

THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS--AN ORDER OF SCHOOL-MASTERS.

From a late number of *Merry England*
VII.

The servant of God was as a man dead to all things, a man in whom nature no longer dared to show itself, nor put forward the least claim, a man whose life was wholly supernatural, celestial dyeme, who thought, spoke, and acted as if he had been of a higher nature, a man to whom virtue had become his natural element, whose life was God, whose soul and centre was Jesus Christ. In prayer he looked like an angel, at the altar like a seraph, in his conduct he was truly an Apostolic man, in tribulation he was another Job, in poverty a Tobias, in abandonment to Providence a Francis of Assisi, in the rigours of penance a second Abbe de Rance, in the practice of obedience a new Dositheus, in the exercise of every virtue a perfect disciple of Jesus Christ. Such was Venerable de la Salle, such is his true portrait.

Until 1734 the body remained in its first resting place, when it was exhumed and placed in the church Brothers had built at their house at St. Yon. In 1793 a revolution mob broke open the tomb, but left the remains almost intact. They were again exhumed when the Cause of Canonisation was begun, and finally, in 1881, they were removed to the chapel of the Brothers boarding school at Rouen, where they will remain until the final Canonisation.

Between the date of the death of its Founder and 1873 the Institute had nine Superiors. During the administration of the first, it was sustained, during the administration of the second, it was extended over France, and recognized by the throne and the Papacy; during the administration of the third, it was continued; during that of the fourth, its educational scope was enlarged, its administrative system improved; during that of the fifth, it was cut down; under the provisional rule of a Vicar General it revived; during the administration of the sixth Superior, it fought the Government and triumphed, it was centralised at Paris; during the administration of the seventh, it developed quietly; during that of the eighth, it again widened its educational scope; during that of the ninth, it once more withstood the Government, spread over Europe, into Asia, Africa, and the New World, weathered the Commune, and was transmitted in flourishing condition to our own day. In the course of this period it originated the principle of the boarding school, the commercial and technical school, the free library, and the evening school. Such is the skeleton of the Brothers' history in modern times.

On Brother Bartholomew, who had been appointed Superior during the Founder's life, fell the sole responsibility of the Institute after his death. He seems to have been a kindly, gentle soul, with no very conspicuous administrative qualities, or, for that matter, defects; under whom the Institute remained stationary. His chief title to remembrance is that he guarded it against Jansenism; and his death, after a rule of only fourteen months, transferred the Superiorship to Brother Timothy. The new Superior proved a very able administrator. His first achievement was to obtain from Louis XV. the official recognition of the Congregation; and this was followed by recognition from the Holy See. The Bull of January 26th, 1725, included the Institute among the Religious Congregations, and approved its Rule. After these recognitions the Institute extended its network all over France. Between 1728 and 1751 no fewer than seventy-two fresh foundations were made in various parts of the kingdom. Brother Claude, the next Superior, had an uneventful rule of sixteen years, and his successor, Brother Florence, distinguished himself principally by removing the Institute to Paris, and dividing it into three Provinces. When, in 1777, he was followed by Brother Agathon, that Revolution was approaching amidst which the whole eighteenth century, rotten artificial structure that it was, may be said to have crushed into flames. With the old order which then yielded place to new, the Brothers of the Christian Schools neither disappeared nor changed; and the better to appreciate this, let us here note something of what they had accomplished when the age was nearing its impenitent end.

To the primary schools, for which the Institute was founded, had been added boarding schools. To the boarding school, indeed, the Brothers gave a larger and more intelligent form. They had simply invented technical education, which we are nowadays acclaiming as if it were a new discovery. At Bordeaux, for instance, in 1741, they had opened a commercial school for teaching everything connected with trade. At Vaunes the Brothers taught mathematics and hydrography, trained sailors in navigation, and gave special instruction to pilots. At Calors they taught architecture and planimetry; at Castres practical geometry, surveying, and double-entry book-keeping; at Cherbourg horticulture and gardening. At Paris they opened a drawing class for children destined to professions requiring skill in design. All this in an age when classical study was as tyrannical as it is now in danger of being neglected. They published school books of a practical and unpedantic kind; indeed, at Montauban they established a free circulating library of school books. This is the first assertion of that principle which has developed into the Free Library movement of our own day. As regards their methods: they insisted on the importance of combining mere instruction with training, observed the rule of moder-

ate work and avoidance of overstudy, and relied for the preservation of discipline as much as possible upon persuasion and kindness. Blessed de la Salle had wished to minimise the use of the rod and the ferula, his successors had carefully restricted and regulated it, finally in 1777, corporal punishment was abolished in the Christian Schools. We have not quite managed that yet, even in these days of humanism, the days which have seen a Don Bosco. But that of it then, in a century when flogging was almost a branch of professional learning, when Sir Roger spoke with bated breath of the great one who had flogged his grandfather, and the Bally Bowyer was always superstitiously revered by the "inspired charity boy" whom he had so often thrashed! They instituted also public examinations before the distribution of prizes. At these examinations, which began in the first year of Brother Florence's superiorship, the children were questioned by priests in religious knowledge and by laymen on secular subjects. Here we see anticipated the modern system of lay ecclesiastical inspection, and the effect is described as excellent. I finish this review of the Institute on the eve of the Revolution, numbered, in 1778, 760 masters, under whom were 114 houses, 14 classes, and 31,000 children. Brother Agathon, the new Superior, was obliged to double his assistants to four, and added to the six students at Rouen three others, of which the one at Angers is first in the illustration.

The Revolution began. The mob rushed to the Bastille, and the history; the Minister rushed to the King, and made a phrase as he hurried, we English might, perhaps, have made the history could hardly have made the phrase. George III. under such circumstances would probably have said "Eh, what? What? What?" The Minister have replied "Deuced awkward business, Sir!" and there an end. But across the Channel actors in great historical events always say the dramatically right thing at the dramatically right moment, even if someone has to invent it for them afterwards. That *Thou, France!* all the men and women are indeed players in a play to a circle of nations, and make their points with unflinchingness. So the revolt which was more than a revolt began, and it should the Brothers of the Christian Schools need to fear from. We needed the free educators of the people to fear from the champions of freedom and the people. The precursors of the Revolution had shown the Institute why it had to fear. Voltaire, the Apostle of Equality and Fraternity who sard of the people. "They are like oxen they only need a spur, a yoke, and some hay"—Voltaire and his disciples had aroused public prejudice against popular education. Chalotais, *procureur general* to the Parliament of Rennes, friend of D'Alembert, and author of the notorious *Compte-rendu des constitutions des Jésuites*—La Chalotais distinguished the Institute by his enmity. "Men," said he, "who are only intended to handle the plane and file ought not to be taught to read and write. The brothers by giving them education, are ruining everything." De Langourla, another *doctrinaire* at Rennes, had exclaimed: "We must, as I said to the King, hunt out those *ignorantins*, those Brothers with the long sleeves, to Jesus rebukes in the person of the Pharisees; for the rascals teach people to handle the pen, which is such a dangerous weapon in certain hands." And on similar grounds had a magistrate of Arles opposed their foundation there. "If once the Brothers begin to teach reading and writing gratuitously, all the inhabitants will send their children to them; and these children, instead of being accustomed to hard work from their tender years will grow up unfit for it." Has not this strangely familiar sound? By such arguments has popular education been opposed in our own day. With such arguments it was then opposed by the preachers of equality, when the educators happened to be Christian Religious.

Yet the Revolution, when it broke out, did not at once proceed to attack the Christian Schools. The new authorities lacked seen schoolmasters, and accordingly houses charged with public education were at first exempted from the decrees against the Religious Order.

But in March 1791, professors engaged in public education functions were required to take the civil oath; which, of course, the Brothers were bound in conscience to refuse. At Rennes they were consequently thrown into prison; while in many places the mob rose against them, and the schools were taken from them. At other places the popular feeling protected them. "Without the Brothers," said the Municipality of Chartres, "what will become of the children of the poor? Who will teach them?" They pleaded that they were not public functionaries; but in August, 1792, a decree of the National Assembly decided their fate. On the ground that "a really free State cannot suffer in its midst any corporation, even that which, devoted to public instruction, has deserved well of the nation," the Brothers of the Christian Schools were formally suppressed. Their schools were broken into, the Brothers turned out, their books torn to shreds, alphabets destroyed, the children let loose, the lights put out, and with this putting out of lights, physical and figurative, was the end.

The King: "but—but this is a revolt!" The Minister: "Sire, it is enlightenment and knowledge inaugurated. The Congregation ceases to exist. The Brothers dispersed, and engaged in secular calling, mostly as public or private tutors. Brother Agathon, the Superior, under a secular disguise gained his scanty living in Paris as teacher.