

JEAN BAPTISTE

CHAPTER I

THE VOCATION OF JEAN BAPTISTE

"You may read, Jean," said Mademoiselle Angers; whereupon a breath of renewed interest passed through the schoolroom, as Jean Baptiste Giroux rose in his place and began to read, in a clear and resonant voice, the story of that other Jean Baptiste, his patron saint.

"Saint John, dwelling alone in the wilderness beyond the Dead Sea, prepared himself by self discipline and by constant communion with God, for the wonderful office to which he had been divinely called. The very appearance of the holy Baptist was of itself a lesson to his countrymen. His dress was that of the old prophets—a garment of camel's hair attached to his body by a leathern girdle. His food was such as the desert afforded—locusts and wild honey. Because of his exalted sanctity a great multitude came to him from every quarter. Brief and startling was his final exhortation to them: 'Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.'"

It was a simple and oft-repeated story, but there was something in the voice and manner of Jean that compelled attention. All the children listened; also the teacher; and the visitor, M. Paradis, curé of the parish, was visibly impressed. He brought his horn-