

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

*From a late number of Merry England.*

### IV.

By 1698 the first house at Vaugirard had become too small for the rapidly increasing Community. Through the aid of M. de la Chetardie, who had succeeded M. de la Barmondie at St. Sulpice, and of a rich widow, Madame Voison, he was enabled to take a larger house nearer Paris, which he most appropriately dedicated to St. Cassianus, the martyred schoolmaster. One of the Brothers he made Master of Novices, another Superintendent of the Parisian schools; and thus relieved of some of his many responsibilities, began a fresh extension of educational activity. A new school was opened in the parish of St. Sulpice, after a fresh conflict with the paid schoolmasters. Increased prestige was brought him by the attention of James II., the exiled King of England. That personage required an instructor for the sons of his Irish adherents. He consulted the Archbishop of Paris, who in turn placed the matter in the hands of M. de la Chetardie; and the Cure of St. Sulpice recommended M. de la Salle. De la Salle agreed to accept the task, and fifty young Irish gentlemen were placed under his direction. They required, of course, higher education than that which the Christian Schools were accustomed to impart; and therefore Blessed de la Salle himself assisted in their education. King James himself subsequently visited the school, and was so delighted with the manners and progress of the young boarders that he expressed to de la Salle his lively satisfaction. This was followed by a further innovation in education, when de la Salle founded the first Sunday school in France. It was designed for lads under twenty, belonging to the artisan and tradesman class. Since he chiefly founded it as a remedy against the evil employment of the Sunday, he wished it to be attractive; and therefore, in addition to reading, writing, and arithmetic, he gave the youths who attended it the opportunity of pursuing studies useful in the higher developments of their own callings; studies such as mechanics, mathematics, and drawing. Two Brothers were specially educated to conduct this Sunday school, at the close of which there was always religious instruction and catechism. It soon became so popular that it was attended by two hundred lads. Unfortunately, the Brothers educated for it took advantage of their special training to quit the Institute and open a paying school of their own. The consequent closing of the school, however, was only temporary: as soon as another Brother could be trained for the purpose, it was reopened, and obtained all its former success. This was, as I have said, the first Sunday school in France: in Holland such institutions were already known; and, of course, Sunday schools for religious teaching had before been set up in Milan by St. Charles Borromeo.

In sequence to this, he established in the parish of St. Hippolyte a Normal school for training country schoolmasters; such a school as that which he had established at Rheims, and which had lapsed during his absence. He placed it under the direction of Brother Nicholas Vuyart, one of the two Brothers whom he had chosen at Vaugirard as his special confidants. Unfortunately, Brother Vuyart, like Judas, succumbed to the temptation of holding the money-bag. The Cure of St. Hippolyte died, and left his money to Brother Vuyart for the purpose of supporting the foundation. He could not leave it to the Congregation, which had not obtained letters patent, nor to de la Salle, who was known as the Superior of the Society; therefore this indirect method of bequeathing his money to the Society was the only one open to him. But Brother Vuyart declared that the money belonged to him, that he would use his own judgment in spending it according to the Cure's intention; and refused to make any arrangements with de la Salle. The supporters of the school thereupon withdrew their contributions, and the pupils left. Brother Vuyart, following the example of the first Sunday school teachers, quitted the Institute, and continued the school on his own account. After some years he died in poverty. This was the end of the Normal school under the old *regime*: the time was not ripe for it, and it was left for a modern Superior of the Congregation successfully to revive Blessed de la Salle's idea, now universally disseminated. Yet more trouble was in store for the Founder from his own disciples. The Brother whom he had made Master of Novices was guilty of excessive severity to his subjects, who complained to M. de la Chetardie (de la Salle being away on business). The Brother who had been made director of the Parisian schools followed in the footsteps of the Novice-master, and harshly penanced a novice who was studying in the schools. This novice likewise complained to the Cure of St. Sulpice. Now, M. de la Chetardie was becoming ill-satisfied with the Founder's administration of the Society, and hastily laid these severities to the account of the Rule, not of the two Brothers who administered the Rule. He sent in a brief to the Archbishop of Paris, which gravely impugned de la Salle's discretion in managing the Institute. The Archbishop ordered his Vicar-General, M. Pirot, to make inquiries. The inquiries were answered by the Brothers favourably to the Superior and the Rule, though the two directors were blamed; but, urged by outside influences, M. Pirot reported against the Founder. When de la Salle

next called on the Archbishop, he was suddenly and quietly told: "Sir, you are no longer Superior of your Community; I have provided it with another." De la Salle, after his usual fashion, withdrew in silence, and passively awaited results. M. Pirot sent him private word when the new Superior was to be installed. De la Salle feared resistance from the Brothers if they were apprised beforehand, and so merely desired them to assemble on the assigned day, without stating any reason.

When made aware of the purport of the meeting the Brothers insisted upon retaining their old superior, saying: "Our determination is bound up with our vow," they declared; "in keeping to the one, we feel that we are being faithful to the other. We will have no Superior but our Father. If another is forced upon us, let that other bring new subjects with him, for we are all resolved to walk out of the house."

De la Salle hastened away to throw himself at the feet of the Archbishop, and crave pardon for the disobedience of the Brothers. But the Archbishop turned his back, and without a word left the room in which de la Salle had sought him. In the end, a priest of St. Sulpice, the Abbe Madot, intermediated. The Brothers agreed to wait on M. Pirot, apologise for their conduct, and nominally accept the new Superior; but on condition that after being formally installed, M. Bricot should make no attempt to exercise any practical authority. As a matter of fact, he only once subsequently appeared at the house; and soon afterwards the Archbishop gave him another employment. The victory remained practically with the Brothers; and de la Salle continued the real Superior.

In August, 1703, the Community moved to the Rue de Charonne from the house at Vaugirard. The new house had schools established in connection with it, as had been the case in St. Sulpice, and a Sunday school was opened. Then followed fresh attacks on the part of the writing masters. In February, 1704, the lieutenant of police sent to seize all the writing materials in the Brothers' schools, and cited the Community before his tribunal. For non-compliance with this order de la Salle was fined and mulcted in costs, besides being forbidden to allow the Brothers to receive any but the poorest children, or to give these any education "above their condition." At the same time the Precentor ordered him to close his schools. Lawsuit followed lawsuit, and the Community was condemned without appeal. The house and schools, even the Sunday school, in the Rue de Charonne were closed, and all the effects seized. The Founder at first took refuge, with his novices, in the parish of St. Roch, but after a few months removed to Rouen. In February, 1706, the Parliament of Paris issued a decree forbidding him, or any of the Brothers, to keep a single primary school in Paris or its suburbs without the formal permission of the Precentor. M. de la Salle, although suffering from a tumour on the knee, returned to Paris, to bear the brunt of this new misfortune. The Brothers' schools being closed, the parish priest of St. Sulpice tried to save those under his control by seeking other masters, and on failing in the quest implored the Brothers to return. The Founder did not refuse, and early in October ten Brothers were appointed teachers on the condition that they should receive no pupils without a ticket of admission from the parish authorities. The schoolmasters having no excuse for further interference, the Brothers once more resumed their labours in peace.

In spite of these difficulties in Paris, de la Salle's work was rapidly spreading all over France. In 1699 he founded the school at Chartres, at the invitation of the Bishop, Monsignor Godet des Marais, who had been with him at St. Sulpice.

Blessed de la Salle provided the Brothers, and the Bishop undertook to bear all the expenses. The latter was much attached to the saintly man, and whenever he was in Chartres pressed him to dine at his table, an invitation he persistently declined. M. Ravelet tells us

One day, determined to overcome him, the Bishop had the doors of the palace locked, and so kept him a prisoner. The holy man, finding he could not get out, submitted with a good grace, and went in to dinner. Amongst the guests were M. d'Aubignac, Vicar-General, afterwards Bishop of Noyon, and, finally, Archbishop of Rouen. After dinner the Bishop and his Vicar attacked Blessed de la Salle about the severity of his Rule and the extreme poverty of his clothes. They criticised his thick shoes, his broad hat, and his patched cloak. He defended himself with his wonted simplicity, and gave the reasons which had led him to frame the Rule as it stood. The shabbiness of his clothes was such, however, that the Bishop made him a present of a cloak; and to leave him no pretext for not accepting it, he had it made of the coarsest and commonest stuff. M. de la Salle took the gift humbly as an alms, and wore it; but not long after, as he was coming home one winter's night, he was accosted by robbers who took a fancy to the cloak, and he let them have it.

Still, even at Chartres there were difficulties in the way of carrying out the regulations. The Bishop himself did not at all approve of teaching the children to read French before Latin; but the Founder held firmly to his opinion, and at last Monsignor des Baras yielded to his arguments.

In the same year the schools at Calais were opened, and the Institute took root in Languedoc and Provence. In 1702 de la Salle's