

THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS—AN ORDER OF SCHOOL-MASTERS.

From a late number of Merry England.

VIII.

The Reign of Terror passed, and individual Brothers, without resuming the habit of the Institute, began again to open schools here and there. In some places "these amphibious ecclesiastics" even paved the way for the return of the priests, by gathering together the people and reading religious services. In 1793 Pope Pius VI. gave them a rally-point by appointing as their acting head, with the title of Vicar-General, Brother Frumence, the Superior of the house in Rome. Under this title Brother Frumence governed the Institute to the end of his days; for Brother Agathon, who had retired to Tours, died of his hardships in 1797. Gradually the Brothers reconstituted their Communities at Lyons, Rheims, Laon, and Paris; and in 1803, through the intervention of Cardinal Fesch, Portalis reported in their favour to the First Consul. The result was a consular decree by which Napoleon formally re-established the Institute, and authorized it to fix its head-quarters at Lyons. Cardinal Fesch recalled to its ranks by letter the Religious who had been scattered to various quarters by the Revolution; and in 1805 the seal was set on the marvellous resurrection of the Congregation by its inclusion in Napoleon's newly-formed Imperial University. This body was created by the Emperor to control public education throughout the Empire, and endured after the Restoration. It was a most providential circumstance, in more than one way, that the Institute should have been admitted to the University; since, in all probability, without the protection the Brothers were thus enabled to obtain, they would have been included in the conscriptions which drained France during the last agonies of the Empire. Another happy circumstance for the Brothers was the friendship of the Abbe Emery, whose unselfish character won the favour and recognition of Napoleon. Any man for whom either Napoleon or Byron had no sneer must assuredly have possessed unusual attributes. The last anomaly remaining from the Revolution days came to an end in 1810, when Brother Frumence died, and was succeeded by a regularly constituted Superior in the person of Brother Gerbaud.

His reign, which extended through the greater part of the Restoration, was marked by the transference of the centre of the Institute to Paris; by a successful conflict against the attempt to subject it to the conscription; and, still more, by an arduous struggle with the mutual, or Lancastrian, system of teaching. That this system should ever have obtained Government patronage is an astonishing example of human proneness to educational "fads." It consists in making the adult teacher a mere kind of head-master, with a general supervision; while the active teaching was given by the more advanced among the children themselves. It was, in fact, an extension of the monitorial system from the realm of discipline to that of instruction. Its grain of truth is obvious. As a matter of fact, the cleverer boy can often explain to the dull boy what the latter has failed to understand from the master. So far as such assistance can be useful, it is informally sought in every school; and rendered with more or less good nature and grumbling. But to make it a system, is to expect from the juvenile teacher a sustained patience, tact, and self-control such as no boy possesses; while the element of authority must evidently be lacking in such instruction. Yet this system was actually taken up by the Government, pushed by the Minister, sanctioned by the King, and pressed on the Brothers until their resistance involved them in a veritable official persecution. Several of the Christian Schools were closed before the Minister at length gave way, and agreed to an arrangement sanctioned by the King. During the generalship of the next Superior, Brother William of Jesus, the struggle with the mutual schools was continued. But the leading events of his brief rule of eight years were the renewal of those boarding schools for professional and commercial studies which had existed before the Revolution, and the creation at Rouen of a Normal school, in which the Brothers undertook to train secular masters. This innovation was afterwards imitated by the Government.

Brother Anaclel, who succeeded Brother William in 1830, governed for just the same period of years; but his generalship, though short, was fruitful. He had the good fortune to be contemporaneous with the Minister Guizot; and that votary of education admired him so much that only the humility of the Superior prevented Guizot from investing him with the cross of the Legion of Honour. Within a year after Brother Anaclel's accession, a decree compelled the Brothers to pass the examinations required for secular teachers before they could obtain their diplomas. This, which the historian of the Congregation resents, no doubt naturally, as the loss of a privilege, seems to me in reality a gain. It fittingly, I think, inaugurated a period during which they were to fight beside, rather than against, the secular teacher. The law of 1833, by which Guizot dealt with the entire system of elementary education, intended to promote the same result. It took up the idea of Normal schools for masters, which had been introduced by the Brothers under the previous Superior, and established such a school in every country. In consequence, Brother Anaclel called a

General Chapter, revised the school-books of the Congregation, and introduced improvements which might help the Institute to hold its place against its secular rivals. Nor was the Normal school the only idea which they had the honour of furnishing to the Government. During this generalship the Brothers originated those night schools for adults which have since secured such general and successful adoption. M. Guizot at once discerned the importance of the act, furnished the Brothers with State aid to extend its scope, and encouraged the imitation of their example. In Paris alone there are now at least two hundred of these schools for young working men.

Brother Philip, who succeeded Brother Anaclel in 1838, governed for the period, unexampled since Blessed de la Salle, of thirty-six years. His biographers, indeed, call him "a second de la Salle," and his generalship, which lasted till after the Commune, takes us into modern times and the thick of the educational struggle. He multiplied exceeding the boarding schools of the Congregation, and kept its educational methods abreast of all the requirements and developments of the day. Indeed, I err in saying "its educational methods"; I should rather say their expansion and application. For nothing has been more noteworthy about the methods so sagaciously elaborated by Blessed de la Salle than their flexibility; they adjust themselves and differentiate themselves, in response to every change of conditions, with the vital plasticity of protoplasm. Brother Philip had to encounter, and successfully encountered, an attempt partially to subject his Brothers to the conscription; he had also to encounter an attack on de la Salle's principle that the Brothers should take no fees for the education they imparted. To this last attack he was compelled, by the arbitrary closing of several of the Christian Schools, to yield temporarily, and under protest. The Brothers continued to refuse all fees for themselves; but the Municipalities were suffered to impose what fees they thought requisite on the children's parents, and these fees the Brothers handed over to the Municipal authorities. Brother Philip's most striking achievement, however, is the success with which he spread the Institute in foreign countries. Its present ubiquitous activity takes its real date from his generalship. Indeed a statesman said of him, "There is the making of a Minister in that man"; and so universally were his great administrative qualities recognised, that when the Educational Law of 1850 was in preparation he was called to serve on the extra-Parliamentary Commission charged with drawing up its plan. For a time, also, during his superiorship, the Brothers worked with great success in the service of the prisons. This had been one of their Founder's ideas, and they achieved a marvellous reform in the jails entrusted to them. But the outbreak of revolutionary trouble in 1848 put an end to this; and the Brothers returned to their more vital work of education. Their success during their period of employment in prison work is, nevertheless, not without its important bearing on the theory advocated by Victor Hugo, among others, so eloquently in the conclusion of "Claude Gueux"—that our prisons should be made moral sanatoria, rather than mere places of penal suffering. Towards the close of Brother Philip's government occurred the episode of the Franco-German War. Amidst that terrible time the Brothers, in addition to their teaching, put themselves forward in numbers for ambulance work; and Brother Philip offered all his houses for the reception of the wounded. On the eve of the Battle of Champigny, perhaps the bloodiest of the battles before Paris during the siege, 150 of the Brothers were drawn up in line near the Champ de Mars, waiting to set off for the battle-field. In the conflict, when they arrived, they advanced so recklessly under fire, in the eagerness to succour the wounded, that General Ducrot had to order them to stand back. At Bourget, which De Neuville's picture has made memorable, one of their number, Brother Nethelme, fell mortally wounded. So great was their devotion at this battle that after it was over Dr. Ricord, one of the most conspicuous among the ambulance surgeons, meeting a Brother, inquired: "Brother, is one ever allowed to embrace you?" "There is nothing in the Rule against it," replied the Brother. "Then permit me to have the honour of embracing you. You are admirable, you and yours. Take this kiss from me to Brother Philip and all your Brothers, and tell them that all thank you in our name and the name of France." It is very French, but none the less warmly genuine because to our insular notions it seems a little theatrical. At the close of the war a public tribute was paid, or rather two public tributes were paid, to the heroism of the Brothers. The American city of Boston offered a prize "to the finest example of patriotism given during the war." The awarding of the prize was left with the French Academy, and that body decreed it to the Institute of Blessed de la Salle. Finally, the Cross of the Legion of Honour was bestowed on Brother Philip. It was only the argument that the honour was in reality bestowed on his Congregation, not on himself, which overcame his modest reluctance to accept it; and as soon as the ceremony was over the cross disappeared from his bosom, nor did any man ever learn what became of it. After the siege came the Commune. The Brothers suffered like all the other Religious Orders at the hands of the insurgents, though they had not to consummate their sufferings by martyrdom. Yet there escape was narrow. Twenty-six of them were imprisoned with the hostages in Mazas, and only chance saved them from being massacred with the rest.

To be continued.