

BIOGRAPHY
of a
GOOD MAN
LECLAIRE
Buildings Painter

CONFERENCE AT THE PALACE OF TROCADÉRO
Following a speech by Mr. Edouard Laboulaye on the history of labor

1 September 1878
BEFORE THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF SOCIETIES OF LABOR
FOUNDED TO FACILITATE THE PLACEMENT OF WORKERS AND
EMPLOYEES

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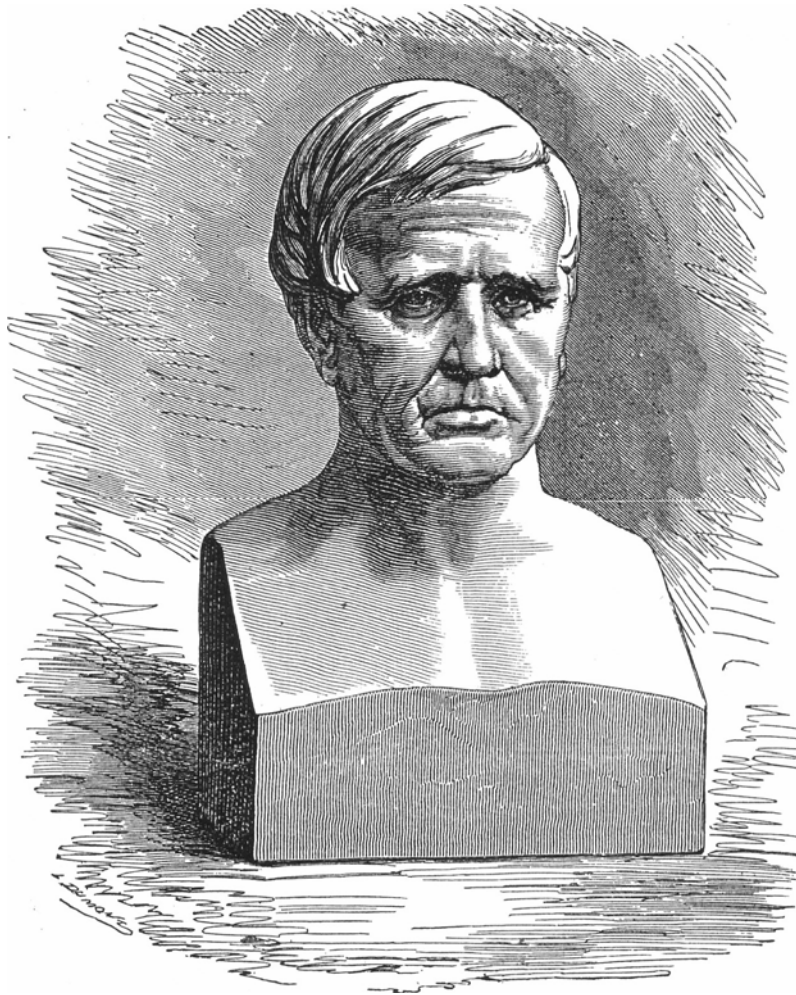
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BUST OF LECLAIRE
EXECUTED IN MARBLE BY Aimé MILLET
Pursuant to a resolution of the General Assembly of the
Society of Providence and Mutual Aid of the Craftsmen and Employees of
The Leclaire Company
November 10, 1872

LECLAIRE

BUILDINGS PAINTER

BIOGRAPHY OF A GOOD MAN

I

JUDGMENT OF LECLAIRE BY A LEARNED
GERMAN ECONOMIST

Those who follow the movement of public libraries have noticed that among the books most wanted by readers are biographies.

This preference is justified.

A good example is better than an eloquent principle.

The buildings painter Leclair, whose life and works I will try to recount, is one of those great craftsmen, one of those courageous and patient inventors whose place is marked in the pantheon of helpful men, one of those friends of peace and work whose memory may be appropriately honored by the simple narrative of what they did.

Leclaire's biography also contains a dual education: it shows both how a young worker, even devoid of any support, can make his way and how, once there, he can help others make theirs.

I gladly seize the opportunity to speak here of a man of whom I was a student and friend. If, to the benefit of his staff, his company became for himself, for fifty years, a field of experience and laboratory research, I found, for my part, since 1860, thanks to his brilliant demonstrations, a practical school of Advanced Social Studies. Before I listened and understood his fiery speech and belief, before understanding intuitively the facts gathered, classified and reported by him, I thought I was sufficiently educated, as all the doctors who read in their offices, some books on political economy. Yet, I was, I confess in all humility, ignorant. It seems to me that I spoke of work, workshops, wages, profit, like someone color blind, and I remain eternally grateful to an old buildings painter who opened my eyes.

He bequeathed me his archives. I am a witness to his work. I consider it a duty to make it known.

But before talking myself, I wish to cite you the judgment of a foreigner, who, after studying, too, the work of Leclaire, appreciates the man and the institutions he created.

In a pamphlet translated from German¹ and extracted from the newspaper *Worker's Friend* published in Berlin, Dr. Victor Boehmert, professor of economics and director of the Royal Statistical office in Dresden, speaks of Leclaire as follows:

Among manufacturers whose good thoughts and generous feelings have, in realizing them in a practical way, opened a new way for the world of work, is a

¹ *Friend of workers Leclaire and his system of remuneration for work* (1838-1877), by Victor Boehmert. Paris, Guillaumin, 1878. This work is part of a large work in two volumes that Mr. Boehmert just published in Leipzig, by Brockhaus, and is entitled: *Die Gewinnbeitheligung. Untersuchungen über Arbeitslohn und Unternehmengewinn.* (Participation in profits. Studies on the remuneration of labor and benefits of the boss).

prominent place for the buildings painter in Paris, Leclair, who, from simple worker, rose to the rank of general contractor, and whose business success was mainly due to the happy relationships that he was able to establish between himself and his collaborators. This modest friend of workers deserves a place of honor among the inventors of all countries and of all time. We usually only count among industrial inventors those who, having scrutinized the nature and action of inanimate forces, who knew first how to use their discoveries for the advancement of the applied sciences or for the success of their businesses. But it is no less important to study the living forces of man considered as an industrial producer, to analyze the interrelationships of these forces among themselves, to find new organizations of collective work, in the end to have, by means of higher salaries and better combinations, increases thereby, not only of general prosperity, but also of the private happiness and personal satisfaction of all those who cooperate in the production. The contractor is required to know and appreciate the way he should behave with his workers, the relations of labor with capital, the proper use and equitable distribution of what comes back to the company, in a word, the *economic* side of his business as well as the *technical* side. We insure against the burning of buildings, the raw materials, the machinery, the tools and other inanimate instruments of industrial production. Is it not time to deal, much more than has been done so far, with the living auxiliaries of work, to protect and insure them against illness, accidents,

disabilities of age, unemployment and other impediments?

Leclaire founded in the interests of workers a new system of wages and insurance against the hardships that threaten them. His creation came out of an impulse of his heart; but with this generous concept was united in him the resources of a practical mind. The projects pursued by Leclaire grew up with him. The original idea was modified and improved in various ways, and one of his great merits is precisely to include diverse applications and very varied changes...

The whole plan of Leclaire and the execution of his plan exhibited higher feelings of humanity in the founder, the deep interest he took in the well-being physical and moral of his subordinates, the desire to improve the material position of his workers, to cultivate them and to raise them morally, to take care of the families of the deceased, and finally an ability quite unusual to adapt humanist ideas to real life.

II

LECLAIRE AND THE SOCIETIES OF WORK

Since it is before the General Assembly of Societies of Work that I speak of Leclaire, it should be noted first that these Societies can claim Leclaire not only as a participant but also as a precursor.

In one of his first pamphlets, entitled *Improvements that could be made in the lives of workers painting buildings*, published in 1843, Leclaire talks, in a special chapter, "of the utility of a bureau for workers painting buildings." He recalls that:

According to usual practice, every worker painter should be hired at the Châtelet ... They wait there where the contractors or their foremen come to find the number of them that they need. They generally

give preference to those they know. As for those they do not know, they hire them after forming an impression more or less favorable after examining them... The result is that the good workman has no more chance of being hired than the bad, since everything depends on the impression formed of the individual in seeing him. So the poor devil, though a good worker, but that nature has not favored with a physique that suits the natural taste of the hirer, has a chance of finding employment only when he had no other choice ... Is it not possible for an office to exist where all working building painters who have no work could register?

In 1848, Leclaire was a candidate for the Constituent Assembly. He began the presentation of his ideas by saying:

Every industry would have its own office where workers without work would give their address, and where each director of a business would submit his requests for workers. The costs that were required for these offices would be borne by each industry.²

In 1850, in a pamphlet entitled, *About poverty and the means to use to make it stop*, Leclaire returns to this subject in giving his wish a much more general character. He calls for the establishment in each town of an office to register the workers out of work:

The need for such an office," he said, "has always been felt. Vauban reported it! Recently an honorable member of the Legislative Chamber, M. de Saint-Priest, made it the subject of a proposal from the rostrum of the National Assembly.

² *The organization of work*. Record of attempts made in the painting buildings industry since 1842 until today.

To demonstrate the necessity of this institution, he tells what happens at the time of harvest in the wine countries, if only around Paris, in Suresnes, for example:

One would see there, coming from all sides and from afar, the pale and emaciated beings of all ages and both sexes, who, attracted by the hope of a few days work, have faced the hardships of the journey ... What cruel disappointments did they not often suffer, these poor wretches! The number of workers is already so large that the price of the day is reduced to zero, that is to say they will work for food only ... But for those who could not be hired, go to Suresnes at nightfall, on the site, you'll see them gathered together and crouched for another night under the vault of heaven, with uncertain hope that tomorrow there will be the need for more help maybe ...

There would be in each community an office where the unoccupied workers would go to register and where people in need would go to ask for them. Similar offices would be established in each capital of the canton, district and even department, these offices would be in correspondence with those of municipalities, etc.

Finally, fifteen years later, in 1865, having become Mayor of the town of Herblay, Leclair in notices sent to his constituents, talked to them about various developments to achieve and he told them among other things:

The City Council can open a list of those who need jobs, who live by their arms, who never think to ask for alms, but who would be happy to find work ... Often they are idle while an owner is having difficulty getting a good worker.

If the list of which I speak was open at the City Council, what benefits to all! It would be like the *Stock Exchange* daily with less speculation.

Societies of work accomplished Leclaire's wish, and it is to one of them, the Society of Work of the Ninth Borough, that the Leclaire Company sent recently to find an employee required for its offices.

III

LECLAIRE, STUDENT, APPRENTICE, WORKMAN, CONTRACTOR

Leclaire (Edme-Jean), son of a poor village shoemaker, was born in Aisy-on-Armaçon, a small village in the district of Tonnerre, department of l'Yonne, 24 Floréal Year IX (May 1801).

He left primary school at ten years old, knowing at most to read and write. He was a very bright child and even a bit violent. They say that while still in the country, armed with a stick, he rudely hit an old woman who had threatened his mother. Out of school, he becomes a shepherd boy; he makes his living by guarding pigs, sheep and cows. From twelve to seventeen, he does several trades; he is in turn an apprentice bricklayer, reaper, thresher. Combative at times, he gives and receives blows. But seeing one day reapers who came with him to Aisy, the capital, embark on the coach to Auxerre, the idea came to him to try his fortune and to leave with them.

He came here to the port of Mail in Paris.

What will he do? He became, by chance, an apprentice building painter. He grinds the colors, carries the basket, drags the cart, makes long trips. To rest at night, he climbs behind the cabs, and often receives, alas, from an inhuman coachman, good lashes of the whip. For pay, he has a piece of bread in the morning, two pence a day, that is to say, a penny for each of the two meals he

has, evening supper and lodging at the boss's. It was hard for him. He suffered a lot.

"Our apprentices here," he said one day in 1867 telling his story, "Can judge the difference between how they are treated and the way I myself was."

In making his start, he already shows a rare mixture of resignation and daring.

He did not think to complain about such a pittance. He works hard and behaves well; he gets one franc more per fortnight, 100 francs reward the first year, 200 francs the second, and 300 francs the third, as foreman, food and lodging. But he is twenty, he is a good workman, and his daring appears. He boldly asks his boss for 3 francs 50 cents a day; he will no longer be fed. The boss agrees, though reluctantly, and sees the power of his will! After a year the young worker has saved 600 francs to free himself from military service, ensuring against the odds of the draw.

Endowed with extraordinary powers, he understands the need to cultivate them to make them fruitful. He borrows books from his boss, he buys some, he wants to learn, to overcome the barriers of ignorance.³

Married at twenty-two, and dividing his time between the workshop and the domestic hearth, he makes rapid progress, soon becomes designer and earns 6 francs, then 8 francs per day.

At twenty-six, again a sign of daring! He establishes himself as a contractor glazier-painter in a small shop at rue Cassette, 15, at 300 francs of annual rent, not possessing 1,000 francs of capital. Anyone who worked across from him was electrified by his ardor. Alert and skillful, he astonished his companions by many a feat, dominated them, forcing them to imitate him, does not lose a

³ In July 1864, on Leclaire's initiative, the Society of Mutual Aid, that he founded, created for its members and workers of the Company a public library established in the spirit and with the aid of catalogs of the Franklin Society.

minute and takes just enough time to eat a humble meal brought in a basket by Mrs. Leclair.

Two years later, in 1829, he waged his first battle. Knowing he would be paid cash, he dares to bid a package for 20,000 francs, painting seven houses built on rue Bourg l'Abbe! People think he is crazy, and they tell him so. But nothing can shake his resolve. He sets to work and begins by exciting the zeal of workers by offering to pay 5 francs instead of 4 francs. He works with them, he leads them, he electrifies them. The work is executed in the time wanted, and he earns 6,000 francs of net profit.

This success brings him luck; several architects, Mr. Gau in particular, whose name he always pronounced with gratitude, becomes interested in him. By 1830, he is already working for wealthy landowners and large jurisdictions. Mr. Ad. Eichthal was one of his earliest patrons. In 1834, he leases on the same street, number 8, a larger premise, and soon counts among his customers two Ministries, the Bank of France, and several companies and railroads.

Here he is in the saddle, armed for the battle. He sees opening in front of him the road that leads to prosperity, to wealth.

He will think now of his workers.

But before going further, permit me a reflection.

Leclair had drawn to himself the excellent program developed so well then by Mr. Laboulaye. He has done wonders of economy and savings; he has been a model of sobriety; he has filled gaps in his early education to his betterment. But what would he have become if he had not learned to read and write? His life, full of useful works, is it not from this point of view, an argument in favor of compulsory education? Genius, talent, inventiveness, the rarest gifts that exist here and there, like a precious seed, in the soul of many creatures unknown or neglected, are suppressed, extinguished, annihilated by ignorance. Blessed be

the day when the little Leclaire had crossed the threshold of the school of his village! A poor school, no doubt, but that, by putting an alphabet in front of him, planted in his brain the first grain of instruction needed to fertilize the seed of a powerful intellect!

IV

PORTRAIT OF LECLAIRE IN 1838 BY M. FRÉGIER

Mr. H. A. Frégier, author of a book on the Dangerous Classes,⁴ and head of the office of the area of the State of the Prefecture of the Seine, traced in 1838, the portrait of Leclaire in the following terms:

In small industry, I have had dealings with contractors who, by the sound direction given to their workers and by the financial sacrifices that they knew to impose on them in case of sickness or for times of unemployment, must be distinguished from the crowd.

There is one above all (Mr. Leclaire, Cassette Street) whose efforts to improve the moral and material condition of his employees has not, I believe, been surpassed in terms of wealth and similar position. This contractor is a painter of buildings. I cite him in a special way because the workers in his profession are in general subject to habits of intemperance and disorder that puts them among the most vicious workers and that, despite the contagion of example, he has disciplined his own with rare skill.

Son of his works, architect of his own fortune, he began by carting around the wheelbarrow, and he

⁴ *The dangerous classes of the population in large cities and how to make them better.* Book award in 1838 by the Institute of France (Academy of Moral and Political Sciences) by H.A. Frégier, Head of the office in the prefecture of the Seine. 2 vols. in-8^o. Paris Baillièrè, 1840.

raised himself gradually by the wisdom of his mind, by his intelligence and his virtues, to the forefront of his profession.

He employs from 60 to 80 workers who, so say the architects in habitual business relations with him, are superior in every respect to the rest of their companions. The regime of the company is severe, but that severity lies more in the requirements of the regulations and the strength of the hierarchy than in the nature of the contractor. The way this one acts with his workers is based on a justice exact and kindly. He is temperate in austerity measures, but when it is appropriate to punish, he is quick and adamant in his resolutions.

He thinks, like all educated and well informed industrialists, that construction masters or deputy heads of industry must be vested with great authority; but he oversees them, and reprimands them outside the presence of the workmen; in a word, he indoctrinates them in such a way as to inculcate proper maxims and to make them inaccessible to the seductions of the cabaret, or to other no less unfortunate temptations, ordinary pitfalls of leaders of workmen.

He visits his workshops, stimulates and encourages workers who are always available, whether idle or on Monday or even Sunday when he needs them. His foresight never separates his interests from those of his workers. I speak of the workers who make up the fixed and permanent part of his company, and that is the larger number. Thus, he combines his operations so as to manage constant work for the latter during the difficult season, although this kind of work does not

provide him any profit. Since the wage is lower, he supplements it with advances for which he will reimburse himself from the first wages upon the return of major works.

What shall I say of the moral discipline? It is such that former workers, who had separated from him to escape the bonds of that discipline, come back to reclaim the healthy yoke of authority when their health is affected by the excesses of intemperance. These returns, almost always well received, are more eloquent than praise I could give the prudent firmness of the man, who has introduced so successfully sobriety, taste for work and economy among workers under his leadership. (Volume 1, pages 301 et seq.)

V

FOUNDATION OF A SOCIETY OF MUTUAL AID (1838)

Terrible sicknesses were, for Leclaire's workers like all other painters, the result of the use of white lead.

That color, of which lead is the base, is a poison. Its use produces first awful colic, called metal colic, accompanied by very acute pain in the limbs and joints, vomiting and paralysis of the hands and fingers, and lead poisoning manifested by nervous irritation, a dangerous delusion, madness, and a blue border around the gums. Often, this disease is followed by premature death.

Distressed with this sight, Leclaire, who had been infected with cholera in 1832 and who could sympathize with the pain of others, led the establishment for his workers in 1838, a Society of

Mutual Aid with monthly contributions that would give them medical care and the necessary remedies.⁵

He had to fight for it against the opposition of several of his workers, but he was not discouraged. He understood all the

⁵ The Society of Providence and Mutual Aid of the workers and employees of the Leclaire Company was authorized by the Minister of the Interior September 28, 1838 and approved by Ministerial Decree of July 27, 1863.

To be eligible, you must have worked for five years at the Leclaire Company and be part of the Nucleus.

The Society has, as of 1 September 1878, 135 members, namely: 96 participating members, 4 honorary members and 35 pensioners, including 24 former members and 11 widows.

The Society bears the costs of illness and burial and does not ask, since 1854, of members any annual fee.

After 20 years service and 50 years of age and in case of injury or disability, all participating members are entitled to a pension of 1,000 francs, revertible by half to the widow and minor children.

All workers, even *non-members*, who, in working for the Company, received an injury that makes it impossible to earn a living, is entitled to the pension.

The same pension plan may be granted by the General Assembly of the Society for the worker, even *non-member*, 50 years of age and 20 years of service and whose strength was exhausted from work.

The deliberations of the General Assembly of the Society are prepared by a family Council of twelve members while all participating members are part of it in turn for a year and who sit with them, as *ex officio* members, the President of the Company, the two Vice-Presidents, the Treasurers and Secretaries, all elected by the General Assembly.

The amount of reserves paid by the Society during 1877 to 40 people (including 24 former members and 16 widows), was 34,450 francs.

The Equity of the Society for pensions on 1 September 1878 was 1,009,851 francs 03 cents. That equity, placed in the Pension Fund for the aged, in government bonds, and the remainder, in partnership and in the current account of the Leclaire Company, results from the accumulation of profit shares allocated for many years to the Society, either voluntarily or in its capacity as silent partner of the Company.

benefits of mutuality, and above the relief of physical ailments, he saw yet another result:

The Society of Mutual Aid, he wrote in 1850, is a powerful means of moralization. It is a living course in public law; its members, being used to complying with various sections of the disciplinary regulations governing it, understand that there is no order and security for the interests of one and the other unless all bend before the law.

And further:

The Society of Mutual Aid is also to say the mother of pension funds.⁶

It was only in 1861, more than twenty years after foundation of the Society, that Leclair, as I will explain further on, could have adopted, by the members, his ideas relating to pensions for guaranteeing them bread in their old days.

VI ORDINARY RESULT OF A TRANSFER OF CUSTOMERS

The great work of Leclair is the organization in his workshops of a system of participation, which, adding to regular wages a share in the profits, allowed achieving with it better work, realizing larger profits and ensuring the future of the workers.

Leclair was the first to apply this system with remarkable success, but he modestly gives all credit for the invention, first to the influence of ideas of social reform propagated by various schools then, more particularly, to Mr. Frégier, office manager at the Prefecture of the Seine, author of the book: *The dangerous classes of the population in large cities*, as just mentioned.

⁶ *About poverty and the means to employ to stop it.* Page 14.

Leclaire wanted to keep his workers from poverty, so cruel for the elderly, by creating for them, with the help of their participation, a system of retirement pensions.

The removal of old workers, the natural consequence of a transfer of customers, had always deeply moved him. He spoke of it in vivid terms in the Proceedings that he was accustomed to sending from time to time to customers of his Company. I ask permission to read here a few pages of this writing. It contains both a perfectly clear narrative and accurate picture of the feelings, the concerns that filled the soul of Leclaire.⁷

It first outlines the sad usual outcome for older workers of the transfer of a customer by a contractor to the purchaser who succeeds him:

The word customer, by the use made of it today, has undergone a complete transformation. It has even become somewhat respectable, since in general it is used as a label placed on a commodity that one claims to own and that one sells well and good.

In fact, any industry leader, having made his fortune, leaving the business, makes a list of what he calls his customers; he puts at the head the most beautiful names, and he submits that list to someone who intends to succeed him. The seller emphasizes the profits he earns from this or that particular client in doing their work. In short, they agree on the price of the customer, and they fix the times of payment.

The successor makes a fortune in his turn, resells the same customer to a newcomer, so on and so on.

⁷ *Report by Mr. Leclaire to customers of his company results they have helped him to obtain for the welfare of his workers.* 1865.

The buyer of the customer keeps the good workers and employees whose appearance does not yet announce agedness; but those whose appearance reveals a diminution of forces are ruthlessly expelled.

Each successor does the same; he obviously has no reason to do otherwise.

A discharge of this nature is a terrible blow to the worker who suffers it...

From that fateful day, he acquires the sad conviction that wherever he goes asking for work, they will think, at first glance at his face and his demeanor, that he is too old to acquit himself well.

So, what happens to these intelligent men who once formed the kernel, the nucleus of the establishment, the sacred battalion, who on one word, on even one sign, understood the will of the boss?

What happens to these collaborators, whose dedication allowed doing the more difficult things, and which, by their example, forced to action the workers who worked at the company only temporarily? ...

What can we do for these noble ruins of the workshop that we push to the side, like tools that have become unfit for any service?

What can we do for these men who were the elite of the construction sites, that customers knew, that they called by name, that, in many cases, they preferred over the boss?

Leclair recalls then that he was a worker himself and that he knows thoroughly and by experience the manual work and the workers.

At seventeen, he says, I disembarked in the big city, where I learned the trade of building painter.

There I could hear everything said of good and of bad about bosses.⁸

I sat in on many conversations related to subversive doctrines, and that certain workers hold against owners, but I could appreciate equally the good sentiments that animate the majority.

Also, one should look twice before daring to utter the ignoble word, *partisans!* and that we are not afraid to apply to the majority; that word that revolts the conscience of all those who have the honor to carry the name of worker.

We do not know the worker enough or his sensitivity with regard to his honor. To know him, one must have been a worker himself, and especially to

⁸ In a speech May 16, 1869 at the Sorbonne, in the general meeting of the Society for Mutual Aid, Leclaire, wanting to show that he had established participation in profits to ensure peace, recalled his memories as follows:

You will find workers whose indifference is such that they do not produce two-thirds of the work they could do; similarly those who are willing to do their work conscientiously who cannot; in all the construction sites you will find some rascals whose arms are as short as their tongues are long, who never stop, through jokes and loads of bad taste, ridiculing the industrious workman. Personally, in my youth as an apprentice and even when a worker, I was the object of sarcasm and discouraging jokes such as these:

“You want to carry silk stockings to your boss, you want to enrich him;”

“Believe me, it will not be to your taste; you do not see that it is your sweat that makes the car roll. Ah! Here, he has a daughter; do you want him to give her to you in marriage? It is possible that we have seen kings marry shepherds. Well! my dear, put yourself in the cluster that is not for your nose, and whatever you do, at the first opportunity you will be thanked as any other, and then when you have no more work, your comrades will not hire you; they will leave you aside like a flat foot.”

Such are the conversations that take place in workshops where employees work by the day, and the education that apprentices receive there; each generation transmits them.

remember it; because for many, the day after they are no longer, they think they are molded of another dough than their former comrades in the workshop.

VII ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PARTICIPATION OF EMPLOYEES IN PROFITS (1842)

Leclair added also in the same report:

Having become boss, I did not forget what I witnessed in acts of all kinds and more or less unfortunate that occurred before my eyes when I was a worker, and I remember all the hardships that the employee who is orderly is forced to impose on himself, to meet his needs every day and to prepare for unemployment and sickness.

I also remember that with a daily wage it was impossible for a worker, who had almost always old parents in their care or children to raise, to save the littlest amount for the time of old age.

I was under the impression that the day when I retired, that the stable workers who would have remained with me could not do the same, and that my successor would do to them what you know.

I thought then that I would not enjoy complete happiness in remembering the fate of those who would have helped to enable me to have my old days happy.

After 1830, some formulations had been thrown into the world; we reproduce only the following:

To each according to his ability; to each ability according to his works (*Olinde Rodrigues*).

In this racecourse of progress, one thing that I will regret having forgotten is that, in a not distant future, it will be necessary to increase the welfare of the working

classes, not by impoverishing the rich, but by enriching the poor (F. Arago).

These prophecies, these formulas, these definitions and all that follows from them led me to reflections of all kinds.

On the one side, the affairs of my business required development, my physical and intellectual forces were not sufficient to direct them to my liking.

On the other side, a long illness had made me understand how important it would be to be replaced as needed.

Restless both physically and morally, I avidly read all the writings related to issues of political and social economy; I hoped to find practical ways of organization that would bring me out of embarrassment.

I was in this state of mind, when the Honorable Mr. Frégier, at the time he was writing his book entitled: *The dangerous classes*, etc., came to me for information on the habits of the working painters that I employed.

His visits were frequent, and our conversation turned solely on this important issue: the relations of the worker with the boss.

To all the developments that I used to explain to him how the difficulties were great to remove the antagonism between worker and boss, Mr. Frégier replied that he saw no solution but participation of labor in the boss's profits.

It was in 1835.

My head was too stuffed with all the ideas expressed by economists and reformers of the time to savor this proposal; it seemed quite impractical, so I rejected it

very far; I could even less understand what Mr. Frégier was expressing without formulating how to apply it.⁹

But, while I continued to be perplexed by the difficulty of responding to all work orders, to the degree that they reached me, the idea of Mr. Frégier

⁹ Strange and even incomprehensible! Mr. Frégier, who in 1835 would thus, according to the oft-repeated assertions of Leclair, have ushered into the mind of the latter the idea of association in profits, seems a few years later, to have completely changed his opinion! In his work, crowned by the Institute in 1838 and published in 1840, he condemns, without exception or reservation, any such combination. We will judge by the following quote:

"The writers most advanced and most bold on the issue of remuneration of labor came together to ask that the worker share the profits like the work of industry, and one of them tried to make this association by calling it the *Finance of work*. Labor compensation by salary or a fixed fee is the most convenient, clearest and most accurate way to pay the productive worker. Setting between him and the contractor any other association, would be to plunge industry into chaos and would deteriorate the condition of the worker instead of improving it ... Such a combination would present the greatest difficulties, not only in the choice of means to establish it, but in the art of running and managing their interests. And besides, could the worker immerse himself in the management of the company without compromising it by continual unrest and the most contrary resolutions? ... This new way of finance ... would it make him partner in liability for losses? Losses! how would the day laborer who lives on his salary, he, his wife and children, be required to pay his share of losses? We could only charge that on the profits ... However, the profits do not materialize immediately ... On the other hand, the contractor, the only managing partner and the only one truly responsible, has he waived the right to dismiss those of his workers that he would have to complain about? Such a waiver would be suicidal and cannot even be foreseen or expected." - The author emphasizes the practical difficulties that would accompany establishment of worker accounts such as dismissal, and workers deprived of their jobs in times of unemployment, and he concludes with this strong statement: "An association complicated by so many interests, so many different positions, so mobile and so precarious, would be a work made with clouds; it would have neither body nor soul." (Volume 1, pages 336 et seq.).

had taken root. Suddenly I saw (in 1840, five years after!) in applying it, I could serve my interests, and be useful to workers and employees who would be attached to my fate (1).¹⁰

So I set to work resolutely on this ground: *the participation of the worker in the profits of the boss.*

Without knowing it, I was prepared for it; I already had a core of good men, who were linked together in a society of mutual aid that I had founded in 1838.

In 1835, he also said, I did not understand, and it only hit me in the forehead in 1842 that the thing seemed possible and easier to implement.

¹⁰ In the speech cited above, of May 16, 1869, Leclaire made the following statement, which deserves to be preserved:

In taking my part, I made this argument, which I often repeat in our meetings: all businesses whose profits depend on day labor can vary greatly: when operating on a large scale, the results are significant.

Could one worker, in our industry, by his activity, his goodwill, and a more intelligent use of his time, produce in the same period of time (one day) additional work equivalent to one hour, that is to say 60 cents, what is the actual rate per hour?

Could he also save 25 cents a day by avoiding the loss of goods entrusted to him and by his care conserving tools?

All answer affirmatively.

So, if a single worker can give this result, to realize, on behalf of the contractor, 85 cents per day in what he produced for 300 days of work, the sum of 255 francs, and if we assume that in the company, the average of workers employed is 300, we would get an annual saving of 76,500 francs.

So, it is using this saving that, first, our Society of Mutual Aid grows its capital every year and can pay pensions for elderly workers and, second, it can distribute profits to those who help produce them.

Is it not remarkable that a word in 1835 injected into Leclaire's mind, by a man who perhaps himself did not understand the scope of this word, could produce for the well-being of several generations of workers, the results we admire today?

The progress of ideas perhaps can be compared to the progress of major rivers, of which we love to search for and view the source. Here, it is a large inlet which merges with the ocean; over there, it is only a humble fountain hidden in the grass.

But the fruitful work of an idea in the brain of a man is accomplished only through constant effort.

You have heard Leclaire say in his report that he was struck in his forehead.

This was one of his favorite expressions.

In one of his First Poems, Alfred de Musset says to a friend:

Ah! strike the heart: therein lies the genius.

But it is not enough to strike the heart to discover truth in the social sciences. Excellent for poets, the counsel of Alfred de Musset would be insufficient, if not dangerous for Leclaire. He had reason to hit his forehead for it to penetrate his head. He had proceeded, to boost in his workshops the human will, to combine the physical and moral forces employed in production, through analysis and observation, as he had in his laboratory for using zinc in paint. He did not create it by inspiration, but by dint of reflection; he knew how to combine elements scattered around him. The phenomenon that was happening in his mind was comparable, not to lightning that suddenly ignites the horizon and is off, but like at the dawn of day, little by little, gradually the darkness is replaced with light.

Thus, after five or six years of hesitation, Leclaire accepted the idea of participation in the profits, that is to say the principle of sharing the wealth created by joint effort with the same sharing and with the energy that produced it.

VIII

DISCLOSURE OF METHODS OF UNFAIR
COMPETITION
(1841)

At the time that Leclair wanted to establish participation, in 1841, frauds in painting were many. He understood that his workers and he himself would be accused of doing so only to increase dividends. What did he do? He revealed, without the slightest scruple, all the secrets of the trade and gave to auditors, architects and the public in various brochures, the mystery of a thousand ways to make them pay dearly for a bad job after having usurped the undertaking with huge discounts.

These publications, he said in 1843, in forcing one to be an honest man, tended to establish well the field on which there should be competition.

Here is how he expressed this in his account rendered in 1865:

An essential condition in my opinion, and what should be the main base to reach my goal, is that the greatest honesty must exist in all possible relations with whoever addresses himself to the company; and so that he could not come to the idea that any worker and employee departs from these principles of honesty, I judged it necessary by a great publicity to expose the frauds that take place in the industry of painting, gilding, hanging, and glazing.

IX

THE LAW OF 22 GERMINAL IN IX AND THE
PREFECTURE OF POLICE
(1842-1843)

Leclair had encountered on his way many obstacles, but also elements of success for him to triumph!

Among the obstacles against which he had to fight, I will mention only two, the distrust of some workers and the alarms of management.

Some historical details are indispensable here.

At all times, since the origin of his company, Leclaire had encouraged by bonuses and high payrolls the workers who showed zeal and diligence, but soon he conceived the idea of exciting emulation in a more complete way and to safeguard the future of his staff.

After founding the Society of Mutual Aid authorized in 1838, he sent to his workers, as early as January 12, 1839, a circular that advocated strict enforcement of a new regulation of the workshop: "So that each of you understand well," he said, "that there are in my thoughts other things than my personal interests." He announced that henceforth foremen would have a rise in pay of 2 francs, deputy chiefs 50 cents, workers working for two years 25 cents.

The authorization given to Leclaire in 1838 to create a society of mutual aid had been preceded by serious investigations of the nature of the Company and the aim of its founder. The findings of the reports made on that occasion by the Prefecture of Police were as favorable to Leclaire as to his workers.

In June 1840, Leclaire, who wanted to prepare a core of workers for his projects of profit-sharing, asked for and obtained permission for them to meet at his place, rue Cassette. They numbered from 80 to 90. A report to the Prefect of Police, June 28, 1840, said that everything went well: well run, very tranquil, perfect order.

On August 10, Leclaire asked his workers by a printed circular that they give him the active and dedicated help asked for in the meeting of June 28; they should complete their apprenticeship because: "It is a matter of great importance and who wants the end

must want the means." The first of these means is that their boss be "the great arbiter to judge the rights of each and to apply the means of implementation." "I think," he added, "that a person imagines the day when they are a partner, that everyone will be free to do what he pleases. No, gentlemen, it cannot at any time be that way. A regulation will set the rights and duties of each ... I am master of my business; I want to arrange it (or speculate, if you please), in such a way that that speculation benefits the greatest number possible." Then follow some very remarkable technical recommendations that end with a warm appeal for help from all.

Leclaire devoted the year 1841 entirely to completing the administrative organization of his workshops and offices.

On February 15, 1842, Leclaire, in a note entitled: A word to our workers, explains that he wants to implement a project to improve the lot of his collaborators; that it requires a full submission to the rules of the company; "that with strict discipline, reasonable and paternal, we can do many things;" - that we must also trust each other: "What I did in the past should answer for the future. This is not a partnership that I form; I do not know even if the law permits me to do it; it is simply to distribute to a number of my workers who shall deserve this benefit, a share in the profits produced through work. I have always told you and I repeat it, I will never do anything without the consent of authority which, to this day, whenever I needed its support and its permission, has always shown her kindness. I like to think that you understand it is something substantial and that success depends on the caution that I take in its implementation." Then follow the statutes, in 21 articles, dated February 15, 1842, entitled: Regulation of administration and distribution of profits generated

by the work of the employees and workers making up the core of the Leclaire Company, put into force on 1 January 1842.¹¹

Some days later, Leclaire, who having left the left bank to establish himself at rue Saint-Georges, 11, and who, to meet with his men, had built for this purpose, at Cardinet street in the Batignolles, in his stores, a place for that purpose, asked the Prefecture of Police permission to meet with his workmen, March 6, 1842, in this room, to explain statutes following which the principal ones among them would have a share in the profits of work. With his request, he enclosed a copy of these statutes. This request was rejected by decision of the Prefect dated March 2, notified immediately.

The meeting did not take place, but, March 10, Leclaire sent a new circular to his workers. He merely told them he would grant new benefits announced in his pamphlet (that is to say participation), but if the inventory of 1842, which would not be done until the end of January 1843, did not show higher profits than previous years, the high wages granted since 1839 would be removed, as well as other promised benefits.

In the course of 1842, the first distribution of profits occurred in the following circumstances:

I spoke of the distrust of workmen; on the side from the group convinced of Leclaire's good intentions were other suspicious workers. The history of labor shows these doubts to be almost invincible, this reserve hostility; excited also by the newspaper, L'Atelier, which accused Leclaire of maneuvering simply to lower wages, the incredulous wondered whether the participation promised would actually be paid, and if they were not the playthings of a vulgar deceit.¹²

¹¹ See the brochure: *Améliorations*, etc., P. 17, reprinted it in 1843.

¹² One of the reports of the Delegation of free labor to the Universal Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876, that of Cabinetmakers, which has just been

published (Paris, V ° A. Morel et Cie, 1878), reproduced against profit sharing very strong attacks already formulated in 1867 by Mr. Tartaret. The editor of this report does not dispute the benefits of industrial profit sharing, but, not seeing wages as a transitional state between serfdom and the full allocation of proceeds to the producer, said it had only the ideal of a "disciplinary organization where the soldier workers have only to do" without complaint and without hesitation "the orders of their leaders, and to accept the bribe of dividends that their lords," in their kindness, "are willing to distribute to them if they have been nice." It holds this system *retrograde*. "Its generalization would lead to nothing less than industrial serfdom." They talk of distributing dividends! of the worker owner, after several years, of the capital that, free, he would not have acquired! Is it that certain serfs in the Middle Ages, did not buy back their freedom with gold? "This capital, besides, is just one part of the excess profits made by the company, to serve as a stimulus that is the bait of a share of the product... It is the bone thrown to the watchdog whose vigilance has driven away thieves."

Another side of this fiery opponent of profit sharing sees the dividend as only a means of disciplining workers, "to rivet them to the company," to establish a regulation that turns the workshop into a barracks. Mr. Tartaret in 1867 was already surprised by the severity of the Rules of the Leclaire Company: "Neither speak! nor drink! nor smoke! nor, etc..!" Soon workers of this company would be considered as only slaves, prisoners or martyrs. For him: "It is Mazas." Participation has, moreover, in the eyes of the author of the report, the serious disadvantage of producing "the isolation of participants and the breakdown of the solidarity that should unite workers." This creates a category of *satisfied* that will inhibit their comrades "from solving the social question by the Production Partnership." The writer, who may have known Leclaire, wants to admit that there are "for the honor of humanity, fortunate exceptions among industrialists who practice this system," but evoking memories of antiquity, he recalls, on this occasion, that the relative mildness of Aristotle, who emancipated his slaves upon his death, saw nothing of "unworthy cruelty of his patrician, Vedius Pollion, who fed the fish in his basin with slave flesh cut into pieces." (Pages 224 et seq.)

In a letter sent March 3, 1868, by Mr. Leclaire to M. Tartaret, appropriate to an open discussion on participation, in the collections of the Raoul passage, Leclaire wrote to him: "Those who push the working class to the Partnership with their own resources are either in bad faith or ignorant. If they are

Leclaire replied to these negative impressions with a theatrical twist. It was in 1842. The inventory of 1841 compiled, he assembled the workmen: throwing a bag of gold on a table, he opened it and gave each his share. The total of these shares amounted to 11,886 francs.

This teaching by seeing, this lesson of things bore fruit. All hesitation disappeared. Everyone put themselves to work earnestly and without thinking back.

Leclaire could see that if it is true that an experienced man is worth two, it is even more true that a worker with a serious investment or a partner is worth three.

This first result, so important, however, received only restrained outside publicity.

We will understand easily why.

The obstacle resulting from the mistrust of workers was overcome.

Its administration remained.

Eighteen months after the failure of his last approach to the Prefecture, September 18, 1843, Leclaire returns to the charge. He addressed to the Prefect of Police a request for a hearing and reasoned:

The difficulties that one experiences, especially in recent years, practicing his profession in my industry, determined me to organize my company, not only in a way to make my task easy and successful for the present, but also to ensure the conservation of what

ignorant, we must forgive them; if they are in bad faith, and they are against it because they foresee the difficulties and failures, they are very guilty because they prefer a revolution to a peaceful transformation in economic and social relations." (Workers' Commission, 1867, 2nd book of Minutes, by Eug. Tartaret, cabinetmaker, Commission Secretary, pages 282 and 302.)

cost me so much sweat and many evenings to acquire. The means I use to achieve this goal, Mr. Prefect, are recorded in the little work that I have the honor to address to you, the work to which I attach the account of operations made in 1842. For the results of my organization to fully meet my expectations, I would need, Mr. Prefect, to gather in one of my workshops, four or five times a year, those of my employees and workers to whom I give *a proportional share in profits* produced from the work. These meetings would have a single and unique aim, namely to explain and make well understood to these employees and workers what course everyone should take, as much in their relations with those who honor me with their trust, as in their internal relations with their comrades, and also to give them instructions on how they should proceed in the execution of work entrusted to me; in short, Mr. Prefect, it is, if I may be allowed to use this expression, to make an ethics course of painting practice and administration. My profound respect for authority prevents me and will always prevent me from using an alternative route to meet my workers, even with me, if I am not positively authorized.

Instead of getting the hearing he requested, Leclair received, October 12, 1843, from the police commissioner of his district, notification of a formal refusal. This refusal, notified after minutes of said date, contains "express ban on said meeting under any circumstances, under the penalties of law:"

The curious report that served as the basis for this prohibition should be retained and live in the memory of men.

Had they discovered a serious matter to charge Leclair?

Not at all.

Whence came the obstacle?

We will judge.

The report, dated September 21, contains primarily in the margins, the following analysis:

There is danger for the working classes and abuse in authorizing meetings of the workers of Mr. Leclaire, painting contractor, to hear him on sharing the profits of the company.

Here is the text of the document:

REPORT.

The painter workers of Mr. Leclaire have formed a partnership for mutual aid.

A ministerial decision of September 28, 1838 authorized their partnership and approved the rules.

Mr. Leclaire, master contractor, is both their honorary president and treasurer.

The rules of this partnership do not include any clause that allows workers to participate in the profits of the work undertaken by Mr. Leclaire.

Already, in March 1842, Mr. Leclaire asked the Prefect for permission to meet in his workshop 60 to 80 workers for their participation in the profits of his work.

As to payment of wages to workers and costs of labor between master and workers, the Prefect refused or rather prohibited the meeting. Mr. Leclaire complied with his orders, and the meeting was not held for the purpose specified in the application that he reproduces this year.

Mr. Leclaire, in the year 1842 nevertheless distributed among forty-four of his workers, a sum of 11,886 francs, produced from profits of his work.

It is this kind of partnership in profit-sharing, that he wants to renew this year, and to do so, he seeks permission to meet his workers four to five times a year, beyond the number twenty.

We believe, in the circumstances where it places the contractor, that his intention is not other than to hire workers to ensure the extension of his work by giving them opportunities to share in the profits he earns from their work.

This is a question of regulation of wages of workers who do not seem to need to be encouraged and is even forbidden by law. The worker must remain entirely free to set and adjust his salary, and he should not form a pact with the master, and that is what Mr. Leclaire aims at today.

In this report, the permissions that he seeks we see ought to be refused, especially if one considers that, by association in the profits, the worker agrees with the master beyond a year, which is forbidden by Article 15 of the Act of 22 Germinal Year XI. For these reasons, we believe and we propose to refuse the authorization sought by Mr. Leclaire.”

The Chief,

Signed: ILLEGIBLE.

This article was intended to work against the spirit of ancient guilds and to protect the worker against any attack on his freedom. The legislator of the year XI without doubt would collapse in profound astonishment if he could have foreseen the use that would be made in 1843 of his germinal law.

Chance led the Commissioner of Police signatory of the interdiction report to recommend to Leclaire a former soldier seeking employment. Leclaire hastened to welcome the candidate who was paid, like any other, his share of profit and who retired shortly after.

Leclaire could not meet with his workers, but if it was disturbing, the bad will of the authorities could not however prevent him from adding a dividend to their salary.

This offense, in effect, is neither punished nor foreseen under the Penal Code.

He simply took the precaution in his circulars and accounts, to substitute the word "benefits" for "participation" deemed suspicious. But this restriction did not last long.

In a pamphlet published in 1845, and entitled: Distribution of benefits of work, reporting years 1842, 1843, 1844 and 1845 in progress, he explains that his staff had received under the title participation, 19,714 francs for 1843 and 20,060 for 1844.

The most striking success confirmed Leclaire's hopes.

He noted it himself in familiar terms:

When, in 1842, I began to involve the workers in the profits of the boss, each said his own, each criticized and claimed that it was not possible, that I would no longer be master of my own place, that I would sink, etc.. Well! They were wrong.¹³

It is also important to note here that, thanks to the good cooperation of his workers participating, Leclaire could, without inconvenience, abandon in some ways, from 1844 to 1850, his painting business to occupying himself with manufacturing white zinc. Leclaire said that not one boss, with only employees by the day, could do so without losing his customers and jeopardizing his interests in the highest degree.

¹³ *Lectures*, page 118.

We see that the lances launched against Leclaire by the Prefecture of Police had completely failed in their purpose.

I limit myself to expressing a wish.

The huge enclosure in which are gathered at Trocadéro and Champ de Mars the wonders that we admire, contains many special exhibitions, collections of all kinds, real museums.

If the idea comes to the organizers of the Universal Exposition to open, before its closing, a teratological museum of administrative monstrosities, the report of 1843 that I have read you would hold a worthy place.¹⁴

¹⁴ I have the worker booklet, no 60421, issued January 8, 1822, by the Prefecture of Police, to the worker painter Leclaire "on the request of his master Jolivet, painting contractor." At the head of this booklet, in the place of honor is printed an extract from the law of 22 Germinal Year XI, including the famous Article 15, which reads: "The employment of a worker shall not exceed one year unless he is the foreman, leader of other workers or has any wage or conditions stipulated by a specific act. "

Dalloz (*Directory of Legislation, Doctrine and Jurisprudence*, Vol. *Industry and Commerce*, No. 106) states that "within the limits prescribed by law, the obligations of workman to the master may take place in all manner, by the day, by the task or event, by means of a fixed salary, by the year," adding that "the worker may still have, in addition to his wages or salary, a share of the profits and be involved in a more direct way in the company." The preamble of the Act of 22 Germinal Year XI, presented to the Legislature by Councilor of the State of Regnault (of Saint-Jean d'Angely), 12 Germinal year XI (*Moniteur Universel*, 13 Germinal), is filled with background on the legislation "enslaving and destructive" the ancient guilds, on the absolute freedom established by Turgot, under the Empire in which "everything was permitted up to confusion," and abolished in 1776, reappeared "with many disorders and abuses," since the Act of June 17, 1791; but title III, entitled: *The obligations between workers and their employers*, which includes Article 15, has no other comment but the following sentence: "The protective measures of provisions relating to apprenticeships, contracts between workers and their employers, protect the workshops from desertion, contracts from violation, ownership of capital and ownership of work from any attack." It is the same principle of protection of freedom that is

SUBSTITUTION OF WHITE ZINC FOR WHITE LEAD
(1844)

The Society of Mutual Aid has functioned properly since 1838, but the statistics of relief again confirmed the frequency and severity of saturnine disease. Leclaire made a thorough investigation and found that of 63 sick policyholders, 19, that is to say, 30 percent, had lead colic.

From another side, we had seen workers with white lead abandon their workshops in writing on the door the word slaughterhouse.¹⁵

The idea came to him that it was better to prevent the evil than to alleviate it without a cure.

What would he do for that? Remove the use of white lead in paint. But to attempt such a work he would need to be initiated into the secrets of industrial chemistry.

Never mind: Leclaire will make himself a chemist!

He began studying under the direction of Mr. Ernest Barruel, but soon perceiving that it would take too long to possess this

connected with the arrangement that section 1780 of the Civil Code carries that "no one can employ services except for a specific time or undertaking." The law simply wanted to preserve the freedom of workers. The report in the Tribune by reporter Mourricault on the law relating to the hiring contract (14th of Ventose year XII) expressly says: "It was convenient to rededicate the principle of individual freedom: that was the plan, in ruling that one could not hire services but for a specific time and firm. The consequence follows from the principle that if the commitment is not executed, it resolves itself into damages." Leclaire, in telling his workers that in working with more zeal they would obtain each year a share of reported profit, they did not sign any pact; he demanded from them neither servitude for life that the law prohibited, nor even a temporary engagement which the law always permitted.

¹⁵ Research on the influence that turpentine can have on the health of painters, by Leclaire, 1861.

knowledge, he asks his teacher simply to make available all the material known about whitewash. Leclaire tries to employ them one after another in paint. Only zinc oxide seems appropriate. Learning that others have preceded him in this kind of research, he renews the attempts of Courtois de Dijon, of Guyton de Morveau in 1783, of the Englishman Atkinson in 1796; he studies the reports of Fourcroy, Berthollet and Vauquelin.

Helped, sustained by an illustrious master, M. Chevreul, he multiplies the tests and experiments with an obstinacy that nothing deters, and one day in 1844, he discovers how to use industrially white of zinc, which is to say, to make it at a good price and to make it dry as quickly as lead. The expense is the same. The life and health of workers will be preserved.

Leclaire immediately buys or rents zinc mines and in 1846 he has built at Batignolles a factory that produces 400 kilograms of white zinc in 24 hours.

It is a revolution in the habits of the trade; it divides into two camps: on one side, consumers of poison, tied to the old routine, with workers thin, pale, exhausted by illness; facing them, supporters of white zinc, at the head of a staff of men large and fat, the complexion flowery and the air of triumph.

A scientific report by M. A. Chevalier of the Society for the Encouragement of Domestic Industry was devoted to the brilliantly successful inventor.¹⁶

The report says, in effect, that "Mr. Leclaire, by the many applications he has made of paint with white of zinc, by his

¹⁶ Report to the Society for the Encouragement of Domestic Industry by M.A. Knight on behalf of the Committee of the chemical arts, on the substitution of white of zinc and colors with white zinc for white lead and lead-based colors and copper by Leclaire. January 1849.

See also the letter from Leclaire to Mr. Legrand, Assistant Secretary of State for Public Works, dated December 26, 1846, published in the No. 8 of the journal, *The Exposition of 1849*.

persistence in overcoming the obstacles he encountered, has rendered a distinct service to the industry and public health."

We must hear Leclaire himself tell of his victory in one of the Lectures he addressed later, as mayor of Herblay, to residents of that community:

The disease of lead poisoning continued to rage against workmates who were growing old with me and that I came to love; I suffered from their pain.

It was in the beginning of 1844; it was then that, like a crazy man, as some qualified me then, I got it in my head to want to remove the white lead in paint, the cause of all these sicknesses. Indeed, there was, for me, madness to develop such a project and to throw myself headlong to do it.

Well, four years later, humanity was endowed with a harmless product, white lead was not abolished, but white zinc had replaced it in my workshops. My workers were no longer sick, and the value of zinc white was affirmed by forty-six of the main architects of Paris, under whose orders I had employed it.

He recounts then that in 1848, 1849, 1850, he received from the Society of Encouragement a gold medal, from the Institute, Division of Unhealthy Arts, a Montyon prize, and from the government the cross of honor. This man so humble of heart boasting boldly because he needs influence and authority for the things he wants to do, and, repeating the familiar sobriquet that had once scornfully been thrown in his face: "The crazy," he says, "The crazy triumph of his daring recklessness."

Today, in 1878, the use of white zinc compared to that of white lead in painting represents a ratio of about 70 to 80 per cent.

LECLAIRE'S CANDIDACY TO THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY IN 1848.

Leclaire was genuinely modest and shunned public honors. Yielding to entreaties, however, he presented himself in 1848 in Paris to the votes of the voters for a seat in the National Constituent Assembly, and at that time published a brochure entitled, *About the Organization of Labor*. Should he regret his failure? He hoped without doubt to work there for the triumph of his ideas, but I believe, for my part, that he served them better at the head of his company than he would have done in a legislature.

Leclaire was already popular in 1848, and during his candidacy many workers in different trades had signed a poster where we read:

CITIZENS

The time for rhetoric is past; these are the deeds we need. The work is to organize for association; only one man can get it done; it is citizen Leclaire, painter in buildings, whom you all know. What he has done is only a sketch, no doubt, but a fact. Now, as he has for six years studied the issue, he must be more enlightened than many who have only theories to present. He should therefore be sent to the Constituent House.

From another side, Mr. Legrand, Assistant Secretary of State, Ministry of Public Works until the February Revolution, who knew Leclaire and his work, and who had seen him at work as a painter of the Department, encouraged his candidacy by writing, April 22, 1848: "Well before receiving your letter, I had you on my list of candidates. Of all the issues on the order of the day, one that affects the organization of work seems to me the most serious and

most difficult, and I do not know a man in France that is more and better suited than you to deal with it and to bring it to successful solution. I very much want the success of your candidacy and I shall contribute to it with pleasure all my efforts. "

Here is the profession of faith of Leclaire:¹⁷

CITIZENS

I come a little late to request the honor of representing you in the Constituent Assembly; I yield to the entreaties of a large number of workers who think that, in the important issue that stirs us, I could be useful to the class to which I have always belonged at heart.

I am the son of my works; I have lived too long with workers not to know their needs; in a word, if I have been more fortunate than my old comrades, I have proven and I prove everyday by deeds that I remember well my origin.

The guarantees that I offer you are in the acts of all my life.

In 1838, I organized a society of mutual aid for the workers in my company, authorized by ministerial order September 28, 1838. That Society, after having helped those of them who have been sick since its inception, has now over 12,000 francs in state bonds and bank savings.

In 1839, January 12, by a circular, I told all the workers in my workshops that the leaders, because of their ability, would receive 50 cents or 1 franc per day more than the ordinary day, and that ordinary workers

¹⁷ This piece was found, after extensive research, since the conference of 1 September by one of Leclaire's former workers, Mr. Baral.

who have been with the company for two years would receive 25 cents more per day.

On August 10, 1840, I proposed to senior workers of my company to make them participate in the profits produced by the work. This proposal has not been appreciated as I had reason to hope; the ideas were not yet developed: it was too early.

In 1841, I began *my* February 24 by setting the workday to ten hours, and in 1842, I completed my revolution by announcing that at the end of the year, profits of the work would be shared among the most worthy as much on the report of intelligence as morality.

| | |
|---|------------|
| On February 12, 1843, the profits of the past year were shared among forty-four people, as many workers as employees; | 12,226 fr. |
| On February 8, 1844, the profits of the past year were shared among eighty-two persons, as many workers as employees; | 19,714 75 |
| On February 7, 1845, the profits of the past year were shared among eighty people, as many workers as employees; | 20,060 . |
| On February 7, 1846, the profits of the past year were shared among ninety people, as many workers as employees; | 19,404 75 |
| On February 20, 1847, profits of the past year were shared among ninety-two persons, as many workers as employees; | 20,388 40 |
| On March 11, 1848, the profits of the past year were shared among ninety eight people, as many workers as employees; | 20,754 25 |

Total 112,588 15¹⁸

Look at what can be done without touching the property of anyone who has it; that is what I practiced for six years: I found there my account and others also.

Finally, witness every day to diseases known as *lead colic*, that white lead, that poison, causes in my trade, on the workers who use this material, regardless of the damages it has done to those who manufacture it, I engaged in the search for a harmless substance that could replace it. After enormous expense and five years of perseverance, I was fortunate enough to successfully manufacture zinc white, which does not endanger health.

As for my political views, I need not say they are Republican; my actions speak loud enough that there remains in no one's mind that *Liberty, Equality* and *Fraternity* are not for me empty words.¹⁹

Fraternal Goodbye,

¹⁸ These benefits that, at first glance, may seem significant, are, however, very minimal, as they result from sales of 1,800,000 francs for six years.

¹⁹ I would like to bring to this profession of faith, dated 1848, the end of a letter that Leclaire would write a quarter-century later, March 20, 1872, to Mr. Audiganne to thank him for having taken one day the defense of profit sharing, too thoughtlessly attacked. He speaks as a statesman:

After the dangers that French society has escaped, in the presence of what is happening in Germany and the trial at this time in Leipzig against the Democratic Socialists, and examining what takes place in England and elsewhere, one wonders how they do not understand the urgency to study conscientiously, without prejudice, without bias, all questions which agitate them, to separate what is utopian from what is practicable and to proclaim loudly what is consistent with the truth, with justice. Let it penetrate well: it is not by quibbling or criticizing all honest attempts that we will succeed in preventing the collapse of modern society.

LECLAIRE

Painter-glassmaker, rue Saint-Georges, 11
corner of rue de la Victoire, 28.

XII

LECLAIRE'S PRACTICAL MIND

The elements of Leclaire's success, I bring back to three principle ones: his practical mind, his administrative capacity, and his diplomatic skills.

"We cannot praise too much," somewhere Mr. Frederic Passy said²⁰ speaking of Leclaire, "The mind that guided him and the practical sense that served him. "

Here is an example of his practical sense, of that exact notion of the nature of things that prevented Leclaire from being drawn beyond the limits set by reason and experience.

The fourth edition of *The Organization of Labor* by Mr. Louis Blanc published in 1845, by Cauville Brothers, contains in an appendix the verbatim reproduction of the minutes of the Leclaire Company for the year 1843, with full details of the distribution of profits, but Leclaire, mind very independent, did not share all the views of the writer who gave him such a large place in an already famous book. Leclaire did not accept the principle of equal pay, although this bias seems still quite common in his corporation. He wanted to promise only what he could adhere to.

In his pamphlet entitled, also, *The Organization of Labor*, brochure as candidate, published in 1848, amidst the agitation of minds, Leclaire, outlining his views on association, declares clearly that the salary of each should be in proportion to the material and intellectual services that each person is capable of rendering (page 19). In 1871, the wage having been reduced from 6 francs to 5 francs 50 cents or 5 francs, a number of workers asked that he take

²⁰ August 8, 1873. see *Journal of Economists*, August 1873.

it for them to 6 francs. Mr. Defournaux, Leclaire's successor, seemed reluctant in the face of unequal treatment that they were agitating to establish. Leclaire wrote to him on July 30: "Believe me, the good workers are not at all flattered to be treated like ganaches; there is a price per day that they want, that they hope to achieve, that they will get, believe it; grant them. Then you will have order, you will have justice, you will have wage inequality. "

Then we find in the writings of Leclaire sentences like this one, dated 1843, marked with the stamp of good sense, and so happily verified at home by the division of land ownership and investment of small savings in the national debt:

"The surest way of conservation is to increase as much as possible the number of those who own."²¹

Leclaire had read the works of Charles Fourier; he had attended meetings of Saint-Simonians at Taitbout Hall; he had studied the systems of the societal school; he counted friends among the members of that school; he was in 1846 one of the sponsors of the journal *Peaceful Democracy*. Presented to Olinde Rodrigues, he seems to have been included with him in 1848 on a list of candidates for the National Assembly. After 1852, Olinde Rodrigues put Leclaire in touch with Misters Emile and Isaac Pereire, who later entrusted him with the work of painting their important constructions.

Arlès-Dufour admired Leclaire's work and wrote in 1867, speaking of his company: "I consider as the solution of the great problem of the proletariat the principle of participation, as applied in this model society. The jacket and the blouse of the worker transform his clothing, and the worker becomes partner. "

In a speech delivered August 7, 1873 before members of the Societal School, to mark the 101st anniversary of the birth of

²¹ *Improvements*, P. 4

Charles Fourier, Dr. Ch. M. Pellarin made a nice tribute to the memory of Leclaire:

Mr. Leclaire, he said, had, as you all know, the merit to apply with no less intelligence than success, one of the crucial provisions of association. It was he who established the first, in his painting establishment, participation of workers in the profits of the boss.

It is certain that Leclaire professed for some of the views of Fourier the greatest admiration. During an interview on the principle of association, he would sometimes suddenly exclaim: "Ah! divine Fourier!" But Leclaire had never been blinded by the spirit of system; he did not follow, eyes closed, either Fourier, or Saint-Simon, or Mr. Louis Blanc. Head of industry, taking the helm, he knew the dangers, he knew the cost of imprudence; he had too much good sense not to exclude any hypothesis contradicted or not yet verified by experience.

As a chemist, he never forgot that given an alloy, one must know to extract gold and reject the useless slag and vulgar metal. The utopian and practitioner met in him at the point where utopia, ceasing to be a dream, could become a reality. Remarkably, the foundations of Leclaire are entirely consistent with sound doctrines of political economy, and this disciple of Fourier had in his pocket a certificate of orthodoxy signed by the masters of science!

The modern world distances itself more and more, and we must rejoice in theoreticians of all kinds: he wants neither doctrinaires nor sectarians, who are one and the other, the theologians of the social economy. We fled them to turn to true science, that is to say, to focus on examining the facts and the experimental method.

Leclaire was conservative in the true sense of the word.

In 1870, in the newspaper *Le Constitutionnel*, someone dared to write that "the participation of workers in the profits of the boss is perhaps only a new form of the insane desire to enter into a sharing with those who own more than us."²²

Leclaire was stung to the quick. In his Report of Results of Operations in 1870, printed in 1871, he cites that article:

According to the author," he cries, "our employees, our workers and I would be a tribe sharers. I ask your pardon! The feeling of ownership is too vivid for it to be so. The share of earnings that is paid to our employees is a legitimate gain, the fruit of their labor, which some use in buying a small house in the countryside, where many already live in peace, with the pension that they get from the Society, while others underwrite loans to the nation, to those of the city of Paris, etc.

He adds that, convinced of having complied with a sense of justice and social harmony, he holds all the more, and his heirs also, to what he owns. He says that after the family, he finds nothing more respectable than property, capital, whatever its form, and he concludes by calling, quite rightly, the author of the article back to Christian charity.

XIII

LECLAIRE DIRECTOR, FOUNDER AND ORGANIZER.

I said that the first element of Leclaire's success was the practicality of his mind, the sureness of his judgment. I found a second in his high capacity as a director and organizer.

None has managed better than he to arrange everything and provide all for the proper management of an enterprise; in

²² *The Constitutional* of May 10, 1870.

classification of employees, constant monitoring, perfect order, measures taken to ensure that each is assigned the task most suited to his abilities. He shows it himself in passing these precautions in his report of 1865:

Finally, he says, all kinds of provisions were taken so that, in our company, the march of business could not be compromised by the death, the resignation, the departure of these or others, and that everywhere and always, in all relations and in all the movements of employees and workers, there has been unity in command and in action.

To his talent as administrator and founder I connect the three following ideas that he put into practice with great success.

The first is the idea so correct that the leader must always have behind him someone to replace him. This thought constantly recurs in his writing. He had enlisted as a partner in 1853, Mr. Alfred Defournaux, the son of one of his foremen. First apprentice colorer in the company, then measurer, clerk and superior employee, Mr. Alfred Defournaux ran almost alone the company since 1863. Leclair wrote to him July 30, 1866:

As I tend to mummify day by day, I can only repeat what I've said to you many times: take action, what you do will be done well. But have in view only one thing: to seek constantly to make yourself dispensable, and be convinced that despite all the efforts you can make in that regard, you will never succeed.

It is under the influence of his views so wise that, while preparing to ensure the perpetuity of his work, he traces the advance in 1869, four years before his death, the mode of electing managers to replace one day his immediate successor; foreseeing that these future managers could be penniless employees, he assures them the means, through an ingenious combination, to

realize little by little the 100,000 francs social capital that each needs to qualify; that way he opens very wide the door to the future capabilities that will reveal themselves in his company; it improves the position of all and seeks to put into practice the maxim that inspired it: "To each according to his ability, to each ability according to his works."

The second idea that I connect to Leclaire's high administrative capacity is to have constituted in his company an elite of workers, a core, an aristocracy open to anyone who is honorable and industrious, and whose privileges, won by election for their work, does not prevent extension of participation to all auxiliaries, without exception, the benefits of an annual dividend and a pension in case of accident; it is to have formed cadres of managers at the same time solid and flexible where other workers take their place as required, and to have reserved to that elite, to that core, the essential vital functions, for example, the right to elect the bosses, the appointment of the Committee of Conciliation, and, as regards the mutual aid society, the right of admission of new members.

To enter that elite, and remain, one must be blameless on the triple point of view of integrity, morality and the performance of professional duties; but those conditions met, workers were not to be threatened by pressure or abuse of authority. Leclaire scrupulously respected in each of his workers, the freedom of man and citizen. He never inquired about their political or religious views. To enjoy the benefits so valuable of admission to the Core and Provident Society, the intelligent, clever and courageous worker has only one title to earn: that of an honest man. And what an excellent preparation for the exercise of political rights, the performance of social duty! what good civic education that results, for a young worker, from taking an active and serious part in investigations, reports, judgments, deliberations, votes, at

committee meetings or general meetings where he acts independently, where he takes responsibility, where he gets accustomed, in short, to managing his own dearest interests and those of his comrades!

The third idea, very bold, is no less fortunate than the preceding ones. It is the idea of having in place, as a point of support for discipline, a conciliation committee whose majority consists of workers, who can alone pronounce the final dismissal of a worker from the Core.

Leclaire's confidence in this respect was well justified. His knowledge of men admirably served him. Often the point of honor leads the workers to take action and cause systematically against the boss. Here, this prejudice does not exist. A special environment, which exerts a remarkable moral influence on someone who enters there, was created, and in this environment, honor commanded everyone to be fair and to enforce the regulation.

Listen to this letter written by Leclaire, a few months before his death, to Mr. Audiganne, March 20, 1872. In a discussion on participation, published in an official collection someone had remarked that a large company in Lyon had to abandon this system because a significant portion of the dividend took the road to the tavern. Leclaire was surprised by such an argument, and, citing what happens at his company, he adds:

Does this mean that he did not have any of his children lost that poverty, hopelessness, domestic troubles drives to drunkenness when they can do nothing more to rid themselves of it? Perish the thought, because in our company there are those who have fallen into this error. After they have come to this, they were called before a committee of conciliation, appointed by election; they were tried and condemned

by their peers. One must see the offenders when they come before this court that governs the process. There are some who are so excited that they cannot utter a word to defend themselves and who cry like children. Some receive counseling, reprimands; others in recidivism, are condemned to go to work one, two and even three months out of the company, and at the expiration of their sentence, they return to occupy their place without a murmur. Should I add this terrible circumstance, that in our company, the drunks correct themselves or commit suicide! Four have already done so, and if we had not arrived in time to another, there would have been five. The father of the family, I must say, to his credit, has really mended his ways.²³

A double job was done this way, within this industrial organization: next to the selection that grouped and coordinated constantly the good elements, it produced the transformation or the elimination of those who would produce a morbid state.

²³ These traditions continue. The workers are very disciplined, they are ready for everything; they do all the work asked of them. We can count on them. The leaders of the workshop carefully check the workers we hire temporarily. Someone who produces little is reported as not earning his day's pay. We can judge by an example the energy with which the Conciliation Committee, which has five workers out of nine members, wishes to preserve discipline. One worker, fired several years ago for having insulted one of the bosses, asked in 1876 to become again a member of the nucleus. The boss who had been offended consented that another boss be chairman of the committee. Despite the efforts of the latter, the other Committee members agreed unanimously that the worker in question be excluded from the nucleus forever, on the basis that, having ventured to insult a boss, it should not be lenient towards him, that the regulation needed to be respected, that it was better to sacrifice the interest of one man than to compromise the general interest.

XIV

LECLAIRE'S CONCERN FOR APPRENTICES

The high skills deployed by Leclaire to found and organize his work would necessarily lead him to consider the recruitment of his staff of workers.

There are no more apprentices! Apprenticeship is dying, apprenticeship is dead. This cry of alarm rang out everywhere, in the associations of employers as in the congresses of workers, and the wishes, constantly renewed, requesting the organization of vocational education.

This vital question could not escape the attentive mind and penetrating spirit of Leclaire.

Concerned to ensure the future of his work, Leclaire occupied himself a great deal with the moral education and instruction of apprentices in the company. In January 1865, he inaugurated lecture courses in hygiene, painting, decorating, wood and marble, spinning, ornaments, letters, gilding, hanging, glazing, measurement and accounting for his workers and employees. These courses are mandatory for apprentices. By a letter dated August 15, 1865, he absolutely forbids them from staying overnight and having them work on Sundays.

He notes in his report of 1865 (p. 24) that the majority of workers who are attached to the company are to teach their children the same trade that they practice:

They, in living honorably," he said, "Will not try to give them another; also we see already up to three generations of painters succeed with us; every father wants his son with him so he can learn his profession faster.

He had, in 1864, called everyone's attention to this point:

Workers and employees, members or not, all should say this. The fate of our family is here, so work with

courage, instruct our children, motivate them so that someday they can make good fathers of the family, good citizens.

Teach them all the respect we owe to others, if they want to be respected themselves.

Teach them that freedom ends where the freedom of others begins to be affected; teach them that the freedom of all is the respect scrupulous, absolute of the rights of others, the constant fear of offending people with whom one has relations of interests or not; finally, that freedom for self, like freedom for others, is nothing other than the implementation of the divine commandment that says "Do not do unto others what we would not want them to do to us;" and he adds, "in charting our duty: Let us, instead, do to others all that we would want them to do to us.

The staff of apprentices in the company is composed, in general, of our children; teach them their trade quickly; make them understand that they must be grateful to all those who show them how to work, and that, to pay that debt, they must, by a good use of their time, help support the men whose strength begins to weaken.

After a visit to the special courses that he had founded for apprentices, he wrote to his partner, September 16, 1868:

Here are apprentices; here is a nursery which prepares them for the future! without counting this young generation that I see in the shops and that I no longer recognize. All this gives me great hope.

After studying the documents governing the organization of the company and the Society of Mutual Aid, Mr. Abbot Lantier,

then chaplain of the Orphans of St. Vincent de Paul, wrote to him from Vaugirard, October 3, 1865:

The training of apprentices, in you making sure that workers are trained in such a good school, will also ensure the perpetuity of the work, which could not fail only for want of men. It is a foundation that will live. How far it is from the worker painter as you understand him and the one trained to that worker-machine brutalized by debauchery and by work done without taste, without interest, without intelligence! In relation with a large number of young workers, I will make known to them all that I know about your company. Perhaps there will come out one day some imitation; at least there may be born among them a certain respect for such an organization that will dispose them to support the efforts of employers who try to imitate you.

XV

LECLAIRE OPPORTUNIST AND DIPLOMAT

A final element of success, the most important perhaps, is found in the wonderful qualities of opportunist and diplomat that prepared Leclaire for the difficult role he played.

If he had posed as an innovator, a reformer, everyone would have turned their back; architects and clients would have found such a claim somewhat presumptuous. So Leclaire made himself humble and small; he was careful to say and repeat that he acted only as an industrialist, a speculator, that it was better for him to earn 100 francs and give half to his workers than earn 25 francs keeping them for himself alone.

Some people, he wrote in 1843, Have gone so far as to attribute to us the ridiculous pretension to pose ourselves as a reformer; we reject with all our might

such an extravagance. We think it should be said, so that we know and so that we know well, that, in acting as we have done, we *speculate* purely and simply in our own way.²⁴

I have nothing to envy, he said in his report of 1865, I have no children: had I had, knowing what I know, I would have acted exactly the same way, and I maintain that if I had stayed in the rut of routine, I would not have come, *even with fraud*, to a position similar to the one I have made. I understood that it was better to earn more by including in my profits those who helped me than to earn less in not including them.

All this was true, but if Leclaire had been only a clever contractor, he would have kept his secret to himself, while in the profits he collected this way, he saw especially the components of a doctrine that he was postponing ceaselessly all that was brewing it.

He gathers and classifies with meticulous care, the praises, the expressions of satisfaction that his workers receive from customers; he challenges, with infinite skill, the most diverse supporters from the most opposite camps. Contractor of works, he is of service to everyone, just as the collection of encouragements that he receives contains the most diverse elements. It is neutral terrain, separate from politics, where are encountered with diverse nuances, in the expression of a common sympathy, the aristocracy and bourgeoisie, finance and the magistrate, the church and free thought, the school of orthodox economics and the phalanstery, government and the opposition, the court, the city and the suburbs, the classes which consider themselves leaders and those who do not want to be led:

²⁴ *Some improvements*, P. 12.

"What a brave man!" they cry enthusiastically in the workshop. "This brave Leclaire sent me a brochure," said at the same moment, with a knowing look, what a bigwig. Indeed, in many of these benevolent letters - signed by famous names, - the praise is banal and as thoughtless, while other characters, by contrast, show our reformer that he was understood, I was going to say guessed. We find in this amazing correspondence, exalted compliments from the highest aristocracy alongside energetic words of a militant proletarian. We admire what required patience, tact, consideration, the ability to form little by little a bundle of votes destined to act, at the desired moment, on public opinion. Haunted constantly by memories of the famous contravention of 1843, always afraid of being harassed, arrested in his progress through some misunderstanding, he sought protectors, supporters, witnesses, in the administration, at the Institute, in the large state bodies, everywhere that his voice and brochures could penetrate. Appointed by decree in 1863, President of his Society of Mutual Aid approved by decree March 26, 1852 in the report by M. Gaillardin, cordially greeted, warmly welcomed in 1864 by several influential people, notably by General Favé, he could read soon in the Monitor or the Official Journal the minutes of general meetings of his Society, and finally ceased to tremble before his police commissioner.

Leclaire, despite his protestations, was indeed of the great race of serious reformers. He wrote to his partner, Mr. Defournaux, July 27, 1866:

Pace yourself. Remember that you do not belong to yourself and that both of us fulfill a social mission.

This may seem very arrogant to many, but it is a fact.

And the following year, May 12, 1867, he writes to him again:

Remember that I started a revolution in 1842 and that you are called to continue it. Therefore, you need

tools so that you can continue one of the most significant works of the time. Patience, courage.

He no more wanted to be regarded as a benefactor than as a philanthropist. He claimed to demonstrate by experience a law of social economy and to implement a process of industrial organization. To award him a prize of virtue, to praise his charity, his generosity, was the offense to his most intimate fibers. It seemed to him that in speaking thus we wanted to undermine the very principle of his work! He knew that the honorable worker wants, as much as possible, no deserts from his good efforts than his sustenance and that of his family. Certainly, he admired with all his heart St. Vincent de Paul, but for him the field of charity and the organization of work should not be confused. He rightly claimed to have limited himself to combining human forces more skillfully than another; it was an offense to compare the dividends of his workers to large charities, or to see in his pension society a kind of richly endowed religious foundation.

Leclair, the same at 65, wanted to hide his strength and hid it as much as possible, so as to not offend self-respect. What respect of the social hierarchy does this Democrat! What a stubborn and prudent silence when it is necessary to be silent! What a tide of words and arguments when it is necessary to convince! What precautions to not go too fast! He advances step by step; he wants to get around problems rather than to address them in big battles; he does not harm anyone. He contributes greatly to many works of public utility that publish lists of their subscribers, but his payments remain anonymous; it should not be that this or that customer may regret having been less generous than this painter-glazier.

When in 1838 he had sought approval of the Government for the regulation of his future Society of Mutual Aid, he had verbally requested that his name should not be a factor, "to the end," says

the official report sent to the Ministry, "of not appearing in the eyes of some business colleagues, to have been driven by motives of ostentation in forming this Society. "

His life is full of lessons of prudence and we do not uncover a blunder.

XVI
RETIREMENT PENSIONS AND THE PROVIDENCE
SOCIETY
PARTNER OF THE COMPANY
(1863)

The Mutual Aid Society, authorized in September 1838, had for its main source contributions of members, set at 2 francs per month. After fifteen years, the share of the capital among the survivors could be reclaimed. In November 1853 there took place in effect, among 29 having the right, a liquidation that allocated to each 546 francs.

The Company would disappear thus at the same moment when assistance for older workers was becoming more indispensable than ever. Leclaire could not let that happen. Thanks to his efforts, in February 1854, it was reconstituted on a new basis, for fifteen more years. More monthly contributions. The resources of the Society would consist mainly in "the sum that would be given voluntarily by the Leclaire company annually at the time of its inventory."

In 1860, Leclaire proposed to members to waive future distribution and to organize a system of retirement pensions, but, from 1854 to 1860, it had formed assets of about 40,000 francs, which made distribution, either in 1869 or even immediately, represent for each a large sum.

Leclaire found himself in the presence of a strong opposition. Many members resisted. It was their right; but to this right, Leclaire opposed his own. More voluntary grants until 1869, and,

at the same time, threatens to introduce into the Society, through the mechanism of regulation, batches of members who would have inevitably a share of the cake.

They had to submit. They yielded. They agreed to grant the Society an unlimited duration, to allow the creation of pensions.

The minutes of the general meeting January 20, 1861 bears the trace of this internal debate:

I congratulate you, Leclaire says to the society's workers, on your determination and I thank you for the confidence you give me ... Since we have known each other, I have had much to battle with you; rarely have your ideas collided with mine; I have always understood the reason, it is quite natural; each of you think only of yourself, and I think of all ... Say it quite loud, it is only blind selfishness that could make one prefer a miserable share to a retirement pension. Pensions, by removing the antipathy between the employer and the worker, create stability and harmony in the workshop ... If I judge by several opinions expressed, you are concerned about this idea that the day when death will separate me from you, it will be over: disorder will come between my associates, the Leclaire company will disintegrate, each associate will want to have a fragment, and your Society of Mutual Aid will disappear ... I do not share your opinion; my partners are men of heart who will continue to honor a masterpiece they helped me to raise ... Gentlemen, when we want the end of something, we must will the means ... If, before long, it is not shown that after me things will persist, there will remain for me only to abandon the fight, considering that if physical and mental forces have their limit, courage also has its own.

Lawfully approved July 29, 1863, by the Ministry of Interior, that is to say become a legal entity, and already owner of a capital of 116,442 francs, the Society of Mutual Aid, as we shall see further on, is the cornerstone upon which rests the Leclaire company's edifice of participation.

In effect, after having established in 1842 participation in the profits for the benefit of workers individually, Leclaire, in 1854, allocated benevolently a share of the earnings to the Society of Mutual Aid; then, taking a step further, he made this Society, in 1863, by deed executed by a notary, a partner of his company. Thus the workers (represented by the Society) became co-owners of the capital of the industrial company. The mutual aid society brought in 100,000 francs in terms of common law. It receives, as a limited partner, interest for this payment of 5 percent per year, plus 20 percent of annual net profit; 30 percent is distributed to workers in cash as a dividend. Such is the situation created in 1863.

In 1864, Leclaire says to his workers in providing them these new statutes:

Members of the Society of Mutual Aid are not merely laborers who act mechanically and leave work before the clock has struck its final blow of the hammer. All have become partners working for their own account; as such, nothing in the workshop should be indifferent to them; all should ensure the care of tools and goods as if they were special guardians.

And he ended with these words:

If you want me to leave this world with a happy heart, you must have achieved the dream of my whole life; it must be that after regular conduct and hard work, a worker and his wife may, in their old age, have enough to live in peace, without being a burden to anyone.

LECLAIRE'S ABDICATION AND RETIREMENT
(1865)

Owner of a small country house in Herblay (Seine-et-Oise), Leclair retires there in 1865 to see his work go on by itself. He does not want to attribute to his presence, to his personal influence, the prosperity of his company the success that is due to participation in the profits.

Sure sign of a great depth of spirit! He wanted to erase, to annul, to make disappear, the jealous attention with which others sought to have him regarded as indispensable.

In 1863, in a letter written and dated January 14, to his senior aides, he said to them:

If, among those who have grown old with me, there are some who have thought about how I have proceeded my whole life, they ought to know that my efforts constant and tireless have always tended to make me dispensable, that is to say that the machine can operate without my involvement. Has the goal been achieved? I do not hesitate to answer in the affirmative.

In his correspondence with his friend and partner, Alfred Defournaux, that idea returns without end. Established in Herblay, he writes to him, August 25, 1865:

I beg you, be constantly aware of the need to put myself at the door of the company. Whenever you see me in Paris, say to me: "But what did you come here to do? Stay in Herblay, go for a walk, take some trips. We do not need you; you forget that you are sixty-five, that you enjoy your days of grace and it is imperative that in the company we get used to not seeing you here." You helped me build a work which, to the

degree that it will be studied, will be more appreciated and will have a greater impact ... a work that will grow and take on proportions that it is difficult to suspect at present. Believe me, I am under no illusion.

A little later, in 1866, still pursuing the implementation of his plan, Leclaire resigned as chairman of the Society of Mutual Aid. Then it was, seeking a successor, and judging me probably sufficiently imbued with the wisdom of his views, he wanted himself to put up and have accepted my candidacy.

Leclaire's retirement in 1865, motivated by his desire to secure the future of his company, could be explained, however, by another cause. He had lost his wife March 20 of that same year and did not want to live in the apartment on Rue de la Victoire, 38, where they had lived so long together. According to his orders, the room of Madame Leclaire, closed like a tomb, remained closed until Leclaire's death. In addition, at each of his meals, Leclaire wanted to have before his eyes, in the usual spot she occupied at the table, the place setting of his "dear departed," always present in his thoughts, always alive in his memory.

XVIII LECLAIRE VILLAGE MAYOR (1865-1868)

Sentenced to loneliness, having for more than forty years shared his sorrows and joys with a beloved wife, Leclaire could resign himself to live far from his beloved workers, but not to remain idle. On September 22, 1865, he accepted the post of mayor of Herblay. His ideal after all was the life of the village; he disliked the noise and the bustle of big cities and in his personal views, social reform by agricultural association held a high place; he even tried one day, but without success, to acquaint the farmers of Herblay with the idea.

Do not go to the big city," he told his constituents, "There are too many people; stay in the village, stay to cultivate your land; one is much happier there than in Paris. Indulge in the study of cultivation."²⁵

For two years and eight months, Leclaire busied himself with tireless ardor, in all parts of city administration. He repaired the church, organized assistance, founded a society of mutual aid, gave all his attention to the primary school and room of refuge; young children would have soup at noon; the older schoolchildren were enlisted in a society to preserve bird nests from destruction; a fund for schools was opened and, each time that Leclaire celebrated a wedding, he appealed for contributions to the fund in the name of the newlyweds. He also established a public library. He thus put into effect in 1867 and 1868, some of the ideas he had issued in 1850 in his pamphlet on poverty.

On large posters displayed on the walls of the village, he chatted with his constituents, with whom he inspired unbounded confidence. He discussed all topics with them, from public education to weeding trees, of public safety to moral hygiene. His extreme sagacity, united with great kindness, was revealed by lines that recall some aspects of the character of Franklin. Thus, when discussions erupted in the bosom of families and we beseeched him to restore harmony:

I'll do it with all my heart, he said, but on one condition, that is, on both sides, they must recount nothing from the past nor explain it. Without that, all I could do would fail to reconcile you.

His *Talks* in the form of posters invariably ended with this beautiful formula – "Confidence, patience, courage, perseverance, love us, help us." Many of these posters contain very remarkable

²⁵ *Talks*, P. 34.

passages. Permit me a brief quote, intended only to show you this mayor of the countryside in his relations with the village children.

I quote this fragment of the Talk from December 1, 1867.²⁶

In recent days, a little girl led by the hand a little child she was having enter the room for asylum, saying:
"Go quickly and be very wise!"

I approached this little girl, who had given advice as would a mother; I asked her who she was and she gave me the name of her father. I said to her:

"You bring your little brother to the room of refuge, you are recommending him to be wise; that is very pretty, that's fine, I compliment you; but you, you are not going to school?"

"I do not have the time, sir."

"How? you do not have the time."

"But no, I must stay home to clean."

"But your mother cannot do it?"

"No, sir, she died."

"Since when?"

"It has been two years."

"How old are you?"

"I am twelve, sir."

"How many children are you?"

"We're five."

"Are you the eldest?"

"No, sir, my brother is. He is fifteen."

"What does he do?"

"He goes to the fields with papa."

"And you are the oldest of the other three?"

"Yes, sir."

"How, is it you who does the housework?"

²⁶ Lectures, p. 58.

"Yes, sir."

"And the cooking?"

"It's me, sir."

"But the beds for sleeping?"

"That's me too, sir."

"But you're not strong enough or big enough?"

"Yes, sir, and then I climb on a chair."

"But, my dear child, you should nevertheless try to go to school?"

"I go there a bit in the afternoon; but there are days that I cannot go."

In recounting this conversation to someone from the country, I learned that this dear little girl had another brother old enough to go alone to school, but, fearing he did not go directly, this little housekeeper accompanied her brother until he was in front of the teacher.

What a housekeeper! What a cook!! Poor children!!!
Poor orphans!!

But, you say, what remedy can be applied to miseries like that?

The remedy, you all know. It was taught to the world, eighteen hundred years ago, by the son of a carpenter named Joseph.²⁷

²⁷ Leclaire wrote in his will this sentence: "I am the humble disciple of the one who told us to do to others what we wish was done to us, and to love our neighbor as ourselves;" but someone who reported about him one day (May 1870) wondered, in reading his publications, to not have often seen the word *providence*. "They probably concluded," he said, laughing at his interlocutor with his Gallic wit, "that I have more to do with the devil than with God? But then, sir, because my business thrives, if the devil really helps me more than his creator, would it not do me well to remain under the patronage of the devil, since he is the strongest? "

Leclaire always claimed to be a speculator and to have established profit-sharing by virtue of the selfish calculation of enlightened self-interest. So be it! but recognize, after hearing the above, that his heart had been neither dried nor hardened by such speculation.

XIX A CHARTER OF WORK PARTNERSHIP (1869)

While Leclaire lived in retirement in Herblay, his company prospered. The assets of the Society for Mutual Aid amounted in 1868 to 327,295 francs.

The Universal Exposition of 1867 had called to Paris workers' delegations many of whose members had conferred with Leclaire.

He had on his side planned several improvements to his social action. Before proceeding, he opened an inquiry among his workers, and to this end, June 8, 1868, addressed a signed questionnaire to them.

The changes, said the preamble to the questionnaire, should have a place for the concurrence of all concerned. Then everyone having contributed to the establishment of the Joint Charter, everyone will respect it and follow it in such a way that there is always unity in action as in the command.

Among the twelve points indicated by the survey, with full freedom to point out others, are the following: Creation of a board of discipline, a way to appoint foremen, the question of unequal wages, conditions to be met for individuals to be linked to benefits, benefits to be granted to auxiliaries (when not associates), control of accounts and records. About 200 written responses, forming a voluminous record, were carefully classified and analyzed in a comprehensive report: A nine-member commission was called to give its advice.

The proposed changes, in accord with the commission, by Leclaire, were adopted by the majority of employees and workers of the company in a general meeting, and finally established by a deed exercised by a notary, January 6, 1869.

This notarized deed, whose writing was prepared and studied in a manner so solemn, is truly for the Leclaire Company, the Charter of work partnership.

According to this document, future partner-managers will be appointed by the general assembly of workers and employees of the core. The choice of the assembly can apply only to an employee sharing in the profits. It is recalled that, according to Article 17 of the Regulation, the company wished so that all abilities would come to light, to recruit, as far as possible, its bosses from among employees. The capital share of 100,000 francs from the newly elected boss is formed by the accumulation of at least two thirds from his share of annual profit, at least if his resources would not allow him to complete his stake otherwise. The outgoing boss or his heirs, if he is deceased, cannot withdraw his capital until and in the measure that the capital of his successor is complete.²⁸

The Society of Providence, partner for 200,000 francs, owner of equipment and customers, receives a quarter of the profits.

²⁸ Leclaire had always had a rule to consult workers on some important issues and to consider their comments when they were correct.

Once before, in November 1848, he had called them to deliberate on the basis of a new organization to be established. Divided into ten committees, they had discussed the following issues raised by Leclaire: Should the company organize its association legally to establish the rights of everyone? Should someone who receives benefits run the chance of losses? If the answer to this last question is affirmative, what guarantees should be given by each one in case of loss? Should the number of members be limited? Should profit sharing be granted to all or only after an internship? On all these points, lengthy and serious discussions took place in each committee and the minutes were kept.

Another quarter is allocated to the management. The second half of profit is distributed in cash to all worker partners, proportionately prorated to wages.²⁹

²⁹ Two notarized actions, dated September 6, 1872 and December 24, 1875, motivated by the death of Mr. Leclaire then by that of Mr. A. Defournaux, have maintained and upheld the industrial arrangement that, in its current state, can be summarized as follows:

Employees and workers bring to the industrial association their intelligence, their arms and also cash capital of 200,000 francs, formed from accumulated profits, and which bear interest at 5 percent. It is the Society of Providence and Mutual Aid approved, legally a person, who owns the stock, who acts as a partner, and who thereby represents the collective interest of workers.

The wage of workers, equal and sometimes greater than the standard rate, is subject to no restraint.

Three quarters of net profit, 75 percent, is allocated to employees and workers, and distributed at each annual inventory, in the following manner:

50 percent is distributed individually to each one in proportion to their work for the year, proportionate to wage or salary earned in the year, whether workers of the core, candidates for the core, or workers who have worked a long or short time; for the year 1877, there were 984 workers eligible for profit sharing;

25 percent is paid to the Society of Providence, which pays pension annuities.

A conciliation committee composed of nine members, namely: five workers, three employees and the boss, chairman by right, is appointed by secret ballot by the Assembly of the Core. This committee handles all the internal difficulties which may arise with the workers. It punishes any infraction of the rules, any breach of discipline.

This social act ensures the perpetuity of the work of Mr. Leclaire. There are always two general partners, of which the oldest gives his name to the Company. The capital contribution of each is set at 100,000 francs.

In the case of death of one of the heads, his replacement is provided by the vote of workers and employees of the core meeting in general assembly. This way a senior employee of the company can become boss. Once elected, he has permanently and indefinitely, all the power and also any liability

Thus, for the Society of Providence, partner in terms of common law, it participates in both profits and losses, with an inspection of the accounts.

For employees and workers, taken individually, there are profits only, without direct participation in losses. But we must remember that participation in losses may result indirectly, even for them, from the establishment of a reserve fund of 100,000 francs created to cope with losses through withdrawals before any division.

XX

PUBLICITY GIVEN TO RESULTS

In 1869, Leclaire's reputation and his work were already well known in France and abroad. For a long time, economists quoted in their books the experience or the example he gave and various newspapers often devoted space to it, but he always hesitated to give wide publicity to accomplishments, rightly believing that each year added new strength to his arguments. From his retirement in Herblay, especially since the notarized deed of 1869, he no longer opposed the spread of the results of an interesting experience.

The encouragements he had received since the publication of his 1865 report explained and justified this boldness. Absolute

resulting from the social act. He realizes little by little his contribution as a partner in name, in accordance with an ingenious combination of the social act.

Twice already, since the death of M. Leclaire, the General Assembly of the Core has exercised its right of election.

The amount of wages paid by the Company in 1877 amounted to 965,964 francs.

The number of workers normally present in the workshops of the Company averages 450. Of 984 workers and employees whose names appear on the payrolls of 1877, we counted 117, aged 25 to 40, who, after investigation of their education and their professional capacity, were elected members of the Core of the Company, 104 who worked all year and are considered candidates for the Core, and finally 763 who worked more or less time during that year.

theories, hazardous fallacies, sharp and brittle claims encountered, in Leclaire's success, a peremptory denial. Among Leclaire's workers, those who had once been strongly opposed to his plans had become his most fervent followers. From then on, he no longer fears the publicity and lets it be said that he did not think only to speculate in taking an interest in participation.

He had sent a large number of people his account of 1865; he had been careful, I have already said, to make his work known to many influential men and to gather their approvals.

He had notably obtained that from the distinguished speaker who presided in the Assembly. Mr. Edouard Laboulaye is a friend of cooperation, a founder of public libraries whose sympathies are acquired by whoever serves the great cause of true democracy.

I already said that, from all sides, valuable supporters came to Leclaire. Irrespective of party, considerable men applauded his courageous initiative.

I will only mention a few names:

M. Jules Simon wrote to him in 1865 aptly about sending his report:

"I congratulate you heartily for your efforts. Never was good will more necessary than today, and never has it been better rewarded by success."

Duruy, who, during his visit to the Ministry of Education, has missed no opportunity to highlight the work of Leclaire and the benefits of participation, opened to the Society of Mutual Aid of the Leclaire Company the amphitheater of the Sorbonne, and in 1869 welcomed there the banner of the Society, saying:

"I hope that your banner will soon lead the industrial world, because it carries in its folds a sense of justice and social harmony."

In a letter dated December 8, 1868, M. Leon Say, today the Minister of Finance, wrote to Leclaire as follows:

It has been nearly twenty years, perhaps even more than twenty years, that I heard talked about for the first time, by my father, Mr. Horace Say, the efforts so worthy of interest that you were making to resolve, without much noise, one grand theory, and also to say in your corner, the question of the relationship of workers and their employers.

Between the wage and the pure partnership, there was a place for an intermediate combination, that of workers participating in the profits; it is this combination that you have adopted and that you perfect every day.

It seems to me sensible, practical and, therefore, very fortunate.

I congratulate you on the developments that you have been able to give to it by extending it to all your staff, and I wish for its extension to other companies.

Berryer, the great orator, wrote to him in Angerville, August 17, 1865:

It is not by the fatal right to strike that the working classes will reach the well-being and dignity of life to which they are entitled. The strike, always inevitably devised, bears serious harm to consumers, to trade, to employers, to workers themselves, and threatens the peace and public order. The spirit of partnership can alone remove these evils, and thus the partnership of workers with those who require the work. The conditions of this work and the free settlement of wages, with workers' participation in the profits of employers, introduces among them a community interest and happy and honorable patronage ties, which should protect working men from the weaknesses and

dangers of sad individualism to which modern legislation has reduced this large class of the nation.

Mr. Michel Chevalier, the proponent of free trade, congratulated him, March 18, 1865, as follows:

I am much obliged for your further communication on the Society of Providence, which unites employees of Leclaire and Company.

There is only one answer to make to a statement like that: if we had in each department, a score of industry leaders such as yourself, social peace, whose absence is our great danger, would be promptly reinstated among us, the abyss of revolution would be closed, French society would be assured of overcoming the immense danger that arouses the antagonism of classes.

Finally, Mr. Chevreul, the illustrious and venerable scholar who had followed and encouraged his research on zinc white, told him at the same time:

Man of observation and practicality before everything, I have acquired the conviction that we will succeed in building something sustainable for the working class that will stand ahead of every kind of industry; that belongs primarily to employers to act.... The first obstacle to overcome is suspicion, and the first condition for success is mutual trust ... Your example finding imitators, the public will benefit.

In another letter January 15, 1869, Chevreul adds:

I appreciate the efforts whose good results now have the sanction of more than a quarter of a century! My congratulations to you are well deserved for the public example you have given of what one man, left to his own initiative, can do to benefit his company and his workmen, and I say, moreover, without fear of

contradiction, in the interest of the public peace. You have never busied yourself with the origin of capital nor with those who possess it. A simple worker arriving from your village to the big city, you knew nothing but its name; but what did you do in Paris? Honest worker, active and intelligent, you have shown how one can acquire this capital, how one can consolidate it increasing it always; finally by involving your workers, you showed how to acquire it honorably without stripping those who have received it from their fathers.

This brings to mind the words of Franklin:

"If someone tells you they can enrich themselves by means other than labor and economy, do not listen, he is a poisoner!"

Do not believe, in listening to the chorus of praise, that Leclaire did not have place many times to regret the peaceful shades of Herblay.

For some he was a man eager for fame; for others, he must certainly be beholden to some party and nourish at the bottom of his inventive mind some hidden purpose, some political or other ambition. All these assumptions were as vain as malicious. Leclaire never had but one goal, one idea. As Mr. Laboulaye, who helped to raise on the ocean shore the Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World, Leclaire, too, wanted simply to light a beacon and place it very high!

One day, May 4, 1867, during a strike by his remaining foreign workers, Leclaire appeared in a meeting held in a room in the Redoubt by some colleagues, numbering about eight hundred, who did not share his views regarding a salary increase which to him

seemed justified. This old man with white hair, then a member of the House Painters' Association, was greeted with furious cries.³⁰

He took his revenge in his own way the next day, bringing the per diem of fifty-five cents to sixty cents, a figure adopted since, in 1873, by the series of prices in the city, and under the law on the fluid balance in the communicating vessels, the impolite people who had booed, soon forced to raise wages too, were then fined!

It is certain, in all cases, that Leclaire was not prompted by vanity, or ambition.

The rest of his career proved it well.

Happy with the rewards he had received in 1848, 1849 and 1850, as the inventor of zinc white, he would regard as a misfortune for himself any distinction motivated by the institutions created in his company. He firmly believed that his authority and prestige would be lost. His workers having taken in 1864, with Mr. Gaillardin, member of the Higher Commission of mutual aid societies, the initiative of a process designed to give Leclaire the Cross of the Legion of Honor, he was indignant and burst into bitter reproaches, accusing the principal culprits of understanding nothing of his line of conduct and his projects and overwhelming them, devastating them with ruthless vehemence with his censure, his anger and disdain.

He even carried his scruples in this vein to exaggeration.

A few years before his death, the Society of Mutual Aid had hatched a new conspiracy against its founder. Wanting to have the image of Leclaire to have it engraved in medal, and knowing that they would never get him to agree to pose for it, the office of the Society arranged secretly with a clever artist of the Currency, who hid in ambush on the passage of Leclaire and was fortunate enough to get a perfect outline with stealth. When Leclaire learned of this trick, he felt a violent rage that he could hardly control.

³⁰ See article by Mr. Horn in *National Futures* May 6, 1867.

The bust of Leclaire, reproduced at the head of this volume, was executed in marble by the sculptor Aimé Millet, from a small photograph taken under a resolution passed by the General Meeting of the Society of Providence and Mutual Aid, on November 10, 1872.

XXI LECLAIRE WRITER

The numerous quotations that I have given have acquainted you with Leclaire's talent as a writer. The style is the man, and you could recognize in his writings the salient features of his character. To appreciate the power of the faculties he possessed, I only recall that this eloquent writer, this economist without knowing it, this indefatigable polemicist, had received only the most basic primary education. He could not spell,³¹ and we cannot consider without surprise the remarkable collection of publications that he had.³²

³¹ In a letter dated January 26, 1870 to his partner Defournaux, speaking of the influence that may give an example, he writes: "Note that a *passiphique* revolution may take place, unlike a violent revolution."

³² Leclaire's publications:

1842. Collection of notes on the abuses in painting buildings and in gilding, glazing and hanging with the means to stop them. Grand in-4°. Carilian-Gœury and Dalmont.

1842-1843. Improvements that could be made in the lives of workers painting buildings, followed by administrative regulations and distribution of benefits produced by labor, by Leclaire, and put into practice in 1842 in his company, rue Saint George, 11, cassette, 8. Same library.

1842. Dialogues on unlimited competition in painting buildings as well as gilding, glazing and windows. Same library.

1845. Distribution of the benefits of work. Record from 1842, 1843, 1844, and 1845 in progress. Widow Bouchard-Huzard.

1848. On the organization of work. Record of attempts made in the business of painting buildings since 1842 to date. Same library.

1850. Of poverty and the means to use to make it stop. Printing by Bouchard-Huzard. (This booklet contains in an appendix the first Rules of the Society of Mutual Aid, founded in 1838).

1854. Rules to be observed in the workshops by the workers and employees (following the new Rules of the Society of Mutual Aid, adopted in 1854).

1858. Price of painting, gilding and glazing. Discounts placed on the prices of work in these companies and the means to employ to prevent and recognize the fraud they do there.

1861. Research on the influence that the essence of turpentine may have on the health of workers painting buildings.

1863. Regulations of the Society of Providence and Mutual Aid approved by the Minister of the Interior, July 27, 1863.

July 1864. Rules and catalog of the library of the Society of Providence and Mutual Aid.

1864. Rules to be observed in the workshops by workers and employees.

1865. Account presented by Mr. Leclaire to customers of his company on the results that they helped him to obtain for the welfare of his workers. The Society of Mutual Aid invested in an industrial enterprise. Participation of workers in the profits of employers.

1865. The origin of currency crises and the means to employ to prevent them. (In this booklet, Leclaire argues that the difficulty for the contractor to make customers make prompt payment is a serious cause of disturbance and sometimes ruin. He asks that Article 1153 of the Civil Code, under which "the interests are not due until the day requested", be amended in this way "that the price of labor done and received, the price of goods sold and delivered generates the full right to profit to the worker or seller, unless agreed otherwise.") A petition to that effect, written by Leclaire and signed by several industry leaders, including Misters Barbedienne and Dietz-Monnin, was presented to the Senate April 5, 1865. It was printed by widow Mrs. Bouchard-Huzard.

1865. Account of the opening of special courses for workers and employees of the Leclaire Company.

1865. Town of Herblay (Seine-et-Oise). Wishes of the Mayor expressed to his administration when he took office in 1865.

The scribe to whom he entrusted his manuscripts without doubt erased spelling errors, but someone should not be allowed to touch the substance of the ideas under the pretext of improving the form.

A good friend of Leclaire helping him one day to put a few thoughts down hastily on paper, changed something and handed him a copy, pointing out that he had made this change so that the sentences were written in better French. Leclaire, with his usual vivacity, exclaimed: "But, sir, you pervert my mind, I am ... mocking the French!"

At times when he had to write a memory, a brief speech, a brochure on some important issue, for example, to request the amendment of section 1153 of the Civil Code³³ or the repeal of section 1781 of the same Code³⁴ he was prey to a veritable fever of work and to the pain of a difficult childbirth. Up at four o'clock in the morning only to go to bed at eleven o'clock at night, overworking the employee, Mr. Marquot, who recopied his almost

1868. Talks of a mayor with his subjects (by posters affixed to the walls of the town) September 21, 1867 to May 30, 1868, with a view to forming an agricultural and industrial association among residents of a town. Guillaumin.

1869. Following the report by Mr. Leclaire to customers of his company. Partnership of the worker in profits of the boss.

1870. Speech in the 31st General Meeting of the Society of Providence and Mutual Aid, May 15, 1870. (The work partnership. Proceedings of the 31st General Assembly, page 36.)

1871. Summary of results of operations for the year 1870, by Mistery Leclaire and A. Defourneaux to customers of the Company, to workmen and employees.

1872. Dialogue between an old worker and a citizen, on the association of the worker to benefit of the boss. - Armand Le Chevalier.

³³ See footnote on page 125.

³⁴ "Art. 1781. The master is believed, on his affirmation, for the amount of wages, for payment of salary in the year due, and for the account facts for the current year." (Repealed by law August 2, 1868).

illegible notes and overloaded with erasures, then rearranging thoroughly up to two and three times the proofs that he re-sent to the printer Bouchard-Huzard, he was suddenly faced with laws, with facts, with unknown books; he encountered at every step, like so many hurdles, the shadows and shortcomings of his first studies. He goes on, nonetheless, by dint of patience and reflection, then, judging his thought worthy to see the day, he fought heroically, and sometimes with a kind of despair, against enormous difficulties that he experienced in giving his ideas the form he wanted them to take: "What more could I do," he told his employee, "to get everything out of my head that it contains! If I had an education, I would return to the world!" The power of his natural faculties was, indeed, worthy of admiration. I said he had read a lot in his youth, but who taught him to speak a language so clear, so strong and noble, and to avoid the pretentious excesses that often spoil the writings of the most intelligent workers? Had he received lessons? Nobody knows; did he take courses? We don't know; and how, indeed, could he have, this worker, the chief of the workshop, the small employer who had to earn his bread every day?

XXII

LECLAIRE'S LAST YEARS

When the war of 1870 broke out, Leclair, although suffering, wanting to remain in Herblay, to protect and support his former subjects, submitted to the trials of the Prussian occupation. The workers of his company, members of the Core or the Society, had done their duty in Paris during the siege. When the sad days of the Commune came, some left Paris, others stood aside, sharing the grief of good citizens and confirming, by their attitudes and feelings, all Leclair's expectations. Then leaving Herblay, he joined them in time of danger. One of his relatives having begged him to leave Paris, saying it would be a crime to brave such

dangers, he replied: "Write to him that I stayed in Herblay during the stay of the Prussians and that I'm back in Paris to stay here also during these painful moments. If Paris blows up, I want to be buried under the rubble with my workers."

He said his goodbyes to several friends who lived outside of Paris and returned heroically into the furnace.

On July 2, 1871, he attended the general meeting of the Society of Mutual Aid where a resolution was adopted awarding a proportional share of profits in cash to every worker member, core member, assistant or apprentice, who worked for the company during any time in the course of the year. The minutes noted that an old pensioner, the senior of the members, observed after the vote, "that this idea had already been issued by Mr. Leclair in 1842."

On 16 June he wrote to his partner, A. Defournaux, the following letter:

I am in my seventy-first year, it is you who says that more than ever I should think of settling my accounts with the Eternal Father; also it delays me to see stopped and completed definitively all that, since 1842, I have undertaken; you who, from your childhood, have not left me, you know that all my actions have been devoted to this great cause of humanity, to the physical and moral improvement of those who have only their daily pay to live on.

All those who have grown old with me, a little more or a little less, have been my martyrs, but of the ones who supported me the most, the one who suffered the most from my requirements for all the many changes that the practice brought me to do in what I have undertaken, is obviously you, and I will keep for you a lively acknowledgement in the life beyond, if possible ...

Pace yourself, you must think of those who, for a long time, will need you, because, as much as instruction, education, will not replace ignorance among the masses, as much as the disinherited will not be in the same position to lift themselves to your level, we will always be obligated to give them a hand; otherwise this antagonism rooted in those who suffer and that is transmitted from generation to generation through the school of the workshop, will not fade out; therefore, reason must outweigh error.

A few months later, suffering and in need of rest, he shuts himself up anew at Herblay and has made business cards bearing these words:

LECLAIRE,

Hermit at Herblay

He writes on this subject to Mr. Defournaux, December 29, 1871:

The farewell that I chose to put on my cards, *Hermit at Herblay*, will look for some like madness; for others I will be an eccentric, original. Have the goodness to say that I enjoy all my faculties, that my resolution to live in isolation came simply from having implemented everything I dreamed of from my youth, I had nothing to want, that I was old enough to leave things to others, having the satisfaction also to have been able to provide bread to those who have grown old with me, my task was fulfilled; that nothing more remained for me to do than to make a statement to thank the gentlemen architects and clients who, in giving me confidence, made me able to drive my boat to safe harbor.

Around the same time (November 1871) Leclaire published with editor, Armand Le Chevalier, a small brochure where he put his whole heart, seeking to summarize his views on the relations of capital, labor and talent. This booklet, which is remarkable in many respects, is entitled: Dialogue between an old worker and a bourgeois, on the association of the worker with profits of the boss. The scene takes place in Paris. The speakers met in the clubs, under the Commune. The brochure has for an epigraph a phrase from Mr. Thiers: "Man has faculties ...; when he employs them, it is obvious fairness that the result of his work belongs to him, not to another." (About Property, p. 38.)

During the summer of 1872, Leclaire weakened; his handwriting, once so strong, became shaky. The first symptoms of the disease that would take him appeared.

He still attended the General Assembly on June 23, 1872, and read a speech full of excellent advice, where he summarizes the things accomplished and the magnificent results achieved after much effort. He could also keep abreast of the work of the inventory and distribution, which, under the notarized Covenant of 1869, gave 33,750 francs to the Society and 67,500 francs in cash to workers and employees.

For thirty years, the day of the distribution, after each inventory, was for him the happiest day of the year. "This was," his cousin, Miss Lise Hutinel, who did his housework since the death of Mrs. Leclaire, wrote me, "the day he was the most joyful and happy: it was obvious to all who met him."

The last joy of Leclaire had been learning, when the darkness of the disease had invaded his mind, that the day before, Sunday, July 7, 50,000 of 67,500 francs had been paid, at the opened office, to more than 600 workers; that the behavior of all had been perfect and exemplary, and that, following their highly expressed intentions, the amounts so distributed were carefully saved or

received, in the interest of family or household, the most useful employment.

Leclaire died at Herblay, July 13, 1872, at 71, of cerebral apoplexy, and was buried in Paris at the Montmartre cemetery beside his wife.

Leclaire had left instructions about his funeral. He wanted to be put into a coffin of pine, "like the one used," he said, "for members of the Society of Mutual Aid that I founded, and the same hearse." Only family and closest friends were to be invited. He added: "My executor will write a letter to the workers and employees attached to the company by which he will share with them that in departing from this world, I recommend to them to constantly remember that in working at the company, they work not only to improve their lot, but that they give a great example, and that that thought must be a constant incentive for them to carry out their duties, since they contribute to the liberation of those who have only their arms to live by."

In his will, Leclaire bequeathed to the Institute a sum to establish a prize for young architects, and to public assistance another sum to maintain, in a hospice, two beds for working painters.³⁵

³⁵ Here is the text of this part of his will, dated April 20, 1871:

I owe my position in large part to Misters the architects, and to show them my gratitude, I give to the National Institute of France a sum sufficient to justify a prize of a thousand francs or two prizes of five hundred francs to be awarded every year to students in architecture who follow the School of Fine Arts, and this, according to the conditions and forms that the members of the Institute may think fit to adopt. ...

In our youth, in our effusions with my dear departed, we formed the project that if one day we could, we would do what was necessary to establish two beds for men and women in a hospice in Paris; therefore, I request that it be done, and in the name of Mrs. Leclaire that preference in admissions be

Leclair left a fortune of about 1,200,000 francs.

If he had died poor, the demonstration to which he had devoted his life could not have been complete.

It seems that today in Paris to say that a man has a great fortune, he must have at least ten million. The one to whom we say simply that he has wealth, must have two or three million, while the rest, they are simply at ease.

Leclair was more comfortable than others with his 1,200,000 francs, he who lived with great simplicity and lavish only with handouts and useful spending.

His character was gay, cheerful. His good humor, his cordiality, mixed with indomitable energy, no doubt helped often to act on the staff of his company. He would make jokes. Alone one day in the country in 1862 and writing to his wife, he recounts to her that in having to make himself an omelette, he burned his hands and face: "So, if the cook does not always succeed, it is not his fault; I vote a credit to lengthen the handle of the pan." I saw him transported with enthusiasm, when speaking the language of a poet or a prophet, but he also had dark days, times of discouragement and doubt, moments when he could see on the horizon only fights and ruins.

Social harmony, so difficult to establish, even in a small circle, appeared to him, however, feasible and necessary everywhere. According to him, to reform was fulfilling a divine law. "God," he said, "could not want poverty." All war, all bloodshed horrified him.

The deterioration of his health often put his patience to the test. The blood rushed to his head and made all work impossible. In 1870, one of his legs was weakened, the following year, his sight

given to members of our two families who may find themselves in need of it, and to worker painters.

became confused, and it was to congestion that he succumbed in 1872.

Gifted, despite his frequent discomforts, with a vigorous constitution, which made him love work, he did not understand that an industry leader should think only of enriching himself quickly to exit business in the strength of age. He could not conceive of the alleged delights of a lazy life, whose emptiness could not be filled with good food, hunting, fishing or cards and that was abridged too often by a premature end due to the boredom!

Leclaire brought to his workers the deepest affection; they were his children; they formed around him a real family. Many, attached to the company for twenty to thirty years, had worked and aged by his side.

He dealt with the situation of each, and in case of trials, came generously to their aid, and with infinite delicacy, to all the miseries of which he could be informed.

He wanted the victims of industrial work to be honored like soldiers fallen on the battle field of honor; one of the workers of the company having been fatally injured following a fall, Leclaire wrote on February 11, 1867: "Poor D... goes very badly. If he succumbs, we must close all the shops and offices; everyone should help. We must honor the memory of this unfortunate to the highest level."³⁶

Those who knew Leclaire will never forget his expansive face, sometimes witty and cheerful, sometimes serious and reflective.

³⁶ This worker, a former artilleryman who had assisted at the Battle of Solferino, aged 33, father of three children, died after six months of suffering, following a fall from a scaffold. He had a broken spine. At that time, according to the law of the Society, the widow was entitled to an annual pension of only 200 francs. The workers in a general meeting, June 2, 1867, found this sum insufficient, and voted an annual allowance of 800 francs.

His white hair, his broad forehead, his sparkling clear blue eyes under thick eyebrows, gave his face a character of remarkable intelligence and dignity. Stocky, broad-shouldered, solidly planted on his legs, with the attitude of the contractor who monitors his workers and inspects their work, always dressed in the old-fashioned mode in a long black buttoned coat, this fine old man, respectable, so courteous, so spontaneous in his impulses, and at the same time so master of himself and others, as such an indelible souvenir in the memory of anyone who saw and heard him.

XXIII

LECLAIRE'S WORK HAS SURVIVED HIM

Leclaire's work has survived him, despite the untimely death of his successor, Alfred Defournaux, which occurred in November 1875. The movement of business of the company, which was 1,500,000 francs a year, when Leclaire died, now stands at 2,000,000.

The Society of Mutual Aid, founded in 1838, holds today by the size of capital the third largest rank on the general list of mutual aid societies of France, as of December 31, 1876. It is passed from this point of view, only by the Society of Mutual Aid of the workers and employees of the Orleans railway³⁷ and the Society of Dramatic Artists.

The Society of Providence of the Leclaire Company currently has 24 pensioners at 1,000 francs, 11 widow pensioners at 500 francs and five non-pensioner widows receiving help.³⁸

³⁷ We know that participation in profits, which serves as the endowment for that Society, was introduced to the Orleans Railway Company by François Bartholony.

³⁸ It is more than three years after Leclaire's death, and by the proposal of his successor, the pension of members has been elevated to a thousand francs, by resolution of October 26, 1875.

The assets of the Company, which was before the war, July 9, 1870, 578,318 francs, and in June 1872, at the time of Leclaire's death, 671,864 francs, has increased to this day, September 1, 1878, to 1,009,851 francs.

The total amount paid by way of participation, since 1842, to the Society of Mutual Aid of the Leclaire Company, or to the workers individually, reached today, September 1, 1878, the enormous figure of 1,932,517 francs, nearly two million!

The Leclaire Company endured since its inception and still without any shock, profound transformations.

It was first, from its founding until 1863, a monarchy, absolute in principle, in fact tempered by good habits and wise laws, and sometimes frustrated by a small amount of opposition. All powers, executive, legislative and constituent were then united in the master's hand. In 1863, a legal action, giving a share of profits to the Society for Mutual Aid as partner, inaugurated an entirely new system, since it determines the constitutional rights, once unlimited, of the head of the company. Then, in 1869, a new charter came in; the principle of the election of managers is set. The regulation, loyally accepted by everyone, is made law. A contract exists. Guarantees are given. Rights are created. Without falling into anarchy or chaos, the Leclaire Company, a limited partnership, takes on several characteristics of a cooperative association of production, but its leaders, partners by name, elected for life, are vested with powers and benefits commensurate with the importance of their function and the double responsibility, moral and legal, that weighs on them constantly. In a republic, as in a monarchy, the success of the general at the head of his army or ship captain on board assumes the full exercise of unquestioned authority. The precarious situation against managers is one of the wounds of the French cooperative.

I conclude with a reflection that suggests to me the success of Leclaire compared to the failure of participation that occurred in England in the coal mines of Misters Briggs and Co. and the metallurgical works of Misters Fox, Head and Co.

The latter, wishing to explain this failure, wrote in April 1876, the cooperative system corresponds to a state of social progress.

They were right.

Give to manual workers moral education, add a decent education, well suited to their state, deliver them from drunkenness, and in a short time, public opinion will come to their side, reforms that could emerge from individual initiative and free understanding will become easier.

Leclaire gave the example. He did, in the humble sphere of his workshops, the great work of education, instruction, of civilization and of progress, which, when accomplished by leaders of a people, honor forever their names in history.

In the Words of a Believer, Lamennais challenges a soldier he sees in his dreams and says to him:

"Young soldier, where are you going?"

"I go to fight so everyone eats in peace the fruit of his work ... to chase hunger from the cottages, to return families to abundance, security and joy!"

Leclaire, the believer, who had faith in the possible improvement of the fate of all, could have, also, stopped one of his apprentices, armed with his tools, and said to him:

"Young worker, where are you going?"

And the young man would have responded:

"I'm going, thanks to you, to win for me and mine, independence and well-being through work!"

This interesting biography has been greeted with deepest sympathy by the General Assembly of Members of Societies of Labor and has provoked on many occasions its approval and applause.