat, who had been told about this purchase which was contrary to the Rule, sent for the Brother. After reprimanding him very severely, he forbade him to wear the breeches. The Brother sought to excuse himself on the grounds of the pressure he was subjected to and the very reasonable price.

"My friend", the priest objected, «I shall prove to you that you were doing wrong and that you have gone against your conscience. Tell me, did you bring them with you to the Retreat? Did you enter the purchase in your account book?" The Brother had to admit that he had done neither. "You have, there", continued the Founder, "two clear proofs that you realized that you were wrong; you find no reason to conceal expenses authorized by the Rule. A good Religious is never prepared to buy an item he would not dare enter in his account books and which he could not show his Superiors without receiving blame."

The matter stopped there, for the time, but shortly after the re-opening of the schools and when the Founder had a spare moment, he visited the house where the incident had taken place. He had hardly arrived when he asked to see the wardrobe. "Open your press", he told the Brother Director. It didn't take him long to find what he was looking for. Taking the silk breeches in one hand and holding them at arm's length, as if he were afraid of contamination by touching them, he invited the Director to follow him. He made for the kitchen stove and flung the breeches into the fire, repeating the condemnation: "These are fit only to be burned!" Then, in a severe tone of voice, he added: "I hope such things are never allowed amongst us. A Little Brother of Mary ought not to make use of silk or have any touch of luxury in his house."

It was not only in the Brothers' appearance that he wished to see poverty reign; poverty was to govern everything at their disposal, such as the dwellings, the room fittings and the furniture.

He maintained that the only ornaments needed in religious houses, were cleanliness and simplicity. Working on this principle, he would not approve wall-paper, costly pictures or any object which was purely ornamental. When he was once in a community where all the rooms were papered, ¹² he did not hide his displeasure and disapproval. It was remarked to him that while it was not customary in the Congregation to use wall-paper, this house had been given them in just the condition in which he saw it; it had not been thought advisable to remove the wall-paper. "If it were my house", retorted the Founder, "I should have every single wall white-washed before nightfall."

It can be pointed out finally that Father Champagnat considered poverty as something necessary to attain the aim of the Institute. "My friends", he often reminded the Brothers, "let us remember what we set out to do in founding the Society; we wanted to spread the benefits of christian education into poor parishes, an aim which ruled out any demands for high salaries. Now, if we depart from the spirit of poverty, if we choose to live in comfort and avail ourselves of all the conveniences of life, our salary will prove inadequate, and we shall be forced to ask for an increase; since most parishes are not in a position to grant this through lack of funds, we shall become useless. Our religious profession, therefore, and the aim we have in view, force us to practise poverty and to trim our demands to the bare necessities; we should not only avoid luxury and superfluity, but also anything that smacks of comfort or worldliness and that would damage the simplicity and modesty which the Institute professes."

As we have pointed out on several occasions, Father Champagnat always backed up his word by example and was the first to practise what he asked of his Brothers. So it was, that in a spirit of poverty, almost all his journeys were made on foot; if he had to take a public conveyance, he selected the least expensive seat.

While he was in Paris, his comings and goings made him extremely tired. A priest friend suggested that he would easily find a bus to take him to the various districts where he had business and that it would cost very little. "There is certainly no trouble finding a bus", agreed Father Champagnat, "the streets are full of them; but we don't become Religious to ride around like lords. If the vow of poverty cost us nothing, it would bring us no merit. I admit that the transport is not costly; however,

¹² Probably the Castle of Vauban (AA, p. 299).

many little sums soon make a large one. In a numerous community, if every member were to gratify his whims, claiming that they amounted to a mere nothing, at the end of the year, all the small payments would together have constituted a sizable SUFFI, enough to pay the upkeep of several postulants. 13"

A Brother was reprimanded by the Founder for some items of expenditure which were not strictly necessary. He made the excuse that there was little cost involved. "How can you talk of 'little cost' r'l, he wanted to know, "in the case of what makes you practise the vow of poverty and keeps you in the spirit of your state? For anyone who reasons and acts like you, poverty costs nothing. Now, if vows don't call on us to make daily sacrifices, you cq.n be quite sure that you do not observe them, and that you will go before God, with your vowed promises unfulfilled. It is self-deception to contend that you are faithful to your vows simply because you do not break them in serious matters.

It is one thing not to transgress the vows; it is quite a different thing to fulfil them like a good Religious. You do not transgress the vow of poverty, provided that you refrain from every act of ownership prescribed by the Rule: buying, selling, making a gift, lending, possessing something in your own name; but to fulfil your vow completely and to have the merit of poverty, you must behave and live according to the spirit of your state; that is, you must restrict yourself in food, clothing and all your needs, to what the Rule allows. In a word, the Brother who lives according to his Rule, lives according to his vows; and .the more he departs from his Rule, the more he falls short of the perfection of his vows."

Our pious Founder looked upon the maintenance of the community spirit and of the spirit of poverty as quite fundamental duties and he wouldn't allow any Brother, whether professed or a simple novice, to assume ownership of even the smallest item. He expected the Rule to be the same for all, that subjects admitted into the community, should divest themselves of everything they had contrary to the custom of the Institute, and that they should retain neither money nor any object forbidden by the Rule.

On one occasion, the Brother bursar came across several books on the desk of a young Brother. They had been taken from the chapel or elsewhere without permission. There were four or five francs as well which he held onto secretly, contrary to Rule. The bursar took all this to Father Champ agnat, who seemed quite grieved at such conduct. He summoned the Brother at once,

13 Cf. LPC 1, doc. 174, p. 351,11.37-39.

reprimanded him severely and ordered him to leave the house that very hour, adding that anyone who behaved that way was not made for the religious life. He was sent away indeed, though it was four o'clock in the evening and snow was falling heavily.

We want to end with a more consoling incident, showing us to what a peak of perfection, the Founder carried the practice of poverty.

Two or three days before his death, an intimate friend of his, Father Janvier, parish priest of Saint-Julien-en-Jarret, paid him a visit. They spoke together for some time then the visitor, as a gage of his affection and holy friendship, asked for a little wooden crucifix that was on the Founder's prie-dieu. «I should willingly grant what you ask", said Father Champ agnat, "but I have made the vow of poverty; I have nothing of my own and can dispose of nothing. What I can promise you, is to ask the Superior General's permission to give you this small memento, and I am confident that I shall not be refused." He asked it indeed, was granted it, and the little crucifix was handed over to Father Janvier.

The Little Brothers of Mary will be blessed indeed if, obedient to the teachings of the venerable Founder, and faithfully imitating his example, they always maintain among themselves the spirit of poverty and simplicity. It is a spirit which he bequeathed to them as a most precious inheritance.

CHAPTER TEN

Father Champagnat's detachment from his parents and from the goods of this world.

When he gave himself to God, Father Champagnat made the sacrifice of everything he had in this world in order henceforward to love only God and belong entirely to him. So, he no longer busied himself about the affairs of this world or troubled himself about his parents. It is true that during his seminary years he spent his holidays at home, but he did not become involved in the temporal affairs of his parents. He simply strove, to the best of his ability, to edify them, to instruct them and to lead them to God. After ordination, during his priestly ministry, he went home only occasionally and when he was obliged to visit the Brothers' community at Marlhes.

His intention in becoming a priest was to serve the Church, and to work for the salvation of souls, not to be of service to his family. Hence, even though his own brothers were in need, he never helped them with money; he even expected them to refrain from discussing their temporal affairs with him.

One day, however, a brother of his who was in great need, came to see him and pleaded with him to lend him a sum of money. Father Champagnat, whose heart was extremely kind and sensitive, let himself be persuaded and gave him the money he asked for. Hardly had his brother gone, however, when he felt guilty at paying too much attention to family ties and began to fear that the weakness he had shown might be a bad example for the Brothers of the Institute. He therefore sent a Brother immediately to ask for the money back and with instructions not to return to the house without it. Father Champagnat could not rest until he saw the money on his table. ¹

Detachment from parents and from possessions is the first disposition put by God in the heart of one he calls to religious life; and this detachment is the foundation of evangelical

¹ Br Avit says: "It was to John-Bartholomew that the Founder loaned 500 francs, sending afterwards to Rosey to ask Philip Arnaud to get it back" (AA, p. 17).

perfection. 2 "If you wish to be perfect", the Lord tells us, "go, sell what you have and give to the poor; then, come, follow me. 3" And elsewhere he adds: "Anyone who does not hate his father and mother and his own life also, cannot be my disciple. 4" Whoever enters Religion with a true vocation, always has this disposition; he is detached from his parents, from the goods that he leaves in the world, and has only one desire: to give himself entirely to God.

The Founder was so convinced of this truth that he did not hesitate to assert that it is usually possible to judge the vocation of a young man by his attitude towards this point; accordingly, he placed no reliance on the perseverance of those who seemed too humanly attached to their families or to the goods they had left in the world. "To persevere in Religion", he contended, "one must come into it whole-heartedly, not just putting in one foot as do people who simply want to have a look or to sample it or who begrudge the payment of novitiate fees."

A young man, who for some time had been preparing to enter the Society, finally presented himself after much hesitation, bringing with him the full fees for the first year of novitiate. Speaking about this candidate to one of the Brothers, he remarked: "So and so has arrived with promising signs of vocation; I count on him now." The Brother asked him what the signs were, and was informed: "They are the three hundred francs that he handed me. That young man worked hard for the money; he would not sacrifice it and be willing to spend it if he were not detached from this world's goods and determined to persevere despite the difficulties he expects to meet in the religious state."

"To be happy in community", the Founder would often repeat, "one must not enter and stay in the role of a servant but like a child of the family. Sacred Scripture teaches us that a man should leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. Well, the Religious likewise, if he wishes to be happy in his holy state and to enjoy all the consolations of religious life, ought to leave his

2 "Religious have no greater obstacle to their vocation, than their relatives... The masters of the spirituallife exhort all those who want to attain perfection, to flee from their relatives and refrain from meddling in their affairs" (A-M. Liguori. *La religieuse sanctifiée*, Vol. 8, Ch. 10, [1], p. 252). He quo tes from 5t Teresa, in the same Chapter: "Just how can you, who left the world to become holy, wish your relatives to visit you so often?" (Ibid, p. 225). Cf. 5t Thomas, 11-11ae, q. 189, art. 10 ad 2.

3 Matt 19, 21.

4 Lk 14, 26.

father and mother, his brothers and sisters and all that he has in the world, to cleave to his Superiors, his Brothers and to the Institute which becomes his family. One who doesn't give himself entirely to his community and who fails to work at acquiring the dispositions of a worthy son, is therefore not a Religious but a servant. Now, do you want to know how to distinguish a servant Brother from a Brother who is a true child of the Society?

The servant Brother looks on his Superior as a master, as a policeman who keeps watch on him; the result is that he fears and even dreads the Superior; he flees from his presence; conceals the details of his conduct, and even more, his defects; he distrusts him and easily imagines that the Superior maltreats him; that he bears a grudge against him; and that he causes him pain and reprimands him without reason.

The servant Brother views his confrères as so many strangers and therefore treats them without charity, without respect, without courtesy and without consideration. Completely engrossed in himself and his own concerns, he takes for himself what is best and easiest, without worrying whether others suffer, are overburdened or are even in need.

The servant Brother is indifferent to the needs of the community. It doesn't matter to him whether it flourishes or withers; for this reason, he carries out his duties in a perfunctory fashion; he has no zeal and makes no effort for the common good; he is wasteful and sees things spoiled without being concerned about it; when furniture and other objects entrusted to him are going to ruin, he lets this happen rather than take any trouble to exercise care.

The Religious who is a child of the family acts in quite a different way. He looks on the Superior as a father and loves him as one; he puts total confidence in his words and entrusts himself entirely to his direction. He is convinced that the Superior wishes and strives for nothing but his good. He therefore accepts his admonitions and reprimands as signs of his affection and proofs of the tenderest friendship. Not one to conceal or dissemble his defects and faults, he takes the initiative in revealing them and is happy only when the Superior is acquainted with all his conduct and all that troubles his soul.

He considers the members of the Society as Brothers of his; it is therefore obvious that his whole preoccupation is to help his Brothers, comfort them and be of service to them; on all occasions, he takes their part, supports them, defends them, excuses their defects and covers them up.

After God, he loves nothing so much as his Society; nothing is dearer to his heart than to see it prosper, that is, develop, maintain its spirit and achieve its object by procuring the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Believing that he has an obligation of his own to contribute to the welfare of the Institute, he makes every effort to give an unwavering example of regularity, piety, submission, good-will and devotedness; he shrinks from no trouble or exertion which may ensure the success of the schools and the sound administration of the temporal affairs of the house; nor does he recoil from any sacrifice when the common good is at stake, when he can edify the Brothers or be of service to them or to the Institute.

It is only the Religious who is filled with these dispositions and with family spirit who experiences in his state the hundredfold of goods and of happiness promised by Jesus Christ. 5 As he lives only for the Institute, and is devoted to the welfare of his Brothers missing no opportunity to be useful to them or give them pleasure, his service is reciprocated and he receives a hundred times more than he gives: people love him and make sacrifice for him; all hearts are devoted to him; he has as many servants, (or rather Brothers), as many friends, as there are members in the Institute.

None of this is true of the servant Brother; far from experiencing the hundredfold, he draws no satisfaction or happiness of any kind from religious life. Since he genuinely loves none of his Brothers and lives for himself alone, no one has any feeling for him: they bear with him; they avoid offending him as Christian charity requires; but they could not display towards him the respect and consideration which he denies others; nor could they show him those sentiments of friendship which would mean nothing to his mind and heart. Hence, I confidently assert that there is scarcely anyone as unhappy as a Religious who lacks family spirit. I mean a Religious who is not devoted to his Institute, who remains attached to those whom he has left in the world, and who lives in community as an outsider, as one whose treasured possessions are elsewhere."

"Detachment from parents is so necessary for a Religious", the Founder maintained in another conference, "that if he happened to lose this disposition and let his heart be shackled by ties of flesh and blood, he would at the same time, lose the religious spirit and the love of his vocation. I have always noticed that those who devote much attention to their parents have little

5 Matt 19, 29.

regard for their vocation; if they are busy about the affairs of their parents, they put little time into the matter of their perfection or even of their salvation. Many Religious have gone astray through a false compassion for their father or mother. Some, having become apostate 6 Religious under pretext of assisting the m, succeeded only in ruining them by their extravagance and in blighting the declining years of their parents by their disorderly conduct.

One of the most dangerous snares of the devil is to induce a Religious to become involved in the temporal affairs of his parents, or, through false compassion, to exaggerate their needs and to consider himself bound to come to their aid in ways incompatible with his religious state. The enemy of salvation even leads some to the point where they believe that they are justified in abandoning their vocation to help their parents. There is no doubt that a child is bound to help his father and mother when they can no longer fend for themselves; but it is extremely rare for a Religious to be bound to abandon his vocation to discharge that duty. Indeed, all theologians 7 agree that for such to be the case, the se conditions must be met:

1. The needs of the father or mother must be extremely serious.
2. There should be really no other means of helping them.
3. The Religious must be certain of being able to be useful to them, by leaving his vocation.
4. The Religious should not be following his own inclination, doing his own will and judging himself the gravity of his parents' needs or the appropriate means of catering for them; instead, he should guide his conduct by the advice of his Superior, the only person who has the right to decide what the Religious ought to do and how he ought to help his parents. 8

6 According to Br John-Baptist "to become an apostate Religious is to abandon one's vocation, at a time when it is no longer a counsel but a precept, that is, after final profession" (ALS, Ch. 3, p. 47); cf. PPC, Part 3, Tract 3, Ch. 4.

7 St Thomas, Ila-IIae, q. 101, art. 4; q. 189, art. 6 ad 1.

8 Quoting St Jerome: "How many Religious have been lost through (false) pity for their relatives?" (*La religieuse sanctifiée*, Vol. 8, Ch. 10 [7], p. 258). "As it happens all too often that some leave Religion to go, in their words, to help their relatives in the world, it is worth remarking here, that this is not ordinarily the motive of their action and what makes them unfaithful to their vocation" (PPC, Part 3, Tract 3, Ch. 7).

7. He should return to religious life and resume the duties of his vocation as soon as his parents cease to be in need, through their death or for some other reason. 9"

Father Champagnat received a request from a Brother for permission to withdraw from the Society, on the grounds of helping his mother who was a widow and had no other children. He tried unsuccessfully to convince the Brother that he was being tempted by the devil, who was jealous of seeing him live in the fear of God and wanted to cast him back into the world where his weakness and his natural bent would make a sad wreck of his life; that, moreover, he would not succeed in being useful to his mother, but would only cause her affliction and make her life unhappy.

The Founder's prediction was duly verified: after his withdrawal, he didn't even go home; he even walked past the house several times without going in; in fact, the mother learnt of his departure only from the public commotion caused by his bad conduct.

Another Brother, who was tempted to abandon his vocation in order to comfort and help his mother in her declining years, often went to Father Champagnat to inform him of the situation and to ask his permission to leave. The Founder several times urged him to resist the temptation and eventually said to him:

"Do you know, Brother, how you should view your vocation? Have you ever asked yourself how it originated? You find my questions embarrassing, and you make no answer. Well, since I know your family, I shall tell you what I think. I believe that your vocation is a reward for the piety and virtue of your mother. God has granted her the grace of having a son in religious life. In his designs of great mercy on you, he has wished you to be a source of blessing for your family.

And you, by abandoning your vocation, will deprive your good mother of the reward for her virtue; you will rob her of the glory, of having given a child to Religion, and you will become a cause of ruin for your family. Instead of performing an act of filial piety, then, in going to look after your mother, you will be showing ingratitude towards her. You see now what it is you wish to do; it is not for me to free you from the obligation of following your

9 Fr Champagnat is full of solicitude for those in real need. Two examples follow: "He receives at the Hermitage, in the hospice for the aged, the parents of Br Liguori" (AA, p. 300); "He receives also at the Hermitage, his own brother, John-Peter, and four of his children who were buried in our cemetery" (AA, p. 18).

vocation: it is God who has called you. to religious life; it is to him that you made your promises and to whom you will be accountable for them." .

The Brother, impressed by these wise remarks, threw himself at the feet of the Founder and exclaimed: "Y ou are quite right, Father; I owe my vocation to the good example and piety of my mother. I have been unfaithful to grace because I am a coward and frightened to do violence to myself, listening too much to the calls of flesh and blood; but from now on, that will change. I promise to turn a deaf ear to temptation and to work might and main to become a good Religious." He kept his word and never afterwards wavered in his vocation, but became a fervent Religious.

"By being too humanly attached to his parents and becoming involved in their temporal affairs, a Religious", according to Father Champagnat, "not only harms his own perfection, he also compromises the best interests of his relatives; for God often punishes such a one by allowing the things he meddles with contrary to the spirit of the vocation, to turn out badly and fail.

A Brother is of much greater service to his family by not troubling himself about them, by living a life of piety and of total detachment, than by striving to serve them and promote their advance in the world. St Louis Gonzaga and St Stanislaus Kostka contributed more to the prosperity and expansion of their families ¹⁰ by being holy Religious, than if they had passed their lives working at their temporal interests. It was the virtue and holiness of those two saints that made their families famous and but for them, those two families would be buried in eternal oblivion. "

After giving marks of a true vocation at the beginning, and having been pious and regular for a long period, a certain Brother began to be influenced by an inordinate affection for his parents. He induced them to visit him, in the house where he was the Director, and took great interest in all their temporal affairs.

These first faults were followed, as is usually the case, by more serious ones; he loaned them money secretly and incurred expenditure for them. Father Champagnat, being informed of this conduct, was greatly saddened by it; he explained to the Brother with all kindness, how reprehensible his conduct was and the gravity of the fault he had committed in violating his vow of

¹⁰ Cf. Fr Meschler, S.J., *Life of Louis Gonzaga*, translated from German to French by Lebréquier, Ed. Lethielleux, Paris, 1927, pp. 382-385.

poverty. This reproof was accepted in quite good part, but the poor Brother's false compassion for his parents, led him back into the same fault and much more seriously this time.

The Founder reprimanded him again with mildness and charity but with an earnest firmness and told him that unless he mended his ways, things would end badly for him and his parents. His prediction proved only too true. After a repeated failure, he abandoned his vocation and went to live with his brother. Within a short while, that brother, who had been the apple of his eye, and for whom he had sacrificed his conscience and his vocation, stole every cent he possessed and drove him from the house.

A few years later, this former Religious fell ill, made his will in favour of a sister he had, and died after experiencing many tribulations. His scoundrel of a brother instituted a law suit against the sister, to have the will set aside in his own favour; he didn't hesitate to calumniate his dead brother in the open court and even to bring forward false witnesses whom he had bribed. However, the justice of God overtook him at that juncture, and did not allow him to live to see the case concluded.

As a result of the exertions he had made and of the many journeys necessary to win the case, he caught pleurisy and was soon brought to the grave without being able to acknowledge his guilt and receive the sacraments. Thus, this wretched Religious, through excessive attachment to his parents, violated his vows, lost his vocation, lived and died in terrible anguish, brought desolation on his family, turned his brother into a thief, even ruined his temporal affairs and, infinitely more deplorable than all that, exposed him to great danger of losing his soul. So the threat of Father Champagnat found fulfilment: If you don't mend your ways, things will end badly for you and your parents.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Father Champagnat's Love of Mortification.

"They that are Christ's», says St Paul, "have crucified their flesh with the vices and concupiscences. 1 They chastise their body and bring it into subjection 2 and strive to fill up in their flesh those things that are wanting in the sufferings of Christ. 3" Truly mortified men set about replacing in their hearts the love of riches by the love of poverty, the love of pleasure by the love of the cross and the love of creatures by the love of Our Lord. Like St Paul, they die daily to themselves, 4 to the inclinations of nature, to the life of the senses 5 and to worldly enjoyment, in order to live only for God and, 9. for eternity.

That was the way Father Champagnat lived. His whole life was a continual immolation of the faculties of his soul and body to God, by the sword of mortification. It would take too long to trace here the details of his hard and mortified life. Besides, a sufficient idea of it can be got recalling what we have already related in this story. It will be enough, for our purposes, then, if we recount a few new instances and fill out the details of others which we have merely touched on.

Father Champagnat was by nature ascetical and conceded to his body by way of food, rest and any kind of comfort, only what he could not reasonably refuse it. 6 He made it a law for himself never to take anything between meals and he observed it all his life, even when engaged in hard work or when on journeys. He has been known to walk all day long in oppressive heat and, at the end of it, to refuse any kind of refreshment, even a little water.

To play down his mortification, he used to explain that he was not in the habit of taking anything whatever between meals and that such concessions to comfort were more prone to damage

1 Gal 5, 24.

2 I Cor 9, 27; Rom 8, 13.

3 Col 1, 24.

4 I Cor 15, 31; II Cor 5, 15.

5 Col 2, 2.

6 Br Sylvester says: "I couldn't understand at all how such a big body could survive with so little food" (MEM, p. 127).

health than to relieve the slight inconvenience caused by thirst or hunger.

"Besides", he added, "the body gets used to everything and it is by refusing to satisfy it that it becomes less exacting. On the other hand, if we have a drink to-day because we are thirsty, tomorrow at the same hour, we shall feel the urge even more insistently and if we always make a point of gratifying nature, what will become of mortification, the spirit of sacrifice and the christian life?"

From the time he joined the seminary, he merely tinged the water with wine; he even went without wine altogether for a long while, regarding it as the enemy of chastity. "Nothing", he maintained, "contributes more to inflame concupiscence and arouse the passions, than the immoderate use of wine; a person who is a stranger to mortification and who fails against sobriety, will never be chaste."

"He held the opinion for a long while that the Brothers should do without wine entirely; later, when he saw that this was not feasible he placed a firm embargo on taking it pure, except in case of sickness; he prescribed, in fact, that it be mixed half wine and half water. At meals, he usually took only two dishes ⁷ and when he was dining alone, he would never allow more to be served up.

Food was such a matter of indifference to him, that it was impossible to tell what he liked and what he didn't like; the only certain thing was that he preferred what was common and ordinary. He accepted without complaint whatever was put before him, no matter how badly prepared the food might be. The only reproach he made to the Brother cook was that he was overcareful in preparing the food he served him; and if the dish served him seemed specially concocted for him, he ate none of it.

When he visited the Brothers in the houses, he lived with them, happy to share their poor, frugal fare; and only rarely did he take a meal at the presbyteries and this was when he could hardly avoid doing so without offence. In the houses, he would never allow the Brothers to prepare anything extra on his account and they could do nothing that pleased him more than to keep to the community menu. Several times he reproached Brothers

⁷ "At the midday meal, soup, two dishes, (plats), some fruit and wine mixed with half water" (Rules of 1837, Ch. 2, art. 26b, p. 22). "At seven o'clock, evening meal, as at midday, except for the fruit" (Ibid, Ch. 2, art. 39, p. 26).

Director with doing otherwise and sent back dishes that had been provided over and above what the Rule allowed.

He was obliged once to spend a whole week in a house because a flood had made the roads impassable. During that time, he was served nothing but potatoes and white cheese, because the community was very poor. The Founder was so delighted with the food and so impressed by the simplicity and poverty of the Brothers, that many a time afterwards he expressed his satisfaction and his gratitude to the Brother Director, and sounded the praise of his white cheese.

In another house, he arrived right on dinner time. The Brother Director apologized with regret for having nothing to offer him, but the Founder replied with kindness: "Don't worry, Brother! I shall dine with you and be happy to eat whatever you are having." He was told that they were having only salad and cheese. He asked about potatoes, only to be informed that they were not prepared and would take too long to cook. "Go and bring some", he ordered, "and I shall help you get them ready; if we all set to work it will be done in no time." They were quickly brought and he helped the Brothers peel them; as the cook was new and didn't know how to cook them, he showed him how to go about it, taking the pan and frying them while he watched.

Arriving back from a journey on another occasion, he told the Brother cook who was getting ready to prepare dinner for him:

"Don't go to any trouble; just give me what is left over from the Brothers' meal." He was told that there was nothing left. "What about that meat I see in the corner?" The Brother explained that it was tainted and so the Brothers had not been able to eat it.

He took it, tasted it and expressed his surprise at the fastidiousness of the Brothers. Having eaten some for his dinner, he asked for the rest to be kept for his evening meal. It is quite certain, all the same, that the meat did smell, and so badly, that the Brothers, who were not hard to please, could not eat it.

However, his love for mortification prevented him from too close an examination, and he seized every opportunity of making a sacrifice to God and curbing nature.

In the light of all this, it is no surprise that the Founder so strongly encouraged the Brothers to practise moderation and mortification in eating. This form of self-denial constituted, in his view, the ABC of the spiritual life. He was convinced:

1. that those who cannot control gluttony will find it hard to conquer other vices and will always be faint-hearted in the practice of virtue.

2. that those who eat without restraint and are slaves to sensuality will not be able to do violence to themselves when it comes to resisting more delicate and more dangerous temptations.

3. that impurity is always preceded by gluttony or idleness;

it was therefore faults of gluttony that he was most reluctant to pardon. Nothing was to be taken without permission between meals, ⁸ and if a Brother was known instead, to have eaten a fruit or anything else, he was publicly reprimanded and punished.

"Don't you know", he explained, "that Adam went astray and the whole human race with him, because of a similar fault? It may not seem of any importance to eat a piece of fruit or take a mouthful of bread or any other such trifle; but it serves to satisfy nature, to accommodate sensuality, to awaken the passions and weaken grace and piety; such effects readily expose the soul to the greatest dangers. One who is not able to mortify himself in these things and who follows his natural inclinations, is headed for serious falls; to be strong and to avoid failure in great struggles, we must be faithful to self-denial and overcome ourselves in little things." He appeared quite upset when he heard certain Brothers murmur and complain about the food. "We did not come into Religion", he would remind them, "to be well treated and to want for nothing, but to mortify ourselves and to do penance. Sensual Brothers are Religious only in name and in habit. It has been my experience that those who are very attentive to their body, give little thought to their soul and that people who take an exaggerated care of their health are very little concerned about their perfection.

Experience has also taught me that it is people who lacked the bare necessities in the world, who complain about the food, and that entered Religion in search of a secure and comfortable existence. Religious who were well off at home, don't complain in community, even though their needs are not all met nor their likes satisfied. This is because they became Religious in order to suffer and to offer themselves to God in sacrifice. No matter how they are treated, then, they are happy and able to take advantage of every opportunity to suffer that comes their way."

Father Champagnat looked upon his body as his greatest enemy and was ever intent on harassing it and making it suffer.

⁸ "Meals should, as far as possible, be taken with the community; nothing should be eaten outside of the dining-room and meal times" (Manuscript Rules, AFM, doc. 362, 1; Ch. 2, art. 61).

In his seminary days he used the discipline and the hair-shirt on it and he continued this particular practice of penance all his life. One day he brought into his room the young man whom he had chosen to be the first stone of his Institute. He spoke to him on several edifying topics and then took out of a small box two hairshirts and a discipline, to show him.

"Do you know what these are?" he asked. "No", was the reply, "it is the first time I have seen the like." Invited to guess what they were for, he still had no idea and requested the Founder to explain to him. "Not just now", he was told. "It is enough for the moment, that you have seen them. Later on I shall give you a set and show you how to use them". After a few months, having trained him in the practices of the interior life, he did in fact explain the use of those instruments, and give him a discipline and a hair-shirt. The novice put them to good use, so zealously even, that the Founder was obliged to moderate his fervour.

Although the Founder attached a lot of importance to corporal penances, he didn't lay down any for his Brothers, apart from the Saturday fast; not that he intended them to dispense with this kind of mortification, but he preferred to have it regulated by the individual and by the wisdom of Superiors. Moreover, he was aware that for most Brothers, the sacrifices and difficulties inherent in teaching, could well substitute for corporal penances.

Each time that he explained the chapter on mortification he would repeat: "Although the Rule does not lay down any corporal penances, it does not follow that we ought not to perform some: one who desires to imitate Jesus Christ and the saints will certainly impose some penances of this kind on himself; but we should not take it on ourselves to act in this matter without the permission of the Superior. He will not restrain our fervour, provided that our health is not in jeopardy." Then, he used to add with a smile: "A little of the discipline does no harm and is even necessary for some."

However, he placed no value on corporal penances which were not associated with interior mortification. It was the latter which he practised above all and which he especially recommended to the Brothers. His views and instructions indicate that interior mortification comprises:

1. The mortification of the passions, with special reference to pride, self-love, inordinate love of creatures, attachment to one's own will and the predominant passions. "We can", he argued, "be saved and even become excellent Religious, without undertaking rigorous fasts or going in for bodily macerations; but we cannot save our soul, still less work at our perfection, without combating our passions and doing continual violence to ourselves. Some may have valid reasons for dispensing with fasting and the discipline; but no one can have such reasons for not repressing his evil inclinations, correcting his faults and reforming his character."

There are saints who have done very few corporal penances: we do not even read that the Blessed Virgin practised any; but all the saints, led by the Queen of Saints, excelled in interior mortification and the custody of the senses which necessarily follows from it. Each of us, therefore, should likewise strive to wage continual war against vanity; against the desire to please men and to elicit their praise; against his defects of character which make it a burden for those he lives with and which are a barrier to the good that he can do amongst the children; and, finally, against curiosity and the pleasurable quest for the news of the world. Each should contrive to bear charitably the defects of his confrères and everything that he dislikes in their conduct; he should even manage to support patiently an insult or a reproach that has not been deserved, maintaining a spirit of charity towards those who blame, contradict or persecute him; he should render them good for evil. 9"

9 Rom 12, 14-17 and 21; 1 Thess. 5, 15; 1 Pet. 3, 9.

Father Champagnat's own example in this matter, is particularly impressive. During his whole life, he was opposed, blamed and persecuted in one way or another; he never yielded to the urgent promptings of nature and self-love to justify himself, let alone complain of his adversaries and persecutors. ¹⁰ He even went so far in his spirit of abnegation, as to speak well of those who harmed him and do them every service in his power.

A neighbour, who was an uncouth and irreligious man, annoyed him in all sorts of ways for several years; there were insults, outrageous letters, threats to harm the Brothers and the destruction of a bank which stored water for the garden. The Founder's only retaliation for such hurtful behaviour was patience and charity. ¹¹ He prayed, and had others pray, for this man who had become his enemy, and he had the happiness of winning him for God. On his death, that man was engaged in a law-suit with a neighbour. Father Champagnat intervened on his behalf and did so to such effect that he succeeded in having the case concluded in favour of the widow and her children. ¹²

2. Mortification in regard to one's employment. This involves, according to the Founder, a complete indifference as to what location or function obedience may assign us; it requires us to exert all our efforts to carry out perfectly the task entrusted to us by Providence and to exploit the opportunities for mortification that the work entails. "This kind of penance", the Founder maintained, "is all the more pleasing to God in that it always conforms to his will, cannot be vitiated by self-love, is unspectacular and necessarily comports the practice of the most outstanding virtues.

Another advantage of this sort of penance is that we can use it every day and at every instant. Take the example of a Brother responsible for a class. Every moment gives him the opportunity of practising acts of devotedness, charity, zeal and patience; he needs to keep a constant watch on himself in order to preserve the becoming modesty and gravity which help to control and edify the children, he will have to do unrelenting violence to himself, if he is to bear with the rudeness and other defects of his pupils,

¹⁰ Fr Champagnat, placed in a delicate situation, indicates his unconditional submission to the Bishop (LPC 1, doc. 150, p. 295).

¹¹ LPC 1, doc. 18, p. 60.

¹² Br Avit gives the details: "Death carried off the Motiron mentioned; he was very much of a nuisance as a neighbour and had caused all sorts of troubles to Fr Champagnat and the Brothers... Monteiller, son-in-law of the deceased, did not follow his father-in-law's follies" (AA. pp. 202-203).

and if he is to make himself understood by all without wearying of always repeating the same things. What a mine of merits for one who turns to spiritual profit, the numerous opportunities he has each day, of mortification and self-denial!"

Father Champagnat's example in this kind of penance is beyond all praise. We shall never be able to grasp what sacrifice it must have cost him to share the privations, works and hard lives of the Brothers; to inculcate some refinement into those same Brothers; to educate them; to correct their faults; to strengthen them in their vocation, to equip them for their functions of teachers of youth; and to make genuine Religious of them.

What devotedness, what charity, what patience, what spirit of mortification he must have needed to merge his existence with that of these poor young men from the mountains! They arrived only with abysmal ignorance, crude manners and those defects usual in uneducated people. Yet he lived, worked, relaxed and prayed with them; he put himself at their service and, indeed, showed them all the tenderness of a father.

While it is true that most responded to his care and kindness, giving him great consolation, it is equally true that their education cost him many labours, much anxiety and considerable sacrifice. It is likewise true that the disedifying conduct of some others, very often filled his heart with anguish and bitterness, testing his patience and spirit of mortification over a long period. But his virtue always triumphed over all these difficulties and, despite all the frustrations and disappointments of his position, no one ever saw him discouraged or annoyed, yielding to bad temper or bursting into reproaches. In fact, he gave not the slightest sign of ill-humour or discontent. If he had to deliver an admonition, a reprimand or a correction, he always did so with kindness and in a way that boosted courage and instilled confidence. He gave the impression that it was a father who spoke and that he strove only for the benefit of the one whom he was obliged to correct. Nevertheless, it sometimes happened that those whom he corrected reacted badly, even to the point of making hurtful remarks to him. When this happened, instead of standing on his dignity and acting with severity, he remained silent; he took to prayer for the thankless individuals who did not respond to his kindness and forbearance.

On one occasion, a Brother took umbrage at a reprimand from the Founder and responded with insolence. The latter withdrew and knelt before Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and prayed that the offending Brother might have a change of heart. Another

Brother showed deep resentment at an admonition, although it had been made with great kindness. A few hours later, when calm and reflection had enlightened him as to his fault, he came and asked forgiveness at the Pounder's feet, begging him to forget his wrong doing and to bear him no ill-will. "How could I bear illwill against you?" the Father exclaimed. "God preserve me from such a thing, dear friend! I thank God that I have never entertained the slightest rancour or the least resentment I3 against you or any of my Brothers." As he said this, he raised the Brother and embraced him tenderly. We could relate many such incidents.

3. The mortification inherent in the religious state.

This kind of mortification is synonymous with the exact observance of the Rule. Pidelity and preciseness in carrying out the Rule, constitute a perpetuai immolation of the Religious to God, and do so at every moment of the day. We can understand, indeed, that we must constantly arm ourselves with the sword of mortification and do ourselves continuai violence, if we are to be faithful to all the practices of Rule; if, that is, we are to study, to observe silence, to carry out our employment; and if we are to practise poverty, obedience, humility, modesty, charity and all the virtues of the religious life.

"A Brother who lives in this way", Pather Champagnat adds, "performs a penance that escapes the eyes of men but one that is infinitely meritorious for heaven and very pleasing to Our Lord. To put it briefly, one who lives in this way, lives according to God. Do you see? He does not live according to man, to the flesh, to the passions, to his whims, to his mood, to his selfishness or to the world, still less to Satan; no, he lives according to God, and according to the example of Jesus Christ and the saints. There is no denying that such a life is hard on nature, and the saints have rightly called it martyrdom. In fact to live according to God, which means according to Rule, one must wage unceasing war on the flesh, the passions, the world and the devil; one must immolate to God all the powers of one's soul and all the senses of one's body."

As usual, Pather Champagnat confirmed his teaching by example. Hence it was noticed that he was always first at community exercises, the first at prayer and at work; the first to practise poverty, humility, modesty and all the other virtues of religious life; and the first to sacrifice himself for the glory

13 He says in his Spiritual Testament: "Although I am not conscious of having voluntarily hurt the feelings of anyoneo"

of God, the sanctification of the Brothers and the welfare of the Institute. Now, we should not conclude that this fidelity to Rule came easily to him; instead, like all those who meticulously observe the Rule, he found it a continual source of mortification and self-denial. What we relate now, is an undeniable proof of the fact "For more than twenty years", he admitted to a Brother, "I have been getting up at four o'clock in the morning; but I have not become used to it; it is a daily trial and sacrifice for me; in fact, when I reflect on my experience, I feel sorry for our young Brothers, who must find that rising very hard. There are some things which we never become used to; rising is one for me."

Although he found that more so difficult, as he confessed, he never failed to rise at the first signal, and it could be said of him, what was said of St Vincent de Paul, ¹⁴ that the second sound of the bell never found him in the same position as the first. Moreover, most of the time he rose before four o'clock, because he was so busy during the day, that he had to take time from his sleep to recite his Office and perform his meditation, which was both a need and a joy for him.

This punctuality in rising continued all his life. In his closing years, although he was unwell most of the time and was urged to take a little rest and although he felt and admitted that rest was necessary for him and would have been a relief to him, he could never be prevailed upon to remain in bed: as soon as he heard the bell ring, he jumped out of bed. When it was pointed out to him that he was too hard on himself and that it was wrong to crush nature in this way, he replied: "If we listened to our own inclinations, half the time, especially when we are up in years, we would require dispensations; we would claim to be slightly indisposed and would put the Rule aside. At that point, we would be Religious only in name. Is it reasonable to forego one's perfection, one's duty and one's soul in order to preserve one's health or avoid a few passing, paltry pains?" "When I was a child", says St Paul, "I spoke and behaved as a child; now that I am a man, I put away the things of a child. ¹⁵" Father Champagnat imitated the great Apostle both in his childhood and his manhood. As a child, he found it extremely

¹⁴ "To tell oneself that the bell is the voice of God and to throw oneself out of bed, the moment it is heard" (Coste P. St Vincent de Paul, 3, 542, Paris 1921). "Yes, gentlemen, even rising in the morning is a struggle for me and the smallest annoying problems can seem insuperable" (Ibid, 12, 93, Paris 1929). .

¹⁵ 1 Cor 13, 11.

difficult to get up in the morning; so, each time that his parents came to wake him and insist that he rise, he used to murmur to himself: "When I grow up I shall be my own master, going to bed and sleeping as long as I like." Having grown up and become his own master, in spite of the urge he felt to sleep on, it would have been a bigger trial for him to remain in bed, than it was to rise in his youth. Such is the transformation wrought in men by grace and the spirit of mortification.

But, alas! How many Religious there are who are identified as grown men only by their stature and their beard and whose views and conduct remain childish throughout life. They seem to have entered Religion only to coddle themselves, to enjoy a comfortable existence and to live a long life. St Teresa says of such people that they always find excuses for satisfying nature at the expense of the Rule. 16 To-day, they don't rise and even neglect observance altogether because they have a headache; tomorrow, it will be because they had a painful head the day before; and the following days, the excuse will be fear of developing a headache. "Woe to those monks", exclaimed St Joseph Calasanz, 17 "who are more preoccupied about health than holiness."

4. Mortifications sent by Providence. These include: sickness and all bodily weakness, temptation and spiritual dryness; desolation and all the trials of the spiritual life; discomfort from the heat or cold of the seasons; and all the suffering occasioned by our particular role, our location, the climate we experience, our places of residence, emergencies, worrying accidents and afflictions of every kind, from whatever source. The Founder saw this sort of penance as one which is very pleasing to God. This was because it comes to us directly from God and, because, in accepting it, we make an act both of mortification and of conformity to his holy will.

16 For St Teresa, the observance of the Rule is a very meritorious mortification: "We fail to observe certain items of the Rule, such as silence, which cause us no harm, and we invent new penances; in the end, we give up both practices" (Cf. A-M. Liguori, *La religieuse sanctifiée*, Vol. 8, Ch. 7, p. 148). "If we aim to observe perfectly our Rule and our Constitutions, I hope that God, in his goodness, will hear our prayers favourably. I don't ask you for anything new, but simply to keep faithful to the commitment undertaken in our profession; for, after all, it is our vocation and we are pledged to it" (Sainte Thérèse, *Oeuvres complètes, Le Chemin de la Perfection*, Ed. Fayard, Paris, 1963, p. 265).

17 "Woe to the Religious whose heart is more set on health than holiness" (Talent. Vie de Saint Joseph Calazance, Livre VI, Ch. 9).

A postulant, seeking admission to the Institute, asked what special penances are prescribed by Rule. The Founder told him that there were none, something which surprised and even scandalized him.

"Although the Rule doesn't require us to wear the hair-shirt or take the discipline", he explained, "there is no lack of opportunities for mortification, if only we take advantage of them. Community life, teaching, and fidelity to Rule constitute a vast field of privation and sacrifice for one who desires to renounce himself and suffer for God. You will begin with the se, which are enough to make a holy Religious of you, if you put them to good use; besides we can add to them later, if necessary."

CHAPTER TWELVE

Humility of Father Champagnat.

Saint Augustine, ¹ speaking of the obligation that binds all Christians to practise humility, is prepared to assert that this virtue is the most necessary and the most important of all. "If you were to ask me", he said, "what is the most necessary virtue of Christian living, I should answer that it is humility; and, if you repeated the question a hundred times, my answer would remain unchanged. Moreover, if you wanted me to decide the best of men, I should choose the most humble. ²"

In a sermon on the birth of Christ, St Cyprian commented: "The very first step in the practice of virtue is to become humble, just as it was the first step of Christ in this world; for humility has always been the foundation of holiness." "The structure of perfection, ³" to quote St Augustine again, "can have only one base: humility; and the higher the structure is to go, the stronger that base needs to be." St John Chrysostom ⁴ puts the same teaching in these words: "If your almsgiving, your fasts, your prayers, your mortification and all your good works do not have a basis of humility, you are wasting your time, for your works will collapse in ruin." St Gregory expressed that teaching differently. "The person who sets out to accumulate virtue without being humble", he assures us, "resembles someone gathering dust and throwing it into the wind, which carries it off at once. ⁵"

Imbued with these truths, the Founder was particularly in love with humility, and later decided that the practice of this virtue should constitute the distinctive characteristic of his Institute. From the moment that he resolved to give himself entirely to God, he carried out a careful scrutiny to discover his defects; he decided

¹ "The first of these paths is humility; the second is humility; and the third is likewise humility; my response to your question would always be the same" (St Augustine, Letters 118, to Dioscorus, 22).

² PPC, Part I, Tract 11, Ch. 2.

³ St Augustine, Sermon 69, 2.

⁴ St John Chrysostom, Homily on St. Matthew, 15, 2.

⁵ St Gregory, Ps 3, 3.

to fight pride in a special way, regarding it, rightly, as the greatest enemy of virtue and the biggest obstacle to the attainment of perfection. For a long while, it was the subject of his particular examination of conscience, and he composed a prayer, which he recited every day, to ask Our Lord for humility through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin and his holy patrons. ⁶ His spiritual reading was drawn from *The Golden Book* ⁷ or from *The Contempt of Oneself*. ⁸ These two works ⁷ were favourites of his and he read them and meditated on them throughout his life.

He rated himself so lowly that acts of humility seemed to cost him nothing. He lived and behaved amongst his Brothers, as the servant of all; he shared their labours and accepted for himself whatever was most arduous and least congenial. Many a time he was seen carrying the mortar, cleaning out the stables and the toilets. If there was anything difficult to do, he was always the first into the breach, and this happened so commonly that it was hardly noticed any more.

At the conclusion of a Retreat made at Belley, his fellow priests earnestly asked him to address a few spiritual thoughts to them. He resisted for a long time, pleading his inability. In the end, he gave in to their importunings and spoke briefly to them, greatly pleasing them all. Surprised and somewhat embarrassed to see how attentively he was listened to, he suddenly stopped and withdrew, remarking as he went: "I am abusing your patience and wasting your time; you know all these things and you carry them out, better than I do." ⁹ On another occasion, when he was returning from a Retreat with the same priests, several of whom were getting ready for the foreign missions, he picked up their luggage, with the request:

⁶ OME, doc. 6 [3], p. 38.

⁷ *The Golden Book* or *Humility in practice* for the pursuit of perfection is useful to all the faithful. (New edition, Paris, Victor Lecoffre, J. Gabalda, 1917, format 7.5cm X 11, 126 pages). Foreword: "This little treatise is not a new work offered to faithful souls; it has been recognized for more than a century, as one of the best instructions on humility; five or six editions of this booklet, issued at different times and exhausted almost immediately, are proof of its usefulness." (The Golden Book was one that all the Brothers were entitled to possess; Rules of 1837, Ch. 10, art. 5).

⁸ Joseph Ignatius Franchi. *Traité de l'amour du mépris de soi-même*, Lyon, 1803. Fr Colin was also very fond of this work (Cf. OM 2, docs. 471 [2]; 550; 726).

⁹ "Fr Champagnat, being responsible for giving us some instruction during a Retreat, spoke to us for a while... he apologized for making us waste our time listening to him" (OME, doc. 155, p. 362).

"Let me carry that; at least I shall have some share in what you do." Despite objections from the priests, he insisted: "Leave it to me; I am from the country 10 and used to heavy work." At the same time, he picked up the luggage, put it on his shoulders and carried it quite a distance with considerable satisfaction.

Neither the success of his Institute, nor the outstanding good which his Brothers accomplished and which won the praise of all, did anything to change the lowly opinion he had of himself. "The foundation of the Institute and its progress", he reiterated constantly, "are the work of God and not ours; it is he who has done everything; it is to Mary that we owe this blessing and all our success. As for us, we are capable only of spoiling what God entrusts to us, and we should never cease praying to him not to give up protecting the community, because of our failings."

Travelling once with two or three of his Brothers, he was asked by a priest who was in the same compartment and was struck by their modesty, who these Religious were. The priest was told that they were Brothers who taught country children. When asked their name, Father Champagnat replied that they were Little Brothers of Mary. The priest went on to inquire who their Founder was. "That's hardly known", Marcellin parried, slightly embarrassed. "A few young people got together and framed a Rule appropriate to their aim; a curate gave them some help; and God blessed their community, making it prosper beyond all human expectation." Having said these words with great simplicity, he 'changed the subject.

Someone remarked to Marcellin on one occasion: "There are' people who spread the rumour that marvellous things 11 happened in the beginnings of your Institute." "There is, perhaps, more truth to the story than you think", came the reply. "What a miracle it is, for example, that God made use of such men to launch this work! You have there, I believe, a marvel which proves beyond doubt that this community is his work. God took men without

10 Fr Terraillon wanted to leave behind his travelling sack so as not to carry it through the tOwll... "Give it to me! Give it to me!" said Fr Champagnat, who already had a heavy load. "I'm from the country, I am. It's no trouble to me." He picked up and carried the two sacks. (OME, doc. 159, p.372).

11 In J uly, 1920, Pope Benedict XV published the decree proclaiming the heroici ty of the virtues of Fr Champagnat. On that occasion, he referred to the marvel of the statue of the Virgin, which appeared, disappeared and was finally found again on the place where the Hermitage is constructed (CSG XIV. p. 386; Cf. OME, doc. 156 [1], p. 362; AA, pp. 148, 149).

virtue, without talent and without any human aid; he formed this Congregation from nothingness so that the entire honour and glory might redound to him and so that no one might ever doubt that it is he alone who has done everything for us."

These sentiments of humility never left him and even intensified with the passage of time. They drew from him the remark, shortly before his death, when it was suggested that this event would be a severe blow to his Institute. "I am useless to the world; what's more, I am thoroughly convinced that I am only an obstacle ¹² to good and that the Community will prosper more after my death than during my life." It now remains for us to record what he did to instil humility into his Brothers and inspire them with a love for this virtue.

When Father Champagnat founded his Institute he had two goals in mind: to provide the benefits of christian education for poor country children; and to honour Mary by the imitation of her virtues and the propagation of her devotion. However, since the Blessed Virgin was particularly remarkable for her humility, and since the role of teaching little children is necessarily a humble one, he wanted humility, simplicity and modesty to be the distinctive characteristics of his new Institute.

So that the Brothers might fully grasp this intention of his, Father Champagnat gave them the name of the Little Brothers of Mary; this name was to remind them constantly of what they should be. The word "little", ¹³ which hurts the feelings of some people, which those ignorant of the Congregation's spirit find an enigma, and which some regard as superfluous and useless, has not been given to the Brothers without strong motives. The Founder ¹⁴ intended this word to teach them that the spirit of their vocation is a spirit of humility; that their life should be a humble life, hidden and unknown; ¹⁵ that humility should be their favourite virtue; and that it is by the daily practice of humility that they will work efficaciously at their own sanctification and that of the children in their care. This word "little" can be

¹² Cf. AA, p. 115.

¹³ The adjective had, at first, a social significance, contrasting the country Brothers with the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the Great (Grands) Brothers, who went to the towns (Cf. P. Zind, NCF, p. 86). But, inserted as it is in the very title, it carries aH the meaning set forth here.

¹⁴ Fr Champagnat uses the adjective only rarely in his writings; mostly, he speaks of the Brothers of Mary.

¹⁵ A task often given by Fr Colin, to the Marist Fathers. (The motto: AMDG and DGM).

described as the stamp of the Institute, or the mould which forms its members; it is the mirror which keeps on reflecting the spirit of the Founder; and it demonstrates to them as well as teaches them, what they are committed to be and the image they ought to project.

Having made the Brothers understand by the name he gave them, what spirit should animate them, he strove relentlessly to train them in humility and simplicity. The first lesson he gave them on arrival at the novitiate, was a lesson in humility, encouraging them to work particularly at acquiring that virtue, the foundation of all the others. The first book that he put into their hands was *The Golden Book or Treatise on Humility*. Each was required to read it and meditate on it carefully in order to imbibe deeply the sentiments and the virtue with which that book aims to imbue the heart and mind of the reader. It was for this reason, too, that he assigned the postulants and the Brothers to manual work; that he had them learn to do the housework; and that he wanted poverty always to be apparent in their food, clothing and accommodation; for poverty and humility should be the inseparable companions of a true Religious.

Pride was the first vice which he aimed to eradicate from novices and young Brothers; he saw it as the greatest enemy of humility and as the antithesis of the spirit of the Institute. He detected it in no matter what form it appeared and attacked it wherever he perceived it. Thus, he continually humbled those in whom he noticed vanity or self-complacency. Sometimes, he did so by a public reprimand; at other times, he assigned them to the more menial tasks; if he thought that they were puffed up with knowledge, he would withdraw them from teaching or restrict their studies to what was essential.

In the course of a catechism class, a Brother made use of a few high-sounding words. The Founder, who had been listening, sent for him after the lesson and said to him: "I was sorry to see the silly pretentiousness you displayed during your class. Why don't you use terms that are readily understood? What do the words *Celestial Sion* mean to your pupils? Wouldn't you have been better understood, if you had simply said *paradise*? If you were filled with the spirit of your state, if you were humble and modest, instead of indulging in the inspirations of vanity, instead of mouthing fine phrases, you would speak simply and in a way which the youngest and most ignorant children could understand."

Another Brother used some lofty language in a letter to the Founder. He reacted by writing; "Brother, I can't understand your

letter; come and explain it to me." When the Brother came, he was given a severe reprimand which ended with these words:

"True Marist Brothers strive to imitate their divine Mother and to acquire her spirit, for this reason, they maintain simplicity and modesty and when they speak or write, their expressions are of the simplest variety. Those who, like you, waste their time instead, composing impressive sentences in order to pass for learned people when, in fact, they are ignorant, do not possess the spirit of the Blessed Virgin. Their spirit is not that of the Institute: it is the spirit of pride. Don't make this mistake again; if you do, you won't escape with a simple reprimand." The Brother promised, indeed, not to do the like again, and he kept his word.

Father Champagnat had a distinct dislike for praise, and this fact was so well known that it was said that you only had to flatter him to make him run away. He had a saying that you shouldn't praise people while they were alive; or in more popular terms, that he put his faith in the relics only of saints who were dead. "Praise", he contended, "can be very harmful to young Brothers; for, it is when they are unaware of their virtues and good qualities that they preserve them; whereas, if you draw attention to them by excessive praise, the demon of pride seizes the opportunity to rob them of their treasure."

On one occasion he was accompanied by the Brother Director during a visit to the Lord Mayor, who spoke in terms of the highest praise concerning the school, and the skill and devotedness of this Brother. When they left the Mayor's house, Father Champagnat challenged the Brother: "You were very pleased with the way you were praised to me, weren't you? Yet, it is sheer emptiness! Oh, how I fear that you may become dazzled by it all and let it turn your head. I don't mince words with you, Brother, because I like you, and my impression was that you really savoured that praise. I warn you, therefore, that if you take such baubles seriously, you are lost." The Founder's words proved only too true. The Brother, puffed up by his talents and his trifling successes, lost his piety and the spirit of his state; in the end, he abandoned his vocation.

Father Champagnat proposed four means of combating pride and acquiring true humility:

1. To work at self-knowledge. "When the devil tempts you to be vain", he suggested, "take a look at the other side of the coin: recall your faults and all the evil you have done; or else, descend into the abyss of your nothingness to examine what you are in God's eyes and what you have that really depends on you."

A serious perusal will show you two things: firstly, that there is little good in you, and it is the work of God; secondly, that you are full of vice, of evil inclinations and defects; that there is no crime, however enormous, which is beyond you and to which your corrupt nature does not make you prone; that if you have not fallen seriously, you owe it solely to the mercy of God, as the saying of St Augustine 16 reminds us: 'There is no sin committed by man, which may not be committed by a fellow man, if the hand which has made man, ceases to sustain him.' "

2. To reflect frequently on the benefits of humility and on the evils produced by pride. Once, when recommending the reading of the little book referred to above, Father Champagnat asked why it was called The Golden Book and gave this answer himself: tilt is because humility, which it deals with, is amongst the virtues, what gold is amongst the metals. Everyone knows that gold is the most precious of metals; so, it is the rarest and most sought after. When men want to bestow exceptional praise on something, they simply say: 'It is all gold.' By this, they mean that it is not merely good but very good, even perfect. The same is true of a Religious who is deeply humble; he can be said to be all gold, for all his virtues are true, solid and strong.

Humility is a balm which preserves the virtues; pride is a poison which corrupts and spoils them. It vitiates our actions and good works before, during and after their performance. In one who is dominated and motivated by pride, the best things lose their lustre and worth, being transformed into dross. Pride is like a guttering dripping on to a main beam which soon rots, causing the roof to collapse and, with it, the whole house. Pride is not like other vices which usually attack a single virtue: it attacks and destroys them all.

The practice of virtue is impossible for anyone who allows himself to be ruled by this treacherous vice. In fact, piety, frequent converse with God and frequentation of the sacraments in good dispositions, are not possible without humility. Nor, without it, can one accept being guided by obedience, put oneself at the disposition of a Superior and remain indifferent as to where one goes and what one does. You will never see one who is not humble practise charity, live in peace with his confrères, put up with their shortcomings and give way to them when necessary. If you remove humility, you ruin all virtues. Not without reason, therefore, did Our Saviour tell us: 'Learn of me because I am meek and humble

16 St Augustine, Sermon 99, 6.

of heart;' 17 not without reason, did he leave US such striking examples of humility; 18 he knew how necessary this virtue was to US; he knew the harm that pride causes us. But, what is hard to understand is the pride of man even while he beholds a God so profoundly humiliated!" 3. Ta be determined to practise obedience and charity. The commonest and the most dangerous faults springing from pride, are: complaining; answering back; receiving the Superiors directives with coldness and indifference; carrying out commands reluctantly, sluggishly and in line with one's own ideas; even refusing sometimes to obey; lauding oneself; wanting to dominate everywhere; failing in respect toward confrères; and being antipathetic against those who do not please us. Now obedience and charity obviate all these faults; and moreover, every act of obedience, every act of charity, is at the same time an act of humility.

Hence, Father Champagnat maintained: "Nothing is more efficacious for combating pride than the practice of those two virtues. Give me a house where all the Brothers let themselves be led with the simplicity of children; where they follow every directive given them; where they give one another respect and support; where, in fact, they love one another; for charity embraces all these qualities; in such a house, there will never be the least division. It will enjoy perfect union and be like a paradise, while a house with proud characters will be a sort of hell. This is because pride gives rise to insubordination, to disputes and to every source of trouble and division amongst the Brothers. Oh! how hateful pride is! I am not surprised that God resists the proud and that all his predilection is for the humble. 19"

4. Ta be modest about everything at all times. "It is characteristic of the proud", said the Founder, "to want to be seen; they like to show off their talents and their good points; they are anxious to be known and flattered; and any good they do is done ostentatiously. Modesty prefers to be hidden. The modest person lives unobtrusively in community; he is simple in his dress, in his

17 Matt 11, 29.

18 "He begins from the time of his birth, to preach by example, what he will later preach by words, saying: 'Learn of me because I am meek and humble of heart' (Matt 11, 29)... I beg you with all my strength, brothers, do not allow so precious an example to be placed before your eyes in vain; model yourself on him, and renew yourself to the depths of your soul" (St Bernard, Sermon for Christmas Day, 1).

19 Prov 3, 34; Lk 1, 51; 1 Pet 5, 5; Jas 4, 6.

deportment, in his words and in all that he does. If he has ability, he does not parade it; there is in him no slightest self-complacency, no pride, no haughtiness, nothing, in fact, contrary to modesty.

As his only desire is the glory of God, he does good without fuss, he seeks no applause and makes no effort to have his name on men's lips.

I know a Brother whose conduct in this regard is exemplary. This excellent man, who was extremely gifted and quite learned, taught only the First Grade; he was the certificated teacher and the one funded by the township; he wrote the pupils' models and any correspondence for the house. Now his modesty and humility were such that all this went on for several years without any outsider, not even a single child, knowing it. The people thought that it was Brother Director who had the Certificate, that the beautiful pieces of writing were his and that this was true too, for everything which the children found attractive in the school and which won the parents' admiration. Never did he breathe a word to reveal his part in the success of the establishment; on the contrary, he was so adept at hiding his talents and his contribution to the welfare of the school, that it was thought in the parish, that he couldn't write. The good spirit, the modesty and the humility of this true Marist Brother, are admirable and beyond all praise. All members of the Institute should follow his example. Subjects like him are a treasure for the community, and a source of blessing for the houses which are fortunate enough to have them."

Indeed, Father. Champagnat was not satisfied to have the Brothers practise humility individually; he wanted them to look on their Congregation as the last and least in the Church. He himself was so imbued with this attitude, that he often advised postulants who applied for admission to approach some other Congregation, particularly the Christian Brothers. "There", he would assure them, "you will find everything properly established and you will have perfect regularity; there, too, your talents will be put to better use and you will accomplish more good."

One day, Father Douillet, Director of the Minor Seminary of La Côte-Saint-André, brought along a young man of whom he spoke very highly. "Why doesn't he apply to the Christian Brothers?" the Founder queried. "They would suit him best and, in his place, that's what I would certainly do." He often recommended the Brothers to show the highest regard for members of other Congregations and to render them every possible service. "Be careful not to envy anyone", he warned, "and

especially those whom God has called, like yourselves, to the religious state in order to educate youth. Be the first to rejoice at their success and to grieve at their misfortune. Never listen to any comments designed to harm them; be willing to let them have their way.²⁰"

The pious Founder always acted in accordance with these maxims. Several municipalities pressed him many a time to provide them with Brothers to replace the Christian Brothers. It was alleged that their salaries were too high, since they did not accept school fees. He always rejected such proposals out of hand, saying that he would never be a party to them. "We have not come", he remarked to his Brothers, "to replace the disciples of the Venerable de la Salle; that is something we would never be capable of doing; our role is to supplement their work, by taking on what they cannot do and going into small towns which their Constitutions usually put beyond their scope. Those outstanding Religious serve as our models; we shall never measure up to them; even so, we shall strive to imitate them from afar, convinced that the better we do so, the more success we shall have."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Father Champagnat's love of purity. His extreme horror of the opposite vice and of sin in general.

It was impossible for someone so humble and so mortified, not to be chaste, for purity is the fruit and the reward of humility and mortification. At an early age, Father Champagnat showed a great love for the decent and decorous, coupled with a sovereign horror of every immodest word or action. "Although he was very fond of playing and having fun with children of his own age", according to someone who knew him very well as a child, "he assumed a grave demeanour, showed his displeasure and even withdrew, if any of his comrades made the least concession to immodesty, in his presence. 1"

His love for holy purity intensified during his studies, helped along by the instructions he heard on the subject in the Minor Seminary; learning there, that purity was a gift of God and beyond our unaided powers, he earnestly prayed for it from Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin. This gift was one of the chief intentions of his prayers, of his Holy Communions and of his visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

However, he was fully convinced that his prayers would be answered only if he himself made use of the means prescribed by religion for all men in order to preserve perfect purity. He therefore maintained a constant watch over his heart, his thoughts and his actions, so as to avoid anything which might give rise to temptation and to the suggestions of the enemy of salvation. Since idleness,² intemperance and pride are sure causes of the vice of impurity, he waged relentless war against them and applied himself in a special manner to the practice of the opposing virtues. It was by the assiduous exercise of these virtues, by prayer, by love of Our Lord, by a tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin, by

1 The word "modestie" is used here in the sense of decency or reserve which was at that time the common meaning.

2 Ecclesiasticus recommends: "Put him to work so that he may not be idle, for idleness teaches all sorts of mischief" (Sir. 33, 28).

watchfulness and avoiding the occasions of sin, that he achieved the perfect purity which makes mere mortals like to the angels.

Since the possession of a virtue always includes the grace of communicating it to others, Marcellin had a special gift for inspiring the love of purity and for consoling, comforting and encouraging, those who experienced violent temptations against that beautiful virtue. It was often enough to open one's heart to him to see painful and humiliating temptations disperse or even cease altogether. Some have even asserted that the mere decision to go and see him was sufficient to free them from the temptations.

The Founder's conviction that the avoidance of occasions of sin is the surest means of preserving spotless purity, led him to lay down the wisest rules for the Brothers in order to protect them from the snares of the enemy of salvation and to cause them to avoid anything which might endanger their virtue. Thus, he wanted them to live apart from the world and never to go out unless there was a real necessity; they were always to have a companion³ when they paid any visit; their discussions were to be brief, especially with persons of the opposite sex⁴, who should be admitted only to the parlour. Besides, he wished the parlour to be left open during the whole time of the interview.

In their dealings with the children, the Brothers were to be reserved and to avoid all familiarity, ⁵ to refrain from any display of too human friendship, from everything contrary to the strictest modesty and from anything which might become an occasion of temptation. For this reason, the Brothers were not to take the children by the hand, pat their face, embrace them and show them any other sign of affection which, while innocent in itself, might be exploited by the devil's malice, to cause temptation. He placed so much importance on these rules, which he rightly considered the safeguard of purity that he reminded the Brothers of them each year at the annual Retreat and earnestly urged that they be faithful to them. Moreover, any Brother who had witnessed a breach of those rules was required to inform him as soon as possible.

On the occasion of a visit that he made to the Hermitage, Father Cattet, Vicar-General, advised the Brothers to avoid corporal punishment and to reprimand the children without

³ Rules of 1837, Ch. 8, art.

⁴, p. 55; ⁴ Ibid, Ch. 9, arts. 9, and 10, p. 61.

⁵ Ibid, Ch. 5, art. 23, p. 44.

discouraging them. He added that, in certain circumstances, a child whom a punishment had reduced to tears, might be embraced in order to calm him and gain his confidence by this gesture of kindness. Father Champagnat then approached the Vicar-General, pointed out to him that such signs of friendship were forbidden by the Rule and asked him to retract the expression. Father Cattet did so at once, assuring the Brothers that the Rule reflected true wisdom.

Although Father Champagnat was extremely kind and corrected the defects of his Brothers very leniently, he always took strong measures against violation of the Rules just mentioned. Having reprimanded a Brother Director several times for going out alone and for being too ready to receive women into the house, he sent for him, and said: "How is it that in spite of my warnings and the remorse of your conscience, you transgress your Rule in such important matters? Have you forgotten that he who loves the danger will perish in it? ⁶ Haven't I told you that God is not mocked in vain ⁷ and that he abandons those who, to the great scandal of the Brothers, introduce such abuses into their houses? You can be sure that, if you do not change your conduct, you will suffer the punishments of divine justice and you will not die in the Society." These prophetic words were soon verified; the Brother concerned, having failed to take them sufficiently to heart, fell seriously and abandoned his vocation.

To a Brother who was not reserved enough with the children, Father Champagnat issued the warning: "It is more dangerous to your soul to allow yourself such liberties, than it would be to your body to play with serpents. Fidelity to the Rule concerning this important matter, and watchfulness over yourself, are the only means to security. Any time you transgress these rules you endanger yourself to some degree. Now anyone who truly loves purity, flees even the shadow of danger." Another Brother asked permission for a pious lady, a benefactress, to be allowed to enter the house in order to inspect the furniture. If this were granted, she promised to repair or replace it as required. "I set a higher store on the observance of the Rule forbidding women to enter our houses", the Founder replied, "than on all the good that we could receive from this pious lady you tell me about. The Institute will collapse, if the time comes when we put our temporal interests before the observance

⁶ Sir 3, 27.

⁷ Gal 6, 7.

of the Rule. Besides, people who wish to help us, will be all the more disposed to do so, the more faithful we are to God and to our duties. Our Saviour told us, after all: 'Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice and all these things will be added unto you.'⁸

During an instruction that the Founder was giving the Brothers on this subject, one of them got up and said: "Excuse me, Father, but it seems to me that there are cases where it is impossible to refuse people entry to the house." "I don't know of a single such case", retorted the Founder "and there has been none in this house during twenty years, although we have many visitors." Asked then if he would allow an exception to that rule, he reiterated: "No never, unless the lady is accompanied by the parish priest or by the mayor." The questioner thereupon suggested that one could not dare refuse to allow in a lady of the highest rank. "If it is the Queen", the Founder replied warmly, "let her in." Then he went on in a calm, firm tone: "Females should not be admitted to the interior of our houses⁹; those who, on specious pretexts, contravene this rule and allow abuses to creep in, become very guilty."

It was Father Champagnat's love of purity and his hatred of the opposite vice which caused him to take so many precautions to preserve this beautiful virtue amongst the Brothers. However, he was aware that the keenest watchfulness and the wisest rules were inadequate unless bolstered by prayer. Hence, he continually begged Our Lord, through the intercession of Mary, to grant all the Brothers perfect purity of soul and body. It was his wish, incorporated in a prescription, that special prayers be said every day throughout the Institute, to obtain the holy virtue of purity.

He often offered the Votive Mass of the Blessed Virgin for the same intention. "Mary was admirable for her purity", he used to repeat. "We who are her children and who glory in bearing her name, should excel in love of this beautiful and sublime virtue, should war against anything in ourselves or in our young charges which can harm or destroy it and should strive to be unsurpassed in its practice."

⁸ Lk 12,31.

⁹ Rules of 1837, Ch. 9, art. 9, p. 61. During the period of Br Francis, the Countess of Grandville was able to be present at a session of the Chapter; she was brought in by Fr Matricon. Br Francis was as strict on this point as Fr Champagnat.

Such was the Founder's horror of the impure vice that even to hear it spoken of made him tremble. He wept at any open fault against purity; if there was corruption of others, he was terrifying and inexorable, showing no mercy to those responsible.

During the La Valla period, as the novices were not numerous, in order to boost the community resources children were accepted as boarders. A postulant, who was employed in the boarding school, once yielded to a temptation of this kind. The Founder, who was engaged in building the Hermitage 10 at the time, heard news of the fault that same day and was deeply grieved. He went straight to La Valla where he learnt that several children and several Brothers knew of the incident. He therefore determined to check the corruption and stifle the evil at its birth, by inflicting a frightful punishment on the culprit.

He assembled in his room all the Brothers and all the novices of the house. When they were all there, he made a sign for them to spread around in a circle, then, without any warning, he took his surplice and stole and sent for the offender. The latter arrived to be greeted by a withering look from the Founder who, reproached him in these terms: "Wretch! since you have not been afraid to crucify Jesus Christ in your heart and to desecrate his living members, you will not fear to trample on his image." At the same time, he threw a crucifix on the ground in front of the postulant and in a thunderous voice, exclaimed: "Monster that you are, tread on the image of your God. The crime that you commit in stamping on this sacred symbol of your redemption will be less than the one you committed yesterday."

The young man was dismayed and threw himself on his knees in tears, asking for pardon and mercy. "Wicked man", replied the Founder, "what did that child do to you, that you should rob him of his innocence? Away with you! You don't deserve mercy." As the postulant kept on asking forgiveness and did not get up, the Founder cried: "Away from here, you monster! Away! You have desecrated this house; never set foot in it again!" The culprit was so full of fear and confusion that he didn't know what he was doing and couldn't find the door even though it was open in front of him. He was pushed out by Father Champagnat, who commanded him: "Go, wretched man, and never again appear in my presence!"

10 Br Sylvester, recording the fact in his *Mémoires* (p. 93) declares: "I quote it, because I knew the individual..."

As soon as the young man had gone, he knelt down in front of the crucifix which was still on the Hoar, and exclaimed: "My Jesus, pardon this crime and all those which have nailed you to the cross! Oh, Jesus, by your sacred wounds, preserve us from such an enormous sin and never allow this house to be defiled again by the demon of impurity!" Then he rose, looked at the Brothers, and said: "My friends, let us beg the good God to preserve us from ever committing such a fault. Let us ask him to banish Satan from this house; he has gained entry, but, with the help of Mary, we shall drive him out. Bring me some holy water." Preceded by a Brother carrying the holy water and with the l'est following, he went through all the apartments; he sprinkled holy water all round, repeating sorrowfully in a voice of great earnestness: "Sprinkle me with hyssop and I shall be cleansed; wash me and I shall be made whiter than snow. 12" He ended the ceremony by kneeling to say a fervent prayer for purity.

Words cannot convey the effect produced on the Brothers by what they witnessed. They were so moved and frightened by it that they all trembled and wept as though they themselves had been the guilty ones. It took place about four o'clock in the afternoon. During the recreation which followed the evening meal, the impression made was still so deep and intense that no one dared to speak. That recreation was passed in gloomy silence.

A few years later, a similar fault was committed by a twentyfive year old postulant. The Founder having learnt of it at ten o'clock in the evening, an hour after the community retired, could not bring himself to leave the culprit in the house till next day; he therefore made him get up and dismissed him immediately. The young man begged him on his knees to be allowed to spend the night in some corner of the house or in the stable, arguing that it was too late to find accommodation elsewhere. "No, no!" insisted the Founder, "for, as long as you are here, I shall tremble with fear that the curse of God may fall on us." While speaking, he hurried him out the door and closed it.

A moment later, a Brother pointed out that the postulant had left his outfit behind. "Go and gather up all his wearing apparel", was the instruction, "and throw it across the river; then we shall be completely separated, not only from him but from everything

11 Benedict XV, at the time of the investigation of the heroicity of virtues, took Fr Champagnat's side, against the Devil's Advocate, who was alleging a lack of charity.

12 Ps 50, 9.

belonging to him; and the water will prevent our being affected by the contamination that his belongings cannot fail to spread." Apart from particular traits of character and a few differences in circumstances and social standing, the saints resemble one another deep down. The Spirit of God which directs and animates them, inspires in them the same thoughts and feelings. There are certain tastes and certain inclinations by which we could distinguish all the saints were we to meet up with them, for they display special characteristics which are typical. These are: a horror and fear of sin; the spirit of piety and the love of prayer; the love of Jesus; zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls; obedience; suffering and love of the cross; and humility. There is no saint who doesn't have these seven qualities; and if we single out only the first, there is no saint who did not fear sin more than death. The incidents in Father Champagnat's life which we have just recounted, and those which we shall record later, are merely a feeble copy of the examples which have been left us by the saints and which adorn each page of their lives.

St Ignatius Loyola's horror of sin made him declare that he would not dare sleep the night in a house where he knew there was a man guilty of mortal sin, for fear that the roof should fall in and crush him under its ruins. "I leave this world", exclaimed St Magdalen of Pazzi, "with a frightening mystery unsolved, namely, how it is that a person can so easily commit mortal sin." St John Chrysostom asserted that he would have preferred to be possessed by the devil than to commit a venial sin. All the sicknesses of the world seemed to St Louis, King of France, preferable to committing a single mortal sin. "I would rather my body perish and my limbs be hacked to pieces", said St Dorothea, "than cause harm to my soul by the slightest sin." An indecent word or even the shadow of sin sent St Stanislaus Kostka into a faint. St Francis of Assisi, St Benedict, St Bernard and many more rolled in the icy snow or in thorn bushes, at the mere thought of committing a sin.

The most distressing events, accidents and what the world calls misfortunes could not ruffle the peace of soul of Father Champagnat. We have already seen that affliction, contradictions and the loss of temporal goods had no impact on his happy and even temperament. Only sin produced a perceptible change in him and gave his face an expression of grief and sadness. Like the saints, he feared nothing but sin. "To see God offended and souls lost", he lamented, "are two things which I cannot bear and which make my heart bleed." In such cases, he could not control his

feelings or hide the pain which gripped him; he felt impelled to reprove those whom he saw offending God.

On one of his journeys he had to go into a tavern with another priest to take a meal. While they were at table, a group of young free-thinkers took up a position near them and, without any consideration for their presence, launched into a decidedly licentious and blasphemous conversation. For some time, the only sign of Marcellin's displeasure and grief was the sad and forbidding expression on his face; but seeing that these young people persisted in their wickedness, he was carried away by zeal, and his grief exploded; he rose suddenly, cast a withering glance at them and brought his hand down on the table with a resounding bang. "Wretches that you are", he shouted, "if you have no respect for yourselves, have some at least for others! So, either get out of here or hold your tongues." The impious young band were thrown into consternation and fright much more by Marcellin's tone of voice and angry countenance than by the blow that had just shattered their ears. With downcast eyes they quietly slunk away, not uttering, a single word.

Sin, its unfortunate effect and its terrible punishments, were the commonest topics of Father Champagnat's instructions. It was by such instructions that he revived the parish of La Valla and won his first Brothers to God's cause. He was deeply convinced of the truth of what the Holy Spirit says, namely: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. 13" Consequently he kept coming back to that truth in his instructions and in his interviews with the Brothers.

His lessons bore fruit. He had the happiness of seeing their hearts so imbued with this salutary fear that it became the solid foundation for the high perfection they attained. It was evident that they all had extremely timorous consciences, causing them to fear the shadow of sin and the slightest danger of offending God. One of them put it this way: "I hate mortal sin so much and have such a great fear of committing it, that the very mention of it affects me in much the same way as the sight of imminent danger; it fills me with fright and makes me want to run away." When the suggestion was made to Brother Anthony, 14 during his sickness at Bourg-Argental, that an old woman should be brought in to attend to him, he replied: "See that you do no such thing. I would rather die than have a woman enter the house to

13 Ps 110, 10; Prov 1, 7; 9, 10.

14 LPC 2, pp. 45, 46.

attend to me." When there was some attempt to persuade him, he insisted: "You are wasting your time; I tell you that, if she comes, I shall take refuge in the school, sick and all as I am."

Father Champagnat did not rest satisfied with urging the Brothers to flee mortal sin; he strove to inspire them with a strong hatred of venial sin and of the smallest faults. Travelling one day with Brother Louis, he began to speak, as usual, on spiritual matters. The conversation eventually moved into the enormity of venial sin and its malice.

"This sin", he explained, "seems of slight significance to many people and yet, after mortal sin, it is the greatest of evils. Yes, all the calamities raging through the world constitute a lesser evil than a single venial sin. Wars, plague, famine, sickness, weaknesses of every sort afflicting humanity, death and even hell with its fires and eternal punishments, are all evils which affect creatures only; by contrast, the smallest venial sin bears a relation to God; in fact, all those evils mentioned, with the exception of hell, can, if we wish, be turned to our salvation and sanctification, becoming sources of merit and can help us acquire an immense weight of glory; sin, on the other hand, is unmitigated evil and brings us only harm. We must therefore conclude that, even if we could prevent all calamities by a single venial sin we should not be allowed to do so."

"What, Father", replied Brother Louis, "wouldn't it be permissible to commit a venial sin to preserve men from the multitude of evils which oppress them?"

"No, my dear friend", continued the Founder, "one could not and should not even tell a lie, though, by some remote chance, one could thereby free the world from the large number of evils which afflict it. Moreover, a venial sin would not be allowable, even if it served to convert all sinners."

Brother Louis commented that, in such a case, it would be better to shut ourselves up within four walls, well away from every occasion of sin, than to expose ourselves to the dangers of the world in order to teach the children.

"Your reasoning is faulty", he was told, "for the education of children, far from putting you in the necessity of offending God, offers you, instead, the most suitable means of avoiding sin; it gives you the opportunity of destroying sin not only in yourself but in others as well."

16 It is never permitted to tell a lie to save someone from any danger whatever (St Thomas, *IIa-IIae*, q. 110, art. 3, ad 4).

"Father, since sin is such an enormous evil", argued Brother Louis, "it seems to me that the best and surest line of action is for each to preserve himself from it and to invoke for that purpose the most efficacious means by embracing a lifestyle which is cut off from the world and even from children; after all, our work amongst them exposes us to a number of faults which we could avoid by directing our activity only to ourselves."

"Here again, you are wrong, my dear friend", the Founder informed him, "for we shouldn't avoid a fault by falling into a greater one. This is what you would be doing by not responding to your vocation, by thinking of yourself alone, by becoming selfish and by failing in the charity that you ought to have towards your neighbour. What would you think of a man who found himself in a house being gutted by fire and who was satisfied to save his own life, while leaving his brothers and friends to perish in the flames, when by taking a little risk he could save them? Faced with danger that threatens our brothers as well as ourselves, it is not enough for us to flee into the distance; charity requires that we also protect our brothers from it. .

Moreover, the chief motive which should lead us to avoid and hate sin, is that it offends God. Now, sin offends God in all men; if we hate it only in ourselves and not in our brothers, if we are out to avoid it only to preserve ourselves from it and not others, then, besides, not loving God, we have only an imperfect hatred and detestation of sin. We avoid it only because of the evils it brings upon us; we should fear it, fight it and flee from it, because it displeases God and is the cause of the sufferings and death of Our Lord, Jesus Christ."

You have there, the attitude of the Founder on venial sin. May the Little Brothers of Mary imbibe it deeply and, after the example of their father, fear and flee sin more than all the evils of the world.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Father Champagnat's love of work.

"Man is born to work", says the Holy Spirit in the Book of Job, "as birds are born to fly. 1" Not only is man obliged to work by reason of his very nature; a specific command of God enjoins him to do so. Scripture tells us, in fact, that after creating Adam, God placed him in the earthly paradise to work in it and to look after it. 2 Moreover, once his innocence had been lost, this law was reinforced by a new commandment from God, to eat his bread by the sweat of his brow and to till the soil by the work of his hands. 3

When our Founder gave us a rule about work, therefore, he didn't lay down a new law; he simply recalled the one which God imposed on us with his sovereign authority. However, in this instance, as usual, Marcellin teaches us by his example and is the first to put into practice what he asks of us. Work was never a trouble to him, and from his childhood he gave himself to it with pleasure. We saw him in his parents' home put a hand to everything and succeed at it. He was very intelligent and naturally skilful, working with enthusiasm and application; as a result, under his father's guidance, but especially by his own diligence, he developed skills in the basic trades for life: farming, masonry, carpentry and the like.

In the years to come, those various skills would prove extremely useful to the Congregation, enabling him to undertake, with the help of his Brothers, many enterprises which would have been an enormous cost to the community, if it had been necessary to employ professional tradesmen. He was able, for instance, to construct the house of La Valla 4 himself. Similarly, a large part of the Hermitage construction was done in this way; so too, were

1 Job 5, 7. 2 Gen 2, 15.

3 Gen 3, 17-19.

4 That is, the 1823 extension, made necessary by the arrival of 8 postulants, followed by that of several others (AA, pp. 46, 47).

the repairs, the furnishings of the house, the fences and the improvements to the property.

His love of work and especially his humility, led him to put his hand to every task. He would construct a wall with the masons, or a partition with the plasterers; make a piece of furniture or lay a floor with the carpenters; hew stones with the labourers; work in the garden; clear a field, haul stones or transport manure: it was all one to him; no task was too menial for him; and the work that he did was always notable for the amount he accomplished and for the stamp of his skill on it. The strongest workmen admitted that it was impossible to compete with him and that he always out-worked any one of them. His example was a spur to the laziest; all worked hard when he was present and no one dared remain idle or refuse a task, no matter how laborious or lowly it might be.

He was working one day with the quarrymen, and their foreman, a strong, fearless fellow with the reputation of not recoiling before any difficulty, said to him: "Father, we have had to give up cutting that rock, for it is such a hard variety, ⁶ that we are wasting our time." Marcellin, who wanted the rock cut away at all costs, because water oozed out from it into the building and made the rooms unhealthy, replied with a laugh: "What! You have no more courage than that? I am not surprised that you can't cut that rock, for your strokes would not pierce the sole of my shoe."

Then, turning to another, he chaffed: "As for you, you have no more pluck than a half-drowned chicken". These sharp taunts, together with his own example, had the desired effect. When the workmen saw him take a pick and strike the rock with a force that sent chips flying in all directions, they seized a tool themselves and set to work so energetically that, next day, the whole mass of stone had disappeared.

It is hardly necessary to point out that Father Champagnat turned to manual work less from taste than from necessity and that he had far more important occupations. He devoted himself to study; to instruct and train his Brothers; to carry on his correspondence; to keep a check on all aspects of the

⁵ Fr Champagnat retained this interest in manual work, all his life. He wrote from Paris to Br Francis, February 4, 1838: "Has Poncet finally cut that rock properly?" (LPC 1, doc. 172, p. 344). On his return to the Hermitage, in the first days of July, he himself began to cut the rock (AA, p. 241).

⁶ Cf. Br Avit, AA, p. 56.

administration of his Institute; to visit the schools; to draw up, to study and to meditate on the Rules which he wished to give his community; to satisfy all sorts of people who had business to do with him; and to receive Brothers and postulants in interview for a discussion of their needs and personal conduct: such were the tasks that filled his day or rather his entire life; they exhausted his strength, wore out his strong constitution and brought him to the grave earlier than would naturally have been the case, if he had spared himself and had chosen a less demanding undertaking.

We come now to an account of what Marcellin did to inspire the Brothers with a love of work and a hatred of idleness. There is, of course, that law common to all men which imposes on them a life of toil. On top of that, religious life, being essentially a life of devotedness, penance and mortification, is by that very fact, a life of labour and fatigue. Father Champagnat never failed to make this clear to the postulants when he admitted them. The first quality he expected of them was love of work; the first test he subjected them to was that of work, either manual or of some other kind; he dismissed, out of hand, those who showed a dislike for work, or, as he put it, had weak elbows.

Father Champagnat's attitude in this matter, conforms completely with the stance taken by the Founders of the ancient Religious Orders, all of whom considered love of work a necessary quality in a member to be received. St Jerome, St Benedict⁷ and Cassian make clear to us that communities of their time, excluded candidates for laziness. In Religious Orders since then, the matter has been considered just as important and love of work has been universally required as an indispensable disposition in a candidate seeking admission.

Since the goal of the Society is to impart christian education to children, it naturally follows that the principal occupation of the Brothers is study and teaching. However, as the Rule expects them to take care of the household duties, they combine their study and teaching with gardening and housework; besides, this gives them some necessary exercise. In preparation for these various responsibilities, their novitiate period allows for some practice at them all. There, they engage in study, tend the garden,

7 "Idleness is the enemy of the soul. The Brothers ought to dedicate certain hours to manual work and others to religious reading. That is why we believe we can prescribe for each of these occupations..." (*Règle de saint Benoît*, Ch. 48, p. 69. Ed. J. Ducolot, 1945).

do the cooking, keep the building clean and see to all the chores that can arise in a household.

The Founder wanted each Brother and postulant to experience these different tasks and to be able to carry them out adequately and in accordance with the spirit of the Institute. To achieve this, he insisted on three particular points:

1. Each one should accept with complete submission, the employment assigned to him and should desire no other.
2. He should apply himself with great earnestness to the perfect discharge of his duty.
3. He should keep busy at all times, never giving way to idleness.

With regard to this last point, his emphasis was not on huge output, especially if the work were difficult; what he did object to was wasting time, a slovenly approach to the task and sitting down in a restful position when doing outside work. He saw this posture as normally indicating laziness or carelessness and involving possible danger to health through sitting on the ground.

A Brother, who was inclined to be slothful but was otherwise a good Religious, had been sent to a field to remove a heap of stones. Having transferred some of them, he sat down on the heap and proceeded to throw the small ones to the required spot. Father Champagnat noticed this from his window and decided to reprimand him in a way that would dent his self-love and lead him to correct a fault which had already been brought to his attention several times, without effect. So he called a young Brother and gave him a cushion, with the instruction: "Take this cushion to the Brother whom you see sitting over there on the stones; tell him that I want him to sit on it." At the sight of the cushion and even more at the invitation to sit on it, the Brother was quite embarrassed; he got up and set to work, not raising his head till dinner time.

It was still more disconcerting, however, to have to return the cushion, given him by the young Brother. He went about it so skilfully and was so well favoured by circumstances that he managed to leave it in Father Champagnat's room without being seen. This good Brother resolved never to expose himself to a second such lesson⁸ which was exactly what had been intended by the one who gave him the first.

⁸ "Pious Br Matthew, somewhat sickly, was working in the garden; after working for a while, he sat down on a heap of stone" (AA, p. 192). In 1852, this Brother was elected as a deputy, to the General Chapter. Br Avit (AA, p. 517, ms. aux AFM) says of him: "He was a Savoyard whose simplici-

In his conferences, Marcellin was always exhorting the Brothers to love work and avoid idleness. "Work", he used to remind them, "is necessary to ensure health of mind and purity of soul; it serves to promote man's physical and moral improvement and is even essential to his happiness. Everything, in fact, reaches perfection through action and use; without these it falls in ruin. Stagnant water becomes foul; unused iron rusts; uncultivated land brings forth weeds and thorn-bushes; and the empty building deteriorates to the point of ruin more rapidly than if it were occupied. All these things are useful or beneficial only insofar as they experience movement, action or use.

The Brother who is not fond of work and has an aversion to study, is less perfect, morally and physically, after ten, twenty, thirty years in Religion, than on the day of his entry. His mind is less capable of reflection; his thoughts, his feelings and his tastes are more worldly; his soul has lost strength and energy, leaving it less fit to resist temptation and practise virtue; his body can no longer stand even the lightest work, because through inactivity, it is clogged with unhealthy fluids and dogged by sickness. There you have the terrible punishment of idleness: it makes man unhappy and useless."

Once when Father Champagnat was talking with a Brother, one of the old men who were cared for out of charity, passed in front of them and, as he usually did, walked about in a childish way; for, being out of his mind, he was incapable of working. When he saw him, the Brother was prompted to remark: "There is one at least who is fortunate! He has nothing to do."

"What?" the Founder interjected hastily. "Do you call a man fortunate because he has nothing to do? Oh my God! Preserve me from fortune like that, which I consider a great misfortune."

"There is no one", he continued, "more to be pitied and leading a more wretched existence than one who lives in idleness. Men like that, experience nothing but merely animal satisfaction on earth; they are completely unaware of the happiness and delights of virtue. Their life is more the existence of a brute beast than the life of a man." The Brother was somewhat taken aback by this reply and he was never inclined again, to describe as fortunate, those whom he saw in idleness.

ty chimed in quite well with considerable shrewdness. His health was quite frail and his education limited, a fact which did not detract from his lively and witty conversation. Bishop de Bruillard of Grenoble was fond of him and had lengthy talks with him..." (AA, p. 641, ms. aux AFM).

Marcellin often made the point that even if man were not obliged by God's command to work so as to earn his bread at the sweat of his brow, 9 a Religious would be obliged to work. He gave a number of reasons:

1. To avoid temptation and preserve his virtue. The Holy Spirit has said: "Idleness is the mother of all vices. 10" It is the cause of the greatest temptations and the source of the most heinous sins. The devil is wasting his time trying to tempt a busy man; but he never fails to lead into sin, those who give way to idleness. By way of illustration, he used to tell the following story:

One day a saint heard two devils telling each other the result of their evil suggestions to two men. "I'm wasting my time", said the first, "tempting that brute of a stone-mason; he is constantly bent over his stone; if I try to suggest some bad thoughts to him, his only response is a few strokes of the mallet; I make no headway at all. He is not a man who will attain great heights of

9 Gen 3, 19.

10 Sir 33, 28, 29.

virtue, because his motives are not sufficiently supernatural; but he will save his soul, for I shall never succeed in giving him a love of vice." The other devil reported that, by complete contrast, the man whom he had to tempt, was an idle fellow. "All I need to do each morning is to whisper to him the evil that I want from him during the day. He will then do it", the devil revealed, "and even go beyond what I had expected." "There you have a picture of the fate of the idle", was Marcellin's conclusion. "A Religious prone to that vice is liable to experience the greatest of falls; and even if he were preserved from these by a special grace, sloth, which is one of the capital sins, would be enough to make a reprobate of him. Notice that the barren tree is cut down and cast into the fire, simply because it is barren; 11 and the unprofitable servant is cast into exterior darkness, though the only crimes levelled against him are his slackness and his laziness. 12"

2. To persevere in his vocation. "In this regard", the Founder assured one of the principal Brothers, "I have a firm conviction that nearly all the young Brothers who have left us, did so because they gave in to laziness. I am not suggesting that this was a direct cause of their departure, but that it led them into serious faults which, in turn, robbed them of a love and appreciation of their state; they were then moved to abandon it. Accordingly, it is my belief that idleness is the greatest enemy of religious vocation and that faults springing from it, do the most harm to young Brothers."

In the light of such a statement, it is easy to understand why the Founder attached such importance to work and so often recommended to Brothers Director, that they should keep the young Brothers constantly occupied. "The Brother responsible for the kitchen", he contended, "should be able to manage his duties so expeditiously that he can spend most of his time in school, helping his confrères teach the children; and if the number of children does not warrant his assistance, he should go along all the same and spend his time in study. The most important service a Brother Director can render a young Brother is to keep him so busy that he has no moment of respite; left to himself, and allowed to remain idle, he is in the greatest danger of going astray, despite his best intentions. I have known numerous good subjects who would be excellent Religious to-day, who would be an

11 Matt 3, 10; 7, 19.

12 Matt 25, 30.

adornment to the Institute; instead, they lost their vocation because their Brothers Director didn't keep them busy enough and did not train them to virtue." 3. In order to qualify himself for his duties. Yes, but for what kind of duties should a Brother prepare? Father Champagnat gave the answer: "A Brother should strive to become capable of filling any post, any employment in the Institute. This means that he should be able to cook, look after the garden, teach the elementary class, supervise the children and discharge any other tasks that may be entrusted to him. If this is to happen, he must love study and apply himself to it with assiduity.

In the novitiate here as well as in the houses, I often come across things being spoiled or worn out prematurely, because no one takes care of them or knows how to get the best out of them; and nothing hurts me more, when I point out these facts, than to hear someone say: 'I cannot do that; I am not used to working . in the garden or to looking after such things; I know nothing about cooking, etc.' A Brother should never feel the need to speak in that way, for he should put his hand to everything and try and master all skills. The same applies to our studies and the subjects we have to teach; we should not rest satisfied with a superficial knowledge of them but study them in depth, ending up with a perfect knowledge; this will not happen without application from us in daily, unremitting study."

In order to stimulate the Brothers to love study and to encourage them to vie with one another in this matter, during the holidays, he often required them to write compositions; 13 moreover for many years, that is while their numbers were small, he made them sit for a formal examination in all subjects to be taught, making an exact record of each one's results so that, the following year, he could check their progress. He wanted the Brothers to be adept in the different kinds of hand-writing. Those who taught the First and Second Classes had to write their own models and were not allowed use ready-made ones. It was also a rule that each Brother bring at least ten samples of his own work in this regard, to the annual retreat. His aim was to stir up emulation and to evaluate each one's progress.

The Brothers Director were likewise trained to a love of work, of orderliness and of accuracy; and they were formed in sound administration of finance and temporal matters; as a means to these ends, Marcellin not only inspected the account books

13 LPC 1, clac 313, p. 570, 11. 88-105.

personally, but established a competition for excellence in keeping them. A commission consisting of the principal Brothers was given the task of examining all these books and of evaluating them on the basis of three criteria: regularity of entries; fidelity to the details laid down by Rule and custom in the Institute; and beauty of presentation. A list was then drawn up in order of merit and was handed over to Father Champagnat.

In addition, to prevent anyone becoming careless during the year or postponing study and preparation for the holiday exams till the last months, he arranged assemblies each Term. The subjects for teaching, to be treated at the se, were indicated in a circular letter and each Brother had to prepare them carefully, even doing so by written exercises. ¹⁴ He himself was responsible for most of the instructions at the assemblies; this involved long and painful journeys for him, but no cost was too great when his goal was to give the Brothers a love of work and develop their professional skill.

It goes without saying that they were recommended to accord a privileged place to the study of religion. He wanted the Brothers to see that it took precedence over all other study and to spend at least an hour at it every day. "It would be a shameful thing", he maintained, "for a religious teacher not to know his religion sufficiently; it would be scandalous for him to be less capable of teaching catechism than the other subjects. A Brother cannot neglect the study of catechism without guilt; in fact, the fruits of his instruction will be proportioned to his care in preparing it. To teach catechism without preparation is therefore virtually useless.

Neglect of the study needed to prepare for religious instruction, is a fault which brings in its wake terrible consequence. To begin with, the Brother is in danger of never mastering a knowledge of his religion and of leading a superficial life; moreover, he scandalizes his Brothers and neglects his Rule; besides, he makes it impossible for him to give the children religious instruction and a suitable training in virtue; he forsakes the goal of the Institute; he destroys entirely the religious tenor of the school; and, to sum up, he fails in the first and most important duty of a teacher which is, before all else, to give religious instruction and christian education to the children.

Do Brothers reflect on these consequences, as inevitable as they are frightening, when they neglect the study of catechism?

¹⁴ LPC 1, doc. 318, p. 581, 11.28-35.

If they did advert to them, they would rarely find a valid reason for omitting it. Some say they have not time; that's an empty excuse, since they find time to study other subjects and to do many less necessary things, sometimes even to enjoy themselves; in any case, how can they be short of time when the Rule allots an hour to religious study every day and no one can take it on himself to use that hour otherwise?

There are those who claim as an excuse, that they have already read the catechetical texts in the library several times. There is more to the study of religion than the reading of such books; that has to be supplemented by the assiduous assimilation of ascetical works, of the lives of the saints and of the history of religion; then should follow meditation on these readings."

These last words prompted a Brother to put the question whether it would be allowable to spend some of the time reserved for preparation of catechism, in reflection and meditation. "Perfectly allowable", the Founder assured him, "and I would fully endorse the practice of following up half an hour's reading of a good book with a similar amount of reflection on it; that is the best way of fathoming the subject and making it interesting to the children."

One day, Marcellin asked a Brother what sort of person his patron saint had been and what were the chief circumstances of his life. This Brother was a pious and learned man, but excused himself for not knowing his patron's life. "What, Brother!" was the astonished reaction, "you have let all this time pass without reading and meditating the life of the great servant of God, whose name you have the good fortune to bear! You should be ashamed! What is the use of your having a saint's name? You might as well have had that of a pagan. Don't you realise that the Church gives us a saint's name so that we can study his life and imitate his virtues. Besides you have a duty to urge the children to read their patrons' lives and copy their virtues. Shouldn't you be the first to carry out what you advise them to do?" "A Brother", he continued, "should often read the lives of the saints, not only for his own edification but to draw from them illustrations to confirm, as the opportunity arises, the truths of religion that he has to teach. "

4. In order to maintain harmony in the house and not be a burden to his Brothers. "If peace and charity are to reign in a religious house, each one must carry out faithfully the task that is his. Now, someone who doesn't like work performs his duties badly and prevents others from doing theirs well. If, for example,

the Brother cook doesn't have the meals ready on time, he makes the Brothers discontented and leads them to murmur and complain; he prevents regularity and sows disorder in the whole house. If, through laziness or inadequate care, his food is badly prepared or he is wasteful, he can be a serious threat to the Brothers' health and, in any case, endangers the community finances; for incompetent cooking is always costly cooking. What we say of Brothers looking after temporal affairs, can also be said of those teaching: anyone who fails to do his own task well, makes the work of others harder; anything neglected by him becomes an extra burden for his confrères who must compensate for the effects of his laziness."

We conclude this chapter with the reminder that Father Champagnat was a model¹⁵ of work to his Brothers throughout his entire life; he missed no opportunity of inspiring them with love of work; yet although he had drawn up the wisest of rules to keep the Brothers always busy and immune from idleness, what caused him greatest remorse at death, and provoked his severest self-reproach, was not having encouraged the Brothers sufficiently to avoid idleness. "I must blame myself", he sorrowfully declared, "for failing to keep the Brothers sufficiently at work; watch over them well, in this matter; have them constantly occupied, for no vice does more harm to Religious than laziness." May the Little Brothers of Mary always remember those words of their dying Father and may they, after his example, work with generous devotedness and avoid idleness like the plague!

¹⁵ Marcellin Champagnat et sa mission: le travail. Cf. Voyages et Missions, No. 132.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Father Champagnat's love for his Brothers and his attachment to them.

No father has ever loved his children more tenderly than Father Champagnat loved all his Brothers. He had a heart that was naturally kind and full of charity for men generally; but it overflowed with tenderness for the members of his Society. That love went out equally to them all: the young and the old; the imperfect and those who were the most virtuous or gave him the greatest consolation. None of them ever visited him or wrote to him without receiving some token of his affections.

His letters abound in expressions such as: "You know, dear Brother, that I love you and am entirely devoted to you in Jesus Christ; you know how dear you are to me and how much I am affected by all your difficulties." And, in a letter to Brothers Director: "Tell your Brothers that I love them as I would my own children; 2 that I think often of them and constantly, pray for them." Then, to a community shortly before he was due to visit them: "I long to see you all, to embrace you and assure you of all the affection I have for you in Jesus Christ. I could not possibly have better news than your letters bring: that you are all well and happy. Your happiness and contentment will last as long as you are united and love one another. 3" Every single one of his circular letters speaks of charity. In them, his tender attachment to all the Brothers is so vividly

1 Here are some terms of friendship, taken from Fr Champagnat's letters (LPC 1): To Br Antony, p. 59: "I love him" (speaking of Br Dominic). To Br Bartholomew, p. 74: "I embrace you in the hearts of Jesus and Mary, to whom I confide you." To Br Theophile, p. 150: "My dear friend, tell Br Sylvester how much I love him." To Br Francis, p. 167: "I give all of you an assurance of the tender affection with which..." To Br Apollinarius, p. 358: "I am broken-hearted to know that you are sick." To the Brothers, p. 152: "While I await the pleasure of embracing you..."

2 Br Lawrence could write: "A mother has no greater tenderness for her children, than he had for us" (OM 2, doc. 757 [7], p. 762).

3 LPC 1, doc. 20, p. 64, 11. 27-33.

expressed that we cannot resist the temptation to give some extracts. In January, 1836, he wrote: 4

"My very dear Brothers, my heart delights in recalling your memory each day and in offering you all to Our Lord at the Roly Sacrifice. But to-day I feel an overwhelming need to show you my fatherly tenderness. You are, Brothers, the particular object of all my solicitude; my only wish, my only desire, is for your happiness.

However, don't misunderstand me; the happiness that I want for you is not the one which the world seeks, believing it to consist in the possession of temporal goods; no, my wish and my request for you are that you gain something more real and more solid: to serve God with fervour; to fulfil faithfully all your duties as a Religious; to strive to detach your heart daily from created things in order to give it to Jesus and Mary and to make it docile to the inspirations of grace. These are the blessings I wish you.

Again, I desire, dear Brothers, that the union and charity of which the beloved disciple 5 speaks, should always reign amongst you; let those whose duty it is to obey, do so with humility and those who command do so with sweet charity; in this way, you will always experience the joy and peace of the Roly Spirit.

Another request which I particularly make of God on your behalf is a great zeal for your perfection. And, since it is only by the exact observance of your Rule that you can acquire this perfection, I beg Our Lord to give you a great love for your Rule and a special grace to observe it in every detail. Courage, then, Brothers! the difficulties and struggles of life are fleeting; let us fix our gaze on the immense weight of glory that will be ours forever as a result of them; let us constantly keep in mind that the just Judge will reward only those who have persevered till the end. 6" In a letter which he wrote at the same period to the Brothers of an establishment, he confided to them: 7 "I don't need to wish you a happy New Year, because you know that my every breath is for you; and that there is no genuine happiness which I do not ask of God for you every day, and which I would not be willing to win for you at the cost of the greatest sacrifices." However, Father Champagnat did not stop at showing his affection merely by words, he gave practical proof of it by what

4 LPC 1, cloc. 63, p. 156, 11. 11-18. sIn 15, 12-17; 1 In 4, 7-11; 2 Jn 1-5.

6 Matt 10, 22; 24, 13.

7 LPC 1, doc. 168, p. 332, 11. 32-37.

he did. In fact, he was constantly busy with the spiritual and temporal needs of each. As soon as a Brother appeared before him, with the tenderness of a father, he immediately discerned any need he might have. Whenever he sent a Brother to take up an appointment, he never failed to recommend him to see that he was provided with everything necessary. At the time of saying farewell and receiving the Founder's blessing, he was always asked a few further questions to make sure that he had all that was required.

Once, a large number of Brothers went along to take leave of the Founder. He ran his eye over them and asked whether they had all they needed. Each said that he had. "And, what about you, my friend", he asked a young Brother who was off to his first appointment, "have you remembered everything? I am sure you've missed something; let's see: how many pairs of stockings have you taken?" His paternal love and concern had guessed rightly; in his lack of foresight, the young Brother hadn't given a thought to stockings and was going off with only the pair he wore.

The Founder invariably encouraged the Brothers Director to see that the Brothers were not suffering and to provide them with anything necessary by way of clothing, of food and of materials for teaching or for other tasks; moreover, he wanted them to be given what they needed, without having to wait for it or being forced to ask a number of times. 8

Whenever Marcellin saw a Brother arrive perspiring from a journey, he was careful to send him off to change and to make sure he had a hot drink; he warned him against cold draughts and suggested that he go to a warm, dry room. "Imprudence or plain negligence in these matters", he used to say, "may precipitate a mortal illness or some prolonged disability." During one holiday period, a number of Brothers arrived in the rain. He immediately sent for the Brother bursar to arrange a change of clothing for them. This Brother happened to be absent and to have with him the key to the clothing and linen presses. Marcellin, impatient to relieve his children, took a tool to force the doors and himself

8 The 1852 Constitutions keep this recommendation: "Since he has the duty of providing for all the needs of the Brothers with him, he must furnish what is necessary for each and see to it that no one suffers or wants for any thing by way of food or clothing. When the Brothers themselves reveal a need or ask a permission within the Rule, he should listen to them with kindness and grant them what is just and reasonable, without having them repeat their requests" (Constitutions and Rules of Government, Part 2, Ch. 4, Section 2).

gave clothes and linen to those who had been soaked. Many a time, too, in the absence of the Brother cook, he would serve food to those who had arrived or were about to set out.

One day, having given a young Brother his Letter of Obedience to go to a community not far away, Marcellin opened his desk drawer to give him a little money. As there were only two and a half francs in the cash-box, the young Brother pointed out that he didn't need any money, since he could go to his house without spending anything. "That is possible, my child", was Marcellin's reply, "but there is always the chance of an accident and I wouldn't like you to be in need without being able to relieve you. It is true that we have nothing left, but Providence will not desert us." With these words, he gave the Brother half the money.⁹ In the evening, he could be seen doing the rounds of the house, especially the dormitories, to make sure that all the Brothers had gone to rest, that the windows were closed and that no one was in any danger.

Yet, the kindness shown by the Founder to his Brothers when they were well, was even greater in their times of sickness. He wanted the needs of the sick to be given priority, on all occasions, to those of the healthy; he spared no trouble and baulked at no sacrifice to secure for them all that was necessary for them. When the house of the Hermitage was built, he could not find a suitable spot in it for the infirmary, so he had a wing added in order to be able to accommodate the sick. "I could not be at ease", he remarked at the time, "as long as there were no suitable rooms for the use of those good Brothers who have used up their health and strength working for the sanctification of the children. Surely it is right for us to give those Brothers special consideration and secure them every means to restore that health which they have so generously sacrificed for the glory of God and the good of the Society. "

Afterwards, he became slightly dissatisfied with that infirmary because it was too close to the river, so he built a second, roomier and more suitable. He set up a dispensary in it, containing all the medicines needed by the sick. He placed one of the senior Brothers in charge, and saw that he got the lessons needed to equip him to fulfil his task perfectly. Several other intelligent, devoted and very kind Brothers were given him as assistants, to serve the sick under his direction. Marcellin insisted on receiving a report each day on the condition of the patients. In spite of all

⁹ MEM, p. 99.

that, the tender affection he had for them led him to visit them frequently in order to see at first hand whether they needed anything; on these visits, he consoled and encouraged them, taught them how to sanctify their sufferings and, when necessary, how to prepare to die a happy death. As soon as a Brother took sick in one of the houses, Marcellin got him to come or sent to bring him, so that he might be properly attended to. 10 One night, when aH the community had retired to rest, Father Champagnat went to see a Brother who was seriously ill. Hearing the words of consolation addressed to hi m, the Brother stammered: "I am quite overwhelmed, Father, by your kindness and I must say that it is even an affliction for me to be such burden to my confrères and such an expense to the community, for which I have done nothing."

"How wrong you are there, Brother", was the immediate response. "Such a thought should not be entertained; a sick person is not a burden to a community but a source of blessing. You are more useful to the Institute and render it greater service by bearing your illness in patience, than would be true if you were teaching. It is no trouble for us to serve you, but a consolation. Banish any such ideas, then, from your mind if they return; for, I should not get any sleep to-night, if I knew that you were worried in this way." After this, Father Champagnat blessed him, embraced him and reminded him again to combat such preposterous thoughts. The sick Brother was deeply touched by these marks of affection and was no further troubled by his temptation.

Since Father Champagnat loved his Brothers as if they were his own children, he wanted them, in turn, to love one another as brothers. In his instructions, in his private conversations with each of them, in his letters and whenever else the opportunity presented itself, he invariably encouraged them to love one another, to edify one another, and to live together in peace and union. "You know with certainty", he wrote to the Brothers of one house, 11 "that I love you aH, in Jesus Christ; that is why I ardently desire that you love one another, as children of the same Father, who is God, of the same Mother, who is the Church; in a word, as children of Mary. Cou Id this divine Mother be indifferent to the fact that we carry ill-will in our hearts or even antipathy against one of her Brothers whom she loves perhaps

10 LPC 1, doc. 126, p. 257, 11. 1-17.

11 LPC 1, doc. 165, p. 332, 11. 43-50.

more than she loves us? Oh! I beg you, let us not cause that pain and sorrow to her motherly heart."

To see charity and union reign amongst his Brothers, was his greatest delight and supreme consolation. In a circular letter summoning them to the Retreat, 12 he wrote: "How wonderful it is that in a few days I shall have the sweet pleasure of clasping you in my arms and of affirming with the Psalmist: 'Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. 13' The very thought fills me with pleasure! It is indeed a wonderful consolation to see you all united, having one heart and one soul, like a single family, all intent only on the glory of God and the interests of holy religion, and battling under the same banner, that of his Holy Mother. Farewell, my good friends! I leave you in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, centre 14 of love and unity."

The great desire he had to see charity reign among the Brothers, spurred him on to discover all sorts of reasons and all sorts of ways for inculcating this virtue. "My dearly beloved Brothers", he wrote to them in a circular letter for the New Year, 15 "let us love one another. On this occasion, no words better correspond to my longings and feelings. In fact, if I probe my heart and my sentiments, the pain I experience at your smallest misfortune, your troubles, which are also mine, your setbacks, which weigh on me as much as on you, (since it is your concerns which move me), and my twenty years of anxiety for you: all of that establishes my claim to address you, boldly and fearlessly with those words which the beloved disciple puts at the beginning of each of his letters: 'My dearly beloved, let us love one another, because love comes from God. 16'

The wishes that I form for you each day, are quite different from those which people of the world strive to express. These wish one another earthly possessions, pleasures and honours; for my part, dear Brothers, every day at the altar I beg our divine Master to shower on you his most abundant graces and blessings, to make you flee sin as the only evil to be feared, and to confirm you in the practice of the virtues befitting Religious, especially the children of Mary. Then I conclude by asking the Mother of us all

12 LPC I, doc. 132, p. 267.

13 Ps 132, 1.

14 The letter quoted (cf supra, note 12), says: "the August Mary", instead of Br John-Baptist's expression; he also modified the last sentence.

15 LPC I, doc. 79, p. 190.

16 1 Jn 4, 7.

to obtain for us a happy death, so that having loved one another on earth, we may love one another forever in heaven." Father Champagnat's frequent instructions and exhortations on charity, were not without fruit; he had the consolation - a most satisfying one for his fatherly heart - of seeing that virtue reign among the Brothers and with it, the peace and union essential to happiness in a Religious House. However, in his desire to see that holy love continue undiminished in the hearts of his children, he followed Christ's example and exhorted them to it in his Spiritual Testament, the expression of his last will. To impart gentleness, strength and a sacredness to this last request, he expressed it in the form of a prayer, convinced that worthy children could not possibly refuse anything to their dying Father.

"I beg of you, dear Brothers", he besought them, "with all the love of my heart, and by all the love you bear me, keep ever alive among you the charity of Christ. Love one another as Jesus Christ has loved you. 17 Be of one heart and one mind. 18 Have the world say of the Little Brothers of Mary, what they said of the first Christians: 'See how they love one another!'

That is the desire of my heart and my burning wish at this last moment of my life. Yes, my dearest Brothers, hear these last words of your Father, which are those of our Blessed Saviour:

'Love one another! 19' " The love which Father Champagnat wanted the Brothers to have for one another was meant to issue in action and he required this to take four forms in particular:

1. To be of service to one another on all occasions, taking one another's place in school and helping one another in the employments for which each is responsible; sharing the secrets gleaned from experience for establishing emulation among the pupils, for gaining the children's love and for training them easily to knowledge and piety; encouraging one another and offering consolation in times of affliction and weariness; treating one another with respect and courtesy; in a word, therefore, being always ready to do one another a favour.

"In the Society", he remarked, speaking on this subject, "it is not only temporal and earthly goods which should be shared;

17 Jn 13, 34.

18 Acts 4, 32.

19 Jn 13, 34.

intellectual gifts, such as each one's talents" 20, should be put to the advantage of all. The same can be said about gifts of body such as health and strength and gifts of soul, namely, the virtues. Anyone therefore in possession of special knowledge and skill in teaching or in directing others, should pass these on to his Brothers. Anyone who is strong and robust ought to lighten the burden of those who are sick or in feeble health; and, lastly, each one should see to it that the spiritual goods God has given him, redound to the advantage of all his Brothers through his prayers for them and the constant good example he sets them. It is in this sense that we should understand and apply the principle which states: amongst the Brothers everything 21 shall be in common.

2. To excuse and hide one another's faults. In order to achieve this end, the Founder has given the wisest of rules. One of these requires Brothers Director to see that the young Brothers are respected; they also have to uphold their authority and to excuse, as far as possible, any faults they may commit in school; and they are expressly forbidden to punish or even reprove 22 a Brother, in the presence of strangers or of the children.

Another rule forbids all the Brothers to relate anything disedifying which may have taken place in the establishments, to communicate to one another the spasms of ill-feeling they may have had for certain Brothers and the problems they may have had with them; it teaches them that they are to tell no one but the Superiors 23 what they may have noticed contrary to the Rule, in the community or in the conduct of their Brothers. .

The good reputation of a Brother held such importance for the Founder that he went so far as to forbid anyone to reveal, to no matter whom, the residence of any Brother. "It can happen", he claimed, "that a Brother does not succeed in a particular place, perhaps because it is his first effort, perhaps because his character jars with that district or perhaps for some other reason; and yet he does perfectly well elsewhere; it may also be necessary to change a Brother because of some imprudence of his. Now, if you make known his residence to the parish priest, or the mayor or someone else, these people may have dealings with the school

20 This sharing of "talents" has always been expected of the Brothers of our communities, in different ways. Cf. art. 88 of 1986 Constitutions.

21 In the formula of promises, written by Fr Champagnat, it is said: "We place everything in common" (OME, doc. 52, p. 138, 1.18).

22 Rules of 1837, Ch. 5, art. 3, p. 38.

23 Ibid, art. 6, p. 38.

authorities or with one of the inhabitants of the locality where the Brother is placed, revealing his faults or the cause of his removal; the result may be that a bad opinion is formed of the Brother and he is prevented from succeeding. So, when anyone asks you where such and such a Brother has been placed, you simply say: 'I cannot tell you.' "

Father Champagnat would not permit the Brothers to speak of one another's faults and insisted that if a Brother were spoken about, it should be only in favourable terms. "It is just as important", he reminded them, "to uphold the reputation of Brothers within the community, as it is to do so in public: a Brother has, in fact, even more right to the respect of his confrères than to that of the public. A Religious who is denigrated by the public can take comfort from the fact that he enjoys the esteem and confidence of his Brothers; but if he is treated without respect by his own, by those among whom he is obliged to live, community life becomes a torture for him, so that, unless he is a man of extraordinary virtue, he can no longer support it. Besides, our duty to avoid detraction is more serious because of the strong possibility of incurring guilt when we recount the shortcomings and faults of our Brothers. This guilt arises:

a) Because a trifle is often magnified into a serious fault; at least it is exaggerated as it passes from mouth to mouth.

b) Because a defect or a slight fault which is revealed, can give a Brother a bad name and may turn against him those with whom he has to live, robbing him of their esteem and causing dissension, disunity, trouble and disorder for an entire year.

c) Because such slander can arouse in the heart of its victim, a resentment and a hatred of the culprit and an aversion to him, that the passage of the years can hardly efface.

d) Because we tend to take such faults lightly, treating them as bagatelles; they are often even omitted in confession, with the risk of sacrilege; for it frequently happens ²⁴ that a particular slander or some word against charity that is taken as a slight fault, is a mortal sin. Faults against charity, from whatever aspect we consider them, are extremely dangerous; that is why the Brothers should avoid them with the utmost care.

3. To support one another. There is no one without his defects. Some have more, others less, but everyone has them. It is certain, therefore, that even the most pious and most virtuous Brother

²⁴ The same author also presents Fr Champagnat's thoughts on slander, ALS, Ch. 26.

will have some defects which will make it difficult for others to put with him. In the light of this fact, charity must be maintained and we must bear with the faults of others just as we expect them to bear with ours."

A Brother Director used to complain of the defects of his Brothers, claiming that he could not relate to them nor conform to their ways, which he found particularly distasteful. Father Champagnat at first tried to encourage him and to invoke the motives we all have for bearing with one another. When it became clear, however, that the Brother Director was scarcely listening to the advice he was given and persisted in blaming his Brothers and exaggerating their defects, he took him to task in these terms: "My dear friend, you are too hard on others and too easy on yourself. You see the mote in your Brother's eye but fail to see the beam which is in your own. 25 You want your Brothers to be perfect and to have only good qualities; meanwhile, you do nothing to correct your own defects and whatever they find displeasing in you.

The thought has never entered your head that there is much to be deplored in your own conduct, that you are the least perfect in the house and that it takes a lot of virtue to put up with you and to live with you. I assure you that I have often admired the patience of the Brothers under your direction and the charity they exercise in bearing with you uncomplainingly. And, as for me, I must admit that, even though I consider you a fine Religious, I find your character so full of defects that I should not be able to get on with you. Be more reasonable and make some allowance for those young Brothers; but above all, keep in mind that they have much more unpleasantness to endure from your unattractive character, than you can show me in their behaviour towards you."

This Brother, who was a virtuous man but had a hard and uncongenial character, admitted his mistakes. He benefited from the wise reprimand, and after it, he became gentler, kinder and less exacting; as a result, peace and union in the community were unruffled.

4. To admonish one another charitably about defects and failures to observe the Rule. The Founder made that admonition an article of Rule. Fraternal correction was to take place each week after the exercise of the Chapter of Faults. After each Brother has declared the exterior faults of which he is guilty, the Brothers present should make known to him the defects he is

25 Matt 7, 3.

prone to and the faults they have led to, if these have been overlooked in his accusation.

Another way of carrying out this admonition, and one which Father Champagnat strongly advised, consists in one Brother's keeping particular watch over the conduct of another at his request, for the purpose of charitably pointing out to him, the defects he notices in him and all the faults he sees him commit. This was a kind of admonition very successfully practised at the beginning of the Institute.

A third way of performing that act of charity, was for the Brothers to tell one another with cordial frankness and simplicity, as the opportunity arose, anything in their conduct, their teaching or particular employment which might be against the Rule or disedifying to others; in addition, they were to give one another wise advice and timely warnings. "You may see", suggested Father Champagnat by way of illustration, of a Brother who is sad or weary or who is struggling to cope with his work. Don't leave him to himself. Show him that you are with him in his difficulties, comfort him, encourage him and give him some hints on how to free himself from the trouble or at least to fight against it.

You may see another Brother who resents the corrections received from his Brother Director and who grumbles and complains, putting the blame on how he is treated. Tell him in a friendly way that he is mistaken and that the Brother Director is right, and merely carrying out his duty. Point out the serious consequences that his conduct can have, urging him to submit and to mend his ways.

Advice given in this fashion can have only helpful results: in most instances, it is the best way to lead a Brother back to the path of duty and restore his good spirit. Moreover, we are not talking here about a matter of mere counsel, but rather one of obligation: anyone who failed in it would sometimes incur great guilt, especially if he took the side of the Brother who had been reprimanded. In such a case, not only would he destroy the positive work achieved by the Superior's zealous efforts and nullify the effect of his corrections; he would confirm the insubordinate Brother in his misconduct and obstinacy.

In matters such as this, we sometimes hear certain Religious who are excessively soft or who lack understanding, argue that the offending Brother is too harshly treated, that he is not guilty of all the wrongs that are alleged and that the weak need to be shown consideration. My answer to them is this: 'On what ground do you judge your Superior? For what reason do you accuse him

of harshness? Do you believe that you are more enlightened than he? How do you know that this Brother is not wrong? Is there any kindness shown in letting a sick person die, in leaving him to his whims and allowing him to inflict harm on himself? If you were fired with zeal, you would understand that kindness and consideration entail a spirited resistance to sin and the correction of the offender and that to act otherwise is to fail in charity.

In taking this Brother's side and in approving, or making excuses for, his conduct, you do more harm than he does. A person who prevents a wound from being dressed is more guilty than the one who made it. The inflicting of a wound does not always bring death; but by obstructing its healing, one causes death. The Brother whose faults you defend and whose passions you pander to, will not persevere, because you have not had the charity to correct him, nor the religious spirit to let his Superior do so. Besides, your fault in this matter is enough to destroy the peace and union which should characterize a community and to inject a bad spirit into it. You rob the Superior of his authority and paralyse all his efforts for good amongst the Brothers.' "

There was another shortcoming against which Father Champagnat inveighed: for a Brother to take offence at a word of correction given by a confrère and even grudgingly allow the Superior to reprove and admonish him. "This attitude", he asserted, "is the antithesis of the religious spirit; it is a clear proof of the spirit of pride. A Brother who cannot bear being reprimanded will never get rid of his defects; he will fulfil his task only imperfectly and, most of the time, even badly. A Brother who has to be treated with caution, and to whom it is impossible to speak without watching one's words, will be only a mediocre religious, an embarrassment for his Superiors and a sick member afflicting the whole body, that is, all his Brothers. To fear correction is a sure sign of pride and poor sense; to love correction, from whatever source, is an unmistakable proof of sound judgment and solid virtue."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

*Care taken by Father Champagnat to correct his
Brothers' defects and to form them to virtue.*

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The love that Father Champagnat bore his Brothers was particularly evident in the way he corrected the defects of these children of his and formed them to virtue. He had a deep understanding of the human heart and was aware that man, following the harmful effects of original sin, was prone to all kinds of shortcomings, bearing within him the potential for all vices. Consequently he would often say: "Man is naturally inclined to fall; and if God withdrew his grace and abandoned us to ourselves, we should be capable of committing all kinds of crimes." Father Champagnat was like a kind doctor whose compassion is stirred by the wounds of his patients; the defects of his Brothers moved him without irritating him.

At times he was seen reprimanding certain Brothers with considerable firmness, but he never lost his temper with the culprits nor spoke to them in anger. He did not approve those who began a reprimand by upbraiding the culprit with the fault; his method was rather to try and get the culprit to understand the situation, to win his affection and confidence and to lead him to make his own admission of the fault; then he would proceed with kindness, to show him how he should deal with it.

His reproofs were almost always administered by way of advice and took the form of indicating with simplicity, frankness and kindness what should be done or what should be avoided. If a first reproof bore no effect, he repeated it in the same manner and without any display of ill-humour. When a Brother Director took umbrage at a reprimand he had been given with utmost gentleness, Father Champagnat explained to him in a letter: "My dear friend, if you want me to continue to point out your defects, you will have to avoid taking offence at my doing so; for, if either of us gets angry, we shall not succeed in making you better; what is needed is humility, patience and charity. 1"

1 LPC 1, doc. 168, p. 331. Br Denis Bron, LPC 2, pp. 171, 172.

Father Champagnat thoroughly detested a scolding disposition and he was never known to be guilty in this regard. Once the reproof was given, he forgot the wrongs involved and if the offender happened to raise them with him, his reply would be: "That will do, my dear friend. Enough said! I have forgotten your fault; don't go on worrying about it and think only about doing better in future." If he came upon someone, doing wrong, most of the time he would simply give a reproving look or speak a few words of blame. One day he went into the kitchen, and there was the Brother in charge, up on the stove, busy reciting jokes for the benefit of his confrères; the only comment of the Founder was to say: "That's not a very fine way for a Brother to set a good example!" The Brother remarked afterwards that the short reprimand was like a thunder bolt and made a greater impression on him than if he had been roused on for half an hour. He reported that it had been enough to cure him of the frivolity to which he was naturally inclined.

A young Brother with many good qualities but slightly scatterbrained met up with Father Champagnat one evening at the foot of the stairs and, thinking that he was a Brother, jumped onto his shoulders with the instruction: "Not a word, now! Just carry me up to the first floor!" Nothing was said, and the Brother recognized who it was only when he saw him make for his room and go in. Hence he was embarrassed at his fault and was sure that it would result in a heavy penance. Marcellin left him for two or three days puzzled and anxious, then sent for him. Seeing him arrive with downcast eyes and looking quite ashamed, he said to him in a severe but paternal tone of voice: "How long are you going to carry on like a child? Did you come here to distract the Brothers and disturb the good order of the house? Come now! I shall give you a year to rid yourself completely of your levity. See that you combat this defect, if you want me to forget your past foolishness. If you don't succeed, I warn you that 'you owe me.' "

Having found another Brother at fault, he did nothing more than repeat those same words to him: "You owe me." "That's true", was the Brother's reply, "but I can assure you that I shall never put myself in the position of having to pay you." "That's all that I ask from you", the Founder replied. "Just make sure you keep your word." In order to understand this episode, we need to know that Marcellin had the practice of pardoning the fault

2 MEM, p. 85.

on the first two occasions but punishing on the third. Hence his frequent assertion: "The first fault I pardon; the second, you owe me; and the third, you pay me." The Brother to whom he said: "You owe me", had therefore committed his second fault; by promising never to pay, he was equivalently promising never to repeat his mistake.

Even in the strongest and most serious admonitions, Marcellin was always kind and merciful. When he had got the offender to see all his faults, he built up his courage, mentioning his good points and the steps he should take to develop them and turn them to advantage for correcting his defects. "Man is so weak", he used to say, "that it is dangerous to stress only his frailty and the dark side of his soul; to bolster him up and give him the strength to fight against his evil tendencies, it is necessary to point out the virtuous dispositions given him by Providence, to show him how to develop them and to let him see that they are to serve as a remedy for his defects."

Marcellin was careful to take into account the circumstances which might lessen or increase guilt, such as the moral climate, age, character, etc. In general, he was extremely lenient towards young people provided that they were well-disposed and showed evidence of good-will. He replied to one Brother Director who gave an exaggerated account of the defects of his community: "If we see only the defects of our neighbour, we have not the spirit of Jesus Christ; to be just, we have to acknowledge his virtues and all the good in him. ³ Isn't it a source of edification and tremendous consolation to see nearly three hundred ⁴ young men spend years on end without deviating from their duty and without falling, at least as far as we can observe, into serious faults?

Amongst such a large number of Brothers, there are sure to be some whose conduct leaves something to be desired; but, if these Brothers are imperfect, if they commit faults in the religious state where they are sheltered from all dangers, they would be much worse in the world. Let us not, therefore, be too demanding and let us make some allowance for human frailty; let us take care not to be carried away by ill-advised zeal, expecting from them a perfection beyond their years.¹¹ When another Brother Director remarked on how badly he felt at seeing the lack of piety in his community, the Founder expressed this view, in public, to all the Brothers Director:

³ Attitude which Fr Champagnat showed to Br Sylvester.

⁴ Statistic from AA, p. 316.

"Brothers, don't be surprised if those who are only fifteen or twenty years old do not match, in their exercises of piety, the fervour and devotion that you have. That age is the most critical period of life; it is the time when the passions begin to make themselves felt and wage a cruel war against man, which finishes only with his death. During that time, the soul, tugged at on one side by the attraction of sensual pleasures, weighed down on the other by the burden of its woes and worn out by pressure of the struggles it has to endure, loses all relish for piety; the holiest realities make no impression on it and the most stirring truths hardly rouse it from its lethargy and put a brake on its evil inclinations.

That is an age which takes its toll of all men and when even those who are naturally good and pious scarcely feel the consolations of grace and piety. For this reason, instead of complaining about the lack of fervour and devotion in those who are navigating that period of life, you should show them compassion, pray for them, treat them with kindness, encourage them and, under no circumstances, rouse on them or ill-treat them; for you might cause them through your misplaced severity, to desert the paths of virtue and tread the paths of vice which lure them, even leading to a loss of vocation. There are four indispensable means to be adopted to shore up those Brothers, helping them pass unharmed through that time of trial, and preserving their vocation:

1. Get them to pray. 'But', I hear you say, 'that's just what they won't do and what makes us complain.' My reply to you is: 'It is because they have lost the taste for prayer or feel great repugnance in turning to it, that it is so necessary for them, and that it is incumbent on you to draw on all the means an industrious zeal can muster, to keep them constant at this holy practice.' Give them wise advice; get them to read works conducive to inspiring sentiments of virtue and a love of their state; require a frequent account of their meditation; suggest to them that they should make a few novenas to the Blessed Virgin, asking her for the gift of prayer; and, above all, insist on their faithful performance of all the exercises of piety laid down by the Rule.

2. Keep them always busy. Idleness is a considerable danger for everyone, but for young people it is a sure cause of temptation and sin. That is why a Brother Director should see that silence is duly observed, should insist on studies being carried out in the way that the Rule requires and should expect each Brother to fulfil his employment diligently and zealously. In this way, a Brother

Director prevents numerous sins every day, preserves the Brothers from a host of dangers and temptations and does them the most valuable service possible.

3. Give them encouragement. People at every age need to be encouraged and affirmed; but that need is particularly acute amongst young people, because their lack of experience means that the slightest difficulty thwarts them and makes them abandon their good resolutions. Since they have not acquired deep convictions and possess a lively imagination, they can be easily swayed and follow, almost without resistance, whatever urge they experience. If they are well guided, if they have the benefit of wise advice and if they receive encouragement, they opt for the path of virtue and walk it with a steady tread.

If, however, they are left to their own resources, or, even worse, are unwisely told, or led to believe, that the path of virtue is impossibly difficult and they are not fit for it; or if they are given the impression that they have not the ability to carry out their work or to live their religious life; all this is enough to discourage them, to lead them to give up everything and to launch themselves blindly on the by-ways of vice.

4. See that they observe the Rule. Regular observance is the source of many graces and is a buttress against great dangers. The little victories that a young Brother has over himself in order to follow the Rule, are an apprenticeship for giant combats and heroic acts of virtue. According to the Holy Spirit's revelation: 'He who is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater.' 5 On the other hand, one who violates the Rule, following his own will in the details of his conduct, will be weak at times of great challenge, and will fall an easy prey to temptations.

How many Brothers have I heard say: 'I cannot resist temptations without observing the Rule. I have experienced misery and defeat because of neglect of the Rule, because we don't rise at the time prescribed and because the exercises of piety are not performed according to time-table.' Oh! how guilty is a Brother Director who neglects the Rule. The small transgressions which he takes for trifles, can be the catalysts for serious faults, of which he will have to render an account before God. Those Brothers Director genuinely imbued with the spirit of their state, understand these truths; they invoke the means I have just outlined and they have the consolation of being helpful to the young

5 Lk 16, 10.

Brothers, of safeguarding their piety and of conserving them in their vocation."

The most admirable feature of Father Champagnat's conduct was its balance of firmness and kindness; but this balance was not so much the fruit of his character and disposition as it was of the gifts of grace and of acquired virtues. He was kind and merciful because he was full of the spirit of Our Lord and that spirit, which guided him in everything, gave him that kind and dynamic character which led him to be loved, respected and feared, all at the same time. Moreover, he expressed the view that the most difficult of all a Superior's duties was that of correction. "To discharge it well", he warned, "the Superior needs a great spirit of self-denial; in addition, he must carefully avoid four pitfalls: the habit of scolding, sulking, loss of temper, and weakness of character or spineless concession.

These four defects have the following deadly consequences:

The habit of scolding causes a Brother Director to forfeit the good opinion of his Brothers, provokes murmuring and infallibly promotes a bad spirit in the community. When a Brother in charge of a class has this same defect, the discipline of the school is destroyed, the children become unresponsive, peevish and unsociable, developing a hidden aversion for the master and the school.

An affected silence or sulking, which is a sign of weakness, ruins authority and robs Superiors of the respect and confidence due to them; it makes their subjects insolent and defiant.

Loss of temper, inspires terror in much the same way as do thunder and hail; it keeps inferiors in dread and in continual apprehension.

Weakness of character or supine softness, leads to the toleration of abuses and to the condoning of defects, an attitude which opens the door to every disorder. The Superior must, in that case, be held responsible for whatever evil results in a house or a school."

The Founder practised in outstanding fashion, the self-denial that he preached; hence his own admonitions and reprimands were always distinguished by mildness, firmness, charity and lenience. With the older Brothers, however, and with those whose virtue was well established, he adopted a harder line, pursuing their defects into the inner recesses of their self-love. If he noticed that a Brother was vain about his talents, he would humiliate him publicly, or perhaps assign him to the cooking, to an elementary class or to some manual employment. If he saw that certain ones

were letting the fires of fervour die down, while their flame of enthusiasm for study burnt brightly, he would withdraw them from secular study to concentrate exclusively on religious knowledge. If it seemed that a Brother who had been very successful was threatened by excessive praise, without warning, he would be removed and appointed elsewhere.

A Brother Director went one time to spend the Thursday holiday at the Hermitage, and was sent to do some work in the garden. He passed some time at this and then, because it was cold and was snowing, left without permission, to go to the stable, where he struck up a conversation with a young Brother. At dinner time, after grace was said, the Founder, who had heard about the fault, called the Brother forward, reprimanded him firmly in front of the rest and instructed him to take his soup kneeling in the middle of the refectory.

The good Brother accepted this penance in such a religious spirit and carried it out with so much humility, simplicity and modesty, that a secular priest present for the meal, was amazed. When he got back to his parish, he described the incident to a few young men whom he used to gather of a Sunday at the presbytery. These were so edified by the account, that they decided to enter the Institute and they became excellent Religious.

When the defects or faults had their origin in a superficial character or in a lack of good sense or were of a kind likely to scandalize the Brothers, the Founder was firm, sometimes to the point of severity. A young Brother had retained an excessive attachment to his parents. Father Champagnat simply warned him at first a few times, with kindness, to lead him to work against this tendency; but he found out that the Brother, on being sent to a community to replace a sick confrère, had gone to see his mother, without permission. He sent for him and dismissed him. When one of the senior Brothers suggested that the action was perhaps too harsh, the Founder replied: "A Brother who loves his father or mother more than his Rule or his duty, is a Religious only in name. We shall always have too many of that kind, and we can't be rid of them too soon, once they are known."

A certain postulant made a fetish of exaggerated cleanliness and, despite the reproofs of the Master of Novices, clung to some of his worldly manners. The Founder himself reprimanded him several times but noticed that there was no improvement. He sent for him and announced: "To-morrow you will leave for home!" As the postulant hesitated to withdraw, he continued: "Go! and take with you all those worldly ways of which we want no part here."

A Brother, on the score that he drove the horse and was often on the roads, had put together a stock of food which he kept in a small trunk. Naturally, he used to eat it whenever he went out.

Father Champagnat got to know this, summoned him, and sent him away that same day. In the Council Meeting which discussed the possible dismissal, he argued: "Anyone who is secretive, who doesn't live like the others and is given to sensuality, is not suited for a community; for the religious life demands an upright and mortified soul which loves community life."

Father Champagnat did more than simply correct his Brothers' defects; he worked relentlessly to promote their progress in virtue; his constant endeavour was to make them daily more pious, more humble, more mortified, more detached from creatures and self-will and more faithful to their Rule. He wanted theirs to be a solid virtue; for this reason, in his instructions he returned repeatedly and insistently to humility, poverty, mortification and the other virtues which strip man of self-love and of all the defects which take refuge in the hiding places of the soul; amongst these are attachment to one's will, vanity, obstinacy and love of ease and of all that panders to nature. He had a rare talent for detecting and unmasking defects of that kind and for instilling a detestation of them.

At the same time, he was especially able to foster the love of virtue; he could persuade young men to embrace it and could lead their wills to make generous efforts to acquire it. He was aware that not all souls are called to the same perfection or led by the same path; he knew, likewise, that the best means to promote their progress is to reinforce the grace which draws them, and to strive carefully to direct each one according to his particular bent. He therefore asked from each one, a perfection which matched the degree of their advance in grace and their dispositions. His approach was to ask only a little at first and to encourage the steps along the path of perfection, one at a time. However, he would not allow a halt let alone a back-tracking.

"Take things quietly", was his message to those who, swept along by passing fervour, wanted to do too much at once or were taking on challenges that were too hard for them, "for virtue does not consist in promising a lot or undertaking a lot; it consists in being constant and in doing ordinary things well" A Brother showed him his retreat resolutions and, having read them, he said to him: "What would you say about a child who wanted to lift a load that a twenty-five year old could hardly carry? That is what you are trying to do, at least as far as I can judge, by what you

have written. Rule out three quarters of your resolutions and make a thorough success of the rest; that will be enough to make a good Religious of you." Father Champagnat's vigilance kept him on the look-out to maintain regularity in the community, to establish fervour in it, to exercise the Brothers' virtue and, if need be, put it to the test.

A Brother endowed with many talents and not lacking in potential for virtue, went to the Founder seeking permission to buy a geometry text book. He was refused. "For", said he, "I want you to study another science, much more necessary than geometry; that is the science of humility." At the same time, he took from the library shelf a book called, Contempt of oneself, 6 and added: "Here is the book which will help you to learn humility; be careful to read it, study it and to spend all this year meditating on it. When the next retreat comes, I expect you to give me a written analysis of this book and to report to me on your progress in selfknowledge and in the practice of humility."

This study and meditation made a big difference to the Brother, and the Founder was well satisfied with those efforts to conquer pride and acquire humility; he would have been even more so, if he had been less zealous for the perfection of his children. As it was, he knew that good beginnings had to be sustained and that, if virtue is to be solid, it needs exercise.

Therefore he kept check of the Brother; in this way, he learnt that he had indulged in a few words of vanity during a recreation, recounting the successes he had achieved in school in the course of the year; he sent for him and informed him: "I am putting you in charge of washing the dishes, a task which suits you perfectly; it would be good for you to spend the whole year at it; in any case, I shall leave you there as long as I can. See that you keep all the kitchen utensils in a state of perfect cleanliness and that you don't break anything." Although this Brother was a Director, the Founder left him at the task during the two months' vacations.

Another Brother Director, whose obedience he wished to put to the test, was busy in the garden, when the Brother in charge of the stable came to him and said: "Follow me; Father is as king for you." A few minutes later, they arrived in front of the privy, and he added: "I was instructed to tell you that you are to go down into the pit and to pull out the dead calf which was thrown in there two days ago. I am to stay up here and when you get the calf out, I shall help you drag it to the river." When the

6 OM 2, p. 177, illustration 49.

Brother Director had reached the bottom and had grasped the putrifying animal in the midst of the excrement, the Brother farmer ⁷ called out to him: "That will do! You can stop now. I was told to let you go no further. So come up and have a wash; you certainly need it."

Two days later, the Founder sent for the same Brother Director and said to him: "You know that there are a lot of us, and that we are short of good cooks; it occurred to me that you would do the job well; go then, and take it over; see to it that order and cleanliness are established everywhere, for I am making you responsible for the kitchen and everything connected with it." Father Champagnat left him at this duty during the two months' holidays, not because it was necessary, but in order to exercise him in humility, mortification and obedience. Meeting him a few days after, he asked: "What have you been thinking since you took on the cooking?"

"Alas, Father", was the reply, "I am so busy from morning till night that I have time to think of nothing but my work. Moreover, I know that in doing your will, I am doing the will of God; that is enough for me and I have no need to think." Marcellin was greatly edified by this answer which, however, only spurred him on, in his zeal to perfect the virtue of his disciple.

Knowing that the Brother was very highly regarded in the parish where he taught, and fearing that he might become attached to it, he pretended during the holidays to give him a transfer. He named him, in fact, for another position, where he would have to build up from nothing and so have to suffer a great deal. In order to know his real reaction and to check whether he complained at all about the transfer, he watched him and had him watched for several days. When the Brother came along to ask to prepare his departure for the new position, Father Champagnat questioned him: "Do you not miss the last establishment, where you were getting on so well?" He replied: "Father, I tell you frankly that I like the place from which you are shifting me; but my chief desire is to obey you and do God's will." "Very well", he was informed, "in that case, go and get ready to return to your former establishment, for I have changed my mind in your regard."

There was another Brother Director, whose obedience he wanted to put to the test, and whose docility and good spirit he wanted to assess. At a time when this Brother was at the height

⁷ The farmer is Br Dorotheus (AA, p. 190). Cf. LPC 2, p. 185

of his success, and when the authorities were united in sounding his praises, the Founder sent a Brother 8 to him with a letter in these terms: "My dear friend, leave at once and follow the bearer of this letter. Don't reveal your departure to anyone - not even the Parish Priest. You are not to inquire either, where you are being sent or what you are to do on arrival; just abandon yourself entirely to obedience."

The Brother obeyed his Superior's instructions to the very letter; he followed his guide without saying a word and the latter let him know his destination only when they reached it, after two days of walking. His occupation was to teach an advanced class under the direction of another Brother; effectively, then, after being Director for ten years, 9 he found himself now in the role of subject.

Two months later, one of his confrères was interested to know how he felt about the new situation, and said to him: "The story is that it has cost you a lot to take up a subordinate position, after ten years as Director; they say that you find the new assignment very painful and need all your virtue to tolerate it."

"Let the rumours circulate, let people have their say", he was told, "but don't believe all that you hear." "Tell me though", the questioner insisted, "how you felt about what happened and what you think of your new post."

"Since you really want to know", came the answer, "I shall tell you in plain language. From the very day that I was relieved of the problems and responsibility of directing a house, I have said a *Te Deum* every evening to thank God for such a grace; and I am so happy in this state of dependence, that I long to remain in it all my life and I ask God for that grace. There are those, even amongst Religious who don't understand the duties of a Brother Director and who understand even less the happiness and advantages of obedience. This explains the existence of certain rumours, which a good Religious should thoroughly ignore."

We could relate a large number of similar incidents, but these should be sufficient to show the profoundly religious spirit of the first Brothers and to illustrate the great wisdom with which Father Champagnat exercised their virtue, strengthened it and developed it; he did these things, it can be seen, by subjecting them to all sorts of trials.

8 AA, p. 191.

9 Except for a year's absence in 1830, Br John-Baptist remained ten years at Neuville... We come across him in about 1836 at Charlieu, where he had replaced Br Louis (Nos Supérieurs, p. 21). It could well, then, be Br John-Baptist.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The care Father Champagnat took to train Brothers Director.

The pious Founder would have faced an easier task, if he had needed only to form ordinary Religious; but the nature of their Society and the goal of their vocation require all or almost all Brothers to be Superiors; the fact is that they all have Brothers or children to watch over, to direct and to train. It fell to the Founder, therefore, to inspire them with the qualities needed to fulfil this ministry, as sublime as it is difficult. In addition, he had to impart these qualities to them.

Indeed there is no greater work than the direction of souls; this fact prompted St Gregory 1 to say that the governing of men is the art of arts and the science of sciences. "If there are difficulties in obeying", adds this holy doctor, "there are incomparably more in giving orders; and these difficulties are even greater in the case of governing a community; for, in this instance, it is not enough to guide Religious in the exercise of a moral, upright and courteous life; no, they must be led to God and to the heights of perfection."

A community, and the same is true to some extent of a school, is a moral body of which the Superior is the head and the inferiors are the members. Then, in the same way as a head communicates all its good or evil influences to the body, the Superior of a house passes on to his inferiors, his dispositions and his defects or his virtue; the holy Fathers have therefore asserted that a community takes after its leader. 2 According to St Vincent de Paul: 3 "The defects of a community normally spring from neglect on the part of the Superior; likewise the good conduct and virtue of its members hinge on the regularity and wise government of the one who directs them.

1 St Gregory the Great, Pastoral Rules, Vol. 1, Ch. 1.

2 In BQF, the author writes: "A community normally takes after its leader; that is, no doubt, what the Holy Spirit meant by saying: 'What the prince is, that his citizens are' (Sir. X, 2)." (BQF, p. 247).

3 Louis Abelly, La Vie du Vénérable Serviteur de Dieu, Vincent-de-Paul, Uv. III, chap. 24, pp. 360-363. Lambert, Paris, 1664.

Causes tend to produce effects of a like nature: a sheep, a sheep; a man, another man. If the person leading others is motivated by a merely human spirit, those who listen to him and strive to imitate him will become nothing but human; whatever he may say or do, he will lead them only to virtue that is superficial instead of genuinely deep. He will pass on to them the spirit that dominates him, just as we see teachers stamp their own particular way of acting, on the minds of their pupils. When a Superior is filled with the spirit of God, his actions are so many silent instructions leading to God, his words always bear fruit, and he emanates virtue which strengthens his inferiors and leads them, all unaware, to be better people." In a word, the Superior is to his community, what the graft is to the receiving tree: if the graft is of a fine variety and of high quality, the tree will bear excellent fruit; if, on the other hand, it is a degenerate or wild graft, the fruit will be unpalatable.

The Superior forms his disciples to his own image and likeness. His faults are invariably imitated, their contagion spreading like a conflagration; they can be compared to a series of original sins, contracted by all who witness them. A Superior is the mirror of his community; that community echoes the conduct of its leader. Therefore, just as victory or defeat in war is attributed to the general of the army, so too the defects or virtues in a Religious house, almost always spring from those of the Superior. ⁴

These sayings were often on Father Champagnat's lips. He was so convinced of them that he declared the fortunes and future of the Institute to be entirely in the hands of the Brothers Director. We need not be surprised, then, that he exercised such caution, perhaps even severity, in the choice of Directors; and we understand why he saw it as one of his principal duties to train them for the direction of schools and houses. His efforts for success in this very difficult task, centred on these three approaches:

1. During the two months' vacation time,⁵ he delivered frequent talks to 'the Brothers Director. In these, he dealt with

⁴ Introduction to *Le Bon Supérieur*, p. 16, Ed. 1951. Also BQF, pp. 248-249.

⁵ In some years, holidays began only at the end of September (LPC 1, doc. 132, p. 267). Fr Champagnat did for the Brothers Director, what he did for the Brothers teaching, as Inspector Dupuy reports: "Fr Champagnat, for a fortnight of the holidays gets all his teachers together and forms them by teacher training and continuous development. The Inspector has seen them

the government of the houses, temporal administration and school management, going into the minutest detail on the virtues needed by a good Superior and how he can acquire them; similar detail was given on the duties of a teacher and of a Director and how to fulfil them. At the end of one particular instruction on this important subject, a Brother Director made this proposal: "Father, since the obligations of a Superior are such, I think it would be better for me not to be a Superior; please relieve me of this office, because the responsibility scares me."

"Brother", he was reminded by way of reply, "when God gives us a task through obedience, he gives us at the same time the help and graces needed to carry it out properly; 6 the result is that the obligations of our state, far from being a hindrance to our salvation, are a means of perfection and provide the opportunity to practise great virtue, if we are faithful to the grace given us. In refusing an employment imposed on us by God, we are not escaping dangers that threaten our salvation, but we are exposing ourselves to the greatest danger of all, namely, withdrawing from the guidance of Providence, frustrating God's gifts and graces to us and putting ourselves in the position of being condemned like the lazy servant, who had hidden 7 his talent.

What would have been the effect, if St Francis Xavier, claiming that his mission was dangerous, had refused to follow in obedience the voice of God calling him to the Indies? This great saint would have been accountable to the Sovereign Judge for all those souls whom he laboured so successfully to save, souls who, but for him, would have remained enveloped in the shadow of death.⁸ St Francis Xavier ⁹ believed this so firmly himself, that he was convinced that he could not avoid it if he refused to go and preach the gospel in Japan. It isn't the responsibility, then, which constitutes a danger for us; it is our infidelity to grace; and to refuse a responsibility placed on us by God, is to take on ourselves the biggest and most terrible responsibility of all."

twice at these exercises; he has read their Statutes and has nothing but praise for them. In the course of his rounds, he has closely inspected the schools under their care... Everywhere there is orderliness, good methods and a teaching which, at Bourg-Argentai, will soon be first class" (RLF, p. 107). See also, LPC 1, doc. 313, p. 566ff for the organization of lectures.

6 St Thomas, Summa, IIIa. q. 27, art. 4c.

7 Matt 25, 25.

8 Job 3, 5; Ps 22, 4; 87, 7; 106, 14; Lk 1, 79.

9 Letter of Ignatius Loyola, Jan 1, 1549 (BAC 100, 283).

In these instructions, the Founder allowed the Brothers every opportunity to air their difficulties, to raise their doubts and to discuss any practical problems in the discharge of their duties. The Brothers made good use of this freedom, each one offering his comments and revealing his feelings and his preoccupations about numerous aspects of administration or government of the house; he was asked how best to conform to the Rule and to the spirit of the Institute in particular circumstances, and what a Brother Director should do in regard to the infinite number of matters he was called on to treat and resolve.

2. He often invited the principal Brothers to sit with his Council, and took practically no action without seeking their opinion. He saw a number of advantages flowing from involving the Brothers in the affairs of the Institute and from consulting them on the Rules which he was drawing up and on the teaching method he wanted adopted. This strategy, he believed, was a sure means of forming their spirit, of straightening out their ideas, of training their judgment, of widening their experience and of teaching them how to evaluate matters before dealing with them intelligently and successfully.

There were times when, after a debate in Council on the pros and cons of some matter or some line of action, he left it to a particular Brother to follow up the matter or to take action, trusting him to judge carefully the best course to adopt. However, once that Brother's task was completed, he was expected to give an account of how he had carried it out. Then the Founder would praise and approve what he judged had been well performed; he would draw attention to a means that could have been used to avoid a problem, to overcome an obstacle or smooth over disagreements; or he might simply point out that another particular approach would have succeeded better.

3. He had frequent interviews with each of the Brothers Director, requiring them to report on their administration, and on difficulties they had experienced with the Brothers, with the authorities and with the children or their parents; he blamed or praised them for the way they had acted in the circumstances and showed them what to do in such cases in the future. For these interviews, he insisted on complete frankness.

"It is not by hiding your mistakes and imprudences", he warned them, "that you will train yourselves and gain experience; to do this you need to disclose your conduct quite candidly to the one who has the right and the duty to pass judgment on it. A person in community who fears control and dislikes being

reproved or told what to do, makes himself incapable of administering affairs or of directing the Brothers; in addition, it becomes impossible for him to fulfil any employment properly and he becomes good for nothing. The vision of man, no matter how excellent it may be, is always feeble and limited; but spectacles and optical instruments enhance its capacity so that it can probe the depths of space. Similarly, no matter how enlightened and intelligent a Brother may be, if he is left to himself and his weak reason, he will see and understand things only imperfectly; he will manage only limited and incomplete views; he will never be suited to a position of trust and will not accomplish the good which God asks of him."

In the course of the year, each Brother Director had to write to Father Champagnat at least every two months¹⁰ to report on the situation of the house, on the Brothers' conduct and on the state of the school; at the same time, he sought advice and instructions on any unforeseen matters. In addition to the many measures that he took to train Brothers Director, Marcellin prayed fervently to God, as king for men really suited to the task. He often made it clear that the daily recitation of the Office of the Blessed Virgin and the Thursday Communion¹¹, had as their special object, to obtain from God suitable Directors and worthy Superiors.

A good spirit, great devotedness to the Institute, a lot of tact, a love of order and of thrift, fidelity to the Rule, genuine piety and, above all, charity, humility and prudence, these were the accomplishments and virtues he looked for in one who was to be responsible for the direction of others. Ability and talents, without those virtues being present in sufficient degree to ensure the good direction of a house, counted for nothing.

It frequently happened, therefore, that very learned Brothers were not Directors and had only the most menial tasks around the house; this often surprised people of the world, who judge things by appearance and by what strikes the senses. In one parish, the local authorities, after visiting the school which was in a very flourishing condition, said to one another, as they withdrew: "It is hard to follow the way these Brothers operate;

¹⁰ Rules of 1837, Ch. 7, art. 1. p. 52.

¹¹ "There were already some Brothers receiving Holy Communion on Tuesdays, in 1831. Saturday Communion became the custom somewhat later... Father allowed sometimes two, rarely three, never four Communions in succession, fearing a habit of lack of preparation" (AA, p. 328, 329).

they do things in an opposite way to others: the most capable Brother takes the lowest class and the one who seems least educated, directs the whole community. Such was indeed the case, but that did not prevent the classes from functioning perfectly; for though the Brother Director did not have much education, he had all the qualities necessary to run the school and direct the community ."

Father Champagnat usually placed only older men in charge of houses, but age was not always, in his view, a factor that mattered. One day, someone expressed surprise to him that he had entrusted the direction of an important establishment, to a young Brother. The Founder pointed out that there are young people who have the maturity of old age and elderly people who have been children all their lives. ¹² He explained that, though this Brother was young, he was endowed with the good sense, prudence and wisdom which are essential to a Director; and that he was, therefore, more capable of being in charge than many others much older than he.

However, he appointed as Director only professed Brothers, ¹³ that is, those who had spent a number of years in the Society and who had had time to absorb its spirit, to develop virtue and acquire experience. He gave three reasons for his requiring profession in Brothers made responsible for the government of a house.

Firstly, it is fitting that Brothers be directed, and trained by a permanent member of the Society and not by a stranger or a novice.

Secondly, profession is taken to be a guarantee that one has the virtues of a good Religious, that one possesses the qualities necessary to be a member of the Institute and that one is fitted to achieve the end which it proposes. .

Thirdly, the guidance of souls and the sanctification of children are the work of the cross and can be accomplished in no other way. The task of Director: therefore, requires Religious with the profession cross.

Men marked with the cross are men of devotedness and sacrifice, who know the mystery of the cross; they are therefore thoroughly convinced that the works of God are all marked with

¹² Ecclesiastes, 4, 13.

¹³ Cf. Statutes of the Society of Mary, art. 7. "A Brother cannot be appointed Superior of a house, if he has not made profession." (AFM, 132.7, p. 3).

this sacred sign; they look on the cross as a pledge of success and as the most effective way of working at catechizing children or directing Brothers. It is impossible to do good without striking opposition from the world and the devil. The cross and afflictions are necessarily the lot of those who do the work of God and who labour effectively for the salvation of souls. Anyone, therefore, who fears contradictions, persecutions and trials; anyone who is disheartened and disconcerted by obstacles and who is hindered and discouraged by difficulties, does not understand the mystery of the cross: he is not fit to be a Director.

To fulfil any employment properly we must have an accurate idea of it and of the obligations it entails. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon to find people put in charge of others but who entertain a strange illusion about the authority entrusted to them, seeing their position only as a source of personal advantage and as a spur to their self-love.

Another thing, equally surprising, is to find, at times, men who actually want to be Superior. How blind can you be! What a lack

of virtue and of religious spirit is reflected by the penetration of such thoughts into the heart. To desire an office, is normally proof positive that one is not fit to fulfil it; one shows thereby an ignorance both of the duties and of the responsibility of a Superior. Father Champagnat probably had such Religious in mind when he made the following remarks during an instruction:

"There are Brothers Directors who make their exercise of authority consist in teaching the advanced class; in controlling the purse strings; in arrogating to themselves the best of everything in the house; in providing themselves with a thousand trifles and superfluities; in cutting a figure in public; in availing themselves of all sorts of privileges; in seeing that they receive service from the Brothers; and in sometimes tyrannizing over them. What a contemptible lot they are! How we should feel for the Brothers under their authority! It takes only a few such Directors to give rise to the most dangerous abuses, to ruin the religious spirit of a house and to upset a community, causing its ruin. God preserve us from ever entrusting a single one of our establishments to a Brother having this spirit and capable of behaving in such a way!"

The Founder paused momentarily after delivering these words in a very emphatic tone, and a senior Brother got to his feet and said: "Father, everybody joins you in making that wish, and it is our hope that God will never allow any one of our houses to be governed by a Brother who would disregard his duty to such an extent; but before closing this session, we would like you to tell us just how a Brother Director should exercise his authority." "I shall do so gladly", agreed the Founder." A Director who has the spirit of his state and who understands the obligations involved in directing a House, uses his authority in these ways:

1. He upholds the Rule and maintains the spirit of piety in the house. To do this, he himself sets an example of punctuality and regularity. By his behaviour and all his actions, he preaches, instructs and shows what should be done. Then, too, with a wise firmness, he insists that all the Brothers under his care do their duty, are faithful to the Rule and act in all things according to the spirit and manner of living of the Society. In this regard, I want to share with you, the splendid response of a certain Brother Director. One of his subordinates, who had done the rounds of a number of houses, and who hadn't become any more regular for the experience, put a case to him. He pointed out that in the houses where he had been, certain things against the Rule were allowed and others were done in such and such

a way. Why, he wanted to know, couldn't it be the same in his new post? 'Brother', the wise Director retorted, 'here we don't take any notice of what happens elsewhere; we are quite happy to follow the Rule to the best of our ability. So please don't speak to me again of what you have seen or of what is done, in other houses; but just tell me when you notice any failures against the Rule here: I promise you that I shall do my utmost to set matters right.' That is how all Brothers Director should speak and act.

2. He devotes himself whole-heartedly to his task, to the directing of his house. He is constantly at the head of his little community; he presides at the exercises of piety, at recreation, at study and at meals; he is the first to respect the silence, to engage in study, to attend to order and cleanliness, to work in the garden ¹⁴ and to supervise the children. A Brother Director owes all his time, all his talents, all his care and all his labours, to his community. His days are filled with devotedness to the teaching and education of the children; to watching over all the classes and keeping himself informed on what happens there; ¹⁵ to directing the Brothers; to forming them in virtue and in the knowledge that they need as teachers; to following their conduct closely so as to give them, as the need arises, warnings, instruction, reprimands or encouragement; and to administering the temporal affairs of the house. He should not engage in any business or pursue any study foreign to his task, to his office and to his responsibility as Director.

3. He makes himself the servant of all his Brothers, so that he can say, after Christ's example: 'I am in the midst of you as he that serves.' ¹⁶ One of his first duties is to form the Brothers to the different employments of the Society; if he is to do this, he should know how to perform them all himself, so that he can put his hand to everything and can give the Brothers in all things, practical lessons, doing in front of them, what they are unable to do. A Brother Director ought to rule over his Brothers as a Sister of Charity does her patients, that is by love, by solicitude, by assiduous care and by continual attention to relieve those who suffer, to help those in need, to bolster the courage of the depressed and to provide for the wants of all.

¹⁴ The prospectus of 1824, called for "a garden" (OME, doc. 28 [11], p. 88).

¹⁵ "The Brother Director will examine each fortnight the children who may have changed classes; besides he will keep informed of the conduct and progress of all the children so as to be able to give an account of it, at any time" (Rules of 1837, Ch. 3, art. 9, p. 29).

¹⁶ Lk 27, 27; Matt 20, 26-28; Mk 10, 43-45.

4. He intercedes with God for his Brothers, praying continually for them. Every Superior ought to imitate Moses, 17 and keep his hands constantly raised to heaven in order to draw down its divine mercy on those under his care and to beg God to preserve them from the snares of the enemy of salvation. A Brother Director ought to implore, by the fervour and perseverance of his prayers, what his instructions, his good advice and reprimands have not been able to obtain. Good is accomplished only by prayer; hence a Brother Director without solid piety has not the grace to succeed in his employment and to form to virtue the Brothers and the children for whom he is responsible.

5. He watches over the little flock which God has placed under his care. The aim of his vigilance ought to be:

a) To know everything that happens in the house and to see to it that God is served there, that all the Rules are observed, that the temporal administration is sound, that good order is preserved and that the Brothers zealously and devotedly discharge their employment.

b) To keep a check on the various aspects of his Brothers' conduct so as to know their weak and their strong points; their spiritual as well as temporal needs. This enables him to correct what is unsatisfactory and to maintain or improve what is already good. He is also in a position to provide what is needed for each one to acquire the virtues of his state and to fulfil the end of his vocation.

c) To prevent faults, by indicating each one's responsibilities; by keeping at a distance whatever might lead to neglect of the Rule, might trouble the Brothers' peace, waste their time or disturb their recollection; and by giving timely correction and reprimand, since faults thrive best on impunity.

d) To take steps to have all the Brothers diligent in their attendance at the exercises of piety and fervent in their performance of them; to see that silence is observed and that there is nothing reprehensible in the Brothers' relations with outsiders or with the children. These are three capital points.

To sum up, a Brother Director ought to let his exercise of authority lie in upholding the Rule, in devoting himself to the welfare of his establishment, in putting himself at the service of his Brothers, in praying for them and, by his vigilance, preventing all abuses and all breaches of Rule."

17 Exod 17, 10-13.

In another instruction on the duties and functions of Brothers Director, the Founder spelt out the functions of the authority given to one who is responsible for directing a house. That authority has seven functions.

1. "It should teach: that is, the Brothers Director have the right and the duty to command their inferiors, to instruct them and to form them; to explain the Rule and, in certain cases, to interpret its meaning and application according to the spirit of the Institute.

2. It should guide the Brothers along the path traced by the Rule, in regard to the employment allotted them by obedience, to their studies, to the practice of virtue and to all the exercises of community life.

3. It should be vigilant, in order to ward off evil and everything that might harm individuals and the Society as a whole.

4. It should keep the Brothers faithful to their duty and to the spirit and goal of the Institute.

5. It should, with tender care, provide for the spiritual and temporal needs of all members of the community so that they don't need to worry about them and can concentrate their efforts on their sanctification and on their employment.

6. It should safeguard the rights of each, upholding the authority of the young Brothers and seeing that they receive the respect and obedience of the children; if necessary, it protects the weak against the strong and oppressed against the oppressor.

7. It should, with kindness and charity, reprove the defects and faults of the good; it should deal severely with those who transgress the Rule, who disturb community peace or who cause abuses and scandals; for, it can be said of every Superior: 'He does not bear the sword in vain. 18' "

Having explained to the Brothers Director in what way they ought to exercise their authority and what were its functions, he made an effort to warn them against defects which can weaken that authority and even destroy it. He singled out four principal defects: facility in violating the Rule, lack of dignity, inconstancy and touchiness.

"You put the Rule aside, you disobey God", he said, "and your inferiors will disobey you; you make light of the Rule and of God's will and your authority will be scorned, as also your orders and even yourself. How often have I heard young Brothers say things

18 Rom 13, 4.

such as: 'I have lost confidence in Brother Director since I have noticed that he ignores the Rule; I shall never have a high opinion of that Brother because he doesn't observe the Rule; I feel inclined to despise my Brother Director and to disobey him, every time I see him fail against the Rule unnecessarily.' You can understand now how one who is not regular, who doesn't like the Rule, forfeits his authority and brings ruin on his Brothers.

Want of dignity is no less damaging to authority. A Brother Director who is too familiar, who goes in for levity, for dissipation, for facetiousness and for any action harmful to the reserve and modesty befitting a Religious, will never have the respect and obedience of his inferiors.

Inconstancy and touchiness lead to instability of conduct, to becoming nettled and taking offence and being hurt by mere trifles. They are two more dangerous enemies of authority. One who has responsibility for others should show anger and displeasure only when he sees God offended; at any other time he should remain unmoved. A Superior should, indeed, maintain his rights and his authority but he shouldn't be too zealous about it. If authority is to be preserved, it has to be kept within its proper limits: for to ask too much is a sure way of obtaining nothing."

We can add that Father Champagnat, in his instructions, in his letters to the Brothers Director and his interviews with each of them, gave them many points and much advice designed to form them as Directors; we can't record them all here, but we quote the following, at least, which were among the most usual:

"One thing which must be well understood is that authority is maintained by respect. Now, a Brother Director ought, in the first place, to respect himself. He should therefore conduct himself on all occasions with great prudence; he must be reserved, grave and discreet in all his behaviour and measured in his words; he should carefully conceal his defects, his inability and his ignorance; and he should avoid all that would cause him to be blamed or despised.

In the second place, he should show respect for his own authority and for this reason, always use it with moderation and wisdom; nor should he ever compromise it by commands that are unjust, unreasonable or inopportune; he should never show bias, and never reprimand or correct in ill-humour, anger, excitement or passion.

Then, too, a Brother Director ought to respect his inferiors. But precisely what should he respect in them? He should respect:

1. Their person: being courteous towards all, issuing his commands with gentleness, treating them as Brothers, as members of the same body, in fact, as other selves.

2. Their rights: listening to their admonitions and to their excuses, taking them into consideration when they are wellfounded. He should leave them completely free always to have recourse to him, whenever they desire.

3. Their authority: never reproving them in front of the pupils or speaking to them without respect and courtesy. A Brother Director can and should, reserve to "himself the punishment of serious faults; but he should never prevent the Brothers from chastising the children. That would deprive them of all authority and remove any means of disciplining their class. It is not by exercising exclusive rights to punishment that a Brother Director should exert his authority over all the children. He should do this by keeping intact the full authority of his Brothers. With this in view, he should frequently visit the classes, inquire openly there about the behaviour of the children and even require from the Brothers a detailed written report of the pupils' conduct; he praises and rewards those who have been well-behaved, while admonishing those who have not applied themselves or have been quite wayward.

4. Their age: respecting the years of the senior Brothers, and the candour, innocence and vulnerability of the young ones.

5. Their virtues: valuing in particular their esteem for the Rule and their respect for the Superior, their confidence in him and their openness of heart towards him.

There are two kinds of authority: that by right, which goes with the office of Director, and the moral authority given by ability, sound judgment and virtue. The former, is of little worth without the second; hence the need for a Brother Director to be virtuous and to set the standard for his Brothers.

Every Superior should conduct himself in such a way that he can say to his inferiors what St Paul said to the first Christians: 'Be followers of me, as I also am of Christ. 19'

A Brother Director will have as many replicas of his actions and conduct as he has Brothers to be responsible for and children to teach. He therefore does either great good or great harm, and stores up for himself likewise, great rewards or great punishments.

To gain the submission, the confidence and the affection of his Brothers, a Director needs to proportion the task of each to

19 1 Cor 4, 16; 11, 1.

his strength and capacity. It is unjust to expect him to do more than he is able, and, in such a case, he is precipitated into discouragement and begins to think about giving up altogether. If a Brother is inexperienced, hasn't the right character, or is without training or aptitude, he will achieve only poor discipline and little progress in the classroom; another might fail in the kitchen, for the same reasons.

Be satisfied with the good-will of these Brothers. Don't discourage them by a show of displeasure, by rousing on them and by making demands they can't possibly meet. But you will find that you can be just in this way to those under your care, only if you cultivate a spirit of wisdom and prudence, which is the compass guiding every good Superior. That spirit of wisdom and reflection will teach him to estimate accurately the talents, skill, strength, health and virtue of each and to allot him a task that matches those qualities."

The implementing of these wise sayings, so filled with the spirit of God, will guarantee to each Brother Director who makes them his rule of conduct, the respect and obedience of his Brothers; it will make his responsibility a light one to bear; and it will secure him the consolation of accomplishing all the good that God asks of him.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

What Father Champagnat did to preserve the Brothers in their vocation.

Vocation 1 is a matter of capital importance. It "is the foundation supporting the whole edifice of our lives. Nothing else has such an influence on our salvation as does the wise choice of a vocation. This is because, quite certainly, almost all men's sins arise from the responsibility related to their state in life. Vocation is for us the highway to salvation and will play the principal part in determining the outcome of our conquest of eternal life; for vocation nourishes the life of grace and this is followed by glory 2 or the beatific vision. It is very difficult to be saved if this sequence, this chain, is ruptured. Bourdaloue and St Alphonsus Liguori 3 both express this view.

After reading to his Brothers the passages just referred to, Father Champagnat went on to say: "The advantages of the religious life are so precious, so excellent, that the y are beyond our comprehension; and the y are so numerous that it would take hours to list them. I shall limit myself to picking out one, which is a source for us of the sweetest and most inexpressible consolation. I refer to the fact that religious life is a mark of predestination. 4 Nowhere is salvation more assured and more easily accessible than in religious life. This assurance of salvation is based:

1. On the very words of Our Lord. He told us solemnly in the Gospel, that whoever, for love of him, leaves father, mother and

1 The author here confines the meaning of this word to the call to the religious .life.

2 Rom 8, 30.

3 "It is evident that our salvation depends chiefly on the choice of a state... It is certain that this choice is the point on which our conquest of eternal life hinges. Justification follows vocation and is, in turn, followed by glorification, that is to say, eternallife" (A-M. Liguori, Oeuvres ascétiques, Vol. 9, La Vocation religieuse, Ch. 1, pp. 247, 248. Ed. Paul Mellier, Paris, 1843).

4 Br John-Baptist develops the theme in BQF, p. 419.

his worldly possessions, will receive a hundredfold in this life and will enjoy eternal glory. 5 Keep in mind that the one who speaks in this way is Truth itself and always gives what he promises.

For people of the world, it is frightening to hear that "many are called 6 to salvation but few are chosen; for Religious, the opposite is true: few are called to this holy state and many are chosen 7 for eternal life.

2. On the abundant means of salvation in religious life. Every means of salvation, we can assert with confidence, is at the disposal of Religious to ensure their sanctification: prayer, the sacraments, spiritual reading, good example, advice of Superiors, Retreats, actual graces and all kinds of help, are lavished on them every day. Now, can anyone suggest that God does all this for the reprobate soul? If he gives Religious such an abundance of graces, it is because he has a strong will to save them; it is because he calls them to a high degree of perfection; it is because he destines them to a high degree of glory in heaven.

3. On the removal of dangers. It is possible, of course, to offend God and to lose one's soul, anywhere. This is because we are free everywhere and we carry with us everywhere that sad leaning towards evil, with which we were born and which we have from our first parents. However, it can be said that it is almost as difficult for a Religious to give himself up to evil as it is for people of the world to avoid it and keep themselves free from it, because of the dangers they confront and the bad example they witness. Certainly there is no other state of life so free from temptation and the snares of the devil, as the religious life; if a Brother, called to this vocation, does not live in grace and virtue there, he will do so nowhere."

These advantages 8 of the religious state caused Father Champagnat to assert that man cannot esteem or appreciate at

5 Matt 19, 29.

6 Matt 19, 23; Lk 13, 23.

7 "This vocation which God has conferred on you in his infinite goodness in order to draw you out from the crowd and place you amongst the chosen princes of paradise, would become, through your fault, if you were unfaithful to God, a special hell for you. Choose, then, since God to-day puts the choice in your hands: to be a great king in paradise or a damned soul, more tormented than the others, in hell." (A-M. Liguori, Ibid, p. 295).

8 "If we consider on one hand, our weakness and, on the other, the devil's persistence in tempting us, we shall find that there is no better means of gaining strength and closing off the devil's access entirely than to link ourselves to God through the vows that we make". (PPC, Part 4, Tract 2. Ch. 1. "Advantages of the Vows").

its just worth, the value and excellence of the religious vocation. He claimed that a Brother will know only in the next world what God has done for him, how he has loved him and favoured him. On one occasion, the Founder saw a Brother in the distance not wearing a rabat and mistook him for a priest. "Who is that priest coming towards us?" he inquired. "It is not a priest", he was told; "he is only a Brother." "A Brother", he shot back warmly, "is a person of greatness; he is a soul predestined to high virtue and on whom God has special designs of mercy. He is one for whom the world is not vast enough and who is satisfied only with the possession of heaven." "

Two young men who applied to be received into the Institute were asked by him: "Why do you come here? What is your motive for coming to us?" "We are here in order to become Brothers", they told him.

"Do you know what it means to become a Brother?" he probed. "To become a Brother is to undertake to become a saint. All the Little Brothers of Mary should be saints. That is the task at which they should labour, all their lives and with their whole strength. If you are genuinely determined to do that; if you intend to work every day of your lives at your sanctification; if you are ready to make every effort to acquire solid virtue; and if your mind is set on accomplishing all the good within your power, then you will suit us. If, however, these are not your dispositions and if this is not what you intend, you would be wasting your time with us and would be better off going back where you came from, to live as good christians in the world."

After a speech like that, we can see why he took such trouble to form the Brothers to virtue and to keep them in their vocation. As soon as he noticed that anyone seemed dispirited, he sent for him, encouraged him, spurred him on and didn't let up until he had dispelled the temptations.

One of the most pious Brothers in the house was given the task of keeping an eye on the new arrivals and of telling the Founder who was having trouble settling in, and who might even be having doubts about his vocation. As soon as such a one was brought to his notice, the Founder either sent for him or found an opportunity of being alone with him. This might be by taking him as companion on a journey, by an outing with him or by inviting his help in some manual work. In any case, he never lost

9 Br Stanislaus (MEM, p. 115).

touch with him until he had reinforced his determination to 'persevere in his holy state.

He had a variety of approaches and he used every possible means to banish temptations against vocation and to instil courage into those who were taking fright at the trials or troubles of religious life. He would make one promise to stay a few days longer, assuring him that if the dissatisfaction did not pass he would let him leave. Another, might be given a position of trust with the reminder that he was counting on him and was confident that he would not be let down in the slightest. Or it might be that he called on the waverer to make a novena, with the promise that, if his dispositions remained unchanged, there would be no obstacle afterwards to his departure. A young man might be advised to stay on to further his studies and while he was busy doing this, the Founder would skilfully inspire him with a taste for religious life and lead him to a decision to embrace it.

A young postulant, having stayed for a few days let himself become discouraged and, giving in to his fickle character, went off home. Several years later, he asked to be readmitted. Father Champagnat, who knew that he had some good qualities, welcomed him gladly and spared no pains to make him happy in his state. But the inconstant young man, hankering after the onions of Egypt JO wanted to withdraw once more. For two or three years, the Father drew on every means that his zeal could suggest to rid him of his thoughts of the world and strengthen him in his vocation. It was no use.

One evening, that Brother sought out the Founder to tell him that he had made up his mind to go, no matter what might happen and that he would not remain even all next day, which was a Sunday. In fact, he left at five o'clock in the morning. The Founder, could do nothing about it and let him go; but hoping against all hope, he prayed fervently to God for that prodigal child, confided him to the Blessed Virgin and besought that good Mother not to abandon him. His prayers were heard. At six o'clock that evening, the Brother returned, went straight to the Founder's room, threw himself at his feet, and begged to be received a third time.

10 "We recall the fish that we ate for nothing in Egypt, the cucumbers, the water-melon, the leeks, the onions and the garlic" (Numb 11, 5). "AU the Israelites, indeed, left the land of Egypt, but not all them left off loving it;

hence, in the desert some of them hankered after the onions and the meat of Egypt" (St Francis de Sales, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Introd. à la vie dévote, Vol. 2, partie 1, Ch. VII, p. 31. Ed. Béthune, Paris 1833).

"What, my dear friend", exclaimed the Founder, "you are back already? Oh, how pleased I am! What made you think of returning?" "Father", he replied through his tears, "I went up and down all day looking for work but no one wanted to employ me, and I concluded that God was punishing me and that I had made a mistake in abandoning my vocation. Besides, I must admit that I had hardly left the house when I was seized with remorse and began to regret the impulsive act I had just committed. This time, I assure you, I really do wish to be a Religious."

"Very well, my friend", the Father gently replied, "no one in the house knows that you withdrew and no one shall know. Go and put on your soutane again; be constant, and to make sure of this, give yourself entirely to God." In fact, no one in the house was aware of what had happened. From that day onwards, the Brother was completely dedicated to his vocation; and to-day he is a Brother Director and one of the most regular, most pious, most devoted and most attached to the Institute.

Another postulant who had excellent dispositions lost all taste for his vocation as a result of some unhelpful remarks from a novice with whom he was working. He made up his mind to withdraw as soon as possible in order to avoid useless expense.

So he went to see the Founder, to inform him of his decision, to ask him for his money and to take his leave. Father Champagnat was deeply grieved at the prospect of losing a subject for whom he already held high hopes and tried to erase the bad impressions that the novice's words had made on his mind. However, he made no headway and could only extract an undertaking to remain for a few days so that he could avail himself of an opportunity to return home, in the company of a Brother who was travelling that way.

Having won this short reprieve, Father Champagnat called the pious and intelligent Brother who was in charge of the kitchen, and informed him: "I am sending you a postulant for whom I have a high regard and who has all the qualities needed to make a good Brother; some remarks made by a novice have sapped his courage, but I am confident that he can regain his pristine dispositions, provided he receives nothing but good example. I shall tell him to report to the kitchen, and I want you to keep him busy; do your best to win him over and to convince him to persevere in his vocation." The postulant took up his position in the kitchen, but despite the good example, the wise advice and the encouragement of the Brother looking after him, his temptations and dissatisfaction

increased to such a degree that they made him ill. He went to the Founder several times, asking permission to withdraw. However, Father Champagnat was so adept at relating to him that he persuaded him each time to delay his departure.

Meanwhile, the devil, who exploits even the best things in order to deceive souls, laid a fresh snare for the young man. When the Founder gave the Brothers an instruction on the benefits and the duties of religious life, the postulant, who was present, was completely discouraged, instead of being moved to persevere in the holy state which he heard so lavishly praised. "I know nothing", he protested. "I have no memory; how, then, do you expect me to remember so many things? Besides, I have tendencies which are so contrary to the virtues of religious life that, clearly, I am not made for such a holy vocation."

The conclusion that he reached was, that he should leave that very night. With this in mind, he went along to the Founder's room after evening prayers, to take his leave. The Founder was saying his rosary and the visitor was so impressed that he didn't dare disturb him. Next morning as he was getting ready to go, the Brother cook challenged him with these decisive words: "Instead of preparing to return to the world, where you have already passed too much time, go this very minute and ask to receive the religious habit. You know that there is to be a reception ceremony in a week's time and you must be one of those involved."

"What nonsense you are talking", the postulant retorted. "Why do I need the religious habit, since I haven't the slightest desire to be a Brother and have none of the qualities necessary for such a vocation?" "If you didn't have any desire to be a Brother, you would not have come here; as to those qualities which you don't have, you will acquire them; so, put all those ideas to one side and go at once and ask for the habit. I promise you that you will have no regrets."

With these words, the postulant felt all his temptations vanish and, after a short reflection, he went and asked to receive the habit. The Founder was slightly astonished at this development, but answered: "That is an excellent idea; however, it is wise to give the matter thought, before accepting a habit which you should put on, only if you are determined to wear it till your dying day." As the postulant persisted, the Founder finally said: "Go to the Brother tailor and tell him to make you a beautiful soutane."

From that moment, the peace of the postulant's soul was never troubled by thoughts of the world; however, to allow time for his good resolutions to consolidate, the clothing ceremony was delayed

for a few weeks. At last he took the habit on August 15th, 1829; he was professed some time later, and, under the name of Brother Jerome, he was a model of all the virtues of religious life, during the twenty-two years that he spent in the Institute.

He was, to use Father Champagnat's expression, a man who could put his hand to any work when needed. He was, in turn, responsible for the kitchen, the bakery, the garden and the cellars; all these tasks were perfectly carried out and he was always distinguished by his skill, cleanliness and economy; the love he had for work and his devotedness to the Institute were everywhere in evidence. "This excellent Brother", commented Father Champagnat, "is not learned; but his character and his virtues make him worth his weight in gold. He is one of those rare and precious men who are hard to replace when God takes them away."

The Founder loved to relate how he had often happened upon the good Brother who was going the rounds of the house during the night. He was making sure that everything was safe, that the windows were closed and that there was no danger of fire. When he heard Brother Jerome walking softly along the corridors or through the rooms, although he was sure who it was, he would sometimes call out: "What's going on there?" And the answer would come: "It's me, Father!" "Me, me, who is this me?" the Founder would tease. On being told that it was Brother Jerome, he would gently chide: "So it's you, Brother Jerome? Well, you shouldn't be putting yourself out like that. Just what are you doing all alone at this hour of the night?"

"I was frightened", would come the reply, "that some window might have been left open and that the wind might shatter the panes: that there might be danger of fire somewhere, etc., and I'm just having a look around." "Good, that's fine", he would be told. "Everything is all right, Brother Jerome; you may go back to bed." Nothing gave Father Champagnat so much pleasure as this kind of care and devotedness. "There you have a Brother", he would approvingly remark, "who loves the Institute; he is not like certain Brothers whose thoughts are only on themselves and who always do as little as they can."

11 Br Jerome, Pierre Grappeloup (1830-1850) LPC 2, pp. 304-305. On April 28, 1829, he was received as a novice, at the age of 26, unable to read or write (AFM, Livre de comptes du Père Champagnat, p. 25). Fr Colin thought of him as a possible gardener for Belley (CM 1, doc. 330 [3], p. 744).

During the last years of his life, the good Brother had the task of driving the horse 12 and going out to do messages. In this role, too, his virtue was unfailing. He was so humble, so polite and so charitable when he had the opportunity to help anyone, that he won the esteem of the people and was looked on as a saint.

In the midst of so many distracting occupations, he maintained a close union with God, preferring not to have outsiders with him on the roads, so that he wouldn't have to keep speaking at the expense of his recollection. He didn't initiate a conversation with those he met along the way but simply answered any questions put to him and exchanged the customary greetings. As he drove the horse, he piously said his rosary or performed his other exercises of piety. Seculars were so used to seeing him pray, and admired his virtue so much, that they would have been very reluctant to disturb him.

This excellent Brother died a victim of his devotedness. His horse having bolted in the centre of the town of Saint-Chamond, he sprang forward to stop it, because a little further down, the street was full of children issuing from the kindergarten. He lost his footing and fell, so that the wheel of the cart ran over his leg, crushing it completely. The horse pulled up just before reaching the school door and none of the children was injured - God's reward, no doubt, for his heroic charity. '

Brother Jerome was picked up by the people who witnessed the unfortunate accident, and was carried to the hospital. Although he was in a terrible state and suffering horribly, he didn't heave a single sigh; he didn't complain. Instead, entirely forgetful of himself, his only words were to inquire whether the horse had done the slightest injury to anyone. He showed great satisfaction on hearing that there had been no other accident. During the week that he lived on, he gave an example of all the virtues. His patience and resignation aroused the admiration of those who attended him or who came to visit him, the hospital Sisters declaring that they had never seen such a virtuous patient.

One last fact will show the uprightness, the simplicity and the purity of his soul. After he had been carried to the hospital, a priest turned up and seeing the seriousness of his condition, said to him: "Brother, I must not hide from you the fact that you are in danger; so, if you need to go to confession, I am at your service; think about it for a while and I shall come back shortly."

12 This horse was also used by Fr Champagnat on certain journeys (MEM, p. 64; pp. 88-89).

Half an hour afterwards, the priest returned and was told: "Father, it's not long since I was at confession and I was even privileged to receive Holy Communion this morning; I have examined my conscience and, thank God, I find nothing that troubles me."

Such was the virtue, such the purity of soul of the good Brother that, suddenly confronted with death, he found no reason to fear the great passage from time to eternity; this can be put down to his habit of confessing every week as though death were to follow immediately after.

The story of Brother Jerome's vocation has several lessons for us. From it, we learn:

1. What harm can be done by the words and example of Brothers who have not the spirit of their state, and how dangerous such men are in a community. A single conversation with such a man almost ruined an outstanding vocation and deprived the Institute of an excellent member.

2. What good can be achieved by a solidly virtuous Religious, the strength and power of his good example and prudent advice.

In the present case, Father Champagnat vouched for the fact that Brother Jerome would not have conquered the temptation and would have lost his vocation, but for the prayers and encouragement of the Brother cook.

3. What tireless charity, patience and zeal the Founder displayed in working to preserve the Brothers in their vocation. The fact is that, what we have seen him do in these two instances, he did for many another vocation.

But it must be confessed that his zeal did not always meet with the same success. It happened often enough that, having gone to considerable trouble to train certain subjects and attach them to their vocation, he sadly saw them lose the liking for their state, fall off in piety and return to the world. This sadness, we can safely assert, was the heaviest of all his crosses. Indeed, in his other afflictions, no matter how great they were, there was some consolation to be found; but this one was unalloyed bitterness. On such occasions, he was sometimes noticed to be incapable of eating or drinking, so deeply moved was he, so keenly did he feel the loss of his children. His only comfort lay in resignation to God's will. "Alas", he used to say, "I would find it infinitely less painful to carry those Brothers to burial than to see them forsake their holy vocation and return to the world."

His grief was intensified by the conviction that most of those who left the community, were unfaithful to their vocation. "I am

convinced", he confided during one instruction, "that amongst those who look back 13 after putting their hands to the plough, more than two thirds have been truly called and would make good Religious, if they corresponded with God's grace. Now, the loss of vocation can be attributed to four principal causes:

1. To the violation of the Rule 14 and especially to the neglect of the exercises of piety. Vocation is a gratuitous gift, but the same cannot be said of perseverance in a vocation. That perseverance is especially the fruit of prayer and of fidelity in the observance of the Rule. One who neglects his exercises of piety or performs them badly, will infallibly lose his vocation.

2. To want of zeal for the christian education of children.

When God calls you to a religious vocation, he has in mind not only your salvation but also that of the children entrusted to you; if, therefore, you neglect to teach catechism and are not zealous in training your pupils to virtue and piety, you go against the plans of God and foil his will to put these children on the path of salvation, through a good education. Now, if you deny them this benefit, you will be rejected and your place will be given to another, 15 who will accept the graces that you flout, and who will do the good that you were not wise enough to do.

3. To lack of concern for one's own perfection. Many Religious lose their vocation, because they are not as virtuous as God wants them to be, because they do not correspond to grace and take no trouble about their perfection. A man who enters Religion 100 king for a soft life and for comforts he didn't have in the world, will not last. The abuse of grace, spiritual laziness, small deliberate faults and luke-warmness, have ruined more vocations than have mortal sin and serious disorders. The most frightening aspect of this for people who let themselves fall for this trap of the devil, is that they realise that they have lost their vocation, only after they have passed through the door, and when their ruin is complete. Religious life is God's gift par excellence; it is the lot of privileged souls; but, to persevere in it, takes great fidelity to grace and much generosity."

13 Lk 9, 62.

14 "When you see a Religious fall seriously don't imagine that the evil began just then; for a long time already, probably, his mind and heart had not been in religious life, he had little concern for breaches of the Rules, and he failed to pray, to examine his conscience and to carry out any other exercise of piety" (PPC, Part 4, Tract 6, Ch. 5, "Contempt for the Rules").

15 Rev 2, 5; 3, 11.

The Founder was visited one day by a Brother who told him that he was worried and discouraged. He asked why, and was given this answer: "I feel discouraged because of the departure of Brother so and so. I tremble when I see men leave their vocation and cast themselves into the world after fifteen years in community. I am frightened that the same mis fortune may happen to me."

"The withdrawal of this Brother causes me neither surprise nor fear", Marcellin assured him. "That sort of punishment is persona!, just as are the faults which provoke it and the failure of a particular Brother is no cause for discouragement. But there is one important truth which may well frighten us and make us justifiably afraid: One who does not live as a Religious, will not die in Religion! When a Brother abandons the religious state, even after spending most of his life in community, it is for one reason only: he has not lived as a Religious.

A good gardener checks the trees of his garden from time to time to see if they need pruning and no matter how large a branch is, he cuts it off, if it is dead; or, more exactly, the bigger a dead branch is, the more speedily he removes it from the tree to which it is doing nothing but harm. God behaves, somewhat similarly. He visits the communities which are his favourite gardens. When he finds Religious who are not producing virtue and who have let the spirit of their vocation die, he cuts them off, for fear that they may harm others and introduce the vices and pet sayings of the world, into the Society of the Saints. So, Brother, it is our life, it is our conduct, which should inspire fear and not the misfortune of others. If your conscience testifies that you are zealous for your perfection, that you strive for the virtues of your state, that you labour to attain the goal of your vocation and to live as a good Religious, then you have nothing to fear. If the contrary is true, you tremble and are frightened with good reason, for I repeat: One who does not live as a Religious, will not die in Religion.

4. Finally, loss of vocation is due to our self-will, and our lack of docility and of openness. There are few Religious whose vocation is not tested by temptation and, for some, this temptation is their longest and most painful. The reason for this persistent war is that a loss of vocation brings with it numerous faults and often the loss of salvation. The remedy for this temptation is openness of heart and submission to the Superior.

He who, in such a case, wishes to be his own guide, is walking straight to his ruin. One who, instead of approaching his Superior

and following his advice, looks for it elsewhere, will likewise come to ruin. Whoever seeks counsels in Egypt, will perish with the counsels of Egypt. 16 When we put aside the advice of the one whom God has given us as leader and guide, we find to our cost, and by a just punishment of God, the advice that we were hoping to get. No one is more fitted than the Superior, to judge the vocation of a Religious; this being so, to prefer someone else's opinion to the Superior's, plunges a Religious into illusion and into the strangest blindness possible to him."

A professed Brother, having neglected his exercises of piety and transgressed the Rules concerning relations with outsiders, completely lost the spirit of his state and applied to Father Champagnat to be released from his vows. Instead of granting him the dispensation from vows, the Founder brought him to the Mother House and got him to make a retreat in order to recover his first fervour. But some time afterwards, the Brother, having fallen into the same faults, became tired of his vocation and decided to give it up.

As he knew that Father Champagnat did not approve of the reasons he was giving for withdrawing, he went to another priest. He reexplained his case in the way that his deceiving spirit prompted, and he got the decision that he hoped for. He informed Father Champagnat, who warned him: "You went looking for the counsels of Egypt, you will perish with the counsels of Egypt. You tell me that the Bishop has dispensed you from vows, on the advice of a priest. For my part, I have to tell you that I do not approve the steps that you have taken in this matter, without my knowledge. The reasons that you put forward to obtain this dispensation or rather to elicit it by stealth, are worthless, and I cannot approve of your abandoning your vocation. Furthermore, if this misfortune does happen to you, you will regret it." In spite of this statement, the Brother did withdraw from the Institute. A few months after, having married, he fell sick on the very day of his wedding. Three days later, he died in terrible suffering after repeating continually: "I have been deceived! I have been deceived!"

16 "Woe to those who rebel against me," says the Lord. "They follow plans that I did not make... they go to Egypt for help without asking for my advice. They want Egypt to protect them, so they put their trust in Egypt's king. But the King will be powerless to help them and Egypt's protection will end in disaster." (Is 30 1-3).

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The steps taken by Pather Champagnat to preserve the Brothers in the spirit of their state and his firmness in upholding the Rule.

St Thomas 1 teaches that when God confides a mission to someone, he gives him, at the same time, the graces necessary to carry it out properly. We can see this truth verified in the life of Father Champagnat. God, who destined him to be Founder of a Society of pious teachers of youth, saw to it that he knew the principles crucial to the creation, development and preservation of that work. He gave him, at the same time, an unalterable firmness in maintaining those principles, notwithstanding the contradictions of the world and the opposition stirred up by the enemy of good.

But what is most surprising, and shows clearly that Marcellin Champagnat was led by the spirit of God, is that he knew from the very beginning, the means he should adopt to attain the end he had in view in founding the Society. We have a few pages in his handwriting, which belong to the beginnings 2 and which leave no doubt in this regard; for in these are found the plan, the object and the fundamental Constitutions of the Society. The Rules which he later gave the Brothers, were only the result and development of his first principles.

However, as the means should always be in keeping with the end to be attained, he understood that the Brothers would be able to obtain the sanctification of the children, only by their union with God; that the greater this union was, the more capable they would be of doing good; that, consequently, they must be given above all, the most efficacious means of attaching themselves firmly to their vocation and of acquiring solid virtue.

Meditation, vocal prayers, daily assistance at Mass, spiritual reading, examination of conscience, frequentation of the

1 St Thomas, Summa, IIIa, q. 27, art. 4c.

2 Probably a reference to the different exercise-books (cahiers) that we possess from the Founder, but which cannot be even approximately dated. Some of them, indeed, contain regulations, drafts of Rules, comments inspired by circumstances, which on that account are no use for dating "beginnings".

sacraments, openness of heart to Superiors, 3 fraternal correction, annual Retreats and religious vows, all seemed indispensable to him, if the Brothers were to be established in solid virtue and persevere in it. He therefore made all these means of perfection fully available, and prescribed that they devote several hours daily to the exercises of piety.

The vows made by the Brothers are four in number, namely, poverty, chastity, obedience and stability. 5 He rightly regarded those vows as the only means capable of stabilizing the inconstancy of the human heart. Indeed, according to the teaching of the Angelic Doctor,⁶ it is by such promises that man's will becomes strong, secure, constant and resolute in well-doing. "No matter what the virtue and good-will of a Brother may be", said the Founder, "at any moment, he may change his plans and relinquish his good intentions, if he has no firm bond; but, if he is committed by vows, he cannot draw back. Even if nature rebels and he is attacked by the world, the flesh and the devil, he will remain firm, because the call of his conscience will drown them out; besides, he will find peace and happiness in fulfilling the promises he has made to God."

Father Champagnat was not satisfied simply to furnish the Brothers with the resources appropriate to establishing them in solid virtue. He thought it necessary, besides, to foresee what there might be in their state, in their employment and in their dealings with the world, which could become a danger for their virtue; then he had to give them the means of avoiding that danger. In this regard, he focused on four particular objectives:

1. To provide Rules governing the zeal of the Brothers and to confine it to the unique goal of their vocation. As we have already

3 "Let ourselves be seen by our Superiors just as we are" (PPC, Part 4, Tract 7, Ch. 1). Fr Champagnat left us a document, "The Account of Conscience" which is preserved in the Archives (AFM, Cahier 6 and 7, and Rules of 1837, Ch. 3, art. 25, p. 33: "The Brothers will be quite open with the Brother Visitor and will confidently reveal to him the interior and exterior troubles and difficulties which they may experience." 4 At the time when Br John-Baptist is writing, in 1856 (Cf. MEM, p. 40).

5 "As to the vow of stability, I never heard Fr Champagnat speak about it, but I know for certain that, during the 1852 General Chapter, each capitulant was shown a document in the Venerable Father's writing with the statement in large letters: the Brothers of this Institute will make the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and the vow of stability. There was no explanation. I saw it myself and it was indeed his writing; the various letters he had written me, removed all doubt" (MEM, p. 40).

6 St Thomas, Summa, 11a-11ae, q. 88, art. 4c.

seen, Father Champagnat had a quite precise aim in founding his Congregation. His sole object was the Christian education of children. Well aware that this work called on all the devotedness of the Brothers, he wanted these to be totally consecrated to it and not to engage in any other work, no matter how excellent it might be.

The difficulty of finding resources for the upkeep of the schools, led the authorities in some parishes to offer the post of parish clerk to the Brothers; such offers were firmly rejected despite any temporal advantages they might entail. In other parishes, efforts were made to have the Brothers teach certain children the elements of Latin; the Founder steadfastly resisted these, in spite of the religious motives often put forward to justify the request for permission.

Requests were made for Brothers to fulfil all sorts of tasks: to look after the sick; to attend to temporal affairs in the minor seminaries; to give primary instruction there; to manage farms, etc. Never, however, did he give the slightest thought to acceding to any of these requests. "They would like", he said at this juncture, "to have the Brothers do all kinds of things, on the pretext that there is much good to be done. I am well aware that all the tasks they propose are excellent; but that is not a reason for our taking them on; for our duty is not to engage in all sorts of works; no, it is to do well the one work which Providence has given us to do."

Another task that was put before him with importunity was the care of sacristies.¹¹ This was proposed sometimes in association with the teaching of children and was suggested as a means of swelling the number of Brothers in the establishment and increasing its resources; at other times, the Brothers were

⁷ "It seems to me that our Brothers should not teach Latin, in any way; anytime that I turned a blind eye to the practice, I had cause to regret the fact" (Fr Champagnat, AFM 0132-4015C; or cahier 4, p. 36).

⁸ At the Hermitage, he opened a small hospice for old men (FMS, No 16, 1975, p. 205). This project evidences the compassion which was one of the qualities of his heart.

⁹ He accepts the establishment of an agricultural school (LPC 1, doc. 28, p. 79) which was destined to become an ordinary school.

¹⁰ The word "never" is too absolute. To meet necessities, Fr Champagnat allowed a few exceptions, despite the drawbacks which he foresaw (cf. LPC 1, doc. 130, p. 263).

¹¹ "I still think that the care of sacristies by our Brothers, will cause us many a headache. Do what you can to eliminate the practice." Letter of Fr Champagnat to Fr Colin, March 29, 1835 (LPC 1, doc. 55, p. 139, 11.88-90).

sought simply to look after the church and then the chief motive presented was public edification and the respect due to the sacred liturgy. These motives, though fine in themselves, did nothing to dint the inflexible firmness of the Founder, and he was unwilling to provide Brothers even for the service of the chapel of Fourvière, at Lyon.

Father Barou, Vicar General, who was extremely keen to entrust the care of this chapel to the Little Brothers of Mary, made very pressing overtures to the Founder to get him to decide in favour of the idea. When he didn't succeed, he finally said rather heatedly: "Father Champagnat, I don't understand you; the position at Fourvières is coveted by several Congregations. At the Archbishop's Palace, where your Society is highly regarded, it was thought you would be pleased to care for the shrine and think it a favour to be allowed to do so. Instead you have the effrontery to refuse. Everyone concerned with this matter considers it appropriate that the altar of Mary be looked after by the Little Brothers of Mary; if you refuse Brothers to the Blessed Virgin, she will not bless you."

"Reverend Vicar General", came the Founder's reply, "I am deeply moved and grateful for the interest you show us and I fully appreciate the advantages of your kind offer. However, the reasons you bring forward to persuade us to accept the position at Fourvières are insufficient to warrant our abandoning the principle we have hitherto constantly observed: to confine ourselves to teaching and to refuse every work which does not have for its goal, the education of children. You threaten me with the Blessed Virgin; I hope she will not be angry with us; for, it is precisely to please her, to merit her protection and to preserve her work just as she has founded it, that we refuse to take the responsibility of looking after the sacristy of Fourvières."

2. To procure what is necessary for the Brothers. Marcellin aimed at giving small parishes religious teachers; but this raised the considerable difficulty of finding the necessary resources to support the schools. On one hand, he owed it to the Brothers to provide a livelihood befitting their religious state; yet demands could not be made on townships beyond their capacity to pay, and school costs had to be kept in line with their limited resources. Having consulted God a long time on the difficult matter, Marcellin decided on three measures as a solution: The first, was to keep the Brothers' stipend at a minimum, by adopting for his Congregation a frugal diet and simple, modest and inexpensive living conditions; the second was to allow the Brothers

to receive monthly school fees; 12 and the third, was to permit them to accept children as boarders. In these ways, the schools were a much lighter burden on the towns, and the Brothers could operate almost anywhere.

Still, after reducing the Brothers' salary as much as he could and having made it possible for the authorities to pay it, he insisted on its being paid and he would have preferred to withdraw the Brothers and close the school rather than yield on this point. 13 "Everyone", he argued, "should live by his profession. If the Brothers, hard and all as they work, cannot enjoy the necessities of life, their situation is untenable; no matter how virtuous they may be and how zealous for the instruction of the children, their only option is to give up."

On one occasion, Marcellin wrote the following letter to the mayor 14 of a district, who complained that the Brothers were too highly paid, and who was irregular in his payments: "The sum of 1200 francs, which we ask, is not much when you think of the expenses involved in supporting three Brothers in a township; to reduce it further, would be to snatch from them not simply the hard-earned money of people in the most thankless and laborious of tasks, but even their meagre and unpalatable meals. Besides, there is not another place where we work which refuses us at least this amount. You are aware that the Christian Brothers, are paid at the rate of 600 francs each, a sum which is, no doubt, considered absolutely necessary; we have reduced our demands to two thirds of what no one begrudges them. I leave it to your wisdom and kindness to decide whether it would not be harsh and inhumane to make further inroads into this scanty stipend."

3. To separate them from the world and minimize their relations with seculars. The relations of Brothers with outsiders certainly constitute the greatest hazard that their virtue faces. To eliminate this cause of downfall, Marcellin wanted the Brothers to live a life of solitaries in the midst of the world, to remain out of view within their houses and to have only necessary dealings with seculars. 15 He constantly reminds them to do good without

12 Cf. LPC 1, doc. 34, p. 103.

13 However, he knew how to make concessions. Cf. LPC 1, doc. 21, p. 66.

14 A.M. Devaux de Pleyne, Mayor of Bourg-Argenta, letter of the end of 1827 (LPC 1, doc. 8, p. 41).

15 "Seculars will not be easily allowed into the interior of the house" (Rules of 1837, Ch. 9, art. II, p. 61).

fuss or show; 16 to avoid all display and anything calculated to attract public attention.

He compiled for the Brothers, rules full of prudence and wisdom, designed to restrict relations with the world and to divert all the dangers which they might present. For the same reason, he wanted the Brothers' residence to be detached from the other houses and not troubled by noise. He didn't want the Brothers to be in view within the house, or in the yard and garden. This independence of the house was so important in his opinion, that he would have preferred to reject an establishment rather than accept accommodation with conditions attached that constituted a danger for the Brothers.

We can understand, then, the following letter which he wrote to a parish priest 17 who had not kept promises that he had made

16 To live hidden and unknown, "Ignoti et quasi occulti." This saying occurs in Fr Colin's writings.

17 Letter to Fr Durand Gilbert, parish priest of Neuville-sur-Saône (Rhône), in May, 1827, (LPC 1, doc. S, p. 36).

on this matter: "If you do not take steps to bring the Brothers' house into line with what is required, I shall withdraw them at retreat time. The house in which they live is unsuitable on account of the restraints it imposes on them. I can no longer tolerate a situation in which the Brothers are troubled by people in the adjoining house and can't go into their own garden without being in full view of those people. If you are not prepared to honour your promise of handing over that house to the Brothers, even though you know that is needed to complete 'their establishment and make it conform to our Rule, then I insist that the doors and casement windows on the school side be boarded up." The doors and windows were not boarded up, but, even better, the whole house was handed over to the Brothers.

For the same reason, he didn't want to see the Corporation or other such organizations hold their meetings at the Brothers' place. Having heard that this was happening in a particular district, he wrote immediately to the mayor¹⁸ to protest against this abuse, telling him: "The house which the authorities have given to the Brothers, although rather spacious, should be reserved exclusively for school purposes; if you have plans to establish the Municipal Chambers there, we shall have to abandon your school. It is quite out of the question for the Brothers to be constantly in contact with the crowds of people coming and going on municipal business. The Brothers need silence and recollection to carry out their mission. The sight of so many people of the world and exchanges with them, are inseparable from such a situation. The Brothers would necessarily be disturbed in the performance of their duties and would be in danger of losing the spirit of their state. I hope, therefore, that you will appreciate my reasons and that you will continue, as agreed, to leave the whole building at the disposal of the Brothers."

Another matter, which he regarded as of great importance, was that the Brothers should attend to their own housekeeping that they should exercise this responsibility in a family spirit and that women should not be admitted into the interior of their houses. Several parish priests, in order to lighten the burden on the Brothers and to reduce the cost which the parish incurred for them, wanted to allow pious and charitable women to cook for them, but Father Champagnat vigorously rejected the

¹⁸ We don't have the letter addressed to the mayor, but the one sent to Fr Bois François, parish priest of Saint-Symphorien d'Ozon (Isère), in July, 1837, reflects the same preoccupation (LPC 1. doc. 125, p. 256).

suggestion. Then, so that such a measure might never be taken, he framed this Rule: "The Little Brothers of Mary must never employ women to do their cooking. 19" Father Douillet, founder of the establishment of La-Côte-SaintAndré begged with him to allow an aged and very virtuous single woman to look after the Brothers' cooking, giving the most powerful and plausible of reasons. But Father Champ agnat, aware that a single exception to the Rule, no matter for what motive, could be a dangerous precedent, would not yield. 20 When Father Douillet persevered in his wish to employ that woman, the Founder told him clearly that, if this were done, he would withdraw the Brothers and forfeit the establishment, though he valued it highly, since it 'Vas a seed-bed of vocations; this, he considered, was preferable to allowing a departure from the Rule on such an important point.

He even wrote to the Bishop of Grenoble 21 asking him to endeavour to make Father Douillet see reason; at the same time, he warned the Bishop, that if the priest did p.ot desist from the proposal, he would be obliged to withdraw the Brothers. "It is not possible", the letter said, "to continue that establishment, except under the conditions of its foundation. One of the chief of these was that our Brothers should be able to follow their Rule and that there would be no interference with their lifestyle. Now, if they were to employa woman to do their housework, as Father Douillet wants, this would set an example that could not fail to hav~ the most unfortunate consequences. I am confident, therefore, my Lord, that you will find my reasons justified and will agree with them." It needed all this firmness to induce Father Douillet to /abandon his project.

The Founder was not sufficiently reassured merely by forbidding the use of women for household duties; in addition, as we have said, there was an embargo on allowing them to enter the interior of the house. Moreover, in order to highlight the importance of this Rule, 22 he adds: "This rule is indispensable", something which he does nowhere else. Besides, he viewed too

19 Rules of 1837, Ch. 9, art. 10, p. 61. .

20 LPC 1, doc. 86, pp. 200, 201 and doc. 93, p. 209. Also, AA, pp. 208, 209.

21 A free quotation from the letter of Sept. 19, 1838 to Bishop de Bruillard Philibert, of Grenoble (Isère) (LPC 1, doc. 213, p. 424).

22 "Women are never to be admitted into the interior of the house, unless they are accompanied by the parish priest or the mayor. This rule is to be strictly observed" (Rules of 1837, Ch. 9, art. 9, p. 61).

frequent dealings, even with men, as a danger for Religious; that is why he forbade the Brothers to take their recreation with seculars; 23 and laid down that these should not recreate in the house or its outbuildings.

Another rule, forbade the Brothers to write letters or anything of the kind, for seculars. 24 The world, in fact, seemed to him such a great danger for the Brothers, and he was so frightened that worldliness might be introduced into the community, even accidentally and imperceptibly, that he ordered the entrance door to be bolted 25 when not required open.

However, it was not considered sufficient for seculars not to come into the Brothers' place without due cause; the Brothers were not to show themselves in public but to live a hidden life in their houses, totally concerned with their sanctification and the christian education of children. With this end in view, Father Champagnat forbade them:

1. To make social calls 26 without necessity; visits were to be limited to occasional calls on the managers and benefactors of the school.
2. To leave the house without permission 27 and without another Brother as companion.
3. To give les sons in private houses. 28
4. To go on travels or to visit the other establishments without a formal permission from the Brother Superior General.
5. To take meals 29 at the presbytery, at the mayoral residence and still less at any other person's house.
6. To invite seculars 30 to eat or drink in the house.

23 "The Brothers are not to take recreation with seculars nor allow these to take it in the house or its adjuncts" (Rules, Appendix art. 25, CSG 1, p. 88).

24 "The Brothers will carry on no correspondence with outsiders and will not undertake to read or write letters on their behalf (Rules of 1837, Ch. 7, art. 10, p. 4).

25 The Brother porter "will be very careful to keep the entrance door closed so that no one can make his way into the house, a thing which could cause a lot of trouble" (Cf. Rules for the porter, AFM cahier 6, pp. 23, 24).

26 Rules of 1837, Ch. 5, arts. 16 and 17.

27 Ibid, Ch. 8, art. 4.

28 Ibid, Ch. 6, art. 24.

29 Rules of 1837, Ch. 8, art. 10.

30 Fr Champagnat writes on this matter to Br Denis, January 5, 1838: "I am surprised that you don't see anything in the Rule forbidding you to eat at outsiders' houses, while you find in it an embargo only on allowing them entry: where is the spirit of the Rule?" (LPC 1, doc. 168, p. 331).

7. To carry on a correspondence ³¹ with seculars; to have close links with those who have left the Institute.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance he attached to the observance of these Rules. Each year, his instructions at retreat referred to these points and he often declared to the Brothers that they could not neglect them without exposing themselves to the greatest dangers, and without losing the spirit of their state and even their vocation. He asserted in particular, that the virtue of Brothers Director was most under threat from the dealings they were obliged to have with seculars.

Learning one day that a Brother Director was in the habit of going out alone, he sent for him at once, even though he lived some forty-five miles from the Mother House. Amongst other things, the Founder said to him: "Either give up transgressing your Rule in a matter of such importance or I shall relieve you of your office and put you to work in the garden for the rest of your life."

When he had come to know of a similar fault, he placed an old Brother, who was very regular, in the same house as the Brother Director in question, with the duty of letting him know whether this Brother continued to violate his Rule. "Be careful not to be swayed by false indulgence", he warned him in giving him the task, "and do not delay informing me, if the Rule is not observed, for you could become responsible for the loss of this Brother."

4. To give them the means to watch over one another in Jesus Christ. Father Champagnat was aware that even the wisest and most detailed Rules could not be a complete protection from the dangers which might challenge the Brothers' virtue. Therefore, when he had taken all the precautions suggested by prudence and zeal, he reasonably relied on fraternal charity to provide a safeguard against the dangers which it wasn't within his power to foresee or to avoid. Deeply impressed with this saying of Holy Scripture, "Woe to him that is alone", and recalling that Christ sent his apostles and disciples two by two, it was his custom never to send out a Brother alone. Besides, he wanted the Brothers always to teach school together, at least in pairs, and in adjoining class rooms separated by fullwidth glazed partitions or, by a glazed door at least. In community, the Brothers were to have a common study, were to sleep in a common dormitory and eat in the same refectory; all the exercises of piety, as well as their studies, were to be done in community. This community life is

³¹ Rules of 1837, Ch. 7, art. 10, p. 54.

one of the most essential rules of the Institute and no Brother, either by day or by night, either for work or for recreation, should break off from the others or look for privileges. When they have to leave the house, when they are on walks and even when going to the church, the Brothers ought to be together. It is easy to understand that this community life is a rampart against every kind of danger, especially when we remember the duty of fraternal correction imposed by the Rule. This requires the Brothers to admonish one another charitably of their defects or their faults and to inform the Superior of abuses which may have crept into the house, of transgressions of the Rule, and of everything in the Brothers' conduct which might scandalize the public or compromise the good name of the Society.

The fruits of this watchfulness and of this fraternal charity, greatly consoled the pious Founder. He was prepared to assert, that through this charitable practice, several Brothers had escaped great dangers, had preserved their virtue and had even saved their vocation. He saw that Rule as a safeguard for the Institute, against abuses and scandals. "Fraternal charity", he insisted, "is the guardian of the Brothers of the Institute. It enables the Superior, in the knowledge of what is blameworthy in the external conduct of the Brothers, to take what steps are necessary to bring them back to a sense of their duty, to uphold the Rule and to prevent or reprove unacceptable conduct. But, if fraternal charity is to achieve its twofold purpose, it must, in the first place, give good example, wise advice and kindly admonition to the one who is failing to correct his defects; then, it must warn the Superior and let him know the behaviour of any Brother who departs from his duties or who easily neglects some of his Rules.

Fraternal correction, as the Rule presents it, is not a mere counsel; it is a duty, which we cannot ignore without becoming accountable for our Brothers' faults. If there were no receivers of stolen property there would be few, if any, thieves; that is why the former are as guilty as the latter.

In community, if there were no receivers, that is, Religious who fail in fraternal charity, covering the faults of their Brothers with a treacherous indulgence, instead of making them known to the Superior, there would never be serious breaches of the Rule nor would any abuses be able to find their way into the houses." These words of the Founder explain the persistence with which he returned to the subject of fraternal charity and to the duty incumbent on the Brothers, to edify one another, to admonish one another charitably and to watch over one another in Jesus Christ.

A Brother who had neglected this duty and who felt remorseful about it, admitted as much to Father Champagnat and was told: "You have done wrong and, God be blessed for it, you repent. Beg Our Lord to pardon you as well as the Brother whose fault you concealed. If we wish, my dear friend, to have no regret, let us not diverge from the true path; let no human respect or false kindness ever cause us to lose sight of the glory of God and of the genuine interest of our Brothers. Do not forget that a failure to inform the Superior is a failure in charity, a failure "Which makes us guilty of the loss of that Brother, who has gone astray, and who might have been set on the right path once more, by a kindly warning from the Superior. You must, therefore, dear Brother, make up for the past by a great fidelity to the Rule concerning fraternal charity."

During the two months' vacations, the Founder gave the Brothers a talk each day on the Rules, taking the articles in turn and answering any of their questions. He used to insist vigorously on the importance of the Rules, or the benefits which flow from them and on the evils which their transgression brings in its wake, both for the individual Brother and the Society at large. Those who had the good fortune to be present were amazed at the novelty of approach and of style which he brought to the annual explanation of what was basically the same material.

Sometimes, instead of the talk on the Rules, he had some chapters read from Rodriguez or from Saint-Jure, 32 in which these authors treat of the Rules. One day, he signalled to the reader to stop and exclaimed in a tone of deep emotion: "Dear Brothers, I am forced to interrupt the reading, despite its excellence, I want to share with you a matter which makes me grieve and fear. I mean the sort of unbelief some of you seem to have on the necessity of the Rules and the serious duty resting on every Religious, to observe them. Rodriguez, whom we have read several times, Saint-Jure, whom we are reading right now and the holy Fathers 33 whom they both quote, all teach us that the Rules are absolutely necessary for Religious to acquire the

32 In Fr Champagnat's library, there was a copy of the "Pratique de la perfection chrétienne", by Rodriguez, Rusand, Lyon, 1814; and a volume of "L'homme religieux" by P. Saint-Jure, Guyot, (nouvelle édition) 1835.

33 St Thomas, Summa Ila-IIae, q. 186, art. 9 ad 3.

St Augustine, Sermon 22.

St Benedict, Rule, 3.7 and II; 7.55; 60.2.

St Bernard, Letters 321 and 341.

virtues of their state; they tell us that if we transgress them easily, we renounce our perfection and put our salvation at risk. Yet these same Brothers, through some detestable presumption and strange blindness have the audacity to question the teaching of the saints and the views of the se pious authors; what all these have said about the necessity and importance of the Rules, is dismissed as exaggeration.

The attitude adopted by those Brothers is a most dangerous one and can lead them into all sorts of excess. With sentiments like theirs, not only is the Rule put aside; the same happens to essential duties, to the vows, to the commandments of God, to the practice of the virtues and to vocation. Fortunately there are not many at all in this sad condition, and they are oblivious of the fact; but there are others who, though thoroughly convinced of the need to observe the Rule in important matters, think that they can safely dispense themselves from doing so in smaller ones. This too, is a most dangerous snare; such Religious, by becoming unfaithful in little things, commit numerous slight faults, constantly resist grace, and reap little profit from the sacraments and exercises of piety; they fall into tepidity, all unaware, and lose the taste and the love for their vocation. Sometimes, the situation reaches the point where they wander from the true path, not knowing or even suspecting that they have done so. Oh, how many have I known who saw the abyss only when they were at the bottom of it!

I am going to put forward a view now, which will surprise you: lukewarm Religious are more dangerous in a community than scandalous ones; they are the greatest enemies of the Institute.

In fact, it is not the irregular Religious, who totally disregard his duty, that we should fear; it is not he who ruins others. Why? Because, thank God, they are rare and they are pruned from the Society as soon as their conduct becomes known; besides, their behaviour carries its own condemnation, and provokes universal repugnance and censure; but the same cannot be said of lukewarm Religious: like fruits which are pleasing to the eye, though they are worm-eaten and rotten within, Religious of this kind seem more virtuous than they really are and therefore are esteemed beyond their merits. Since there is no suspicion in their regard, others easily yield to their influence and adopt their point of view; conduct is modelled on theirs and it is considered a mark of distinction to think like them, to act like them and to be what they are.

The example of the lukewarm is extremely contagious:

1. Because these Brothers are considered virtuous and conscientious, since they are generally faithful in important matters.
2. Because they have the reputation of being reasonable, tolerant and compassionate.
3. Because they have the knack of cloaking over, with a thousand excuses and plausible reasons, their slack and irregular behaviour, their failings and the liberties they take.
4. Because they have no scruple about those kinds of faults, with the result that others are led to believe their conduct irreproachable and quite safe to imitate.
5. Because their bad example is a daily occurrence and our weak human nature, with its leaning towards laxity, is imperceptibly drawn to copy them.

Lukewarm Religious, and those who bend the Rule to suit their whim, have a frightening influence; it is impossible to calculate the harm they cause by word and example. They are the ones who depict the Superiors as exacting, harsh, severe and unyielding, thereby robbing them of their subjects' respect, esteem and confidence; they are the ones who destroy all the effect of the good example of pious, fervent, regular and punctual Brothers, by dismissing them as small-minded, scrupulous and punctilious individuals, who don't know how to live; it is these same ones who sap esteem and love for the Rules, presenting them as a burden, a nuisance and a yoke to be dispensed with as much as possible; they, finally, are the very ones who destroy regular observance, and foment bad spirit, abuses and all the disorders that infiltrate into a community. See how true it is, then, that Brothers who are lukewarm, careless and readily indifferent to the Rule are the great enemies of the Institute; just as truly, Brothers who are pious, humble, regular and solidly virtuous, are its authentic friends, its protectors and its mainstay."

In another conference, the Founder expressed himself in these terms: "To be exact in the observance of the Rule, is to do God's will continually; it is to take giant strides along the path of perfection; it is to procure for oneself all the consolations of religious life; and it is, as far as possible, to ensure one's salvation. Yes, be faithful to your Rule, shun public notice, avoid communication with seculars, keep to the confines of your own house, and you will love your vocation; you will have peace of soul; and you will receive the hundredfold 34 of goods, of graces

34 Matt 19, 29.

and of consolations, promised by Christ to those who have left all things to follow him. Look after your Rule, observe it faithfully and I promise you Paradise."

"You ask me", he wrote to a Brother, "what means you should adopt to advance in virtue; I know of none better for you than fidelity to your Rule." "If you are faithful to your Rule", he assured another, "I answer for your salvation. 35"

Father Champagnat did more than address solid instructions to the Brothers; he gave them, as well, the example of regularity, being always amongst the first to the community exercises that concerned him and observing all the rules of the house, as far as his occupations allowed. If, by chance, the bell-ringer forgot to ring the rising signal while the dock was striking, he himself would run and pull the bell-cord. So that the Brothers might develop great punctuality, he had prescribed a penance for the one who arrived last at the community exercises. Likewise, anyone who missed an exercise was required to inform the Superior and to ask for a penance, if the absence were avoidable or the result of carelessness. It can be seen that the Founder used every means that his zeal could suggest to form his Brothers to regularity and community spirit.

35 LPC 1, dac. 89, p. 204.

CHAPTER TWENTY

His zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Zeal is, at the same time, the fruit, and the indisputable proof, of charity. Indeed, it is not possible to love God without wanting him to be known, loved and served by all men, without being grieved at seeing him offended and without also desiring to procure for our neighbour the spiritual blessing which will enable him to attain eternal life. Zeal always bears a proportion to charity; one who has a great love of God, is devoured by zeal; one who loves little, has little zeal. The saints who have all excelled in charity, have all, likewise, excelled in the virtue of zeal; but they have exercised their zeal in a variety of ways, according to the possibilities, offered by their state and their circumstances.

Father Champagnat's life is one prolonged work of zeal and it suffices to recall the main circumstances of that life, to realise to what an eminent degree he perfected that virtue. "To love God", he sometimes explained, "to love him, and to labour to make him known and loved - that is what a Brother's life should be." In these few words, quite unwittingly, he has painted his own portrait and recounted his own life-story. A constant striving for union with God by the practice of the most outstanding virtues; and labouring to win souls for him: there you have his life's work. Observe him from the moment he decided to become a priest until he died, and everywhere, at all times, you will see him busy with works of zeal.

During his student days, all the leisure moments of his holidays went to catechizing the village children, visiting the sick, preparing them to die well, consoling the afflicted, teaching them to sanctify their sufferings, reading spiritual works to his relatives

1 St Thomas: "Zeal, no matter how understood, springs from intensity of love" (Summa, Ia-IIae, q. 128, art. 4). St Augustine: "If souls are pleasing to you, love them in God... Draw with you towards him, and those that you can... It is he who has created those things and he is not far away" (Confessions, Bk. V, Ch. 12).

and giving them simple instructions, and doing likewise for his neighbours, as well as for the many people who came eagerly to hear him. Even though he was engrossed in his priestly studies, he found time to conceive and clarify plans for his Institute; to talk to God at length about this mighty undertaking; to develop its spirit and the principles on which it was to be based; in a word, he brought its preparation to the point where he was able to begin the Institute on the first day of his ministry.

Appointed curate at La Valla, he renewed that parish by his zealous labours. Confessions, instructions, catechism lessons for the children, visits to the sick and to the schools, private talks with those who had neglected to approach the sacraments - these were the tasks that filled the minutes of his days. No, I'm wrong; he still found time to teach the Brothers; to train them to virtue; to show them how to take catechism classes with the children; and even to monitor their performance in the exercise of this ministry. His purpose in this last case was to remedy, in their conduct and in their teaching, any shortcomings which might have prevented them from becoming good catechists.

He spared no efforts to be present wherever there was good to be done. If it came to his knowledge that there was disunion in a family, he hurried to establish peace and harmony; if he learnt that someone was to make a public almsgiving, that is, a distribution of bread to the poor of the parish and the neighbourhood, he always attended so that spiritual alms might be joined to the corporal ones. On such occasions, he spoke a few words to all the poor who were gathered; he exhorted them to bear their hardships without complaining; to sanctify their poverty by submission to the will of God, by humility, by patience and by being careful to join their sufferings to those of Jesus Christ.

Although the Founder's zeal drew him to all those works which could contribute to the sanctification of others, he had a special love for works aimed at the Christian instruction and education of youth. It was sweetly consoling for him and even relaxing, to teach the children catechism and to form them to piety.

2 Mr Francon threw stones on Mr Drevet's ground. Hence there were bitter words and blows. Fr Champagnat heard about it and went to the spot where he saw rocks with soil still clinging to them after being dug out by Mr Francon and thrown on Mr Drevet's field: "They have not been put there by the birds of the air", said Fr Champagnat. "You do wrong to complain about Mr Drevet". Mr Francon was lost for words. Later, the two neighbours resumed a friendship that lasted all their lives (Testimony of Br Mary-Regis, AFM, Positio, p. 335).

and virtue. He would often stop in the streets or wherever he met them, getting them to repeat the mysteries of our holy faith, finding out from them whether they went to school or giving them some words of advice. Sometimes he spent hours on end, teaching catechism to little shepherds, or to other children whom he found in the fields, or when on sick calls.

If he met children in his travels, he immediately struck up a conversation with them, and after talking for a short while, he would kindly ask them whether they had made their First Communion and whether they attended the catechism classes in the church; he skilfully discovered whether they knew the mysteries of religion and the other truths necessary for salvation; he got them to repeat these, or taught them what they were, without their even suspecting that he was doing so. He was often heard to say: "I cannot see a child without feeling an urge to teach him catechism, without wanting to let him know how much Jesus Christ has loved him and how much he should, in turn, love the divine Saviour."

Sometimes when he saw a group of these children at a loose end, left to themselves and playing in the streets, he would exclaim: "Look at those children, who perhaps do not know Jesus Christ; who are ignorant of the truths of religion, source of so much consolation; and who do not know that God is their Father, whom they are destined to see in heaven. Poor children! How I pity you! How guilty your parents must be to let you grow up in ignorance and to take no care of you." Then he would add: "What great good the Brothers could do! If there were a successful school here, the children would be off the streets, on which they see only bad example and learn only to do evil; they would be in class, protected from the dangers of the world; and they would be trained in piety, in virtue and in knowledge that might be useful to them later on."

The pitiful state of so many children growing up without education made him burn with desire to have Brothers. He went past a group of workers one day, all of them young men about 20 years old. He ran his eyes over them and announced: "Oh, what excellent novices they would make if they came to us! If they understood the happiness of serving God and working for the salvation of souls, how readily they would leave everything to enter our novitiate." "The happiness of the religious life", he went on, "seems to me to be so great and I am so full of desire to have Brothers to give to all the parishes that are without them, that whenever I

meet young men, I almost always feel that desire, and I beg God to call them to that beautiful vocation." He often prescribed community novenas to ask God for candidates and it was one of the chief intentions for the exercises of piety. However, fully convinced that the Brothers accomplish good only in so far as they have the spirit of their state, he considered it a prime duty of his, to form them to solid virtue, to mould them into good catechists and to inspire them with great zeal for the sanctification of the children. This matter of capital importance, filled all his days and was the chief object of his solicitude. The conferences he gave them on the subject would fill volumes; but, to keep to a reasonable length, we shall record here only a few of his thoughts on this matter.

The first thing which the Founder strove to impress on the Brothers' minds was the aim of their vocation. "Never forget", he warned them, "that the teaching in primary subjects which you ought to give the children is not properly speaking, the goal that we have set ourselves in founding the Institute; such teaching is rather only a means towards reaching that end more easily and more perfectly. The true aim of your vocation is to impart christian education to the children, that is, to teach them their catechism and their prayers and to form them to piety and virtue.

The parish priests, who invite you into their parishes, entrust you, in part, with this aspect of their ministry; likewise, the parents, in sending you their children, rely on you to take care of their religious instruction, and themselves no longer bother to get them to pray or to see that they go to confession; they no longer take any pains about the conduct and religious instruction of those children; they believe that they have fulfilled their obligation in this important matter, by passing them over to you. Hence, if you fail to give your pupils christian instruction and education, you offend God by failing in your most sacred duty, your first duty as teachers; but, in addition, you betray the confidence of the pastors of the Church and of the founders of the school; you take unfair advantage of the good faith of the parents who send their children to you primarily to be given religious principles; you bring this Congregation to ruin by abandoning the object for which it was founded; - and you set yourself against the designs of Providence in establishing it.

Let no one, then, on the pretext that he has to teach secular subjects, neglect the teaching of catechism, claiming that he is unable to consecrate to it, all the time required by the Rule. Keep in mind that your first duty is to bring up the children as

christians; that we have undertaken to teach them secular sciences only to make it easier to teach them catechism every day, and by doing so, to instil more deeply into their minds and hearts, the science of salvation. History, grammar, drawing and all other similar subjects, should be like so many baits 3 in your hands, serving to entice the children into your schools and to keep them there. .

Do you know what the missionaries do in primitive lands? They take with them little mirrors, knives, ornamental containers and a thousand other kniek-knacks which they show to the natives in order to attract them; they promise to give them these trinkets, if they are willing to listen and be instructed; and while their attention is caught by the mirrors, the missionary speaks to them about God and teaches them the truths of religion. You should do the same with the children: show them pages of beautiful handwriting, laud the value of drawing, of geography, and the like; but in giving les sons on those special areas, don't overlook the catechism lesson; see that you contrive to accord it prime importance. Besides, care should be taken to make sure that the religious element is not lost in any of your teaching and that the knowledge that the pupils begin to acquire from you, serves to nourish their faith and their piety, brings them to love religion and leads them to God."

Father Champagnat had a special gift for carrying out himself, the advice he gives here to the Brothers. On a visit to a particular school, he went into a class while the children were being taught drawing and geometry. He began by asking them what they were doing and what they knew about these subjects. Then he continued: "Children, I am pleased to see that you know how to measure a tract of land; that's fine, and you may need that skill later on; but don't forget to learn as well how to measure heaven. You do that by learning how valuable it is; what is needed in order to merit it; and what it cost Christ to win us a place in it. Oh! children, how much there is to measure in heaven! How great it is, how beautiful, how rich! You know how a mathematical scale of proportion works - you have just demonstrated it to me; can you give me a scale for heaven? I'll tell you: to scale to heaven, you need the commandments of God; if you know them and keep them, they will be your ladder to climb to heaven."

On another occasion, he was present at a French history lesson, and asked: "What is your topic for to-day?" Told that it

J LPC 1, doc. 313, p. 567.

was the reign of Clovis, he invited the pupils to go through the story. When they came to the battle of Tolbiac he interrupted them to ask: "What does the account of this battle teach us? I see you are puzzled. Very well, I shall tell you, provided you promise me not to forget. This story teaches us three things:

1. The strength and power of prayer. Clovis 4 does no more than address a short prayer to God and that prayer wins him a resounding victory.

2. Piety, that is, prayer is profitable for all things; 5 it obtains for us the protection of God and success in spiritual matters, as well as in temporal ones, when these fall within the designs of Providence. Thus, prayer is able to obtain for a general, victory over the enemies of his country; for a workman, success in his trade; and for a student, the intelligence to learn his lessons and to perform his school duties well.

3. Much more, then, is prayer able to procure for us, victory over the enemies of our salvation. Every day, children, we are obliged to wage war and to fight against the devils who want to bring us to offend God and to be lost; but we shall always be victorious if, like king Clovis, we pray; if, like him, we call Jesus to our aid, promising to serve him and to have no other God but him.

Marcellin himself was one day giving his Brothers a geography lesson. In the course of his treatment of the capitals and other famous cities of Asia, it came time to discuss Jerusalem. "What observation", he queried, "can you make about this city?" When the Brother gave his answer along the lines of the text book which he was following, Marcellin continued: "Since the death of Our Lord, this city has undergone fluctuations of fortunes unparalleled in the whole world; it has changed masters seventeen times, being the domain of princes from seventeen different dynasties. It has belonged, and still belongs, to the bitterest enemies of christianity; and yet despite all those vicissitudes, despite the raging of the wicked and the fury of hell, the holy sepulchre has always been respected; public worship of the christian religion has gone on there constantly; the holy sacrifice of the Mass has always been

4 "Jesus Christ, you who are, according to Clotilde, the Son of the Living God, help me in my distress and if you grant me victory, I shall believe in you and be baptized" (G. Kurth, *Collection, vie des Saints, à sainte Clotilde*. Ed. Lecoffre, p. 53, 1905). Testimony by Gregory of Tours, first historian of Gaul, in 6th century, relating the victory of Clovis, king of France, over the Alamans.

5 1 Tim 4, 8.

offered there; and the faithful of all nations have come in a continuous stream to the tomb of Our Lord.

Thus the truly prophetic words of scripture have been fulfilled: 'You will reign in the midst of your enemies.'⁶ The sepulchre of Christ remains intact, even more, it is respected, venerated and covered with glory, although it is in the hands of the wicked, the persecutors of christianity, the enemies of the Saviour God; all this proves his omnipotence, his sovereign rule and the immense love he has for men. Yes, it is Christ's love for sinners which induced him to leave under their control, his sepulchre and all those places consecrated and sanctified by his presence, by his sufferings and by the mysteries of his holy life. He wills that Calvary, where he suffered and died, and the tomb, where he was buried, should remain in the hands of his enemies as a constant reminder to them of what he did for their salvation. We can add that the vicissitudes of Jerusalem are an image of the sinner, who has abandoned God, to give himself over to vice and who has as many masters, (or rather tyrants) as he has passions. "

It was in ways such as this, that the Founder was able to use every lesson as an instrument of piety; all secular science was turned to good effect by him in getting the child to know and love his religion and in simultaneously training his heart and his mind.

At no time was Father Champagnat more eloquent and more deeply moving, than when he spoke about catechism, about the ways of gaining children for God and about the good that can be accomplished by a zealous Brother. The most indifferent and the most unfeeling, could not hear him without being stirred to the depths and won over so that the resolve was made to teach catechism better. "My dear Brothers", he pointed out to us, one day, "what a high value God sets on the function⁷ that you perform! How fortunate you are to have chosen such a noble task! What you do is what Christ himself did when on earth: you teach the same mysteries, the same truths; you do what the apostles did, the doctors of the Church and the greatest saints; you carry out a function which is the envy of the angels and which is denied them. You have under your care children whose salvation was

⁶ Ps 110, L ⁷ Fr Champagnat wrote to Br Bartholomew, Jan 21, 1830: "How lofty and sublime is your occupation!... How I would like to have the happiness of teaching, of dedicating my efforts, in a more immediate way, to forming those tender children" (LPC 1. doc. 14, p. 53).

bought by the blood of Christ; the many children you teach, will, after God, owe that salvation to you.

The divine Saviour gives you the most precious portion of his Church to cultivate; he entrusts to you, those whom he has loved most: the children! the children, whose friend he is; the children, whom he calls to himself and whom he loves to have around him: 'Suffer the little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven; 8' the children, in whom he takes his delight: 'My delights are to be with the children of men; 9' the children, whom he caressed and whom he blessed. 10 It is this divine Saviour who, to induce you to take great care of these tender children, to respect them and treat them with kindness, assures you that 'everything you do to one of these, my least brethren, you do to me. 11'

To bring up a child, that is, to instruct him in the truths of religion, to form him to virtue and to teach him to love God, is a more sublime and more noble function than governing the world. To teach him catechism, a prayer such as the Pater or the Ave, is a greater and more meritorious action in the eyes of God, than victory in battle. A catechism les son, I mean a well-taught one, is of more value than the greatest penances you could perform. 'The holy Doctor, St Gregory the Great, tells us so, in these terms: 'One who mortifies his body by the austerities of penance, is less pleasing to God and has less merit in God's eyes, than one who works at the salvation of souls.'

Have you really understood this? So true is it, that Our Lord, who is Truth itself, assures us that the one who 'practises and teaches' the christian truths and the commandments of God, 'will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 12' We call men great, when they are remarkable for their genius, for their fine and noble sentiments, for their glorious actions and their outstanding worth; and God calls men great, when they teach his holy law and, by their lessons and good example, show others how to observe it." "My dear Brothers", he reminded us encouragingly during a Retreat, "sometimes you are frightened by the memory of the faults in your past life, you fear death and tremble at the thought of hell, but you have a sure and effective means of softening the

8 Matt 19, 14; Mk 10, 14

9 Prov 8, 31.

10 Mk 10, 16.

11 Matt 25, 40.

12 Matt 5, 19.

impact of death, and of avoiding heU. Listen to what the Holy Spirit says through the mouth of the apostle, St James: 'He who causes a sinner to be converted from the error of his way, will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins. 13' How many sins you are able to prevent! How many souls you can save!

How many children you can preserve from heU! How many times you cover the multitude of your sins if you diligently carry out your ministry, if your vigilance and faithful supervision prevent your children from offending God. Who knows how many faults you can ward off, seeing that you have fifty, sixty, eighty and . sometimes even a hundred 14 children in your class? If those children were not in your care, most of them would be in the streets keeping bad company; there, they would be learning to swear, to blaspheme and to misbehave in similarly bad ways.

I say, therefore, that even if you didn't teach them anything, and did nothing more than look after them and keep them off the streets, you would be doing an immense good; for there is probably not one of your pupils who, if left to himself, would -not commit a number of faults every day, faults which you prevent by keeping him in class. St John Francis Régis 15 used to maintain: 'I shall be adequately rewarded for all my efforts, if, as a result, even one sin goes uncommitted.' How happy you should consider yourselves, then, since you can prevent hundreds every day. Count up the days you have spent in school and the children you have taught and supervised. You will see the good that you have done and are still able to do.

But perhaps you want to raise an objection at this point? You agree that there is good to be done amongst the children and even that it is easy to form them to virtue; all the same, you add, with sorrow, that very few of them persevere in the principles which Yoli give them and that most of them are overwhelmed by the torrent of their passions when they reach adolescence. I would answer that it is no small matter to keep them in innocence for

13 Jas 5, 20.

14 It was, indeed, the number of children that the Brothers had, especially in the beginner's class (LPC 2, p. 301).

15 "Again and again it was pointed out to him, that these women who were public sinners were hardly ever sincerely converted; rather, impelled by the force of long habit, they almost always returned to their original misconduct. He answered that, if he were to succeed only in preventing one mortal sin by his efforts, he would consider his labours well rewarded" (Daubenton, *La vie du Bx Jean-François-Régis*, 3ème édition, p. 52. Jacques Lions et Louis Bruyet, Lyon, 1717).

a number of years; to form them to virtue and to the practices of christian' piety; to give them a solid religious instruction; and to, enable them to make a good First Communion. Yet the fruit of YOlir labours goes beyond ail that.

The children whom you have brought up with care have experienced the attractiveness and the charm of virtue and so they know at first hand how good God is and what a joy it is to serve him. If, then, they go astray at some future date, their return to fidelity will be easier. Since they will not find in pleasures and worldly goods, the happiness that they were promised, they will forsake the side-tracks of vice to return to the true path of virtue.

Look at the prodigal son! 16 What is it that induces him to come and cast himself at the feet of his good father? It is the comparison he makes between the happiness and possessions he had in his father's house and the wretched condition to which he was reduced on abandonirig it. If he had not known his father and the happiness of living close to him, he probably would never have thought of going to throw himself into his arms and retuming home to his friendship.

A good First Communion is a pledge of salvation; I would almost be prepared to say it is a mark of predestination: it is one foot in heaven. The gospel makes it clear that Our Lord brought grace and salvation wherever he was well received and that he predicted misfortune for those who didn't put his visit to good use or received him badly. 17 When some one enters a house with peaceful intentions and friendly feelings, if he gets a bad reception, he withdraws in anger, determined never to set foot in that house again. Our Lorêi normally acts in the same way, when he comes into a heart for the first time; if he is not made welcome; if he finds there his enemies, namely, mortal sin and the devil; he withdraws, never to return. One of the reasons that so many people stay away from the sacraments is that they desecrated them the first time that they approached them. 50, to enable a child to make a good First Communion, is to secure for him the most precious of ail benefits. He is firmly placed on the way of salvation; he is given the surest and soundest means of following that way and of remaining ail his life, a good christian.

However, it takes more than a few days to prepare a child for First Communion; it takes months and sometimes even years. Yes, time is needed, if you are to give a child solid instruction,

16 Lk 15, 11-32.

17 Matt 11, 21; Lk 10, 13; Matt 23, 37; Lk 13, 34.

correct his defects, train him in virtue, inspire him with sentiments of piety, lead him to a love of God's law and instil in him the habit of fulfilling his religious duties. In the same way, it is lessons which are repeated often and at length which bring the child to understand the importance of the great action he is about to perform, and to achieve the dispositions befitting that action.

You ought, of course, to conclude the children's preparation for First Communion by a few days of retreat; but that retreat, which can produce outstanding fruits and which should claim all your care and zeal, is only the immediate preparation, the last effort to dispose your children to receive Jesus Christ. The major preparation should begin as soon as they are eight or nine years old; from that time, you must speak to them about this great event and about the dispositions it calls for and show them, too, how to prepare for it. 18"

During the eight years that Father Champagnat was curate at La Valla, he carried out to the letter what he recommends here to the Brothers. As we indicated in the account of his life, he used to gather the very small children, to take them for catechism and to teach them to pray and to assist with decorum at the Church liturgy; likewise, he used the occasion to speak to them about their First Communion. He heard their confessions every three months; supervised them in the church; encouraged them to avoid bad company and to attend school; and urged them to say some prayers to Our Lord, to the Blessed Virgin and to their Guardian Angel for the grace to make a good First Communion. As the time of the First Communion drew near, he was even more assiduous in looking after them; he gave them catechism lessons; required them to attend Mass almost daily; heard their confessions more frequently; and, what is more, wound up their preparation with several days' retreat. During the retreat, he was constantly with them, in order to inspire them with the holy dispositions necessary for a worthy reception of Jesus Christ.

When speaking of First Communion, he never failed to recommend the Brothers to fight against the false shame in children which often causes them to doak over and conceal their sins. "One of the most dangerous snares of the devil", he used to remind them, "is to exaggerate the gravity of faults, to confuse young people completely about them and to convince them that, if they confess their faults, they will be scolded and kept back

18 "The state of the parish of Marlhes, 1808" shows that First Communion was made at 13. (AFM, 146.003).

from their First Communion. Combat this dangerous temptation, and tell them: 'Children, your faults are not always as serious as they seem to you; often the devil leads you to believe that a certain thing is a mortal sin when, in reality, it is a mere trifle. Besides, however serious and numerous your faults may be, they will never surprise the confessor and never bar you from your First Communion, if you confess them and sincerely detest them.'

Instruct them carefully on the necessity of confession and on the importance of telling all known serious sins. Try to instil into them an extreme horror of sacrilege and let them know that nothing worse could happen to them than to desecrate the sacraments. It is of capital importance to insist on this point and to return to it often. If you prepare your instructions well and illustrate them with some well-chosen incidents from history, they will always bear fruit."

"True zeal", Father Champagnat commented in another instruction, "is generous and constant; and so it should be, for the salvation of a soul is something wonderful and truly warrants the great sacrifices with which it is purchased. To achieve its redemption, God gave his own Son; his Son became man; he was subject to all our weaknesses except sin; 19 he laboured for thirty-three years; he poured out his blood and sacrificed his life; he concealed his greatness in the Holy Eucharist; and he sacrifices himself daily on our altars. If we want to win the children for God, if we want to cooperate with Jesus Christ in their salvation, we must, after his example, offer the sacrifice of our labours, our solicitude, our strength, our health, and, if necessary, our very life. The salvation of a soul can never be bought at a lower price. That is no surprise, since each soul cost the blood and life of a God-Man.

A Brother who does not have this devotedness, is not worthy of the mission he has been given. Truly generous zeal never recoils before sacrifice and never spares itself; it seizes every opportunity of being useful to the children, of instructing them, of correcting their faults, of forming them to virtue and leading them to God; it makes itself all things to all men; 20 it uses every means and assumes every form in order to procure their salvation. The Brother who never loses sight of his children, either by day or by night; who watches over them everywhere; who sacrifices his recreation, his studies and his rest so that he can be with them,

19 Heb 4, 15.

20 1 Cor 9, 22.

keeping them to their duty and safeguarding their innocence; and who, everywhere; is busy at their education and sanctification, is a Brother with a truly generous zeal.

I sometimes hear Brothers say that teaching is too difficult and that they want no more of it; if they knew the value of souls and how much we please God by contributing to the salvation of a single one, they would reckon fifty years of teaching as nothing, in order to put one child on the path of salvation.

Others find the children hard to manage, uncouth, ungrateful and full of defects, so that they cannot bear to remain amongst them. Such Brothers have not the slightest zeal; they lack the spirit of their vocation, the spirit of Jesus Christ, and they don't know what it means to do the work of God. If the children were perfect, they wouldn't need our service; it is precisely because they have defects that it is necessary to give them a good education and that we gain much merit in instructing them, in bearing with them and guiding their formation.

Notice what it cost the apostles to convert the world: all of them gave their lives to accomplish this task. Notice, too, at what a price the missionaries instruct the native peoples of the New World and of Oceania. They face every kind of sacrifice and every kind of privation to win the salvation of non-Christians; and would we expect to save souls without undergoing suffering? Would we hanker after a life of ease and convenience? Would we complain at meeting some difficulty from the children or their parents? If we behave in that fashion, alas, we know very little about the ways of God and our thoughts and our views are base and worldly. It was by his cross and sufferings that Christ redeemed souls and we presume to work at their salvation, while enjoying the delights and gratification of nature. If these are our sentiments, is it surprising that we do little good and that our apostolate bears no fruit?

There is, however, another element which is not less necessary than generosity and which is a feature of true zeal, that is, to pray for the children confided to you. Your instructions, your good advice even your reprimands are a seed which you sow in the minds and hearts of your children; but if it is to grow and bear fruit, this seed must be watered by prayer. Without moisture, the soil yields nothing; without prayer we can do nothing, either for ourselves or for others. The more defects certain children have; the more difficult they are to manage and to train up; the less benefit they derive from your care and instructions; so much the more must you pray for them. Such children are won for God

only by prayer; pray for them, therefore, to Our Lord and to the Blessed Virgin, every day. Your perseverance in praying for them is the greatest act of charity you can perform in their regard; it is also the surest means of changing them and bringing them back to the paths of virtue."

After this discourse, which he delivered with great verve, he paused for a moment to get his breath. One Brother took advantage of this factorise and ask whether on feasts of the Blessed Virgin and other feast days, when there are ceremonies in the church, it might not be a good idea to give the children a full holiday. In this way, he suggested, the Brothers would have more time for recollection and prayer.

"My dear friend", came Marcellin's reply, "you can't possibly do anything better on such days that to be with your children. Assemble these little ones in the school and get them to pray; have them learn and recite the gospel; give them a short instruction on the mystery which the Church celebrates that day; and take them along to the Church ceremonies. By doing all that, you pray the most excellent of prayers. It is an act of charity and zeal which is more pleasing to Mary than if you passed the whole day prostrate before her altar.

Besides, it would be impossible to choose a better opportunity to give the children an instruction on the Blessed Virgin. Then, too, I can't imagine that there is a single Brother who would be prepared to pass a feast day of the one who is the Mother, the Patroness, the Model and the first Superior of this Society, without speaking to the children about her; for an authentic Brother of Mary does not stop at loving and serving that august Virgin; he strives to make her loved and served by an his pupils; and he avails himself of all the means suggested by his zeal and piety, to inculcate into them a profound respect, a limitless confidence and an entirely filial love, for that divine Mother. Devotion to Mary tends to spread itself; we can be sure that we do not have this valuable devotion, if we make no effort to communicate it to others and if we have little enthusiasm for spreading more and more the practice of knowing Mary."

The Rule requires catechism to be taught twice a day. In the early stages of the Society, there were even three catechism classes each day; for, every evening at nightfall, the local children, whether they were pupils of the school or not, gathered there to be taught catechism by a Brother. The class lasted an hour. Besides, the Brothers used to go, especially on Thurs4ays and Sundays to teach catechism in the hamlets of the parish. Later, a few young

Brothers who had let the flame of zeal which had fired their elders, burn low, began to believe that one catechism class a day would be enough. They put this proposal to Father Champagnat and, in order to convert him to their way of thinking, they claimed that there was insufficient time for the other subjects.

"My friends", he remonstrated with the m, "the Rule allows those other subjects, all the time that they need; and, even if there happened to be inadequate time for one or other of them, it is not catechism which should be cut back - to do that would be to forsake our goal; no, some less essential elements of primary teaching would have to be curtailed." One of the Brothers then expressed the view that they all seemed necessary for the success of the schools. "That may be so", he was told, "but catechism is more vital to that success than all the other subjects; besides, it is necessary to the child in order to ensure his good behaviour, for the success of his temporal affairs, and especially for the success of that great affair: eternal life." It was then respectfully pointed out to the Founder, that the Christian Brothers, every bit as dedicated to catechism as ourselves, teach it only once a day. "It does not follow at all", he argued, "that you should have only the one class in catechism. Let me tell you why:

1. It is quite likely that if the Venerable de la Salle were founding his Institute in our time, he would have his Brothers teach catechism twice a day. Indeed, when he founded the Christian Brothers more than a hundred and fifty years ago, the parents of the time were eminently religious. 1; they themselves educated their children, and all the Brothers had to do in their schools, was to put the finishing touches on the instructions received in the family. To-day, unfortunately, the situation is different: parents, in the main, neither know nor practice their religion; they are completely engrossed in temporal matters and make no effort to educate their children; they rely entirely on you to take care of this task. So, in the times in which we live, catechism is needed more frequently in the schools, than was formerly the case.

2. Our children don't spend as much time at school as do those of the Christian Brothers. In the towns, children start school at an earlier age. They stay on longer and attend more regularly.

Add to that, the fact that they are normally more intelligent, and speak French properly.²¹ This means that they can understand the Brothers' instructions much better. On the other hand, our

²¹ Country children used to speak their regional dialect.

schools are almost always in the country and the children come along for only some months ²² in the year; often they are quite old when we get them and as soon as they are useful for work, they are taken away. We, therefore, have to take advantage of the short time that is ours to instruct them sufficiently in the truths of salvation and so we need to take catechism twice a day.

Quite often, three lessons daily have been needed, at the time of First Communion, in order to prepare the children adequately. Moreover, although we take two catechism classes each day, we don't devote any more time to this task than the Christian Brothers; their classes are for half an hour on ordinary days, an hour on the eve of a holiday and an hour and a half on Sundays and feast days, which makes five hours a week. Now we don't do more than that ²³

But it wasn't only in his instructions that Father Champagnat strove to inspire his Brothers with a holy zeal for the sanctification of the children; in interviews with the Brothers and in letters to them, he constantly returned to this subject. He wrote, for example, in a circular letter, to all the houses of the Institute: ²⁴ "My wish and my desire are that, imitating Jesus Christ, our divine Model, you should have a tender affection for the children. Break for them the spiritual bread of religion, with a holy zeal; do all you can to form them to piety and to penetrate their hearts with sentiments of virtue that will last forever."

"Tell your children", he advised one Brother, ²⁵ "that God loves all those amongst them who are well behaved because they resemble Jesus who is infinitely wise; that he loves even those who are not good, because he hopes that they will become so. Tell them also, that the Blessed Virgin loves them, because she is especially the Mother of all those children who attend our schools. "

²² For most, it was from All Saints till Easter. However, at this period, the children "were never at the same point of progress: one had returned to school in October, another in November, another in December or later. These staggered returns throughout the school year - the Easter one was as important as the All Saints one - must be seen, as well, in the context of irregular daily attendance." (Antoine Prost, *l'Enseignement en France de 1800 à 1967*, p. 115. Ed. Armand Colin, 1968).

²³ "Every day the Brothers will teach catechism for half an hour, on the vigil of a full day's holiday for one hour, and on Sundays and feast days for an hour and a half" (Common Rules of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, Ms. of 1705, folio 28).

²⁴ LPC 1, doc. 63, p. 157.

²⁵ Letter of Jan. 21, 1830 to Br Bartholomew (LPC 1, doc. 14, p. 53).

Having given excellent advice to a Brother Director 26 to help him fulfil his apostolate in the difficult situation he had encountered, he made this recommendation: "Never cease . reminding your pupils that they are friends of the saints, children of Mary and members and co-heirs of Jesus-Christ; that this divine Saviour eagerly desires the love of their hearts; that he .guard~ it jealously, deeply grieved at seeing it given to the devil; and that . he would be ready to die again, if necessary, on the Cross to prove his love for them. Say to them: 'Do you know, children, why God loves you so much? It is because you have been bought with the Blood of Jesus Christ and because you can easily become great saints, if only you want to; for, Jesus, in his kindness, promises to take you on his shoulders, 27 to save you the trouble of walking. Oh! how unfortunate are those of you who find catechism hard and unpleasant and learn it badly; they will not have the happiness of knowing Jesus Christ and loving him.' "

Another time he wrote to a Brother: 28 "Put every effort into your catechism les son; spare no pains to form your children to virtue; make them understand clearly that without piety, without the fear of God, they will never be happy; that there is no peace for the wicked; and that God alone can make them happy because they have been created for him alone."

"My good friends", he wrote to the Brothers 29 of another establishment, "do your utmost to make your school succeed; never lose sight of the enormous good you can do; this good and the great reward which awaits you should stimulate your zeal and courage. See what tender love the Saviour of the world,- has for your children; he openly reproaches the apostles for keeping them at a distance from him. 30 You, my friends, far from preventing the children's approach to this divine Saviour, devote all your efforts to leading them to him. Oh, what a warm welcome you will have from him, at your death! How generously he will reward the troubles and sacrifices that the education of your children has cost you! What glory and what happiness are being prepared for you by this Master who is so generous and who does not let a

26 Letter of Nov. 1, 1831 to Br Bartholomew (LPC 1, doc. 24, p. 72). Br John-Baptist's version is faulty.

27 Lk 15, 5.

28 Letter of Jan. 3, 1831, to Br Bartholomew (LPC 1, doc. 19, p. 61).

29 Letter of Feb. 4, 1831, to Brs Antony and Gonzaga (LPC 1, doc. 20, p. 63).

30 Matt 19, 13; Mk 1a, 13-16.

cup of water 31 go unrewarded! Moreover, he has' pledged himself to regard as done to himself and to reward accordingly, whatever you do to these little children."

"You ask me", he answered a Brother Director, "what is the best way to succeed in your employment and make your school prosper. This is my advice:

1. Get the Blessed Virgin on your side, and do this by remembering to treat her as the first Superior of your house; in such a case, you will do nothing of importance without consulting her; confide to her protection, your person, your Brothers, your children and your whole school; do all that you can to promote her honour and to inspire devotion to her; go to her in all your needs and tell her that, when you have done everything possible, she will have to take the responsibility, if things don't succeed. 32

2. Take particular care of the poor children, the most ignorant and the dullest; show such children a lot of kindness; ask them often how they are; and make it clear on all occasions, that you esteem and love them all the more for the fact that fortune has not smiled on them nor has nature favoured them. Poor children are to a school, what the sick are to a house - a subject of blessing and prosperity, when they are viewed with the eyes of faith and honoured as the suffering members of Jesus Christ.

3, Wage a constant war against sin; to do this, you must be unremitting in the supervision of your children, for that is the only way that you can preserve their innocence and help them to avoid evil. Strive to instil an extreme horror of mortal sin, remembering that if you have the happiness to keep your children free from it and to prevent its access to the school, God will infallibly bless your establishment. In this case, we can repeat with the Apostle: 'If Gad be for us, who is against us? 33' Provided God is in the midst of you and your children by his grace and love; nothing can harm you. But if sin and the devil are allowed entry to your house, it will perish; or, at least, it will be on the brink of destruction. This is true, even though you enjoy the backing of the authorities and of all the influential people in the land.

I am willing 'to answer for the success of your establishment, Brother, if you use these three means. Tell your children, that

31 Matt 10, 42.

32 Br John-Baptist transcribes a passage from the Feb. 4, 1831 letter to Brs Antony and Gonzaga (LPC 1, doc. 20, 11.22-26, p. 64). Is he quoting another letter, which we don't have, or amalgamating several letters? It is certain that Fr Champagnat was not in the habit of writing such long letters.

33 Rom 8, 31.

I never go up to the altar, without thinking of you and of them." Then he added: "Oh, how I would like to have the happiness of teaching the children, and of contributing in a direct way by my efforts, to their formation in virtue! 34"

There is no better way to finish this chapter than by recording the method used by the Founder, at times, to conclude his own instructions on the need to teach catechism. When he had said everything that his zeal prompted, to make the Brothers understand their obligations in this important matter, he would end by exclaiming: «I speak to you in this way, to perform a duty of conscience; it is now up to you to do yours. If you fail to do it, if you do not instruct the children and form them to piety, you can incur great guilt; you will answer to God for the soul of each child and you will have to account to him for all the faults that they have committed through ignorance of religion and lack of education."

34 LPC 1, doc. 14, p. 54.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Marcellin 's charity towards the poor.

Marcellin's charity was not confined to the spiritual works of mercy; he also assisted the poor in their need, as much as his limited resources permitted him. Three factors helped inspire this charity:

1. He had a kind heart, which could not bear to have a neighbour suffer without being touched by compassion and without feeling moved to help him.

2. He had a deep respect and love for Our Lord, become poor for us; the poor were images of him and reminders as well.

3. He ardently longed to work for the salvation of souls, a longing which was satisfied, in part, by almsgiving. In giving alms, he always spoke a few words of edification to the one requesting them. If it was a child, he would question him to see if he knew the principal mysteries of religion and then give him, as occasion required either an exhortation or a brief instruction.

On a journey to Paris, as he was getting down from the carriage during an uphill climb, several youngsters ran up and asked him, as they usually did, for a sou. "I am quite willing to give you one", Marcellin promised, "if you know your catechism." So, he began to question them on the principal mysteries and was saddened to find a ten year old boy who knew nothing about them. In handing over the money, he said to him. «I shall pass this way again, my boy, in about a month, and if you have learnt the mysteries, I shall give you five 1 sous." The boy promised to ask his comrades or others to teach him, and he kept his word. When Father Champagnat returned that way, he saw the same boy running up to him and crying out: "Father, I know my catechism; give me the five sous you promised me." He really did know the mysteries well and it was a great consolation to the Founder to give him the reward he expected.

When Marcellin was appointed curate of La Valla, he found a certain number of poor, careless parents who left their children

1 Five sous is the equivalent of a quarter of a franc. The daily salary of a good worker in 1838 was in the order of 3 francs.

in ignorance of the truths of religion, sending them neither to school nor to catechism classes; he took these children and placed them with the Brothers, making himself responsible for feeding and clothing them. In the first year, there were twelve 2 of them; in the years that followed, this number increased and he took in all that the house could accommodate. He didn't confine his charity to the children; all the poor of the parish felt its effects; there wasn't one who sought his help without obtaining it. Some received bread from him; others, clothing and linen; he had suitable food prepared for those who were sick, and he assigned two Brothers, or some other kind persons to look after them at night.

One day, he was summoned on a sick call and hurried to the address, where he found a poor unfortunate covered with ulcers, lying on a little straw and with only a few rags to cover his nakedness and his sores. Moved to deep compassion at the sight of so much suffering and such great poverty, he first of all spoke a few sympathetic words to the sick man; than he ran home, sent for the Brother bursar and told him to go at once to the sick man's place, taking along a straw mattress, sheets and blankets. The Brother pointed out that there was no spare mattress. "What!" he was asked, "not a single one in the house?" "Not one" came the reply, "and you may remember Father, that I gave away the last one only a few days ago." "Well", he went on, "take the one from my bed and see that he gets it at once." It was not unusual for him to deprive himself in order to help the poor or to cater for the needs of his Brothers.

Another time, a pious person asked him to visit an unfortunate man, who was crippled, sick and sunk in misery, but who nevertheless belched forth dreadful blasphemies against religion, and coarse insults against those who were kind enough to visit him and bring him some relief. Father Champagnat made every possible effort to soften that hard heart, but he had no success and found it necessary to leave so as not to provoke further blasphemies.

On returning home, he said to the Brother responsible for giving alms to the sick: "There is only one way to win that man over, that is, to do good to him and to meet his insults with acts

2 Fr Champagnat wrote to Br John-Mary Granjon, on Dec. 1, 1823: "As for La Valla, it seems that we shall have enough pupils and no shortage of poor ones. Thanks be to Gad, we shall do what we can to feed them" (LPC, doc. 1, p. 30). Cf. OME, doc. 166 [17], p. 445.

of kindness. Charity and only charity will achieve his conversion. Therefore, get him all that he stands in need of; see that there is always someone at his side to wait on him, to watch with him even through the night; speak to him with great gentleness and kindness and pray earnestly for his conversion. However, don't mention religion to him just yet, so that he has no excuse for blasphemy: the good God will do the rest."

These wise instructions were carried out to the letter and had exactly the desired result. The sick person, seeing himself the object of such assiduous attention and" treated with so much kindness, was moved by it all, and cried out one day: "Oh, I can see that religion is true, since it promotes such great devotedness and charity; only religion can inspire you not merely to put up with me, which is no small matter, but even to serve me and lavish on me care that relatives or servants couldn't give me, if I had any." He then asked for Father Champagnat and made his confession to him, after requesting pardon several times for the ungracious way he had received him on the first occasion. That man died soon afterwards, fortified by the sacraments and displaying fully christian dispositions.

About the same time, Father Champagnat was called to the bedside of a sick woman to hear her confession. He found her in a very destitute condition, even without fuel to make a fire.

He heard her confession, spoke a few words of consolation, urging her to place her confidence in God and to offer him her privations and sufferings; but, well aware that consoling words are inadequate in such situations, he had her brought all that was necessary by way of food, clothing and fuel. Besides, he procured a nurse for her by day and night and he asked a doctor to see her and give her the benefit of his professional skill, at no cost.

The woman having died, the Founder looked after the child she left behind. That child, as a result of the mother's long illness and her extreme poverty, knew nothing whatever of religion and had already formed habits of vice. These spoiled his character and corrupted his heart, thwarting for a long while the efforts to care for him. The Brothers to whom Father Champagnat entrusted him, let him want for nothing by way of food and clothing. They put him into a class and did all they could to teach him religious principles and to eradicate his defects and bad habits; however, instead of benefiting from the attentions showered on him and being grateful for them, he responded to the kindness he received, only by insults, ingratitude and indocility.

Accustomed to live as a vagrant and to follow his evil inclinations without restraint, he could not stand the discipline demanded by a regular school routine or the lessons and fatherly admonitions of the Brothers. He ran away several times, preferring to beg for his bread and live in destitution than to curb his rebel will and submit to the control of the school. The Brothers brought him back to the school each time and did their utmost to reform him, to win his affection and to improve his attitude; in the end, discouraged by their almost total failure, they asked Father Champagnat to leave him to his unhappy lot; claiming that they were wasting their time and that, sooner or later, it would be necessary to send him away.

The Founder, gifted with a more constant and a kinder zeal, urged them at first to be patient and to pray for the poor boy; but, faced with their continued demands for him to be sent away, he said to them: "My friends, if all you want is to be rid of this poor orphan, that is easily done; but what do you gain by throwing him onto the streets? If you abandon him, isn't there reason to fear that God may ask you an account of his soul? Aren't you frightened, too, of losing an opportunity of practising charity and zeal? Of losing the merit of leading this child back to the paths of virtue? If you cast him aside, God will give someone else care of him and the grace to bring him up. You will then be sorry, but too late, for letting your impatience deprive you of this

glorious mission. We have adopted this child; we have no right to abandon him; we must keep him, although he is troublesome and unresponsive and we must work relentlessly to form him to the perfection we wish him to have."

"Moreover", the Founder reminded them, "keep up your courage. God will not allow your numerous sacrifices for this orphan and your many acts of charity towards him, to bear no fruit; pray for him often to God, and I am quite certain that, before long, he will cause you just as much consolation as he has caused you trouble." In fact, soon afterwards, that child, whose bad conduct had worried the Brothers so much for several years, changed completely; he became gentle, docile, well-behaved and as pious as an angel. Having made his First Communion in the holiest of dispositions, he asked to join the Society, and his request was granted. He was full of esteem for his vocation and was a pious, regular and obedient Brother; ³ he died with all the signs of predestination, at twenty-one years of age, in the arms of Father Champagnat after thanking him for all that he had done for him.

This account reminds us of the advice the Founder gave to the Brothers, concerning children whose behaviour puts them in a position of deserving expulsion. "To expel a child", he warned, "is an extremely serious step. It is the ultimate and most terrible punishment. Faults that warrant this unfortunate and extreme measure rarely occur amongst the children, when the class is well disciplined and the master has been able to maintain his authority. Were you to ask me which faults justify this punishment, I would reply that I don't know of any that do so by their very nature, provided the culprit offers prospects of reform and sincerely wills it. Expulsion, in other words, is only for the incorrigible and for those who contaminate a school with their vice.

Before expelling a child, it is necessary:

1. To be quite sure of his guilt and of the gravity of his faults.
2. To be equally sure that there is moral contagion and that the child is really, as they say, a black sheep.
3. To have exhausted every remedy likely to correct him and to prevent contagion.
4. To pray, to reflect, to consult; for a matter of such importance ought, first of all, to be put before God, and prudence requires that every means suggested by charity should be used in such a case to ensure the justice of the action.

³ The reference is to Br Nilamon (Jean-Baptiste Berne), who died in 1830 (BI XXVIII, pp. 409-413).

I am justified, then, in claiming that expulsion is an extremely serious sanction and should be very rarely invoked. To inflict it on a child because he has defied an imprudent threat, because his character is neither friendly nor attractive, because he is frivolous and hard to control, because he misses school or even church ceremonies on the slightest pretext, because he has not carried out penances imposed on him, or for whatever similar fault - to inflict expulsion I say, is to fail in one's duty, to sin against justice, and damage the child's reputation in the parish: for expulsion is understood to involve serious faults and scandalous conduct.

When the expulsion is not justified, it causes murmuring and public complaints; it arouses the anger and hatred of the parents whose child has been expelled; it alienates the minds of the children concerned and sets them permanently against the Brothers. One who weighs those damaging consequences will be careful not to get worked up and send away a child in an outburst of temper or passion or because of faults which may seem serious, but are not calculated to harm the other children, to imperil their innocence, to taint them with a bad spirit and to jeopardize seriously the discipline of the school.

No matter what class the pupil is in, his expulsion is exclusively reserved to the Brother Director, and a second-in command who took it on himself to inflict this punishment, would be seriously out of order. When the point has been reached where expulsion is called for, the child should be encouraged to leave of his own accord; or his parents should be sent for and, when their child's conduct has been explained to them, they should be asked to withdraw him so as to avoid the unpleasantness of seeing him expelled."

Father Champagnat was constantly preoccupied with the wants of the poor and he referred to them whenever the opportunity arose. If he saw someone being wasteful, he would be prompted to complain: "You are forgetting that many poor people lack even the necessities of life and would be happy to have what you misuse and spoil." "We should be very blameworthy", he repeated often, "if we incurred useless expense and looked for superfluity, when so many poor people are without food and clothing. We lack charity, if we are insensitive to the misery and privation of the suffering members of Christ and neglect the means of helping them, by failing to take care of things. The saints, who had a great love of God, loved the poor like brothers. Hence, they went without what was necessary and practised self-renunciation to help them."

At the beginning of each winter, the Founder had all the discarded clothing in the house 4 mended, packed up and sent to the Brothers stationed in the mountains, who were responsible for distributing it to the poor. When it was pointed out to him that the repairs cost a lot and that it would simplify matters to send them as they were, since the poor were well able to do the mending themselves, Marcellin replied: «I agree that it would be simpler, but would it make the poor happier? And would our charity towards them be greater, acting this way? That is what I have reservations about. If you pass on these clothes as they are, some of the poor will not bother to mend them, and having worn them for a couple of days, will then get no further use out of them; others won't have the thread or the material needed. It is better to spend a little more here and to have the task properly done. "There was another work of charity which Father Champagnat carried on during the last years of his life. He took in, and cared for, a number of elderly men 5 who were without means, and who, being no longer able to work, faced a life of severe hardship. He assigned a Brother to look after them, providing for all their necessities and asking nothing in return except that they live as good Christians. Some of these men were afflicted with quite repulsive sickness; others, in addition to bodily sickness, had moral weaknesses, which made it extremely painful and difficult to serve them.

But charity, which is patient and bears all things, 6 never giving up, was undaunted in the Founder, by such wretchedness.

Needless to say he did not stop at assuring their physical needs and soothing their bodily sufferings; his zeal concentrated especially on their reception of the sacraments, on teaching them to pray and to sanctify their sufferings by resignation to God's will and union with the sufferings of Christ. Following his advice, these old men planned their time, dividing it between prayer and occupations commensurate with their strength and health.

4 "You are asked to put into your parcels the spoiled linen and the old clothes, which are of no further use, and to forward them..." (LPC 1, doc.

266, p. 500, 11.29-33).

5 Cf. A. Balko, "The Invalids' Building" FMS, No 26, p. 205, 1975. On Dec. 1, 1832, in his account book (folio 37), Fr Champagnat wrote: "To-day, Saturday, December 1st, 1832 has been a happy and fortunate one; we contributed to a good work done by Mademoiselle Fournas, by receiving two incurable invalids."

6 1 Cor 13, 4 and 7.

Attendance at Holy Mass, spiritual reading, the rosary, and visits to the Blessed Sacrament were part of each day.

A Brother was appointed to watch over their conduct and bring to their notice any forgetfulness in this regard; he attended the religious exercises with them and helped them perform these with piety. All these old men died in christian dispositions and afforded Father Champagnat the consolation of having served their spiritual needs even more than their bodily ones. ⁷

The spirit of faith which animated the pious Founder, showed him in the poor, the image of Jesus Christ, made poor for us. This led him to have the utmost respect for them. If he was not always able to give them aid, he at least gave them consolation, encouragement and every possible proof of concern for their welfare. He happened to be visiting an establishment one day, when he thought he heard the Brother porter speak offensively to a poor man who had come to the door.

As he hadn't completely caught the meaning of what was said, and was very busy at the time, he thought he should let the matter drop. However, the following night he was thinking about it again and felt a stinging remorse for not having taken the Brother to task. Next day he sent for the Brother, to seek a clarification. The latter admitted that his words might, indeed, have seemed slightly harsh but he claimed in defence that only such language would get rid of one who was constantly abusing the kindness and charity of others. .

Although the Brother was a virtuous man, endowed with a sound character and should therefore have been entirely credible, and although the Founder could not fault the answers given to his many questions, he went back on purpose to that house ⁸ which was only nine miles from the Hermitage, to see a priest of the region; he had witnessed the incident and therefore would perhaps be able to shed some light on it. This priest told him that the Brother was in no way to blame and that the poor man's character and unbalanced mind did justify the Brother's manner of acting; only then was Father Champagnat reassured.

Though his religious state and his limited resources were a barrier to his giving the poor all the material help he would have wished, Marcellin amply compensated for the fact by training

⁷ "Fr Champagnat accepted... old Chazelle, a cobbler who later took the habit, under the name of Br Spiridion" (AA, p. 132 and pp. 300, 301).

⁸ It is difficult to know whether the reference is to Tarantaise or to Valbenoîte, each of them nine miles from the Hermitage.

teachers to give primary instruction and christian education to poor children.⁹ It was especially for the sake of these, that he founded his Institute, and he wished the Brothers to consider themselves especially responsible for their instruction. In the first formal commitments pronounced by the Brothers, that point is specifically mentioned, and the Founder thought it so important that it was given priority: "We bind ourselves above all", the statement says, "to instruct, without charge, all the poor children whom the parish priest sends us. 10" He wasn't satisfied for them simply to be taught catechism; he wanted them taught all the subjects which they might require in after life; there was to be no distinction made between them and the children of the rich.

Equality ought to be the hallmark of the Brothers' schools; no one there should benefit from preference or privilege because of social standing or exterior qualities; each pupil, rich or poor, should be treated according to his deserts, his ability, his virtue and his personal worth. This equality should characterize all aspects of the child's education: the same class for all, the same studies, the same punishments and rewards, and the same solicitude. The poor child's standing in the school is to depend, not on his social or financial status, but on his ability; he should be allowed, like the rich child, to pass through all classes and exhaust the whole programme of elementary instruction, provided he has the necessary aptitude for learning; he should be free to compete with the rich boy, to match his performance and even surpass it. In fact, as far as possible, the Brothers should pay no attention to the social standing of the children, seeing in them only what faith reveals there, taking into consideration only their conduct and loving and treating them all as their children.

"Nevertheless", the Founder wisely remarked, "this does not mean to say that one may not show some consideration for certain children, when their welfare or the general good of the school calls for it. Thus, for example, it is not judicious to place a rich child, who is meticulously clean, beside another who is covered with vermin; 11 the parents of the former, might well object, and the

9 "The poor children are taught without charge in our schools...." (Champagnat, cahier 1, art. 15, p. 21. AFM 0132.0102).

10 Cf. OME, doc. 34 [2], p. 103 and doc. 52, p. 138.

11 Marie-Françoise Beché, born at La Valla in 1828, testified: "I only vaguely remember seeing him in my childhood. I merely heard frequent references to him by my mother, who helped him in his good works. Several times, for example, she removed the vermin from poor children whom he

latter child should, in fact, be placed where it is not possible for others to be affected by what is offensive about him. In such a case, the consideration shown the rich child redounds to the benefit of the poor one; the precautions taken in order to keep the former at the school, have as their aim, to furnish the means to instruct the latter; for, most of the time, if there were no rich children to provide the Brothers' salary, the school would not be viable.

Yes, prudence and wisdom allow and sometimes even dictate such caution; but the spirit of faith, which shows us in the poor the image of Jesus, humiliated and made poor for our sakes, ought to fill the Brothers with a great respect and love for the poor child.

This respect and love are evident on every occasion in tokens of kindness and esteem; they are evident in the constant efforts to ensure his progress and in the unremitting care to treat him like the others." You see, now, the line of conduct that the Founder wished the Brothers to observe, towards the children of the poor.

accepted and taught, some of them becoming Brothers" (AFM, Positio, Testis 27, Foli9 593).

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

What Father Champagnat did for the primary instruction of the children and for the establishment of good discipline in the schools.

The spirit of God, which guided Father Champagnat in establishing his Institute, made him clearly understand that, to produce all its fruits, the education given by the Brothers should, as far as possible, cater for the needs and aspirations of the times. The first need to be met is to keep the child at school as long as possible in order to remove him from the contagious, bad example confronting him at every step, even in the bosom of his family. One of the high hopes held by our times is to have a teacher who imparts an advanced instruction, introducing his pupils to a wide range of knowledge, on which the public sets great store; this is so, despite the fact that such knowledge may really be of little value to the child and, because of the bad use to which he puts it, may even be harmful to him.

All this being so, the Founder understood that, while giving to religion all the importance which it deserves in education, the Brothers' schools should leave nothing to be desired as regards the value and organization of the studies; the parents would then be induced to prefer the Brothers' schools, as much by the benefit of the solid primary instruction conferred, as by the certainty of procuring for their children an eminently christian education. He therefore had no hesitation in including in the programme of studies for the Brothers' schools, all those subjects ¹ belonging to primary education.

He even went so far as to declare that a class in which all those subjects were taught, should be opened in all our more important schools; he undertook to provide a Brother for the purpose, whenever the locality ensured a sufficient number of pupils to follow the course. Father Champagnat did not shut his eyes to the dangers which these advanced studies might pose for children who were mostly destined to work on the farm or in

¹ Circular letter of Fr Champagnat to the Brothers, Jan. 10, 1840, on the arrangements for lectures on teaching (LPC 1, doc. 313, p. 567).

industry. However, he reflected on the fact that we live in an age when man has a thirst for knowledge; he saw that the wicked, spurred on by the enemy of salvation, exploit man's craving for knowledge in order to exert influence over children and, under the guise of giving them primary instruction, to inculcate their dangerous doctrines, wiping out faith and morals; he therefore was willing to overlook any disadvantages that might be involved in teaching secular subjects; disadvantages which a solid christian education would either diminish or destroy and which, in any case, would be experienced, in more acute form and without any antidote, in those schools conducted by mercenary teachers, who have no religious principles. ²

He wanted absolutely to have access to the children. In order to lure them from those schools, they had to be promised as complete a teaching as that provided by secular teachers. Then again, he realised that, despite any drawbacks of secular learning, it does have advantages. It keeps the student busy, retains him longer at school and, on that account, wards off laziness, steering him away from bad company and all the dangerous occasions he would have met each day, if, instead of being at school, he had been left to himself and grown up in idleness. In fact, an occupation or serious application to study, by protecting the child from his evil inclinations, preserves his faith, his piety and his virtue. The learning he acquires sharpens his intellectual faculties and equips him better to receive religious principles and put them into practice. .

For a school to prosper and its teaching to be effective, the co-operation of the students is needed. What the teacher himself does, by his devotedness and his lessons, doesn't add up to much; what he gets the pupils to do by study, application and work, is vital. The important thing, is to secure the willing co-operation of the pupils. Father Champagnat saw emulation as a sure and

² Letter of Fr Bartholomew Artru, parish priest of Peaugres, Sept. 7, 1835: "I had always realized the need to provide a better education for the parish children, than the one they had hitherto received. Neither the ill-mannered teachers who came du ring the off-season to dole out some lessons in arithmetic and writing nor the sycophantic hypocrites of the Teachers' College, were capable of meeting our needs... At the end of 1833, I brought in your Brothers. Their establishment in my parish has been a distinct success; it has taken only a few months to dispel the prejudices that some people had; nothing is better proof of the good done by the Brothers, than the enthusiasm with which the families entrust their children to them; and this happens not only in my parish, but in neighbouring ones" (AFM, 129.15). Cf LPC 2, p. 56.

efficacious means of achieving this, and he expected the Brothers to make every effort to establish and maintain it in their schools. It wasn't enough for emulation to exist amongst pupils of the same class or of the same school; he wanted it to operate amongst all the schools directed by the Brothers; this accounts for his setting up a general writing competition. Each writing-master³ was asked to bring to the annual retreat, the first written examination that he had given to his pupils when school began and the last one given before the holidays.

A committee of the most expert Brothers had the task of comparing the two, deciding on the progress made by the pupils and classifying the schools in order of merit. So that the competition might promote rivalry both amongst teachers and pupils, the Founder had established two kinds of award: one, for the Brothers whose classes were first in the competition; the other, for the children who had made the most progress during the year and who excelled in writing. Needless to say, steps were taken to prevent deception.

Another means adopted by Father Champagnat to ensure that the schools were well run, that the pupils made progress and that they received religious instruction and christian education, was to pay an annual visit to each school. If any school failed to come up to standard, he didn't rest satisfied with a single visit, returning, instead, every three or four months. In addition, a Brother was given responsibility in each district for the supervision of the schools there. He had to visit each school in his district, 4 once every two months, draw up a detailed report of the state of the school and send it on to the Superior.

The Founder did not underestimate the good effects of these visits and other measures taken to stimulate the Brothers' zeal and promote emulation amongst the pupils. Yet, he knew that such policies were not enough to ensure the prosperity of the schools and that it was especially imperative for the teachers to be competent. Hence he went to extraordinary lengths to see that they were such. He gave them lessons himself in reading, writing, arithmetic, geography and singing. Often he had to make inroads

3 "Every year, at the same time, (holidays) a page will be brought which contains the child's best writing at the year's start and at the end. The Brother Director of the nearest establishment will verify its authenticity by comparing it with the exercise book, written over the same period" (Rules of 1837, Ch. 10, art. 4, p. 63).

4 "In each district there is a principal Brother Director, who must watch over all the Brothers employed there" (Ibid, Ch. 3, [2], art. 15, pp. 30-32).

into recreation time to teach one or other of these. Having initiated them into the se different subjects, he went further and showed how they should be communicated to the children, forming them in the method of teaching. It seemed to him that the simultaneous method, originated by the Venerable de la Salle, was to be preferred and he had his Brothers adopt it. To train them in the method and practice them at it, he engaged the service of a teacher who knew it perfectly.

When he was a child, Father Champagnat found it very hard to learn to read; 5 later on, trying to search out the reason for his difficulty in acquiring this basic skill, he concluded that the problem lay with the ineptitude of the teachers and the inefficiency of the method then being used for teaching to read. After studying and examining this question for several years, and having made trials and experiments with different ways of teaching a child to read, he became convinced that the old way of naming the consonants and the spelling which resulted, multiplied reading difficulties and retarded pupil progress. In the light of his finding, he might well have abandoned immediately, a method that had proved so ineffectual; but, distrustful of his own wisdom, before introducing such a basic change, he insisted on consulting the most capable people and the wisest judges. All of these, after close examination, shared his view.

Thenceforward, his mind was made up; in spite of numerous objections from a certain number of Brothers, Father Champagnat did not hesitate to break with custom. He adopted for the schools of his Society a shorter and more intelligible system; the theory and practice of this, he explained in a booklet entitled, *Principles of Reading*; it had been composed by him in concert with his principal Brothers.

Although Father Champagnat loved all children, he particularly loved the youngest ones whom he called "little angels", on account of their innocence. He never tired of speaking

5 "Born in the district of Saint-Genest-Malifaux (Loire), the enormous difficulty I had experienced in learning to read and write, awoke me to the urgent necessity of founding a Society which would be able, at a lower cost, to procure for country children, the fine teaching that the excellent Christian Brothers offered in the towns" (Letter to King Louis-Philippe, LPC 1, doc. 34, pp. 98-104. Also, to the Minister for Public Instruction, LPC 1, doc. 159, pp. 306-312).

6 The Circular of November 11, 1916, announces the 42nd edition of this volume.

about the beginners' class, 7 which he rated the most important; 8 he spared no detail when treating of the care to be taken in teaching them the first truths of religion, in inspiring them with piety and love of virtue and in smoothing out the difficulties as they learned to read. A Brother asked him to explain why he considered that class the most important. He gave these reasons in reply:

"1. The entire success of a child's education normally depends on the first lessons he receives. St Jerome 9 uses two very appropriate and very true comparisons to help us understand this fact. He points out that wool, once it is dyed, never completely loses the first colour it is given; and that an earthen vessel retains for a long while the taste and smell of the first liquid put into it. The holy Doctor goes on to say that similarly the first impressions received in childhood, are not easily erased and habits formed then are rarely changed. Hence, if the children form sound habits and attitudes in their first class, they will retain them all their lives.

2. In many districts, most of the children complete their education with that class. and leave school for work; or if they go up to the next class, 10 they don't stay there long.

3. This first class lays the foundation for all the others. If the children imbibe sound principles there, are well formed to piety and taught to read properly, they will easily cope with later rote learning; they will succeed in all the other facets of primary study and will develop into able pupils. On the other hand, if they leave that first class without having learned to read, knowing neither their prayers nor the principal truths of religion, they will be an enormous problem to subsequent teachers and despite the best efforts of these, they will continue to be the most backward. Even more, after attending the school for eight to ten years and

7 "Under the Restoration, and up till 1839, the policy was to divide the pupils into two classes of a different level: the beginners' class ("petite") for those who were learning to read; the advanced class ("grande"), for those who learnt writing and mathematics as well. Two teachers per school were therefore needed and a sufficient number of pupils" (p. Zind, SMC, Vol. 2, p. 77, and *Présence Mariste*, No 151).

8 In a letter to Br Euthyme, March 19, 1832, Fr Champagnat stresses the importance of the "petite" class (LPC 1, doc. 102, p. 223; and Cahier 4, p. 33, AFM 0132.4014d).

" 9 Lettre à Leta, trad. Charpentier, Ed. Garnier, 1936, *Lettres de saint Jérôme*, vol. 2, p. 61).

10 See Note 7, above.

having reached the highest class, they will still be weak in all the basic parts of primary instruction; they will be poor at writing, spelling and arithmetic, and poor even at reading, because they were not properly taught the very elements. So you can see that a Brother who teaches that first class inadequately, hampers the prosperity of the school and jeopardizes the total educational progress of the children who attend it.

4. Children of the beginners' class are very pleasing to God because of their innocence and so they draw down blessings on the establishment.

5. This class makes special demands on the Brother responsible for it. He needs large reserves of charity, zeal, patience and devotedness in order to repeat the same lessons over and over, to get down to the level of the youngest of them, to keep them under control and make them work without maltreating them or being too hard on them. Hence a Brother who cannot stoop to make himself little, who is irked by having to repeat the same things, who has to be constantly making progress, is not suited to this class. The surest means to ensure the advancement of beginners is to adopt a language within the scope of their limited intelligence; then to return often to the ground already covered and to apply oneself to teaching thoroughly rather than injudiciously extending their range of knowledge.

Faithful to this very important principle, the Brother responsible for this class should frequently go back over what he has already taught and what the children have already recited or learned. To avoid losing too much time through these continual repetitions, the teacher should enlist the aid of the most capable students. When, for example, he has heard the children at the blackboard read, he will leave it to a monitor to go back over the lesson with them, while he turns his attention to those concentrating on the elements. He will do the same for subsequent lessons and for the recitation of prayers and catechism." It was in this way that the Founder unconsciously combined the simultaneous and the mutual modes; ¹¹ he borrowed from the latter what was best in it, to perfect the former. He was preparing his Brothers for the eventual definitive adoption of the simultaneous-mutual method.

¹¹ Br John-Baptist writes "mode" for "méthode." Mutual method and simultaneous method (Cf. P. Zind, *Sur les traces de M. Champagnat*, vol. 2, pp. 76-77 and *Présence Mariste*, Nos 151, 152).

The importance he attached to the beginners' class prompted his earnest recommendation to the Brothers Director 12 to keep a close eye on them; to visit them at least fortnightly; to keep themselves always informed on the progress of the children; to determine personally when they were ready for promotion; and, especially, to train thoroughly the Brothers intended for these classes, doing everything to inspire them with christian virtues and with those fatherly attitudes which are indispensable in making them into worthy teachers of children.

Father Champagnat was continually pursuing the interests of religion and, noting that many church ceremonies in the country were poorly performed for lack of singers, decided to act. He believed that it would contribute greatly to the glory of God, to public edification and to the solemnity of the ceremonies, if singing were taught to the children; by this means, singers would be formed for the parish. His plan proved successful. The parish priests were delighted at the introduction of church music into the schools and told him clearly how pleased they were. "God be blessed", one of them wrote to him, "for letting you understand one of the great needs of our time and for having inspired you with a means of meeting it. By teaching singing, your Brothers will render the parish priests the greatest of service; they will awaken and renew the piety of the faithful; they will attract large numbers to the ceremonies of the church and the children will acquire a love and a taste for these."

Another motive in introducing singing into our schools was to draw the children to them and encourage them to stay because of the pure and innocent pleasure of singing; 13 to keep them joyful and happy; to give them a relish for the charms of virtue; to make their instructions in the truths of religion quite congenial; to fill them with sentiments of piety; and to outlaw secular songs. Singing can, indeed, achieve all these results when the children are taught it well. At the time that our Congregation was founded, it was not taught at all in primary schools; that has changed since, but to Father Champagnat belongs the merit and the glory of having first introduced it into those schools, at least into the country ones. 14

12 Cf. Ch. 17, note 5.

13 In the official request for legal recognition, Jan. 15, 1825, "Church singing" features on the programme (OME doc. 34 [2] p. 103).

14 "In teaching their children singing and giving them a taste for the ceremonies and worship of the Church, the Brothers render an important

School discipline was another matter which greatly preoccupied Father Champagnat. Rather than go into excessive detail on the subject, we shall limit ourselves to recording some of his thoughts on two of its major aspects, namely, the necessity of discipline and the essential qualities of good discipline.

"Discipline", he would say, "constitutes half the education of the child, and, if that half is missing, then most of the time, the other half is useless. What use is it to a child to be able to read, to write and even to have learnt his catechism, if he doesn't know how to obey; if he can't behave himself; and if he hasn't developed the habit of controlling his evil inclinations and following the promptings of his conscience? How is it that men to-day are so vacillating, so sensual, so incapable of self-denial and of going against nature's cravings? It is because they have known no restraint since their youth; they have been given too much liberty; they have not been taught self-control; and they have never learnt to do violence to themselves, combating their evil tendencies.

Discipline is the body of education and religion is its soul. Now, we normally judge the inner quality of a man by his exterior; so too, an educational establishment is judged by its exterior discipline. A firm discipline impresses at once and is pleasing to everybody; it wins the esteem and confidence of the public and is often sufficient in itself to establish the reputation of a school and ensure an influx of pupils. A Brother who has the art of securing discipline in a class, even though he may not be capable of much else, is preferable to one who may be very learned but who either does not understand the importance of discipline or is incapable of achieving it. The first Brother, by conferring the benefit of a wise discipline, at least teaches the children how to obey and that is a considerable gain.

In fact, the besetting sin of our age, as all agree, is the spirit of independence. Each one wants to follow his own will and sees himself as more suited to command than to obey. Children refuse obedience to their parents, subjects rebel against their sovereign, and most christians scorn the laws of God and of the Church: in a word, insubordination is rampant. It is therefore a valuable service to religion, to the Church, to society, to the family, and especially to the child, to curb his will and to teach him to obey.

service to the parishes and the parish priests, contributing greatly to the solemnity of the ceremonies and to the edification of the faithful" (*Guide des Ecoles à l'usage des Petits Frères de Marie*, 1853, partie 3, chap. 7, pp. 211, 212).

Discipline has the further advantage, comparable in importance to the previous one, of facilitating work, of keeping the child busy and of shielding him from idleness, which is the mother of all vices. 15

When order reigns in a class, each pupil is busy with his lessons and his exercises; he loves study; he becomes attached to the school; he is engrossed in the work of his education; and he doesn't even have time to give evil a thought. The peace, orderliness and recollection that surround him, lead him to be docile, respectful towards teachers, pleasant and helpful towards fellow-pupils and courteous, affable and kind towards everybody. It is hardly necessary to point out that catechism classes can succeed, and piety reign, only in classes where discipline exists.

And that other Brother, with all his knowledge, what is his service to the children? I find it hard to say, for I am certain that it is minimal. I doubt even, whether it is worth the pupils' while to attend his school; perhaps they would be better off staying with their parents." After visiting the classes of one establishment, he sent for the Brother Director and said to him: "Why do you allow the children to fight in your class?" The Brother pleaded ignorance of the fact and was told: "They do fight, but you do not see them. Moreover, it's not surprising that lots of things happen which you fail to see; there is no discipline in your class; you are lost in the middle of the noise; and you hardly notice the rank disorder and the most serious misbehaviour. Are you aware that your children may commit much evil without your seeing it or knowing about it?"

"God forbid that such a thing should happen", said the Brother, "but, in any case, my conscience tells me that it would not be my fault." "That is less true than you image", the Founder warned him; and, when asked why he made this claim, he went on: "You do more than enough to sow the seeds of disorder in your class, and nothing at all to nurture discipline there. You encourage chaos by not remaining at your desk, with the result that you cannot keep the children in view; you reprimand them orally instead of using the signal; 16 you shout and speak without necessity, punish excessively and are too familiar with the children.

15 Sir 33, 29.

1~ The Brothers "will consider it a duty to speak only when the signal cannot-be used instead" (Guide des Ecoles, Ed. 1853, chap. 7, p. 18). Also Présence Mariste, No 151 and SMC, vol. 2, p. 76.

Then, you make no positive contribution to discipline. You attach no importance to punctuality, don't insist on rules or require the children to arrive at school at the prescribed time; you don't exact fidelity to memorization and written exercises; you don't prevent the children from leaving their place; and you place no stress on silence, so that there is a constant noise and hubbub.

With this din and distraction reigning in their midst, the children cannot possibly hear you when you teach catechism; nor can they pray with piety or even work. Well, if they don't listen to the catechism taught, if they don't pray and are not busy working, what are they doing? They are spreading their defects; they are teaching one another evil; what I have seen this afternoon is a conclusive proof for me." "In that case", ventured the Brother, "the best thing for me to do is to close the school." "An undisciplined school", affirmed the Father, "is the bane of a parish and it would be preferable to have no school at all; however, there is a better alternative than closing your school, that is to put some order and discipline into it, and the sooner you start, the better."

"Discipline", Marcellin remarked on another occasion, "is never established without difficulty, for the child fears it perhaps more than anything else. Memory work and written tasks cost him less than discipline; most of the time he accepts them with pleasure and will often even like them; but good order and control are always irksome to him. The first thing he does when left to himself, is extricate himself from them. The reason is that discipline constantly restrains nature and keeps a rein on all the faculties and all the senses of the child. But this is precisely what shows its importance and necessity.

To establish and maintain discipline in a class, a teacher needs two qualities especially: strength of character and constancy. It follows, that people without these attributes are poorly suited to the education of children. Weakness of character is not something that can be eliminated, because you can't change the nature of man, but its disadvantages and sad effects can be minimized. This is done, by carefully following the counsel of the Superior and heeding his warnings; by complete fidelity to the prescribed teaching method and to school regulations; and by attentive supervision of the children so as to see all that they do, and to prevent their faults. These same means can also be used to remedy inconstancy."

It is evident that Father Champagnat sought to have firm discipline in the classes, because it is an essential part of

education, and because it is impossible to bring up a child without it. But the discipline he sought was a paternal one. "The aim of discipline", he reminded us, "is not to restrain the children by force and fear of punishment; it is to preserve them from evil; to correct their defects; to form their will and incline it gently towards good, inducing them to contract habits of virtue and orderliness, from religious motives and a sense of duty."

We see now why Marcellin always so strenuously opposed the abuse, prevalent at the time, of corporal punishment and so often recommended the Brothers not to resort to it. "Is it by striking them with the cane", queried the Founder, "that children are to be brought up and inspired with a love of virtue? No; it is convincing reasons and religious motives and not punishments, which persuade the mind and change the heart. It is strange that, in the education of children, methods are used which would be considered unsuitable even in the case of animals. If we want to tame or break in an animal, we are careful not to maltreat it; on the contrary, it is treated with kindness and caresses; the curb is used only with prudence and caution. It is by constant attempts, by frequent exercises repeated patiently over a long span of time that the animal is made docile and apt for its particular purpose.

Yet, the child, created in the image of God, endowed with reason and freedom; usually full of good will, of virtuous dispositions and of the desire to do his best; the child, I say, is brought up by reliance on brute force. Such methods of education flout the dignity of human beings; they degrade the child and draw down scorn and hatred on their perpetrators; they introduce disorder into the school, destroying feelings of love, esteem, and the mutual confidence and respect between teachers and pupils; finally, they wipe out the benefits from all the care bestowed on the child.

Perhaps you will object that the Holy Spirit recommends the punishment of the child and wants him to be reprimanded; and, you will add, punishments are necessary if the discipline we call for is to be achieved. It is true that the Holy Spirit wants children to be reprimanded for their faults and even imposes this as a duty on parents and, by the same token, on those who take their place or who share their task in the education of youth; but, to punish children is not necessarily to strike them and in Holy Scripture the word "punish" ¹⁷ does not refer specifically to corporal punishment but to any kind of penalty. Of course, to maintain

¹⁷ Prov 13, 24; 23, 13 and 14; Sir 30, 1.

discipline, we have to reprove breaches of the rules and dereliction of duty; but remember that it is not corporal punishment which wins us the obedience of the children; this is won, by the moral authority that we succeed in exercising over them. Moral authority is made possible through our behaving in a becoming way and giving constant edification; through unstinted devotedness in educating them and through a consistently decorous and unassuming manner.

Be fathers to them rather than teachers; then they will respect you and obey you without difficulty. The spirit of a Brothers' school ought to be a family spirit. Now, in a good family, a well run family, sentiments of respect, love and mutual trust predominate, and not fear of punishments. Anger, brutality and harshness are attitudes inspired by the devil in order to destroy the fruits of the good principles imparted to the child; and, just as the cockle choke the good grain, so does cruel treatment stifle all the fine sentiments which instruction and good example have enkindled in the heart of the child." Father Champagnat took such a serious view of the misuse of corporal punishment that he described harsh and violent Brothers, who were prone to ill-treat children by words or by actions, as unsuited to teaching; they were fit only to break stones or dig in the fields.

To prevent corporal punishment, excessive severity and any kind of extreme in reproofing the children, he did not want them to be chastised at the very time of the misdemeanour; his fear, no doubt, was that quickness of temper, lack of reflection or the reaction that might be experienced at seeing a child fail in his duty, could lead the teacher to exaggerate the fault and overdo the punishment. So opposed was he to corporal punishment, that he even made efforts to prevent it happening accidentally or in an unguarded moment of irritation. For this reason, the pointers used to indicate letters and numbers or reading and arithmetic charts, were to be attached with a string, making it impossible to strike the children with them.

In order to establish the firm and paternal discipline indispensable for the education of the child, "the teacher",

18 "Serious faults should be punished only at the beginning of the next session; a start can be made by assigning the culprit a few lines to learn" (Rules of 1837, Ch. 5, art. 20, p. 43).

19 "Pointers used for indicating reading and arithmetic charts, should be tied at one end" (Rules of 1837, Ch. 5, art. 28, p. 65).

Marcellin maintained, "requires to use great vigilance. Its aim, however, is not simply to maintain order in the school and to see that the children perform all their tasks; its aim is especially to prevent the contagion of vice and conserve the innocence of the children. Looked at from this point of view, vigilance is the virtue which a teacher needs most. Lack of supervision will frustrate all the good that he might otherwise do; and his class, which ought to be for the children a school of virtue and a means of sanctification becomes a cause of their depravity and an occasion of ruin and wickedness.

A Brother ought to be the guardian angel of the children. God will require of him an account of their conduct while at school, and their faults will be imputed to the Brother as his very own. Woe to him, if through culpable negligence, he lets an infected sheep spread contagion in the little flock ²⁰ entrusted to him; if, through lack of vigilance, he allows the Enemy of Salvation, who prowls ceaselessly around the children, ²¹ to rob them of their baptismal innocence and the life of grace, sowing cockle in their hearts. A Brother should shudder at the thought of such a calamity and resolve to be constantly on his guard.

Let him not forget that if, to save the soul of another is to save one's own, then, to let a soul be lost is to lose one's own.

In other aspects of education, one quality may compensate for the lack of another. Thus, devotedness and zeal can make up for want of great learning; but it is not possible for piety, for virtue, for good example and still less for great talents to compensate for neglect of vigilance; even if the teacher were a saint, should he fail in his duty of supervision, his children will corrupt one another and all his instructions and his works of zeal would be of no value to them.

The first and most important of his duties, therefore, is to exercise continual supervision over the children; a supervision which shields them from anything which may endanger their virtue and from whatever may be a trap set for their innocence;

a supervision in short, which may make it impossible for them to commit evil. This is the price that must be paid if a Brothers' school is to be useful to the children; if, through lack of supervision, it were to become the graveyard of their innocence, instead of being its guardian and refuge, those tender children would have been better off never setting foot in that school."

²⁰ Lk 12, 32; 1 Pet S, 2).

²¹ 1 Pet 5, 8.

To discharge satisfactorily the duty of supervision, 22 the Brother, according to the Founder, should never leave the children unattended and hence should not leave the classroom. If a Brother is asked for during school-time, he should answer that he cannot leave the children and that he would like the person who wishes to speak to him, to call to see him outside of school hours. This rule gave rise to considerable opposition and was the object of numerous protests. Many Brothers thought that it was difficult to refuse to leave the class for a moment in order to satisfy a parent who had come a distance to speak about her child or to pay the school fees; but the Founder stood his ground and refuted, over and over, the reasons put forward against this rule, reasons more specious than solid.

Amongst other things, he said: "Class time belongs neither to you nor to the people who come to speak to you: it belongs to your children. To use it for someone else or to waste it, is to do them an injury and be guilty of an injustice. Notice, too, that the matter soon becomes a serious one. Suppose that you absent yourself from the class for five minutes; those minutes, multiplied by the forty or fifty pupils that you have, give three or four hours of wasted time. Is the fault, then, so insignificant after all? But that brief span of five minutes is enough time for the enemy to throw into your class, a spark capable of becoming a conflagration; considered from this point of view, your fault is far more serious."

As the major argument of the Brothers was that you couldn't send away without giving offence, persons of some standing or those who came from a distance, Marcellin countered: "No one is justified in finding fault with you for keeping your Rule and for remaining at your post. On the contrary, the parents will be pleased to see how assiduous you are with regard to their children; they will be edified by your zeal and devotedness in teaching them. Besides, even though this rule were to give rise to some complaints, (and I don't concede that this will happen, if you tell the children to warn their parents against coming in school hours), the harm resulting is much less than that from leaving your class

22 "As long as children are in the building, they should be supervised. The Brothers should assume this responsibility themselves; and if, for good reasons, they are obliged to be absent, they will see to it that there is always a reliable supervisor with the children" (Rules of 1837, Ch. 5, art. 21, p. 43). "They will not answer to parents during class-time and those who ask to be seen will be told that the children cannot be left and that they should return at another time" (Common Rules of 1852, Part 3, Ch. 7, art. 8, p. 111).

unattended. I could tell you of a class in which, as a result of the master's absence for a few minutes, wickedness, which had taken possession of the heart of one child, was propagated, spreading its contamination into all the other hearts.¹¹ During the recreations, ²³ the Brothers should be with the children to encourage them to play, to see what they do and to hear what they say. In the church and during the ceremonies, the Brothers should keep the children within view and not lose sight of them, even in order to sing and serve at Mass, unless there is a sufficient number of Brothers to superintend them. In a word, as long as the children are under our care, they must be supervised. This responsibility should be fulfilled, by the Brothers themselves and not, except for serious reasons, delegated to a trustworthy monitor.

We conclude by pointing out that the Founder placed such importance on the duty of supervision that he declared himself unwilling to give permission for Holy Communion to any Brother, who, without good reasons and without someone to replace him, left the children to themselves during class, or recreation, or at any time that he was responsible for them. "In watching carefully over the children and keeping them busy all the time, a Brother", he maintained, "can be sure that he is doing service to all the pupils of the school.

1. He is safeguarding the innocence of the little ones and often succeeds in presenting them for their First Communion, without their having fallen into serious faults.

2. He keeps all the pupils out of a great number of sins.

Indeed, children left to themselves, get out of hand very easily; they often follow, without realizing, the evil inclinations of nature and the bad example they witness. They fall into a number of faults which, under the care of a good Brother, they wouldn't commit and wouldn't even think of committing.

3. He prevents the spread of evil, stifling the guilty thoughts in the hearts of wayward children and causing them to restrain their harmful tendencies and to struggle, sometimes in spite of themselves, against their passions.

4. He inculcates in the children, the habit of steady work; he keeps them calm and recollected and fittingly disposed to benefit from the religious instructions they receive.

²³ "During recreation even, the Brothers should not be too familiar with the children, nor play with them, except to start the game. They should avoid talking apart with some of them lest they be distracted and general supervision suffer" (Common Rules of 1852, Part 3, Ch. 4, art. 9, p. 98).

5. He maintains class discipline, promoting the progress of the pupils and, consequently, the prosperity of the school.

However, there is no point in hiding the fact that supervision is a duty which can be carried out only at a great cost. To do it well, zeal, vigilance, perseverance, punctuality and constancy are required. These are virtues found only in those Brothers who have a strong spirit of mortification and of devotedness. They are Brothers who can sacrifice their own tastes and their comfort to promote the glory of God and the sanctification of the children."

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Views of Father Champagnat on the education of children.

To bring up a child involves more than teaching him to read and write, more than initiating him into the subjects which normally make up primary instruction. That teaching would be adequate for man, if he were meant only for this world; but he has quite a different destiny - he is made for heaven and God; and it is for these that he must be brought up. To educate a child, therefore, is to show him this high and sublime destiny and to give him the means to reach it; in a word, it is to form him into a good christian and a virtuous citizen.

In consequence of his original fall, man is born with the germ of all the vices as well as of all the virtues. He is a lily, but amongst thorns; 1 he is a vine, but needs to be pruned; 2 he is the field of the head of the household, in which he has sown good grain, but in which, his enemy has sown cockle. 3 The aim of education is to pluck out those thorns, to prune that vine, and to cultivate that field, weeding out the cockle.

In founding his Institute, Father Champagnat had more in mind than providing primary instruction for the children or even, than teaching them the truths of religion; he wanted to educate them, in the sense that we have just explained. "If it were only a question", he said, "of teaching the children secular studies, the Brothers would not be necessary, because secular masters could do that; if our only aim were to give religious instruction, we could confine ourselves to being simply catechists, bringing the children together for an hour each day and letting them to recite their christian doctrine. But, we aim at something better; we want to educate the children, that is, to instruct them in their duty, to teach them to practise it, to give them a christian spirit and christian attitudes and to form them to religious habits and the virtues possessed by a good christian and a good citizen. If we are to do these things, we must be teachers; we must live in the

1 Canticles 2, 2.

2 1s 5, 1-7.

3 Matt 13, 24-26.

midst of the children; and we must have them with us over a long period. "It was with a view to giving a more perfect education, that the Founder allowed the Brothers to receive boarders and that he wanted each school to have a playground attached to it. "If we were intent only on our own interest and tranquillity", he wrote to the mayor ⁴ of a district, «I should not ask you to provide a playground, for the garden gives adequate opportunity for the Brothers to take some fresh air; the playground affords them no advantage beyond that of making themselves useful to the children, by keeping them off the streets and by supervising them during recreation. It is only because we make a point of giving our pupils sound principles and of seeing that they don't frequent bad company that we ask for a place where they can take their recreation. ⁵" Since we have, in the course of our story, noted relevant aspects of the Founder's teaching on the education of the child, we shall simply add here, some of the sayings and views which we have not yet had occasion to record.

"Education is for the child", he asserted, "what cultivation is for the land; no matter how rich the soil is, if it remains untilled, it produces only thornbushes. Similarly, a child may have excellent dispositions, but if he does not receive education, he will have no virtue and his life will be devoid of good.

By tilling a field, we remove the useless plants, the weeds and the brambles; by cultivating the heart of a child, we do away with his vices and defects. It is a task that goes on for a long while and makes demands every day; a Brother should be untiring in correcting and weeding out, that is, he must make the children aware of their defects and inspire them to hate and destroy them, while arming them for the combat.

To form the heart, is to promote the growth of its good dispositions and to adorn it with virtue; this is done, by giving the children sound principles and filling them with a hatred of sin; by letting them know the attractiveness, the charm and the delights of virtue; and by leading them to practise it at every opportunity, for virtue is acquired only by acts.

As every perfect gift comes from above, ⁶ piety, is the shortest and most effective means of ridding the children of their defects

⁴ This letter is not in our possession.

⁵ Cf. OME, doc. 28 [11], p. 88.

⁶ Jas 1, 17.

and forming them to virtue. Now, if we want to make children truly pious, three things are essential:

1. We must make them understand the necessity and benefits of prayer and give them a distinct esteem for the exercises of piety.
2. We must take special care to see that the school prayers are said with attention, decorum and devotion. This point is capital.
3. They should engage in exercises of piety appropriate to their age and needs.

A good gardener weeds, cultivates, plants and waters; a Brother is committed to the same tasks: he weeds out or corrects the defects of the children by friendly admonition and by wise and prudent reproofs; he cultivates good dispositions; he sows sound principles in their hearts by his instructions, by his well prepared exhortations and his opportune words of advice; finally, he waters with fervent prayers.

Obedience is the foundation of all good education; it is the pivot on which the whole future of the child as a man and as a christian, revolves. Obedience is the virtue for the whole of life and for all circumstances of life. A person who doesn't know how to obey, is not only a bad christian, he is the scourge of society, whose survival hinges on dependence and on obedience to magistrates and laws. To secure obedience and to form this virtue in the children, a Brother carefully follows these rules:

1. He never commands or forbids what is unjust or unreasonable.
2. He avoids issuing too many commands or prohibitions at the same time, since this causes them to be forgotten, and unnecessary pressure foments ill-will.
3. He never commands what is too difficult or impossible; for nothing is more calculated to exasperate the children and make them stubborn and rebellious, than excessive demands.
4. He requires the complete performance of what he commands. To issue orders, impose class exercises and to prescribe penalties, without insisting on proper execution, encourages the child, to be disobedient; it weakens his will and accustoms him to disregard the orders and prohibitions he receives.

7 "Obedience is especially, the virtue which the children ought to practise." Letter of Fr Champagnat to Br Alphonsus, Nov. 3, 1833 (LPC 1, doc. 31, p. ~6).

To educate and form a child, one must establish a claim to his respect and obedience. Now, the claims which a child recognizes and understands best are virtue, good example, competence and the paternal feelings displayed towards him. Education is especially the fruit of good example. This is because virtue reinforces authority; because it is natural to man to imitate what he sees done; and because actions carry more power to convince and persuade than do words and instructions. A child takes in a lot more through the eyes than the ears; it is through watching his parents or masters work, that he learns the various skills and acquires a trade; likewise, it is especially through seeing good done and through receiving good example, that he learns to practise virtue and to live as a christian. A Brother, who is pious, regular, charitable, patient, devoted, courteous and faithful to all his duties, is constantly giving catechism classes. By his good example, and without even adverting to the fact, he instils into the children, piety, obedience, charity, love of work and all the christian virtues.

To educate children well, one must love them and love them all equally. We love them, if we dedicate ourselves entirely to their instruction and utilize every means suggested by an industrious zeal, to form them to virtue and piety.

In this love, we never forget that children are feeble creatures who need to be treated with kindness, charity and mercy; and that they need to be formed and instructed with perfect patience.

Our love leads us to bear uncomplainingly their defects, their indocility and even their ingratitude; to propose to ourselves, in the care that we bestow on them, only supernatural motives, such as the glory of God, the good of religion and the salvation of those tender children. Nothing is more opposed to that true and sincere love which we ought to have for the children, than unbecoming familiarity, partiality and particular friendships."

In his instructions on the delicate question of particular friendships, the Founder inveighed against them with great vigour; he declared that they were often a cause of ruin to both teacher and pupil.⁸ Indeed, three great evils result from them:

1. They spoil the character and all the moral faculties of the children who have the misfortune to be involved. Experience

8 "They will not talk to a child in private, no matter what the reason; they shall do so in the presence of one of the Brothers or at least four children" (Rules of 1837, Ch. 5, art. 22, p. 44).

shows us only too well, that children who are admired, flattered and praised in an immoderate and unreasonable way, become proud, secretive, headstrong, lazy, rude, intractable, selfish and, consequently, dissolute and thoroughly depraved.

2. They constitute for the teacher, one of the most dangerous snares of the devil and a source of the worst temptations. This fact caused the Founder to prophesy: "One who allows affections of this kind to take over his heart and does not combat them, places himself in extreme danger; before long, his situation will become so critical even, that he will be in the proximate occasion of sin and walking on the brink of the abyss." These words explain the great severity of the Founder towards faults of this kind; for he would not allow any Brother who had failed on this point to receive Holy Communion without first going to confession. What is more, he considered unsuitable for the Institute, those who showed a marked tendency for these friendships; he was known to delay the profession, even for several years, of subjects, though they were otherwise virtuous and talented, for the sole reason that they had shown some transitory weakness in this matter.

3. They are a source of bad spirit amongst the other pupils; for jealousy naturally opens their eyes to this partiality and leads them to believe that they are scorned and unjustly treated; the result is that they become angry, rebel, tend to despise the teacher and disobey him and sometimes even to suspect him and calumniate him.

Father Champagnat often pointed out to the Brothers, that one of the means most conducive to attract children to the school and to form them in virtue was to prepare the catechism class well and make their instructions congenial. He suggested a number of ways in which they could do this:

1. They should learn by heart or at least read over with great attention and reflection, the lessons that they have to explain.

2. They should pick out the most important points and those to which the children's attention needs especially to be directed.

3. They should foresee what follow-up questions will need to be asked on each of these points; linking up the questions in such a way that they make the truth clear and intelligible to the weakest students.

4. They should make liberal use of comparisons, parables, examples and historical incidents to reinforce the teaching and to gain the children's attention.

5. They should plan follow-up questions which are short, , clear, useful and simple.

6. They should insist on exact memorization of the catechism; that mastery will help the children considerably in understanding the explanations given and in remembering them.

7. They should unceasingly have a fourfold aim in teaching catechism: 1) to make Jesus Christ known and loved. 2) to reveal the loveliness, the charm and the benefits of virtue and the happiness of those who practise it; 3) to depict with equal clarity, the deformity and ugliness of vice and the evils and punishments it draws in its train; and to strive to inspire an extreme horror and strong fear, of sin. 4) to win the heart of the child, making him love religion and bringing him to discharge its duties out of love.

- 8. They should often put to themselves the following questions, as they prepare their catechism: Do I know sufficiently well myself, the work I intend to teach and explain? Do I understand well enough this lesson, this truth? Have I really absorbed it myself? How shall I go about conveying knowledge of it to the children and getting them to love it? How shall I lead their will to love what the truth commands and avoid what it forbids?

9. They should maintain a dignified demeanour while ensuring that their countenance conveys a gaiety, affability and tranquillity which betoken the great pleasure they have in speaking of God.

It was reported to Father Champagnat one day that a particular Brother did not teach catechism. He sent for him and asked him why. The Brother explained that the only reasons were his incompetence and the difficulty of teaching catechism properly.

"It is not difficult to do so", the Founder maintained, "for a Brother who is pious, who is zealous and who makes the preparation required by the Rule. The Brother catechist is not expected to engage in long explanations, to evoke lofty ideas, to pose difficult questions and, least of all, to deliver sermons. He should leave all this to the priests and limit himself to short, probing questions and a few simple, standard explanations.

Suppose, for example, that you are taking a catechism class on the mystery of the Redemption. You don't have to be a scholar to ask the children.

What are the principal sufferings of Our Lord in his Passion?

What is the cause of his sufferings and of his death?

Why did he suffer?

How did he suffer?

What feelings should the sufferings and death of Christ inspire in us?

Now, four or five questions like these, followed up by subsidiary ones and accompanied by a few words of exhortation to love Our Lord and hate sin, which is the cause of his sufferings, are enough to ensure the success of the catechism class.

It may be that you are to give a class on a commandment of God. Is it really difficult to ask what it lays down and what it forbids? To show the benefits of observing it and the evils we experience from transgressing it? To convey all that, and to reinforce it with comparisons and incidents from scripture or the lives of the saints?

Many a pious mother teaches catechism to her children in this way every day. It would be strange if the Brothers, who by their profession are bound to study religion, were not capable of doing as much. It is not by long discourses and impressive displays of learning that we instruct children and train them to virtue; it is by teaching them perfectly the words of the catechism, by engraving deeply on their minds the principal truths of religion, by giving them frequent reminders of the essential duties of a Christian, and by forming in them habits of practising those duties. Now, all this should be done with few words; but these words and the teaching attitude that goes with them, should make clear your deep conviction of what you say." Father Champagnat's guidance on teaching catechism, bore

abundant fruit; the first Brothers 9 were all distinguished by their zeal for the christian education of children and by a special skill in leading them along the path of virtue.

In one parish, a woman who had refused to send her children to the Brothers' school, alleging that the Brothers were too young, went one day to the parish priest and admitted: "Although the Brothers are not much more than children, I must confess that they teach catechism very well. The neighbour's child, who attends there, is already better informed on his religion than any of us mothers; he repeats the lesson to us of an evening and has the most wonderful things to tell us. I have made up my mind, therefore, to send off my three boys to the Brothers to-morrow."

In yet another parish, the curate, surprised at the enthusiasm with which the children reported to the Brothers on Sundays solely to attend catechism classes, remarked to his parish priest: "I don't understand what the Brothers say to those children; they keep them there for hours without any flagging of interest." "The Brothers teach catechism very well", he was told. «I am sure that it would do you good to hear them." The same parish priest, speaking to a Vicar General about the success of the school and the good being done by the Brothers, informed him: "The view of the people is that our children have changed; but the exterior improvement perceptible to everyone, is the least significant; you need to be parish priest and confessor to realize the amount of good the Brothers have achieved since coming here." Another factor, considered by the Founder as indispensable in drawing children to the school and making them virtuous, is discipline. He knew that there were those who delude themselves with the thought that discipline keeps children away from the school. He claimed, however, that the contrary is true; that all men have a love of good order and that disorder dissatisfies everyone, even children; that children are happy and at ease in

9 Especially Br Lawrence. In the Circular of July 3, 1851, Br Francis, announcing this Brother's death, related the following fact: "How many times Br Lawrence has approached us since his poor health confined him to the Mother-House, asking to go from village to village, teaching catechism and begging for his bread!" (CSG, VII, p. 71) and (AFM, Letter of Br Lawrence). The author of this book, Br John-Baptist, sent as Director and cook to the school at Bouillargues in 1842, at a time when he was Assistant General, taught catechism each day to the great admiration of parishioners and parish priest. The latter insisted on listening from inside a confessional. (Cf. Nos Supérieurs, pp. 29, 30. Economat Général des Frères Maristes, Saint-Genis-Laval, 1953).

a disciplined school; and that they suffer, and dislike study in a class that is out of control.

"Lack of discipline in a school", he maintained, "can be compared to the predominant passion in men. It is the source of all the faults committed there. The defects most harmful to a master and most likely to undermine his authority and the discipline of the school, are: an uncontrollable urge to talk, distinction, excessive familiarity, discouragement and inconstancy.

Authority is too weak when it is unable to command respect in monitors and in those whom the master appoints to take his place; it is likewise too weak when it cannot survive in his absence. Hence, whenever you notice that order and discipline waver or disappear as soon as the master is not present, it is a sign that he has no moral authority over the pupils and keeps them in check only by physical force. In a class of that kind, education is impossible and the master is a glorified policeman.

Punishments and rewards help to maintain discipline only if they are used with moderation and great wisdom. There should also be an attempt to vary the penances and to grade them, beginning with the lightest; severe ones should be resorted to only rarely and for serious faults. The same applies to rewards: the children should be led to desire them and expected to merit them; they should be meted out intelligently and with fairness.

A penance should never involve something which, in itself, ought to be dear to the children and held in respect by them. This would be true of praying, serving Mass, doing someone a service, etc. Nor should a penance consist of attendance at a catechism class, copying out prayers, or learning them by heart; there would be the risk of inspiring the children with an aversion for things which they ought to cherish and love.

Emulation, rewards and punishments are only aids to make the children active, studious and docile. If this aim is to be achieved efficaciously, the child must be preserved from evil and maintained in innocence. In order to keep children innocent, it is important to imbue them thoroughly with these two rules of conduct:

- God sees always and everywhere.
- One should never do alone, what one would not dare do in company and what one would be embarrassed to admit to parents or Superiors.

It should also be remembered that to bring up children well, we must have an ardent love of Jesus Christ. That is the lesson Christ wanted to teach us when he asked St Peter three times

whether he loved him, before giving him the responsibility of looking after his Church. 10 Our Lord, who summed up all the commandments in love of God and love of neighbour, Il likewise reduces all the virtues of pas tors of souls, of Superiors and of anyone responsible for others, to the virtue of charity; because, everything that they need, to carry out their functions worthily, depends on that virtue as a principle and source. In fact, my dear Brothers, love Jesus, and you will have all the virtues and good qualities of a perfect teacher.

Humility is the hallmark of a true Little Brother of Mary, and ought to be his chosen virtue; charity is humble and does not swell with pride. 12

Gentleness should be your element as teachers and should accompany all your virtues so that you can win the hearts of children; charity is gentle, kindly and compassionate.

You need patience to bear with the defects of your children and all the difficulties inherent in your holy state; charity is patient and puts up with everything, never taking offence or becoming embittered.

Prudence and wisdom are indispensable virtues in those who must guide others and educate children; charity is neither rash nor hast y and never fails to act with considerateness.

You are required to be at all times kind, polite and affable in dealing with the children and with everybody else; charity is not scornful, it is completely tolerant and becomes inured to everything.

There is need of a great spirit of disinterestedness, of zeal, of generosity and of self-denial, since you are to spend your life in the midst of children and sacrifice your whole existence to their education; charity is generous; it is stronger than death; it doesn't seek its own interests; it seeks only 13 to procure the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

The Brother who truly loves Jesus, is therefore humble, gentle, compassionate, patient, prudent, generous, firm, zealous and polite; in a word, he has all the virtues; and charity which unites him , to God, in assuring him of grace and divine protection, makes him all powerful and capable of fulfilling any task.

10 Jn 21, 15-17. 11 Matt 22, 40.

12 1 Cor 13, 14-17.

13 1 Cor 13, 4-8; Rom 12, 9; 13, 10.

One more matter merits your close attention, that is, Christ's instruction to St Peter: 'Feed my sheep. 141 Why my sheep and not your sheep?

1. Christ is teaching us that we should seek the glory of God and not our own; that we should pursue the interests of Christ and of religion and not be bent on our advantages.

2. He is encouraging us to respect the children and treat them invariably with kindness, justice and charity. If these children were sons of princes or of kings, what care you would lavish on their instruction and upbringing! What a close watch you would keep on yourself, in order to be worthy of your mission, to win the esteem and affection of your pupils, to be affable to them and to avoid anything which might offend or trouble them! Your children are much more than sons of kings, they are sons of God, brothers and members of Jesus Christ; and never forget that Christ, who is truth itself, assures us that he regards as done to himself, 15 all the good or evil that you do to them."

Let us conclude this chapter with a few reflections from the Founder on the excellence of zeal for the sanctification of children. "Zeal", he explained, "is a virtue that is prolific in fruits of graces and blessings; it is a treasury and inexhaustible source of all sorts of benefits. For a Brother, zeal is the philosopher's stone, it works like alchemy, turning all zeal's actions into gold. You teach grammar, arithmetic, geography and drawing to your children so as to keep them busy and shield them from the occasions of offending God; you use all those subjects to attract them to the school, to win their esteem and to form them more easily to virtue.

Well, all your studies and every one of the lessons you give in reading, writing, grammar, arithmetic and the rest, will be counted for eternity; each of them is reckoned as an act of virtue. The zeal that you have for leading children to God, will have transformed into gold, that is, into acts of virtue, your most ordinary actions and all your classroom performance. Oh! what a mighty difference there is between a Brother who teaches as an apostle out of a spirit of zeal, and one who does so simply as a school master carrying out a profession. All the words and all the actions of the former are vivified by charity and are works of zeal; in the case of the latter, they are dead works.

The education of youth is not just a profession - it is a religious ministry and genuine apostolate. Those Brothers who say

14 Jn 31, 17.

15 Matt 25, 40.

that teaching is a difficult occupation are greatly mistaken and have a very secular approach to a work which is very meritorious and pleasing to God. If they had the spirit of their state and understood the excellence of their vocation, they would say instead: 'To educate children is a work of zeal, of devotedness and sacrifice.' To carry out this employment worthily, since it is a participation in the mission of Jesus Christ, one must have the spirit of the divine Saviour and, like him, be ready to give one's blood and one's life for the children.

A zealous Brother is a man extremely dear to Our Lord; the Saviour loves him as the apple of his eye; he regards him as his associate and co-operator in the sanctification of children.

Zeal draws down abundant graces on a Brother and a particular protection from God in all the temptations and dangers in which he may find himself. You further the interests of Christ by teaching the children catechism and leading them to virtue; he, in turn, will look after your interests. You fight in the cause of Jesus, by supervising the children, by correcting their defects and enabling them to avoid sin; he will fight on your side, and it is befitting his own glory to sustain you in your temptations and to grant you total victory over your enemies. I know several Brothers, who have won a complete victory over the most terrible temptations, because they were dedicated catechists and promised Jesus to teach the children to pray and to prepare them carefully for First Communion.

The Brother who has been zealous, will feel great consolation at the hour of death. There are three kinds of people who don't have to fear death: those who love Jesus ardently; those who work for the glory of Jesus; and those who suffer for Jesus. Now, a Brother who has zeal, does all these things. He loves Jesus; he has left everything to serve him and to win the children to him; and he suffers greatly in his ministry as catechist, a ministry so noble, so honourable but also so difficult. Oh, how well will a Brother, like that, be received by Jesus at the hour of death.

What 'joy, what happiness he will experience when the divine Saviour shows him all the acts of virtue he has practised in class, all the prayers that he has taught, all the instructions he has given, all the good advice he has imparted and all the children whom he has instructed, formed and prepared, for First Communion.

What joy and happiness will be his when the divine Saviour lets him know all the sins that he has prevented and says to him: 'Come blessed of my Father, come share my happiness! 16 You

16 Matt 25, 34.

have spent your life in harvesting the fruits of my Blood, in making me known and in inspiring children to bless me. Come, receive the crown of your glory and enter forever into the joy of your Lord and God. 17' Zeal is a source of prosperity for a house. We are told in Holy Scripture that God blessed the midwives of Egypt and showered down prosperity on their houses because they had saved the Hebrew children 18 from death. If God gave such graces to these pagan women, for having saved the bodily life of the children of his people, what blessings will he not accord a Brother, who labours to preserve the children's souls from eternal death. An establishment governed by a zealous Brother, is an establishment founded on a rock. 19 God will protect it; defend it and bless it, giving it an ever-increasing prosperity. Zeal is a magnet which attracts children and gives them affection for the school. If your catechism classes are well done, if you teach the prayers carefully, if you form the pupils to virtue, if you keep them out of bad company and lead them to avoid sin, the angels will bring children to you; God himself will do so. He will see to it that the hearts of those children are drawn to you by a secret power and that in spite of their parents and of anything the wicked can do to keep them away from you, they will come to your school."

17 Matt 25, 21.

18 Exod 1, 17-20.

19 Matt 7, 24.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

His constancy in doing good and in all his undertakings.

It is the teaching of St Thomas that one of the greatest signs which we can have of our predestination, is constancy ¹ in our good resolutions, in carrying out the works undertaken for the glory of God and, especially, in the vocation that we have embraced. This view expressed by the Angel of the Thomistic School, is based on those words of Jesus Christ: "He who perseveres to the end, will be saved; ²" and on those others: "He who puts his hand to the plough and looks back, is not fit for the kingdom of heaven. ³" One of the most outstanding features of Father Champagnat's life, is the generosity and constancy of his practice of virtue. He was constant in everything and everywhere, in little things as in great. He was constant in prayer, giving himself to that holy exercise, with admirable fervour and assiduity in spite of the difficulties and tasks that filled his life. He was constantly working on the correction of his defects, on mortifying his nature, subjecting it to the spirit and combating in it whatever might be opposed to the operations of grace or might tarnish the purity of his soul. He was constant in bearing, with complete resignation, the contradictions and persecutions of men, as well as the sickness, afflictions, adversities and the many troubles inseparable from directing ⁴ a numerous community. He was constant in his devotion to the Blessed Virgin and in his tender love of Our Lord,

¹ "Constancy has therefore the same goal as perseverance and the same difficulty as patience. But as the end is more important, it is to perseverance rather than it pertains" (St Thomas, Summa 1^a 2^a 2^e, q. 137, a. 3).

² Matt 10, 22; 24, 13.

³ Lk 9, 62.

⁴ Fr Champagnat remarked one day: "I could have led a peaceful life in a small parish instead of being continually weighed down by the government of this Society; but the glory of God and the salvation of souls demand this work of me. I could, likewise, have lived at peace, working away, instead of enduring the numerous troubles, cares and travels involved in the government and direction of the Brothers; but this is what God wants, and I am happy" (In the Carnet No 8 of Br Francis, p. 77).

both of which kept growing till his death. He was constant in his vocation, striving relentlessly to be faithful to it and to devote himself completely to what it demanded of him. He was constant in seeing through, the works he had undertaken for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, even though human means and resources were often lacking and difficulties of all kind loomed in his path.

"Were the whole world against me", he sometimes asserted, «I should not flinch. It is enough for me that God will the matter and that my Superiors approve it; then the contradictions of men and difficulties are of no importance; I take no notice of them. If we had to come to a halt every time human means failed or any other obstacle barred the way, nothing would ever be done. The devil is essentially the enemy of good, so we cannot hope to undertake a worthy enterprise without his opposition and total effort to hinder its success, and without his arousing against it, all the passions of men. We insult God, if we take fright in these circumstances and let ourselves be discouraged by the obstacles we meet. At the same time, we fail to appreciate the true character of his works, which is to be marked by the sign of the Cross, and we betray the interests of religion, by a cowardly concession of victory to the devil."

This constancy and steadfastness of the Founder were the salvation of several establishments, which the wicked had vowed to destroy. In an effort to get rid of the Brothers, it happened several times in certain localities, that they were blamed, slandered and persecuted; their stipend was even cut off and all sorts of measures taken to prevent the children from attending their schools. But all these efforts of hell were futile; the perseverance and patience of the Founder gave him victory in every one of these trials. He never yielded an inch to the enemy and chose to provide for the upkeep of the persecuted Brothers at the community expense, rather than give up the schools. ⁵ This disinterested conduct won him the confidence of upright people and drew a large number of requests for openings. They liked to place their schools in the hands of a man who was capable of such sacrifices to safeguard the works entrusted to him by charity.

There was, however, not the slightest rashness or obstinacy in the constancy and tenacity which he brought to the execution of his plans and "to the preservation of the schools he had founded. If he did not take fright at the sight of obstacles or recoil before

⁵ This was particularly so for Feurs (LPC 1, doc. 21, p. 64).

difficulties, he prudently avoided creating any. He did what good he could, with the resources that he had; counting on Providence for the future, he was satisfied to attend to the necessities of the present. That is why the house at the Hermitage, having been built in sections and as need arose, lacks harmony and regularity of structure.

"If the cause of religion is to triumph during persecutions, and if the opposition of the wicked to the works of God is to be frustrated", contended Father Champagnat, "two means are supremely efficacious. The first is to gain time. There is a proverb which says: 'He who gains one day, gains a hundred.' Now, during the time gained, the state of affairs may change for a thousand reasons. A death, a switch of administration or a commonplace happening, can free you from the most dreadful adversaries or change their attitude towards you, turning them into your friends and protectors.

The second means, is to provide passive resistance by the exercise of patience, that is, by bearing the persecution and maltreatment of the wicked without murmuring or complaining or reacting to their attacks and slanderous accusations. ⁷ It often happens, indeed, that in attempting to make a defence, one stirs up passions, arouses hatred and embitters minds; in that way, the fire of persecution is not only maintained but is even intensified; by contrast, the fire can be put out, if its fuel is removed. When you are persecuted, follow St Paul's advice: 'Bless those who curse you, pray for those who persecute and calumniate you, returning them good for evil.'⁸ Imitate the first christians: ⁹ conceal yourselves within the interior of your houses; keep your dealings with outsiders to an indispensable minimum; remain in unity with God, intensify your zeal for the education of your children; and work unostentatiously, avoiding any action which could focus public attention on you.

By these wise precautions and this humble, christian conduct, you will conquer all your enemies; and the storm, with all its

⁶ Thus, in the wake of the 1830 Revolution (RLF, p. 82) the District Council and the Council General of the Loire were opposed to Fr Champagnat and his Brothers who seemed, in their eyes, friendly to those who had been overthrown. But from 1833, and especially in 1835 (RLF, p. 121), those two Councils declare themselves unanimously in favour of the Marist Brothers.

⁷ The life of Br Cassian furnishes a particularly striking example of heroic humility in the face of maltreatment (BQF, p. 167).

⁸ Rom 12, 14 and 21.

⁹ Acts 2, 46.

savagery, will pass without crushing you, and without carrying off a single hair of your head. 10"

He wanted the Brothers to behave similarly when they were in competition with other teachers. "In those cases", he warned, "beware of imitating your opponent; let him seek the limelight; let him devise all sorts of means, and make a thousand promises, to attract the children to his school. Your tactic should be to adhere ever more faithfully to your Rule and to your prescribed teaching method; change nothing in your way of doing things; be satisfied to redouble your zeal and devotedness for training your children to piety and advancing them in the essential elements of primary instruction. If you follow this line, of action, you will retain your pupils and have the advantage over your competitors; and, what is much more valuable, you will preserve the spirit of your state, you will edify the parish and draw down on yourselves God's blessing.

On the other hand, the rivalry will only be perpetuated, if there is an open struggle and you give certain les sons simply because your competitor does, if you adapt your programme in order to match his; for self-love then becomes a factor in the situation and no one is willing to yield. It is especially on such occasions that we need to remember that we are engaged in the work of God and that success in these works is achieved chiefly from means supplied by religion.

These include: piety, fidelity to all the duties of one's state, good example, the practice of christian virtue and zeal for the perfection and sanctification of children. If we fight with arms like that, arms which the world does not know, we can be assured of victory; if we spurn such arms, preferring human means, we prolong the combat and prepare the way for the triumph of our adversary." .

If Father Champagnat had to call on generosity and constancy to achieve the success of the Brothers' foundation, he had to do so almost as much in order to preserve the work launched by the Marist Fathers in the diocese of Lyon. He left no stone unturned in seeking the support of ecclesial Superiors and of fellow priests, to further this cause. Many a letter was written, and many a long and painful journey undertaken, to achieve this end. We can see from his letters to Father Colin, that no sacrifice was too costly for him and that the latter was often obliged to moderate

10 Lk 21, 18.

Marcellin's zeal. 11 From the moment that the plan for the Marist Society was drawn up, in the Major Seminary, he devoted himself to it wholeheartedly and promised God to work all his life for the implementation of all the elements of that plan. One of his greatest regrets, and he said as much several times, would have been to die before the Constitution of that Society was finalized, and without pronouncing his vows. Accordingly, on the very day when he received news of the Holy See's approbation of the Marist Institute, he wrote to Father Colin, asking to make profession.

Generosity, devotedness and constancy were virtues that permeated his whole life and one of his great sayings was: When you give yourself to God, you should do so for good and all, without reservation and with total sincerity. "Woe", he added, "to those who long for the onions of Egypt; they are not fit for the promised land of religion. To bargain with God, to indulge in endless examination before committing oneself to his service, to make only a partial gift of oneself, holding something back - all this is a proof that one is ignorant of God's greatness, of the excellence of the religious life, of the beauty of virtue, of the price of salvation and of the happiness of heaven; all this, shows a mistrust of God and is an insult to him; it leads one to lay a snare for one self and to risk, sooner or later, being trapped in the toils of the devil. Do you want a proof? Ask those who have lost their vocation; ask them what was the basis of the temptation which led them into the world; most of them will tell you that they were lost because, on entry into religious life, they gave themselves to God with some reservation; they placed conditions on their promises; they had some ulterior motive; they left some door open for a return to the world; and the devil took advantage of that door to enter their heart and take possession of it."

According to Father Champagnat, inconstancy was a proof of unsuitability for the religious life. When examining postulants, if he discovered that any of them had tried several callings, it was

11 Fr Colin wrote to Fr Champagnat: [2] I am more than ever attached to the project in honour of the Blessed Virgin. The current situation only reinforces my confidence and courage; but I'm not sure that the assembly which you call for would be prudent. I know that the election of a central control is necessary to this holy undertaking; I long for it as much as you, but I doubt the prudence of having large numbers travel at this time... [3] Moreover, if we assemble, even for a few days, without the consent of our Superiors, they will take umbrage... [4] Let us have patience and work hard to form ourselves. I shall be happy to see your numbers increase... (OME, doc. 84, p. 175).

reason enough for him to reject them. "What kind of work have you done?" he asked one young man who was very keen to be received into the novitiate. "I have done different kinds", was the reply, and he immediately named three or four. "You should go and try a fifth", the Founder advised, "for you are too inconstant to suit us. To become a Religious, you must be able to settle down and you don't seem to have sufficient stability of character for that."

Another postulant had just been told to withdraw, after spending a few months in the novitiate. One of the senior Brothers, seeing him in tears, took pity on him and went to intercede on his behalf. "Brother", the Founder said to him, "this young man does not deserve any reprieve and, in any case, it would be no use to him. He belongs to that group, referred to by the Holy Spirit in Ecclesiasticus, 12 when he says: 'A fool is changed as the moon.' Such people are little suited to virtue, which calls for a steadfast character and a strong will. Still less do they fit our mode of life in which patience and constancy are so necessary, whether for fidelity to the Rule or for the education of the children.'

A young man 13 presented himself to be received into the Institute, but the Founder was inclined to suspect that his upbringing had been too soft and that there was reason to fear that the rigours of community life might be too much for him. Therefore, having painted him a picture of its painful aspects, he went on: "Take stock of your strength; have a careful look to see if you can cope with such sacrifices; it is my opinion that you cannot and that a life of this kind is too hard for you." The young man thought for a while and then made this reply: "I admit that nature would find this life burdensome; yet two things lead me to believe that I shall get used to it, and urge me to remain in your Institute, if you are willing to receive me. The first, is that I am capable of doing, with the help of God's grace, what so many others do. You have a number of postulants here, younger than I am; if they can follow your Rule, I should also be able to do so. The second, is that it is more than three years since I decided to become a Religious. During this time, I have asked that grace from the Blessed Virgin and I have persevered in my resolution,

12 Sir 27, 12.

13 The reference is to Jean-Baptiste Grimaud (Br Attale) whose well-to do parents opposed his entry into Religion for a long while (BQF, pp. 364, 365).

although my parents have done their utmost to make me change my mind." .

Delighted with this answer, the Founder assured him with deep emotion: "Yes, my friend, you are suited to the religious life; your perseverance in prayer and in your resolution, are a certain proof of the fact. Constancy is an excellent quality; look after it carefully, for it will strengthen your vocation and make a holy Religious of you."

One day Father Champagnat found a Brother's Office Book on the table. He opened it and read these words written on the first page: "With the intention of asking Mary's intercession, for the grace of perseverance, I vow to say an Ave Maria, every day of my life:" He then commented to the owner of the book: "It is an excellent practice to ask for perseverance through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, and you should do so every day. However, you should not have committed yourself by vow to recite that Ave Maria, because it is not right for a religious to make a vow without permission. Perseverance in practising a virtue guarantees us the possession of that virtue; perseverance in asking for a grace is a pledge that it will be granted. I am full of praise for your perseverance in asking the Blessed Virgin for the grace of salvation and I promise you that she, your divine Mother, will obtain it for you, if you are constant in your request; but I do criticize you for imprudently making a vow and urge you never to make a similar one without permission."

We shall conclude the life of our venerated Father by summarizing an impressive instruction which he gave to the Brothers on the subject of constancy, while explaining the gospel for the second Sunday of Advent. "Constancy", he reminded them, "is a virtue that is absolutely necessary to a christian to save his soul, and even more to a Religious to persevere in his vocation and acquire the perfection of his state. Our Lord's conduct in today's gospel is a convincing proof of this truth. The divine Master pronounces a magnificent eulogy of St John Baptist and before the assembled crowd, declares him to be the greatest of the children of men. 14

Now, what is it that he particularly praises in the holy Precursor? Is it his innocence, which was such that he probably never in his life committed even a single, fully deliberate venial sin? No. Is it his humility, which was so profound that he

14 Lk 7, 28.

considered himself unworthy to untie the straps of Christ's shoes?
15 No. The divine Saviour does not mention humility in his praise of St John. Is it his love of chastity, which led him to reprimand Herod fearlessly for his criminal behaviour? No. In this case; Jesus does not extol the virtue of chastity, however grand and sublime this virtue may be; all his praise is for the constancy of the holy Precursor.

To draw attention to the invincible firmness of St John, Our Lord questions those who surround him, and asks: 'What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 161 No; such a fickle and frivolous character, would not have been so great a spur to your curiosity and admiration. But, what did you go out to see? You went to see a man who is constant in the practice of the rarest and most heroic virtues; a man who never wavers in fulfilling the mission entrusted to him by God; who perseveres in the vocation and austere mode of life that he has embraced;

who is steadfast in serving God, in edifying his neighbour, in reproving and correcting sinners and in supporting with unalterable patience and perfect resignation, the persecutions of the wicked: such is the man you went to see.

But why is Our Lord so lavish in his praise of constancy? Because, in some way, this virtue includes all the others and because the others are worthless without it. The important thing, according to St Augustine, 17 is not to begin well but to finish well, for we have Christ's assurance that only the one who perseveres to the end will be saved. 18 Besides, this virtue has to be practised every day and at every instant. In fact, the life of a christian and still more that of a Religious, is a continual combat. To correct our defects, to practise virtue and to save our souls, we must do ourselves constant violence 19 and struggle against all that surrounds us. We must struggle, for example:

1. Against ourselves, against our passions and our evil tendencies and against all our senses in order to maintain them in restraint and subjection.

15 In 1, 27. 16 Lk 7, 24.

17" 'Whoever perseveres to the end, will be saved.' (Matt. 24, 12). The prophet is prepared for a tireless perseverance, but he has seen that life goes on and on, and he has asked God, who commanded him to persevere, to perfect his perseverance" (St Augustine, Ps 134, 11).

18 Matt 10, 22; 24, 13.

19 Matt 11, 12.

2. Against the devil, that roaring lion who never sleeps, who is ceaselessly on the prowl to devour us; 20 against that seducer of the children of God, 21 that angel of darkness who transforms himself into an angel of light 22 so as to hide his snares 'and catch us more easily in his toils.

3. Against the world and its vanities, its maxims and its scandals; against the bad example of those of our confreres who neglect their duty and the prescriptions of the Rule; against relatives and friends so that we may not be motivated by considerations of flesh and blood, 23 and may love them only in and for God; against those who make themselves our enemies, rendering them good in exchange for evil and, in this way, as the Apostle says, heaping coals of fire upon their heads.

4. Against all the creatures and objects around us, so that our hearts may not be attached to them and that, instead, we may use them simply as means to go to God and to work out our salvation. 24

5. Finally, we should struggle, with a holy violence, against God himself; we do this by our fervent prayers, by supporting with patience and resignation, the worries, dislikes, aridity, temptations and all the trials to which Providence may choose to subject us.

Now, only unshakable firmness and unflagging constancy can sustain us in such a violent and enduring struggle. It is too much for the inconstant, the faint-hearted and the cowardly; that is why they are in great danger of being lost, and it is to them that Our Lord is speaking in these frightening words: 'Those who put their hands to the plough and look back, that is, those who are inconstant, are not fit for the kingdom of Heaven. 25"

FOR THE GLORY OF GOD ALONE!

20 1 Pet 5, 8.

21 Rev 20, 7-10; 19, 20.

222 Cor 11, 14.

23 Jn 1, 13.

24 Rom 12, 20.

25 Lk 9, 62.

CHRONOLOGICAL INDEX

1789	20th May. Birth of Marcellin Champagnat.
1803	His call to the priesthood.
1805	Entry into the Seminary of Verrières.
1813	Entry into the Major Seminary of Lyon.
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1816	22nd July. Ordination to the priesthood by
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1816	16th August. Curate at La Valla.
1817	2nd January. Foundation of the Institute.
1824	Construction of the Hermitage.
1825	The month of May. The community moves to
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1829	The costume of the Brothers takes a definite
form.	
1830	Steps taken in Paris for the legal recognition of
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1835	Contacts with Father Mazelier.
1836	29th April. Recognition by Rome of the Society
of Mary.	
1836	24th December. Departure of the first
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1837	Printing of the Rules.
1839	Illness of Father Champagnat.
1839	12th October. Election of Brother Francis.
1840	6th June, Saturday. Death-of Father
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1851	20th June. Legal recognition of the Institute in
France.	
1856	Publication of the Life of J.B.M. Champagnat.
1888	The Diocesan Procedure for Beatification of the
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1889	Exhumation of the remains of Father
Champagnat.	
1896	28th July. Father Champagnat is declared
"Venerable".	
1897	Procedure begun by the Apostolic See.
1903	The Founder's remains were hidden in the
hamlet of Maisonnnettes.	
1920	11th July. Decree on the Heroicity of the
Virtues of M. Champagnat.	

PART TWO - 24

1920	1st December. The remains of Father Champagnat are brought back to the Hermitage.
1955	29th May. Beatification of Blessed Marcellin Champagnat.