



BROTHERS WITNESSES OF HOPE

1- BROTHER ZOËL HAMON (1819-1851)



- A Master Baker
- Giving the Bread of the Good News



Map of France



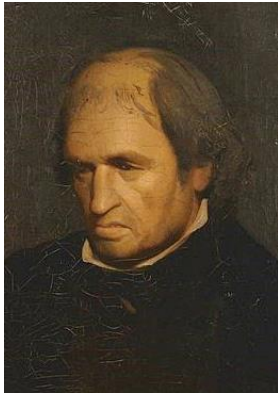
Map of Brittany

BROTHER ZOËL HAMON:

A LITTLE HERO AMONG THE BENCHES OF A SCHOOL

There are heroes who have accomplished Great Adventures, Perilous Explorations, Extreme Sacrifices, just as there are Great Saints known to all... and there are also Hidden, Little-Resonant Heroes: there are even some among the benches of a Poor Class, like Brother Zoël who we are going to present.

1- A DNA OF PATRIOTS, ARTISTS AND BENEFACTORS



*Portrait of Yves-Gilles
HAMON, father of the
Hamon family (painted by
the painter son Jean-Louis
Hamon)*

His father, Yves-Gilles Hamon, had been a “Chouan”, a rebel against the Revolution. Born in Brittany, in 1777, in Trégor, the land of St-Yves, he could not accept the persecution of Revolutionaries against Christian Traditions. With his companions in the “Chouannerie” he had taken up arms to engage in Guerrilla Warfare against the Army of the Revolution. Several times he had been put in prison, released, then enlisted in Napoleon's Armies, still a Prisoner in the Terrible English Pontoons: at the end of his “Career” he had emerged Poor and covered in Scars. Fortunately, because of his “Military Merits”, he had received a position as a Customs Officer, monitoring the Coasts of Brittany. He supplemented his salary by working as a Shoemaker, which he had learned in the Pontoon Prisons. He was 39 years old: finally, he could start a “Normal” life. He married Marie-Angélique Quimper, from a Solidly Christian Family, but in fragile health. The New Family settled in Plouha, in a very Poor Cottage. Three children were born in this place on the Coast: Eugénie Perrine in 1818, Aurélien-Jean (our hero) on September 23, 1819 and Jean-Louis, the future Painter, on May 5, 1821. The children were baptized immediately and they received a Christian Education, given especially by the

Mother, who followed and loved her little ones very much. Unfortunately, she had Fragile Health and was not able to exhaust all her Maternal Love towards them. To health difficulties were added the fatigue of traveling due to the father's Job as a Customs Officer: first in Plouha, then in the St-Malo Region (the fourth child was born in St-Suliac), then in Trébeurden (Côtes -d'Armor). Mother Marie-Angélique died in 1833.



*Self-portrait of Jean-Louis
Hamon (1821-1874)*

Valuable help to Yves-Gilles' family came from the family of his brother Tugdual Hamon. Exiled in Spain

during the Revolution, he had been the Regent of the Collège de Lannion for many years. His sons had important positions: Civil Servants, a Doctor, a Priest. They lived in a Large House which also included a Linen Workshop. Uncle Tugdual's family would always be an important point of support for the Poor Children of Yves-Gilles.



*Brother of Aurélien
Jean-Marie (Brother
Zoël)*

2- LEARN WHILE WALKING

Let's try to follow the Hamon children as they travel. In Plouha they were very small: they played next to the House, with their Mother; they walked the paths along the Coast. In Saint-Malo, Commune of St-Suliac, they were a little larger. In Pleudihen, the Mennais Brothers opened a Free School, run by Brothers Frédéric and Hippolyte, highly esteemed by the Population: ideal for attending the Class of the two Hamon brothers, at least for a few years. Around 1830 we found the family in Trébeurden, on the Trégor Coast: "an Arid and Wild Country, dotted with Rocks and

Beaches, with Islands and Peninsulas". There they met a Priest very devoted to the Population, Father Pierre-Yves Le Luyer. He took care of the Reconstruction of the Church, especially the Bell Tower which was to be visible to Sailors. He had rescued people in danger at Sea, he had worked to treat Cholera Patients in 1832, risking his life. He was also interested in young people: he taught them Catechism to prepare for the Sacraments and he sent them to School in Lannion. He had acted in the same way with Jean-Louis Hamon, who had marked him with his Artistic Painting Talents. After an incident caused by hunting for Nests in the Cliffs, he found a solution to transfer to Lannion and attend the Brothers' School.

And Aurélien? The Memories of his childhood and youth are quite-



waves, like those of his family that he followed: in Plouha (Lanloup) in his early childhood, in St-Suliac for his Primary School, little brother Jean-Louis in the same pas-

sion for an Artistic Craft that they had inherited of their father. He had bought him a Box of Water Colors for painting: he himself made "Sculpture" in Wood... But he had a Particular Project: he wanted to be part of the "Compagnons du Tour de France". These formed an Association to learn one or more Trades. You had to travel through a Tour of Stopover Towns, linked together, where you could specialize in this or that Trade: Baker, Shoemaker, Carpenter, Blacksmith, Mason, Painter, Cooper, Cabinetmaker, Plumber, Farrier, etc. We would stay several Months in the same City, then we would move to another: time to learn the Trade and then we would start again by doing the Tour in another City, where we would meet other Companions. "While his younger brother was studying in Lannion, Aurélien left for his Tour de France, thus putting into practice one of the Projects of his early childhood." This Tour could last several years. You had to know how to walk to cover long distances, and become independent by working as an Apprentice and have a good disposition for a Job well done.



But, now that he had learned his Trade, that he had accomplished Important Experiences, that he had matured his Character, what direction would he have given to his life? In 1839 he returned to Trébeurden, perhaps on the occasion of his father's Second Marriage. He was 20

years old: he would decide his future.

3- A SILENT AND IRRESISTIBLE CALL

We find Aurélien in Ploërmel in 1839, in the Novitiate, preparing to become a Brother. Who directed him to go to this place, to the Novitiate of the young Institute of the Brothers of Christian Instruction? Institute which had been founded by a Zealous and Dynamic Priest, Abbot Jean-Marie de la Mennais. We know that his brother Jean-Louis had already been present in Ploërmel for 3 years. The latter, after his year of Novitiate, had made his Temporary Religious Profession. Then he remained in Ploërmel, as a Drawing and Painting Teacher.



Jean-Marie de la Mennais, Founder of the Brothers of Ploërmel

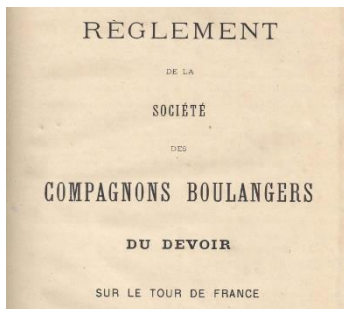
Aurélien arrived in Ploërmel around June, but his younger brother was already in a Vocational Crisis. He felt inclined towards a Profession as an Artist and, despite his sincerity and his efforts at Obedience, Religious Life always attracted him less. Even the presence of his brother, whom he loved and esteemed, was not enough to make him pursue his Vocation as a Brother. However, Bro Elpyre (Jean-Louis' Religious name) played an important role in the life of his brother Aurélien. He introduced him to the Congregation of the Brothers of Mennais, he introduced him to the World

of Religious Education of Children, allowed him to deepen his Spiritual Training, which would complete the Professional Preparation of the Companionship. Aurélien had no hesitation. He had thought carefully about his Project. His decision was entirely Internal, matured in Silence and a certain form of very Personal Prayer. We can try to sneak into his heart.

- He admired people who gave themselves to others, to the Poor, to the Unfortunate, like the Priest of Trébeurden, or his own cousin, Dr. Joseph Hamon.

- He wanted to make his Professional Skills learned at the Tour available to others, especially young people.

- A given life appeared to him as the Most Successful Adventure of Life, through which he would have achieved something beautiful for others.

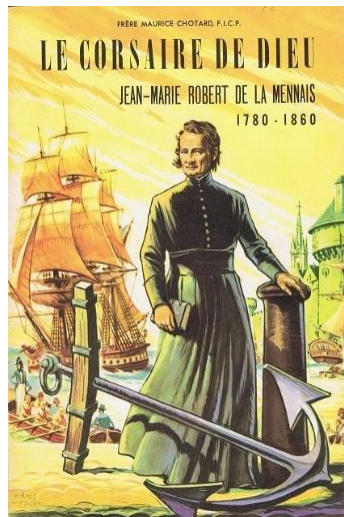


Dr. Joseph Hamon and Abbé Le Luyer, parish priest of Trébeurden

- Spiritual Motivations: the closest people of faith that we know were Father Le Luyer de Trébeurden and his Priest cousin François Hamon: both examples of Great Charity and Solid Piety.

In any case during the year and several Months that he would spend in the Novitiate, where he received the name of Brother Zoël, he would make Great Progress in his Concrete Spirituality and Faithful to the Rule, to the Letter: "The The qualities required to enter the Novitiate are: Complete Detachment from Earthly Things, the Spirit of Obedience and Humility, Talents and Taste for the Education of Children." (Rule of 1835). "From the Moral Point of View, the Novitiate of Ploërmel is directed in a Good Path of Submission, Personal Abnegation, Dedication to Duty, Zeal for the Education of Childhood, distancing from all Ambition and all Temporal Affairs..." This is the Moral Portrait of Aurélien.

In the Novitiate we also prepared for the teaching of all Subjects: “If Religion is the basis of the work, it does not absorb it. All Teaching Subjects were in full force in advance: Religion, Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Grammar and Analysis, Academic and Linear Drawing, Geography, Geometry, Elementary Maths and Chemistry Courses with Applications to Arts and Crafts and to Agriculture and Hydrography for the Communities neighboring the Coasts.” Bro Zoël was already largely prepared and succeeded in obtaining his Brevet de Capacitance pour l'enseignement primaire on September 3, 1840. Having received his Certificate of Morality in Lannion, he could begin his first experiences as a Teacher.



The Founder took care of the First Obediences of the young Brothers: he placed them alongside experienced Brothers: they could learn a lot through their examples, their Practice and their Virtues. Br. Zoël was sent for a year to Dol, in the Primary Section of the College: Teacher for the Little Ones and Drawing Teacher at the College. The following year he was in Dinan, where he came into contact with the Brothers from the little very beginning, who had known Heroic Times: in particular the Brothers André Labousse (24 years in Dinan), Paul Guyot (Director 27 years in Dinan) and Charles Brottier, died at age 29.

4- AN OSSUARY BECOMES A MODEL SCHOOL

Br. Zoël arrived in Plouvorn in 1842. The Municipal Council of February

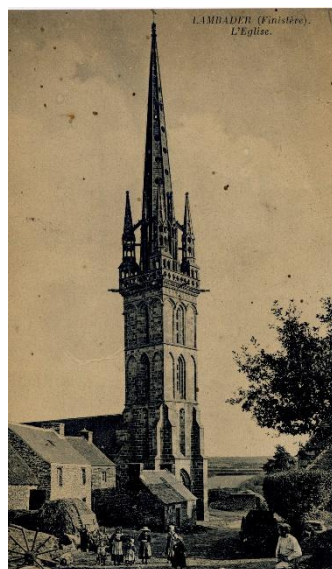


Plouvorn

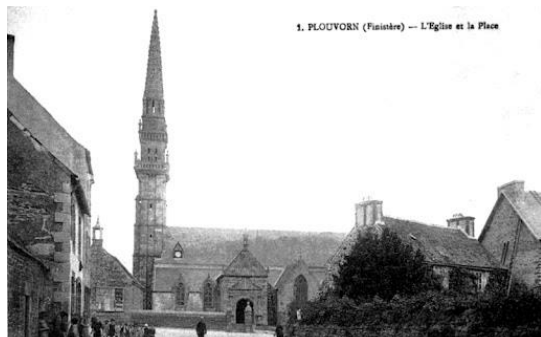
27, 1842 appointed him Municipal Teacher. He was 23 years old, he had his Papers in order, he was very well prepared, he would put his Resources at the service of children who needed everything. Indeed, Plouvorn, a Town of about 3,500 Inhabitants, in Finistère, Léon Region,

was a very Poor Country. Some figures: "In the District of Morlaix the needy represented 23%, in Plouvorn there were more than 800 Beggars, 97 boys aged 7 to 12 were in a complete state of Destitution". The houses were Unsanitary, Full of Smoke, Humid, with Hygienic Conditions that caused Diseases and Epidemics. "The Town and its surroundings offer only a vast Cesspool where water and filth stagnate, due to lack of drainage... foul ponds are almost everywhere." Although the population was very poor, from a Religious point of view it could boast of a Centuries-old Tradition: The Beautiful Parish Church of St-Pierre, numerous Chapels, the Sanctuary of Notre-Dame de Lambader, with its very High Bell Tower, very popular place of Pilgrimages.

Let's take a close look at the School which was to welcome Br. Zoël and his students. "The Primary School is in a state of deterioration". It was a Building located at the corner of the Cemetery which surrounded the Parish Church: it served as an Ossuary, but also as a Store for the Church Factory and as a Depot for the Parish's Foodstuffs.



Chapel of ND de Lambader



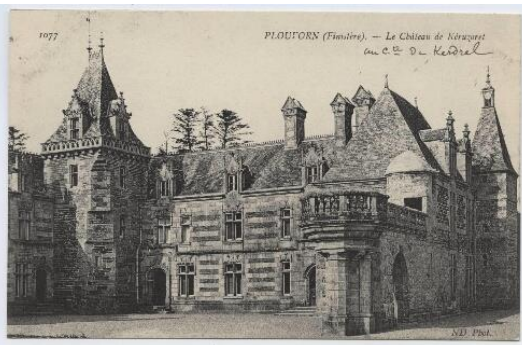
1. PLOUVORN (Finistère) — L'Eglise et la Place

Parish church, square and school

It was “Well Ventilated”. In fact, the Wind, the Cold, Rain came in through the Roof, Windows and Doors in very poor condition. No paneling under the Roof. No Benches, Tables, School Materials. No Latrines. For essential repairs we had put a Tax on Drinks in Bistros.

In this School a Former Seminarian from the Country, Olivier Yven, and then Mr. Hervé Abelain had taught. He had introduced Mutual Teaching of a Secular and Anticlerical Nature, which had aroused the reaction of the Population and Influential Families, the De Kéruzorets and the Boscals de Réals. In favor of Mutual Teaching there was the Council District of Morlaix, who sided with Secular Schools. With patience and determination, Father de la Mennais had succeeded in introducing the Schools of the Brothers into this Department “as hard as these old stones”.

In the midst of these Institutional Tensions, Mr. Abelain died. The Plouvorn Municipal Council was called upon to appoint a New Public Teacher who could replace him. The Council decided in favor of a Teacher in agreement with the faith of the Population: “We want to bring up Christianity to our little children who ask for the Bread of Instruction - and only find almost poisoned hands to break it for them - by naming as Community Teacher, a Brother of Christian Instruction.”



PLOUVORN (Finistère). — Le Château de Kéruzoret
au C. De Kéruzoret

Kéruzoret Castle

5- A TEACHER AND A FATHER FOR 114 STUDENTS

Br. Zoël arrived in Plouvorn in 1842 to start the School year. He was 23 years old, he carried with him the Certificate of Ability, the Certificates of Morality, the two years of experience in Dol and Dinan, the Spiritual Preparation of the Novitiate and the Enthusiasm of this New Adventure among the children. Other Brothers had left for the West Indies or Africa to Evangelize Black People and Slaves, others gave Instruction in Classical or Professional Schools, in Large Cities or Villages in the Breton Countryside. He, Brother Zoël, in this Small Town, became a father to break the Bread of Education to his more than 100 students and not only to them.

According to the old Rule of Brothers placed alone, he lived in the Presbytery, forming a family with the Rector, Father François Caer, and his Vicars. But his real home and family was the School. First, he begins to make it habitable. He got help from the Population and from Wealthier Families, he protested strongly near the Municipal Council, he had the Art of asking and getting help.



Plouvorn today

The Clay Floor was covered by Wooden Parquet; the Roof, Windows, Doors are repaired: no more Drafts; he arranged the Benches, the Tables, the alphabet and arithmetic tables; it honors religious images; it separates the Classroom (14mx5m) from the part reserved for Parish Equipment; he had a place reserved outside for the students' Recreations; he does not leave the Municipal Council in peace until he had the Latrines built.

He led his Class like a Captain of children: "Founder in this Commune of a School made up of 114 students, he knew with his Talent alone, to organize this Large Class that the zeal of two Brothers would barely be used to

direct. He also made it one of the most Flourishing Schools in Finistère. Ten of his students were today at the Collège de St-Pol de Léon...”

But behind the results, we find intense work “to check more than 100 Note-books every day, to prepare the Class for several Divisions: what Nerves, what Vocal Cords!”



A Brother with his students in Plouvorn

Brother Zoël did not just run his School well. As in a family one is always a father, he willingly gives his “Free” moments (he had none: all his time belonged to the children) to provide them with a more complete Education. On their days off he offered them a little “Tour in the Countryside”.

The people of the Town admired this Spectacle: “He liked to surround himself with his students: then, traveling BareHeaded through the Countryside, he went everywhere in the middle of this little Troop”. Game time never failed. He made the children observe the Spectacles of Nature: The Plants, Animals, and Landscapes. In front of a Religious Image, a Chapel, they stopped to pray; Arriving at a Quieter Point, Br. Zoël sat among them for a moment of Reflection and Exchange. Often the Outing ended with a “Good Deed”: Relieving Suffering visiting a Sick Person, giving a Helping Hand to an Elderly Person... We returned home singing the praises of the Lord and Mary. From all these Spontaneous Catecheses, the Youngsters of Brother Zoël would make a Precious Treasure: they would be the basis of their Christian Formation and for many the source of their Ecclesiastical Vocation.

6- THE “MOUTARDS” OF BR. ZOËL AND THE SOLUTION OF ALL SCHOOL PROBLEMS

Who were Brother Zoël's Students? Most, if not all, came from very poor families. In September 1842 the Municipal Council considered that there was reason to admit Free of Charge to the Municipal Public School 97 boys aged 7 to 12 who were in a complete State of Destitution. These Poor Children come to Class covered in Rags. Brother Zoël immediately asks for help from the Country's Benefactress, Madame de Kér-uzoret. He describes their Shabby Clothing, like a father who cannot bear the misery of his sons:



“Mrs, I have the honor to send you a list of some good children:

- *Jean-Pierre Bernard: he has neither Clothes, nor Pants, nor Shirt of any value*
- *Jean-François Péron: a Jacket and Pants*
- *Jean-Marie Quéré: Poor like Job. A Jacket, Pants*
- *Le Gall Quervellec: a Jacket, Pants, plus Shirt*
- *Moguérrou: a Jacket or Blouse*
- *Cloarec Cosquin: Poor Child! All or Almost Naked*
- *Sinou: has no Clothes to go to Mass*
- *Mocaer, Pescarchardou: a Jacket, Pants*
- *Letty, Quillequien: a Jacket*
- *Cornily: a Jacket*
- *Crenn, Bourg: Vest, Jacket, Pants, etc.*

That's it for the Exterior; now let's look at the Interior:

Jean François Péron, Jean-Marie Le Gall, Moguérou, Cloarec, Letty: these are the most in a hurry at the moment. And I have the honor of greeting you for the moment. Brother Zoël."

All this was a First Aid for Clothing and even for Food, as we will see later. But our Brother had a Project that aimed much further. A few years after the arrival of Brother Zoël in Plouvorn, Mr. de Kerdrel was able to give a completely upside-down picture of his Class: "Whoever had visited his little Christian School, had admired the good behavior of his children and their appearance of health. He saw the solution to this problem: Instruct, Moralize, Clothe and Feed Poor Students." And after the death of our Brother, he could confirm: "Thanks to him we were able to Educate, Clothe, Feed Poor Children, without having to resort to anyone, buy rewards for the children, support a few students for the Ecclesiastical Vocation. This Modest Institution had the merit of being Self-Sufficient and could have developed further."



**Plouvorn Entrance to the town
Saint Joseph Boys School**

The Small Christian School kept within itself an Integral Project, according to the Inspiration of the Founder: to Educate Faith and Intelligence, Culture and Religion, Body and Soul, Physical and Moral Development. A Project which involved the entire Population, Families and Authorities, for

the complete good of the children. All this was not based on Theoretical Reasoning, but on very Practical Measures, even in Material and Financial Terms. The Municipal Deputy for Education assured: "Every year we give the sum of 300 F. for the Brothers' Institute. We pay the Rector's Pension of 400 F. for the Brother's Food and Accommodation. Our expenditure amounts to 700 F. The School has 120 to 130 Students, including at least 80 Paying Students. At 1 F. per month that makes 800 F. for the School

year, plus the 300 provided by the Commune Budget for Education. The Total Income of the School amounts to 1100 F., the Expenditure to 700, therefore remains 400 F. This Surplus is used to make Soups, buy Bread, Books and Paper for the disadvantaged or Poor Children of the School. The Brother is himself the Judge of these situations and the Distributor of these Alms. He reports to the Administration and, when there are Savings, he deposits them in the hands of the Council for the needs of the School."

All this was in full line with the thoughts of Father de la Mennais: "The Poor are Sacred to Us". And towards the Specific Administration of Plouvorn, he added: "I made this Agreement with the Municipality of Plouvorn only in favor of Indigent Students and it is only for these and for the good of the Class that must be applied the Excess Remuneration, if any."

7- THE CHARITY BAKERY

For 5 years, Brother Zoël had been running his School to the full satisfaction of parents and to the Joy of his kids. But in this already Poor Region, a General Famine struck towards the end of the First Half of the 19th Century, which turned into a Catastrophe during the years 1846-47. "Agricultural Production in 1846 had been Poor; that of 1847 promises to be Catastrophic. In addition to the exceptional harshness of Winter, Infectious Diseases were decimating Livestock. The early Crops wither on the Frozen Ground... Late Blight devastates the Potato Fields...". Hunger and despair are fueling the Population's Revolt. There are Riots almost everywhere: Looting of Carts and Boats full of Grain, attacks on Stores, fights against the Gendarmes who protect the Merchants. And there are some who benefit from



it. "Speculators buy the Meager Stocks of Food at a ridiculous price *Agricultural Products still available to resell at Prohibitive Prices. Many children are reduced to Skeletons.*" We find an echo of this Terrible Scarcity even in the letters of Father de la Mennais. "Oh, what a Disastrous Year. Wheat is frighteningly expensive; the Poverty is Terrible! How many Poor People suffer and are exposed to starvation!"

In Plouvorn it is the same Poverty and there are 800 Beggars. The Municipality tries to open "Charity Workshops" for the Unemployed, to impose Extraordinary Taxes, to beg for help from the Ministry of the Interior... But it is a drop in an Ocean of Misery. Faced with this frightening situation, Brother Zoël was moved, but above all he thought about taking action. He



Ancient bakery

could not bear seeing people Literally die of Hunger, your children reduced to Skeletons: you have to find the means to feed these starving people. But he doesn't react in an emotional way: he knows how to organize a Small Business, as he learned as a Companion of the Tour de France. He

would create a Social Bakery, with criteria that will make it feasible: Fair, Economical, and Sustainable. He would run it like a Small Businessman. He explained his plans to Madame de Kéruzoret, who could provide First Aid. He wrote her a long letter, supported by, Figures, Names, Concrete Means, Prices...

Let's analyze the Parts :

- PRICES ACCESSIBLE TO ALL :



“We would divide the Poor into Two Classes: those who have Nothing and those who are not in Extreme Poverty. Wheat being 19 F. per 100 pounds [1 lv = 0.453Kg], we would give the first Bread at 15 cents per pound, the others at 20... Supposing that we sold 2000 lb at 20 c., it would be 80 F. . gain per Week that could be lost on the Bread for the Poor with Vouchers. By selling 3000 lbs, [for the Poorest] who give 3750 lbs of Bread, which sold at 15 c. give 562.50 gain, here was the Bread at 15 c. for the Poorest and 20 for the others.

- WORK TO BAKE BREAD

“The difficulty was to provide so much Bread for the 5,000 lbs of flour: it's enormous. We would take two women, Honest, Hardworking, and Industrious, who knew how to Bake. We would pay them 15 or 20 cents per day: this was included in the Bakery Costs. We would need a House in the Village, in which we would put Two Large Dough Pots, a Cooking Pot, Wood to heat the Water, etc. The House where God Cam would work perfectly, or the House of Gallo's Oven. These women would each bake 400 lbs per day, M's servant: Loer 300, Guillou's 400, Caer 400 and Fenta 500. That would be 1600 per Week, plus 4800: more than the count.



Bread Oven

- SELLING AND TRANSPORTING

“Another Embarrassment, a Terrible Pitfall, is in selling Bread. Here's how to do it: poor people's Bread at 15 c. would be divided into loaves of different weights. The two women would sell this Bread and, as Vouchers must be filled out, I would give one of my students to help them on the days set for the sale. Bread at 20 c. would be sold at Guillou who has

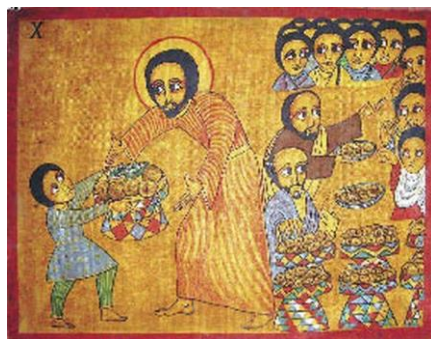
always lent himself to it with the greatest pleasure, then at the Demoiselles Naissoit and Mme Loer. Guillou would lend his little cart and the two women and my kids, who asked for nothing better, would serve as Horses to transport the Bread.

- DISTRIBUTION OF VOUCHERS

“We would have to distribute Vouchers to the Poor and there would be a fear that, despite this precaution, the Poor, who are sometimes so funny, would take it into their head to buy Bread for others (to cut corners). I thought about it and the Bons overcame this inconvenience. They will be valid for a specific time, 15 days, I suppose. Here is the model:

"DATED ...	AU...GOOD FOR BREAD
NAME AND RESIDENCE...	NUMBER OF PEOPLE
BREAD TO BE DELIVERED during the 25th...	BOOK BREAD, LB SOLD

CONCLUSION: “This, madam, is the thing as I understand it. Have the kindness to think about it and take from it what you find suitable. I would still have things to say, but time is running out, because I am like the Horses of Simon the Coachman, I always go, always. Accept... Fr. Zoël, June 21, 1846, 7 O'clock in the Evening.”



Mercy for the Poor

We find in this letter the Portrait of Brother Zoël: the ability to organize a Company according to the Spirit of the Compagnons du Tour de France, which had fascinated him in his youth; feelings of mercy towards the Poor; paternal tenderness for his “boys”; the

limitless offering of oneself which makes him similar to Jesus in the gift of the Bread of Life.

8- CONSUME YOURSELF FOR OTHERS

For at least a year, Brother Zoël added responsibility for the Bakery to his work in his School. He always runs, he knew no Rest. But Poverty and Hunger are still there and we must respond to them. Almost a year after



the start of the Charity Bakery, he made a Provisional Assessment of his "Business", in a letter to Mr. de Ker-drel, the son-in-law of Mrs. De Kéru-zoret. "March 28th, 1847. Sir, my Business is not doing badly at all; I think we managed to do something good. Praise God for that. But, am

alone. How long will it last? The price rise is frightening. All that would remain is to dig Pits, since to amass a handful of the Vilest Metal, which like Lion gnaws at bones, these brave people allowed a crowd of poor people who are their brothers and whose blood cries out to perish before their eyes, revenge against them. If, then, we have been able to do any good, God be Praised and Blessed forever! May He deign to fill with Blessings all the Charitable People who have attached themselves to me and who would continue to do so." Br. Zoël continued by giving the figures for his Charity Bakery: in three Weeks he had around 4000 kg of Bread baked, with a small temporary loss of 70 F.: "but it was about the lives of men, our brothers". He was determined to continue, especially to fight to prevent price rises, to sell to the Poor as before. Finally, he asks Mr. de Kerdrel for a Loan to buy at a very low price reasonable 2000 lv of pure quality Wheat from a friend.



It was a very Practical Letter and at the same time full of Passion, where the cries of the Ancient Prophets and the Accents of Tenderness for the Poor resonate. He was filled with gratitude for the people who helped him. An Entire Community was transformed by the Charity of Bread purchased, worked, distributed: a Eucharistic Community. Br. Zoël was the Light and the Hope in this year of Darkness. Here are some Testimonies: “We remembered that in 1847, that Horrible year of Famine, the memory of which alone made one shudder, he organized a Bakery at a discount, on a simple and skilful execution plan, he was quite happy with this competition, to stop the sale of Bread at such a high rate that the Country was starving for it.”

“In a few days he created a Bakery which provided Bread to entire Families, even though they did not have a piece of Black Bread to satisfy their hunger.”“He searched for Wheat, he castigated the Speculators, he made Bread which he distributes to 800 Poor People, who would pay 3 or 4 cents for it, some with a simple <God will pay you>.” “He, spent his nights helping

the Baker, tried to balance a Budget that only Providence ensured. Despite all the obstacles, the Social Bakery functioned and, helped by Volunteers, as well as some Great Students, Brother Zoël provided Daily Bread, the minimum subsistence in times of Pov-



erty... Did we suspect all the Heroism hidden behind this splendid dedication? After exhausting days in an Overcrowded Classroom, what many sleepless nights helping the Baker!” A former student wrote in his Memoires: “I often entered Class with an empty stomach. It was not possible to follow the Lesson. And Brother Zoël moved Heaven and Earth to give us Food, to launch a Bakery for the poor that we were. I still don't know how he did it. For that he resembled the Abbot of Mennais.”



Our Little Brother is part of the Social Catholicism Movement of the 19th Century. Everywhere the Church, through Congregations, Associations... focused on the Poor, the Sick, the Oppressed. Priests and Lay people created Solidarity Movements that focused on the World of Schools, Factories, Countryside, and Families. In France, Ozanam launched the St-Vincent de Paul Conferences. Mutual Aid Societies sprang up in numerous numbers. From Paris the Famous Painter Jean-Louis Hamon, brother of Brother Zoël, urged him to join Socialist and Humanitarian Movements. But he did not need Ideologies: he lived Solidarity in his Works, even in the Gift of his Life.

9- OFFERING OF LIFE WITHOUT LIMITS

After the period of the Terrible Years of the Famine 1846-1847, Brother Zoël resumed his usual Rhythm: an ever more numerous Class, ever closer solidarity with the population. He tried to regain some of his strength. He was relieved by the Joy among his kids, the friendship with the Clergy, the contact with his closest Colleagues, the Retreat from Ploërmel, the Support of the Founder. He helped establish Brothers Schools in the Region. But his Health, although Robust, was badly shaken. Brother Zoël's Health is affected by sleepless nights and the fatigue of an Overloaded Class. In the Spring of the 1849-50 School Year, he became seriously ill. The Vicar, Father Meudec, informed Father de la Mennais. The Founder is very painfully worried: "It is certain that he was getting too tired and, if we wanted to keep him in Plouvorn, it was essential that he had helped. Everything I could say to him to moderate his zeal would be useless, as long as he brought together in his Class a multitude of children who required care that

two Teachers would barely be able to give them. I would be obliged to limit their number..." But this statement would never come true: The Commune did not have enough money to pay another Brother; the parents would never have removed their sons from his Class: all consider the removal of Brother Zoël a Public Misfortune; he would not have sent away any child at all costs if he was not sure of the arrival of a second Brother. In any case, the situation, in the Fall of 1850, seemed to improve in every way, so much so that people were thinking of establishing a New School nearby in St-Thégonnec. He was also delighted that in Plouvorn they had started to build a House for the Sisters: he would get help, but when? He gently com-

plained to the Founder that a second Brother was not arriving. But he left himself to the Will of Providence which passes through the hands of the Father: “Your very Obedient child Fr. Zoël”.

New School Year 1850-51: a period of relative tranquility and new perspectives, but God had other, even more fruitful plans for him: he would be a “Martyr of Christian Charity”.

A New Scourge fell on the Region, which had barely recovered from the Horrible Years of Famine. "In the past, Epidemics were frequent in all Regions and the means to combat them were weak: the absence of Medical Knowledge, lack of Hygiene, Unsanitary Housing, Promiscuity... favor the spread of Contagious Diseases." In Brittany, Epidemics also spread through Ports and in Sardine Towns. They broke out almost regularly: Cholera, Typhus, Typhoid Fever, which often overlapped one another; with symptoms: High Fevers, Headaches, Extreme Fatigue, Digestive Disorders manifested by Vomiting and Diarrhea,

Intense Dehydration and often Death, as the final outcome. In each Town there are Dozens and even Hundreds of Victims. In the year 1851, during the Winter, Plouvorn was also affected by an Epidemic of Typhoid Fever. A panic fear grips all the Inhabitants: those who could go as far away as possible. The Typhoids lie in their Cottages on a bit of straw, without Cloths, without Remedies, without a Parent or Friend to care for them. No Nursing Sisters, no Doctors



Typhoid Fever

nearby.
The Municipality does what it could: almost Nothing.



10- A BROTHER NURSE WHO GIVES HIS LIFE

In the midst of this Catastrophe, Brother Zoël felt called not to abandon his people. He saw fear in his children's eyes. Some did not return to Class, others lost their parents. Silently they begged him to help them. He was the Brother to whom all look with confidence. He understood that God is asking him to lend his Hands, his Heart, his Strength, even if his Health was more fragile. He was going to risk his life, but it was the Evangelical Commandment of Jesus that he had decided to follow to the end. He was beginning, and was aware of it, a New Phase (the last?) of his existence.



“At 3 or 4 a.m., Brother Zoël lighted his Candle in his Room in the Presbytery. He put Food and Medicines, the fruit of his quests, in a bag. Well before daybreak - he would have to return to Class at 7:50 a.m. - he run along the paths damp with dew. He entered the Slums; there he dressed disgusting wounds, carried out tasks that

it was better not to detail, he cleaned the pallets, he helped to eat or drink... He only left the sick after having left them with help for the body and comfort. for the soul.”

Br. Zoël continued this work for two or three Months. He did not spare himself. He became more than a Mother for the sick. He knew that he risked death: such close contact inevitably exposed him to contagion. But he only looked at the salvation of his “sons” and “brothers”. Contagion was inevitable: “In his turn Brother Zoël was forced to take to his bed”. And immediately after, the final outcome: “Death has just taken away good Brother Zoël in less than 8 days”. Normally the disease developed within 3



or 4 Weeks. This meant that Brother Zoël, even already contaminated, continued for a few more Weeks his relief work, to the limit of his strength.

He stayed in bed during the Week that in the Ancient Liturgical Tradition was called "Passion Week", which he shared with his master Jesus. On Palm Sunday 1851, April 13th, Brother Zoël, aged 31 years and 7 Months, returned to the Jerusalem of Heaven, with its King of Peace and Love and with his children who acclaimed Jesus but also their Master and Brother. Holy Monday, April 14th, the Entire Population followed the Coffin of their Teacher with Silent Sadness. Everyone testified to the great pain of his loss, but also to their Immense Gratitude: "For him there was not a



Current Grave of Br. Zoël

suffering that he did not hasten to alleviate, not a misfortune that he could not help, not an affliction that he was not happy to pity and console... Go into one of these cottages in Plouvorn and pronounce the name of Brother Zoël: you would find regrets keenly felt there, you would see Tears of Gratitude still flowing."

After his death, the fame of his Heroism continued to grow. “This man left, in his short existence, the memory of so many Benefits” (De Kerdrel).

1. “The Entire Commune followed his Coffin, weeping. This man of so much merit died a Martyr for his Devotion” (Journal “La Bretagne”).

“The Poverty is very great in Brittany. Brother Zoël did not spare himself to relieve her and his zeal was rewarded by the Holy Martyr of Charity” (Miss de la Fruglaye).

Jean-Marie de la Mennais: “I lost a child in Plouvorn who was particularly dear to me; I will take care that his Successor is worthy of him. This word says it all”.

His Painter brother, Jean-Louis Hamon, preserved his memory with veneration: he represented him to his friends in Rome as “a Saint; Miracles - he said - were performed on his Tomb.”

Even Today, almost two Centuries after his Heroic Existence, his Memory is Alive. In his Commune, we commemorate the important dates of his radiant presence; we venerate his Tomb and when a child is slow to walk, we have seen many Mothers hold him on the Slab which covers his Relics: to walk well, but also to follow his steps. His Memory is Alive in the Congregation of the Brothers of Mennais who propagate it throughout the World.

Our little Brother Zoël was a Brother who represented so many others. All offered their Young Existence for the Kingdom of God and the Service of the little ones, in Obscurity and Humility, but with Heroic Love. Would



Old Slab where Mothers made their little children walk

he, little Brother, friend of children, Paternal Baker, Martyr of Christian Charity, one day be proclaimed “Saint”?

*Jean-Marie de la Mennais est né à Saint-Malo, France,
le 8 septembre 1780. Devenu prêtre, sensible à la situation
des enfants et des jeunes au lendemain de la Révolution,
il fonde, pour le service de l'éducation, la congrégation des Filles
de la Providence en 1818, et, avec Gabriel Deshayes,
celle des Frères de l'instruction chrétienne en 1819.
Il décède à Ploërmel le 26 décembre 1860.
Il est déclaré Vénérable en 1966.
La Famille Mennaisienne est en attente de sa béatification.
Les Frères de l'instruction chrétienne et la Famille Mennaisienne
animent avec 8 000 collaborateurs, 200 écoles et centres éducatifs,
au service de 100 000 enfants et jeunes dans 26 pays
sur les cinq continents.*

Prière pour la béatification de Jean-Marie de la Mennais

Dieu notre Père,
Tu as donné à Jean-Marie de la Mennais
un cœur généreux et un zèle passionné
pour faire connaître et aimer Jésus-Christ,
spécialement aux enfants et aux jeunes.

Puisque nous le vénérons
comme fondateur de deux congrégations
vouées à l'éducation chrétienne,
fais qu'il soit bientôt déclaré bienheureux.

Aide-nous à suivre son exemple
au service de la vérité
et accorde-nous, par son intercession,
ce qu'en ce moment nous te demandons...

Par Jésus-Christ notre Seigneur. Amen.

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