

THE BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS.

“The Christian Brothers stand
To-day within old Mother Church, a brave devoted band,—
The Virgin Knights of Mary’s love, the Galahads of heaven,
The wealth of all their loyal hearts to Christ and Peter given !
Lancaster, Uhland, Jacotot, and Pestalozzi—all
Have had their day ;—the world hath watched their systems rise and fall,
But the grand method of LaSalle, still in its mellow prime,
For two long centuries hath stood the crucial test of time.”

—ELEANOR C. DONNELLY.



Every age and in every land, the Church has proved herself the *Alma Mater* of education. Even in the so-called “Dark Ages,” Popes and Bishops, Councils and Synods, strenuously endeavored to promote the instruction of youth, by exhorting the secular princes to foster letters within their dominions and by commanding the clergy not only to establish primary schools in every parish, but also to teach therein whenever necessary. Thus by untiring efforts, the Church at length succeeded in providing for the instruction of her youth by the multiplication of elementary schools and of higher institutions of learning, throughout the length and breadth of Christendom. But there was one essential of a Christian education that she seemed unable to provide. Try as she might, she could not procure good efficient teachers to whom she might fearlessly entrust the innocent ones of her fold. The clergy were unable to respond to the call of the bishops to teach in the parish schools, for it was impossible for a priest to remain all day in the school-room and at the same time to attend to his numerous and pressing duties as pastor. The priest-teacher had to neglect either his school or his parish, and naturally he chose to perform properly his priestly office and to entrust the school to lay-masters. Unfortunately these lay-teachers were not always men of a good, moral character; indeed, too frequently were they but unprincipled “gamesters, drunkards, profligates, ignorant and brutal.”

This state of affairs, despite all the solicitude of the Church, grew worse and worse until finally the situation became so alarming that, in 1649, there was formed in France a pious association whose members pledged themselves to pour forth unceasing prayers that Almighty God might give to France good Christian teachers. Two years later was born John Baptist de LaSalle, founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

From earliest childhood, La Salle evinced a marked predilection for the ecclesiastical state. When yet but eleven years of age, he received the tonsure and five years later was made Canon of the Cathedral of his native city of Rheims. In his nineteenth year he took his degree of M. A. at the University of Rheims, and then proceeded to the Seminary of St. Sulpice in Paris, where for two years he edified his condisciples by his exact observance of the rule and by his unostentatious piety. The deaths of his father and mother in 1762 necessitated his return to the bosom of his family in order to take charge of his younger brothers and sisters; but he still continued his theological studies, and in 1678, was raised to the sublime dignity of “priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech.” From the time of his ordination may be said to date his labors and sacrifices in the cause of Christian education. His fellow canon and spiritual director, Father Roland, had some time previously founded a religious sisterhood for the education of poor girls. Before his death, which occurred a few weeks after LaSalle’s elevation to the priesthood, the aged