

priest bequeathed to his young brother-canon the care of this rising institution. La Salle, out of gratitude to his old and tried friend, generously accepted the charge and so successful was his administration that he was soon requested to establish similar institutions for poor boys. He hesitated for some time to undertake this second project but finally, in 1679, he opened at Rheims the first free school for boys. Thus far LaSalle had taken an active part in the infant work. Now, however, that it was established, he thought that his connection with it was at end. But the superior, or rather the nominal superior of the school-masters engaged in this charitable labor of free-education, continued to consult the gifted young canon in all matters of importance concerning the schools. In this manner La Salle was led almost unconsciously to take an interest in the daily life of the teachers. At first his visits to them were confined to short business calls upon the Superior. Gradually these visits began to multiply until at length not a day passed that did not see him in the midst of the masters, encouraging, advising, reprimanding them. It was but a step further to bring them into his own house where he could supervise them to greater advantage and form them with greater facility to the duties of their new station; for La Salle considered their state of life to be not merely a profession but a religious vocation. Finally he took the sublime resolution to enroll himself in this humble militia and he, the noble abbé, the wealthy Canon, the Doctor of Divinity, he upon whom the world had smiled from his very birth, and upon whom it still wished to bestow its smiles, sacrificed his patrimony, renounced the world and all its works and pomps, to embrace the obscure profession of his followers, and to share their unpaid toil. After a year of probation and preparation, the founder of this new religious family and the twelve disciples that still remained faithful to him, drew up a rule, donned that coarse black habit so familiar to the eyes of our urban populations, and adopted the name still borne by their successors—the Brothers of the Christian Schools. A few months later they pronounced the fourfold vow of poverty, chastity, obedience and perseverance.

Thus formed by their venerable founder to the practice of religious virtues, and trained by him in improved methods of teaching, the Christian Brothers soon became renowned throughout France, and ere long they were to be found at the head of schools in nearly all the dioceses of the land. But La Salle did not confine his labors to the mere direction of his disciples. He engaged personally in the work of teaching, and this practical experience in the school room opened his eyes to the deficiencies of the methods of instruction then in use. To supply these deficiencies, or rather to cast aside entirely the old systems of education, and to replace them by one more perfect, more rational, became now the object of his indefatigable labors. Not only did he accomplish his end by substituting the mutual-simultaneous method for the individual method, but he also anticipated many other educational "ideas that are popularly regarded as the product of modern thought." He opened the first Normal School at Rheims in 1684. Technical schools, schools of design, boarding institutions, academies and reformatory schools, all owe their origin to him. The Sunday school is likewise the offspring of his genius. In a word, a new era in the history of education begins with the life of this wonderful man, at whose "bidding the whole modern educational system leaped into existence." Of course such a radical reform raised violent opposition, and La Salle was persecuted until the very hour of his death in 1719. His disciples, too, have had to suffer frequent persecution, worry, and trial during the two hundred years of the existence of their religious family, but Heaven has confounded their enemies by its visible protection. In 1684, twelve humble school-masters knelt at the feet of their common father in Christ to dedicate themselves irrevocably to the sacred cause of free education. To-day these numbers have increased a thousand-fold, and the children of La Salle embrace the world in the sphere of their labors.

"Where'er the banner of the Cross is lifted to the light,
There may the Christian School be found—a fair and goodly sight.
From shore to shore, by sea or stream—where'er religion smiles,