

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

CONSOLIDATION AMIDST FAST EXPANSION

At the beginning of 1837, Champagnat's Institute numbered 34 establishments and 171 Brothers.(1) However, it must not be thought that Marcellin was undertaking what could be termed reckless expansion. He never hesitated to confront a priest who was not giving the Brothers the support that Marcellin had originally insisted upon before he founded any school. More than that, he always insisted that the Brothers must be free to run the school in the way they wished and as the rules of their Institute required. Hence, as we continue our story of Marcellin's handling of the Brothers and his establishments after 1836, the first event of any real importance, on 2nd January 1837, was a letter from Marcellin to the Brother Director at La Côte-St-André, telling him plainly that the seminary director in that location, Fr. Douillet, had to stop his interference with the Brothers' manner of living and the way they ran their school.(2)

It seems that Douillet had been such an embarrassment to the Brothers there that their Director, Brother Louis-Marie, went to the Hermitage and placed the whole affair in Champagnat's hands. There were several matters of concern at this establishment, but one that Marcellin knew he must remedy was the growing antipathy between the Brothers at La Côte-St-André and Douillet's domestic servant Marthe Cuzin, whom the Brothers there referred to as Sister Marthe. This domestic servant had been made responsible for certain items in the Brothers' house, but her over-bearing manner and constant complainings to Douillet had so exasperated the

1. "Lettres de M. Champagnat", FMS Archives, C - RCLA - p.24; SI.107.

2. "Lettres de M. Champagnat", FMS Archives, C - RCLA - p.23; SI.127.

Brothers that one of them, a jovial-charactered Brother Castule, decided to do something. We are told that one day he tied one of Sister Marthe's arms with a rope long enough to tie the other end to the neck of a cow. Then he tied her other arm, in similar fashion, to the neck of a goat. Following this he excited the two beasts so as to make them hop about, meanwhile laughing at the loud shrieks emanating from Sister Marthe.(3) Marcellin's response was to write to Douillet to let him know clearly that if the matter of Sister Marthe was not cleared up quickly, he would withdraw the Brothers.(4)

Marcellin had had previous problems with Douillet. In January 1835 Marcellin had withdrawn Brother Louis-Marie from La Côte-St. André to help in the formation of young Brothers at the Hermitage. As relations had deteriorated between the Brothers and Douillet, Marcellin acceded to Douillet's request to return Br. Louis-marie to La Côte-St.-André.(5) Now, after his strong letter to Douillet in February 1837, he was hopeful things would change for the better. Unfortunately, however, Douillet failed to change his manner of dealing with the Brothers, thus causing Champagnat to go to La Côte-St.-André himself early in March.(6) He was further induced to do such action after receiving a letter from Fr. Colin (whom Champagnat regarded as his Superior in the Society of Mary) requesting that Marcellin try and manage the troublesome items with Douillet and not take away his Brothers from that school.(7)

Douillet was most unhappy at having the Brothers telling him what he should be doing, and Marcellin failed to influence him to change. This was a very serious matter. Marcellin knew that he must either withdraw his Brothers, or get action from the Diocesan

3. Br. Avit, Annales de l'Institut, (FMS Archives), p.101.

4. "Lettres de M. Champagnat", FMS Archives, C - RCLS - pp.31,32; SI.145.

5. Avit, op. cit., p. 101.

6. "Lettres de M. Champagnat", FMS Archives, C - RCLS - p.33;SI.149. (Lettre a M. Berthier, Vic. Gen. Grenoble: 11.03.37).

7. "Lettres du P. Colin", FMS Archives, 122/23.

superiors to put pressure on Douillet. For the sake of the children in the area, Marcellin chose the latter course. No doubt he was also influenced by the fact that Douillet had been responsible for encouraging some of Marcellin's recruits to go to the Hermitage. Marcellin had obviously thought, at first, that Douillet would understand things and would readily do what was required; but when after earlier complaints from the Brothers, Marcellin had written to Br. Louis-Marie instructing him to inform Douillet that the Brothers must be free to follow the rules and customs of their Institute(8) but Douillet refused to alter anything, Marcellin was forced into taking stronger action. Undoubtedly, the letter from Colin was also a very strong factor influencing Marcellin in his decision-making.

On 15th February 1837 Marcellin wrote to the Bishop of Grenoble, informing him that unless Douillet removed Sister Marthe from her work in the Brothers' house, he would have to remove the Brothers from La Côte-St.-André.(9) Then, after Marcellin himself visited La Côte-St.-André early in March and, discovering that Douillet, albeit reluctantly, would withdraw Sister Marthe from her work with the Brothers but refused to negotiate any of the other complaints of the Brothers, Marcellin wrote to the Vicar-General of Grenoble, Father Berthier. Marcellin pointed out that, although he had himself visited La Côte-St.-André, he failed to make any positive arrangement with Douillet. Marcellin wrote that he had booked two places on the coach for Grenoble, but Douillet said his poor health would not withstand such a cold journey. Hence, wrote Marcellin, he and Douillet were prepared to await the arrival of the Bishop (who was soon due to visit his Minor Seminary at La Côte-St.-André).(10) It so happened that Douillet was one of the most influential priests in the Bishop of Grenoble's diocese, which in itself surely makes Marcellin's actions on behalf of his Brothers even more commendable. Although we have no document regarding decisions made after the Bishop's visit to

8. "Lettres de M. Champagnat", FMS Archives, C - RCLA - p.23;SI.127.

9. Ibid, C - RCLA - p. 31; SI.140.

10. Ibid, C - RCLA - p. 33; SI.149.

La Côte-St.-André, things obviously turned out well enough for Marcellin to continue his school there.(11)

Many of Marcellin's letters at this time were letters to various people in important positions (such as Mayors, Parish Priests, Bishops) in which he had to reluctantly give a negative reply to their requests for new schools - practically always because of unsuitable lodgings being obtainable for the Brothers and/or the school in some areas. For instance, one such letter was written to the Superior of the Jesuit priests at La Louvesc (12) on 21st March 1837:

"The establishment of our Brothers at La Louvesc greatly interests me. What pleasure it would be to have our Brothers working near the tomb of St. Francis Regis for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, and under the patronage of the Jesuits. It afflicts me greatly not to be able to agree to this request. However, from now on, an establishment for your place will be written on our register and we are resolved to do all we can to create this foundation...."(13)

We know how Marcellin, in spite of his constant efforts, had failed to gain legal authorisation for his Institute. One of the many sad consequences of this concerned the recently founded school at Sémur. On 20th May of this year (1837) the Bishop of Autun, (in whose diocese was Sémur), wrote to Marcellin, saying:

"In my visit to Sémur, I was able to greatly appreciate the value of the Brothers whom you have trained and in whom you have instilled so much zeal, combined with excellent teaching, for the education of children. I understand how important it will be to retain at this establishment the Brother Director who will soon be

11. It probably says much for Brother Louis-Marie and his confreres that they were able to handle this situation (of course, with the strong support of Champagnat) and gave satisfaction to the Town Council and the people. Br. Owen Kavanagh remarked in a letter to this author that the whole affair at La Côte-St.-André illustrated "the patience, constancy, adherence to his principles, efficiency, respect and reliance on ecclesiastical superiors ... that marked Father Champagnat as a strong superior, a man of principle...".

12. The site of the tomb of St. Francis Regis to which Marcellin had often gone on pilgrimage in his seminary days.

13. "Lettres de M. Champagnat", FMS Archives, C - RCLA - p.36; SI.155. "Lettre à Rigaud, Sup.S.J., La Louvesc).

conscripted for the military. Do not forget the many troubles a new school has to undergo. I am confident that you will not close this school so recently opened and which has the interest and support of all the people there.

I wish to confide another establishment to your Brothers. I have no doubt, Father, that I can depend on you to furnish me all the aid I need to bring about this new foundation in which I am greatly interested...."(14)

The two foregoing letters are given simply to illustrate the multitudinous affairs that continually confronted Marcellin. Amongst the many other letters that reached him around this time, perhaps the following might also be mentioned, purely to further illustrate their variety. On 9th August 1837 Father Colin wrote to Champagnat, asking various questions on the economic conditions concerning all the establishments.(15) He then advised Marcellin to take three months off, during which he might do this: but, as he was trying to say, Marcellin was wearing himself out from overwork and needed a spell. He concluded his letter by telling Marcellin that if he were to die, everything would be in order for his Institute provided he had first itemised each establishment's economic conditions as Colin requested.(16)

It was a rather awkwardly framed letter and, in any case, Marcellin was never one to leave aside his important work on behalf of the Brothers. He would attempt to accomplish what Colin had suggested, but it must be no obstacle to his work to provide the leadership that such a comparatively newly-founded society, consisting

14. "Lettres des Evêques au P. Champagnat", FMS Archives, 128/3. Marcellin was able to avoid closing this school. The new establishment that had been mentioned by the bishop was the foundation of a novitiate at Vauban, 18 kms from Sémur. This novitiate was begun in 1839. (Br. Avit, Annales de l'Institut, FMS Archives, p.128).

15. He mentioned that he was not yet able to set out all the economic particulars of the Marist Fathers since definite arrangements had not yet been accomplished in some areas. "Lettres du Père Colin au P. Champagnat", FMS Archives, 122/20.

16. Ibid. (9 août 1837).

largely of very young men, required. For instance, on 15th August, when Marcellin circularised all the Brothers concerning the arrangements for their holidays and Retreats, he also announced the forthcoming foundation of a Juniorate (17) at La Grange-Payre.(18) However, when he went to Meximieux next month to make his own Retreat with the other Marist Fathers, a church technicality had to be observed. Since Marcellin was now in the officially recognised Marist Fathers within which Society the members had elected Colin as Superior General, Marcellin was required to obey this man and do whatever duties this particular person, as Superior, entrusted to him. To make it easier for Colin, Marcellin wrote out his official resignation as Superior of the Marist Brothers. Colin accepted it, but then immediately reappointed Marcellin to be the Superior of the Marist Brothers.(19) Marcellin's own faith, allied to his willingness to obey his rightful superiors, was certainly shown clearly.

When Champagnat returned to the Hermitage to prepare for the Brothers' Retreats, several newcomers had arrived, one of whom (20) was later to become Frère Avit. This young man persevered to become a Director, an Assistant to the Superior General and the writer of the Annales of the Institute's early years. He included many of the events that occurred in all of the Institute's establishments in France, until his death in 1892 (aged 72 years). (21)

Marcellin, except in the unsettled year of 1830, had always given conferences to the Brothers during their Retreats, particularly

17. A Juniorate was to be a school for boys who had thoughts of later becoming Marist Brothers. The boys would be taught the same subjects as in other schools, but would also carry out various Marist prayers, etc. that were not done elsewhere, so as to help them decide if they wished such a life later. Actually, the opening of this juniorate was another result of the Guizot Law of 1833: the young aspirants had to have more and longer training before coming to the Hermitage which was now retaining its young people longer also. Extra room had to be found, and this new venture, including as it did some ordinary boarders who paid well, was a measure which supplied both needs. Marcellin confided it to Br. Cassien.

18. The large estate (valued at 70,000 fr.) was left to Champagnat by the Will of Miss Marie Fournas.

19. Archives générales des pères maristes, dossier Champagnat, 18 septembre 1837.

20. Arriving on 1st October. (G. Michel, Chronologie de l'Institut des Frères Maristes des Ecoles, Rome, 1976, p.74.)

21. FMS Archives, Fiche F. Avit.

stressing what was required of them as religious and also the various rules of their Institute. Br. Jean-Baptiste wrote that, although he had always found Champagnat most interesting in his talks, this particular year stood out and the impression left on the Brothers was obviously profound and, more important, it stayed with them.(22) Yet, perhaps a stronger reason for his principles remaining with his Brothers was that, by now, he had finally printed the Rules for his Institute.(23)

For many years Marcellin had thought that there should be definite rules for his Institute and he often discussed the various items with his Brothers. After the official steps had been put into operation in 1836 really to commence the Marist Fathers, Marcellin had made the official printing of the Rules an urgent task. With the Marist Fathers to begin officially in September, he thought it opportune to have it done by then. However, more important to him, was the fact that these Rules must be as clear as possible. An additional reason for an urgent printing of them was that now, with so many establishments, it was difficult to have exact manuscript copies in each house. (24) During 1836, as Br. Jean-Baptiste put it:

"He assembled, for this purpose, a number of the most experienced among the senior Brothers, and for more than six months he devoted several hours a day to this important work. Each article was examined and discussed separately; and some of them occupied several sittings..."(25)

They were given to the printer in December 1836, and the following January each Brother received his own copy.(26) There were eleven chapters in this 58-page booklet, covering such items as: conditions for being received into the Institute, conditions for setting up an establishment, how Directors were to govern, a short Retreat each

22. Br. Jean-Baptiste, VIE, Vol. 1, p. 243.

23. Règle des Petits Frères de Marie, Lyons, 1837. (Copy in FMS Archives, Rome.)

24. Frère Sylvestre, Mémoires (Vie du Père Champagnat), St.-Genis-Laval, 1885-6, p. 157. (FMS Archives).

25. Br. Jean-Baptiste, VIE, Vol. 1, pp. 227,228.

26. Avit, Annales, p. 136.

month, and many other items.

It would be remembered that Marcellin had been sending Brothers to St.-Paul-Trois-Châteaux to escape the military conscription and when he attempted the long trip there in late July 1837 he had become ill and had had to stay with the Parish Priest at La Voulte. Whilst there, Marcellin had promised this priest that he would set up a school there - something very much desired by that priest. Well, in the midst of Marcellin's Retreat preparations and finalising the printing of the Rules, he heard that Fr. Cattet (Vicar-General of Lyons) had written to the Vicar-General of Viviers, Fr. Vernet, in whose diocese La Voulte was situated, telling him that since he already had a society of teaching Brothers in that diocese he should forbid the introduction of the Marists.(27) Nevertheless, when this news reached the Bishop of Viviers his immediate reaction was to write to Marcellin and plead with him not to suspend the sending of Marist Brothers into his Diocese.(28) Although Marcellin's work was mainly in the Lyons Diocese, he could not see why it should be restricted to that area. He thought that La Voulte, an important new town for coal and iron, had more need of a school than most of the many other applications he had received, so the establishment went ahead. Undoubtedly the influence and generosity of the mining manager Mr. Génissieux would have also helped to persuade Marcellin to give a favourable response.

27. Fr. Vernet, Vicar-General, had, at the beginning of June (8-6-37), given orders that the Brothers of Christian Instruction of Viviers (a society originally founded in 1825) were to move from Notre-Dame de Bon-Secours (in the Diocese of La Blachère) since 1827 the Viviers Brothers, having failed to gain legal authorisation, had joined up with the much smaller group known as "Frères des Sacrés Coeurs de Jesus et de Marie" who had authorisation. On 27th August this same Vicar-General announced that their superior must be a Brother, not a priest. (Chronologie des Frères de Viviers, now in FMS Archives, Rome, since they later joined the Marist Brothers).

28. Mr. Génissieux, manager of the Mining Company of the Loire, had been another person strongly urging the setting up of a school by the Marist Brothers at La Voulte. He was ready to pay all the expenses of the foundation, as he had done twice before - at Terrenoire and at Lorette. (Br. Avit, "Annales d'Aubenas", Maison de La Voulte, (Ardèche), p. 5. (FMS Archives, 211/33.).

The year 1837 finished with but two schools being closed,(29) whilst five new schools were set up. These latter were at Thoissey (Ain), Saint-Nizier (Rhône), La Voulte (Ardèche) plus Firminy and Perreux (both in Loire).(30) Thus, by now, the Institute had 38 establishments (31) and 210 Brothers. Champagnat later wrote that, during this particular year, no less than sixty-six priests or mayors had requested Marist Brothers' schools to be set up. (32) Forty new young men had started their novitiate, whilst five Brothers had died.

Two other events in 1837 are worth mentioning. One particular priest, Fr. Fontbonne, who had worked at the Hermitage in 1830-31, had been sent out in 1836 to Louisiana (U.S.A.) as a missionary. He was very keen to have Marist Brothers there. On 16th May 1837, Marcellin replied to say that he was sorry he was unable to help at the moment, but he added:

"... Our society goes from strength to strength - we now have 176 Brothers and a good number of novices ... All the Brothers were jealous of the two who had been chosen to go to Polynesia... I would be happy to send you Brothers to help in the work in America, if it were at all possible...(33)

Later in the year, Marcellin received this reply:

*"Your letter of the 16th May reached me ... my heart bounded with joy, and I went at once to the room of my confrere and started to read it to him, until I came to where you said you wished you could come out here to be with me. I could contain myself no longer, and went at once to the Bishop and handed him your letter...
..I spent the night in joy and agitation, worried about*

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29. Vienne and Sorbier (the latter was reopened in 1844, in Loire).
30. Michel, op. cit., p. 76.
31. "Résumé de 1837", FMS Archives, Rome.
32. Michel, op. cit., p. 76.
33. "Lettres de M. Champagnat", FMS Archives, C - RCLA - pp.40-42; SI.162.

the Bishop's reaction, because I had not told him that I had been in your Society, and still considered myself one of you (34)... He said to me the next day, "I am a religious also, and I want religious...tell your Fathers to come here to direct the Brothers... while waiting for Brothers, the Bishop is going to rent a property from an Irishman here... The Brothers can do at least as much good here as the Fathers...

Fontbonne, Missionary Priest."(35)

Of course, Marcellin was unable to send Brothers there at this stage. Many requests would keep coming to the Hermitage even after Marcellin's death; but it was not until 1885 that the Marist Brothers established themselves on the North American continent: in Canada, and finally, in 1886, in the United States.

Marcellin's first six months in 1838, as will be remembered, were spent mostly in Paris where he was desperately trying to gain government approval for his teaching Brothers. When he wrote to Brother François (the Director of the Hermitage) on 4th February, sections of his long letter said:

*"I have received your reply and the prospectus (36) you have sent to me. I have noticed from your letter that things are going along very well...
...We are being urgently requested to set up a school at St.-Paul, a small town near Arras. The funding has been assured; 40,000 francs has been given for it ..."*(37)

34. He had been a member of the Marist priests, but had departed for U.S.A. early in 1836, before the official foundation of the Marist Fathers. (Coste & Lessard, Origines Maristes, Vol. 4, Rome, 1967, p.281.)

35. "Lettres de Diverses Personnes", FMS Archives, 129/33 (19 août 1837).

36. In an earlier letter to him (23rd January) Marcellin had particularly requested that a dozen or so copies of the Institute's Prospectus be sent to him (as an aid, it seems, in his interviewing of several people to help in the authorisation issue.).

37. "Lettres de M. Champagnat", FMS Archives, A - AFM 111/32;SII.10.

Marcellin must have found it most distressing to stay in Paris so long. Although his efforts to hurry through his Institute's legal authorisation were occupying so much of his time, his mind was constantly concerned with the current work of his Brothers. During his six months in Paris he wrote at least thirteen letters to Brother François at the Hermitage, both giving directions and seeking advice.(38) His letter of 12th April stated:

"... I expect to be back at the Hermitage on the 28th of this month. Our affairs, concerning authorisation, are proceeding well. When I arrive, it is most important that I be told of all that is taking place, so that I will be able to continue the work, aided by the advice of the other members of the house..."(39)

Although he reached the Hermitage at the end of this month, it happened to be a very brief stay since he returned immediately to Paris after having presided at the religious clothing ceremony of the new novices on 13th May.(40) However, as we know, Salvandy was holding up the legal authorisation process, so Marcellin decided to return to the Hermitage, but, en route, he visited St.-Pol-sur-Ternoise. The Parish priest there, Fr. Jean-François Robitaille, had managed to have sufficient money put aside for the foundation of the school there. It had the support of the local Mayor and Marcellin intended starting a school there later that year. In his last letter to the Hermitage before leaving Paris, Marcellin had instructed Br. François to send Br. François-Regis to Lyons to learn printing. He wrote that a friend of Marcellin's, a Mr. Guyot,(41) would be pleased to instruct this Brother.(42)

38. He may have written more, but 13 have been preserved and are in the FMS Archives in Rome.

39. "Lettres de M. Champagnat", FMS Archives, A - AFM - 111/41; SSI.38.

40. This was the Feast of the Ascension in the Catholic Church. Two of the new novices, Brothers Avit and Aquilas, asked to be sent to the missions. ("Registre des Vêtures", 80, FMS Archives. Br. Avit, Annales, p.5.)

41. Mr. Guyot was a printer: he printed the 1837 Rule.

42. "Lettres de M. Champagnat", FMS Archives, A - AFM - 111/45; SII.57.

Marcellin then returned to the Hermitage, with the sorrowful tale of nothing but obstructions having been put in the way of legal authorisation. He wrote immediately to Mazelier to let him know that their 'make-shift' arrangement for the Marist Brothers' by-passing the conscription and Brevet laws would have to continue. On 15th August, the principal Feast Day of the Church year in honour of Our Lady, Marcellin had the pleasure of admitting a further sixteen postulants. It also happened to be the day when an organ was first played (officially) in the Hermitage Chapel - Br. François being the first organist.(43)

Four days later (21st August) Marcellin circularised the Brothers with regard to their coming Retreats; whilst asking, for the first time, for the Brothers Directors to write down the historical details of their respective schools.(44) Then, on 27th August, Marcellin travelled to the Midi.(45) He had agreed to discuss certain matters with a rich landowner there, Mr. Auran, who had invited Marcellin to consider the setting up of a novitiate at Lorgues (Var). Whilst in this area, Marcellin also planned to meet again the Director of the Seminary of Montpellier concerning the foundation of a school in that town.(46)

Whilst Marcellin was in the Midi attending to these matters, on 2nd September three of his Brothers, Brs. Elie-Régis, Marie-Augustin and Florentin began their departure for New Zealand with two Marist Fathers, Frs. Epalle and Petit.(47) Naturally, Marcellin had arranged matters with these three Brothers before he had departed from the Hermitage.

43. Avit, Annales, p. 168.

44. Circulaires des Supérieurs Généraux de l'Institut des Petits Frères de Marie, Premier Volume 1817-1848, Lyons, 1914, p. 23.

45. The Midi is that part of France, strictly speaking, that is south of Ardèche.

46. Avit, Annales, p. 180.

47. Ex archivo Sanctae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, Rome, Sectio Prima, p. 558.

When Marcellin returned to the Hermitage, one of the first items he had to deal with was a letter from Fr. Douillet of La Côte-St.-André in which this priest wished to impose new conditions on what had been settled the previous year. It will be remembered that Marcellin had, in 1837, to seek eventually the aid of the Bishop in settling the problems between Douillet and the Brothers at La Côte-St.-André. It was obvious to Marcellin, since he had previously talked over the matter with Douillet without achieving anything, that he must again submit the whole matter to the Bishop. Hence, on 19th September, Marcellin wrote to the Bishop of Grenoble:

"I thought Your Lordship would not mind my putting before your eyes the conditions that Douillet seeks to impose upon us. Here is a copy, word for word: 'Kindly believe, Fr. Superior (48) that my demands are not made for worldly reasons, but simply because of their just value...

- 1. With the exception of a small number of items, I give the use of all that I possess at the Brothers' establishment, for an annual sum of 600 francs payable to me fully and at the precise times stipulated: on the coming 1st November, 150 francs; 1st April, 150 f.; 30th August 300 f.; this procedure to follow until the end of the lease of 9 years.*
- 2. The Director (Brother) will be responsible, and pay for, all taxes of whatever nature, both now and in the future.*
- 3. All repairs and the total cost of annual maintenance of the house, the enclosure walls, the school yard and the whole enclosure will be charged to the Director, who will maintain it as a good father of a family would always keep his estate.*

48. i.e. of the Marist Brothers.

4. The free school will continue to be maintained as before and directed by two Brothers with whatever stipend the local Council provides for them.

5. If the Brothers were to leave the establishment at La Côte, everything is to be left as it was there when they arrived, whilst the sum of 3,000 francs is to be paid (for the furniture) to the lessor, unless this person prefers to take them in kind in the actual state they are in at that time.

6. The Director promises to set up an establishment in the region specified by the lessor.

7. In any case, Marthe Cuzin (49) will continue to have the use of the kitchen and the bathroom in the house. Furthermore, if she continues her work in the house the Director will give her 100 francs (annually). If, on the contrary, she leaves the house, she is to be paid annually the sum of 200 francs, payable in equal amounts each three months: for the nine years of the lease'.

We will not be able, My Lord, to continue our school at La Côte-St.-André except on the conditions under which we first founded that establishment. We have granted Brothers to Fr. Douillet on the condition that they be housed and supplied with furniture such as we ask for. We have not one other establishment (founded) on any other agreement and it would be contrary to our practice to make such arrangements."(50)

However, it seems that the Bishop failed to take any action to remedy affairs there, so on 31st October Marcellin wrote to Fr. Blanc, Parish Priest of La Côte-St.-André to tell him that, because of the unsettled problems with Fr. Douillet, the Brothers would be

49. The same "Sister Marthe" whom the Brothers there could not get along well with (to put it mildly).

50. "Lettres de M. Champagnat", FMS Archives, C - RCLA - pp.101,102; SII.75.

leaving the school.(51) This letter really stirred up matters there. The Parish Priest went immediately to the Bishop, and between the two of them they persuaded Fr. Douillet to adopt a more reasonable approach. He agreed to make certain concessions, and a new agreement was written and signed on 5th November.(52)

Meanwhile, back at the Hermitage, Marcellin had earlier concluded the Brothers' Retreat (on 20th September) with the setting up of a large cross in the grounds. The whole occasion was marked with a procession, the singing of hymns, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament,(53) and a sermon by Fr. Séon. Later, the Cross was erected on the high terrace ("La Grande Promenade") at the Hermitage, (54) where it remains to this day.

On 25th October Fr. Chanut wrote from Verdélais (near Bordeaux in south-western France), requesting on behalf of Bishop Donnet(55) the establishment of a Marist Brothers' Novitiate at Verdélais. He

51. "Lettres de M. Champagnat", FMS Archives, C - RCLA - p. 111;SII.80.

52. Michel, op. cit., p. 80.

53. This particular service in the Catholic Church is when the host (thin slice of bread) has been consecrated during a Mass and is now (as Christ himself) publicly displayed to the congregation.

54. Avit, Annales, p. 170. It is today more generally called "La Grande Terrasse". (Michel, op. cit., p. 54.)

55. This person had been a friend of Marcellin during his seminary days. In a letter he wrote in 1864 to Br. Louis-Marie (then Superior-General of the Marist Brothers) when he was seeking Brothers for a school near Bordeaux, he included: ". . . it was at my entreaty with the local authorities that he (Champagnat) was able to have his first Brothers set up schools at St.-Sauveur and at Bourg-Argental . . ." (FMS Archives, letter N:3-1). This could be true, but when he added in the same letter that Champagnat had influenced Colin to send Marist Fathers to his diocese, he was, as Father Coste has put it, "(il) fait mainfestement flèche de tout bois pour se trouver des rapports avec l'institut des frères". (He was using every means available to claim relationship with the Brothers' Institute). In any case, as Coste points out, Champagnat opposed the sending of Brothers to this part of France.

said that the Parish and the pilgrims there (56) had recently decided that they would like this novitiate.(57) Earlier that year, Father Colin, after consultation with Archbishop de Pins, had accepted an invitation from Bishop Donnet to begin a Marist Fathers' establishment at Verdélais and he had sent Chanut there as superior.(58) Chanut was soon to leave the Marist Fathers, and perhaps Marcellin, who had known Chanut at the Hermitage 1831-32, realised it would be injudicious to commence a novitiate for his Brothers who would be under this priest's "care". At any rate, Marcellin wrote and informed Colin that no Brothers would be sent to such a distant place as Verdélais.(59) Colin replied in an impassioned letter, condemning Marcellin for his insubordination and telling him that he must immediately make a Retreat of three days.(60) A few weeks later Chanut wrote a very strong letter to Marcellin demanding that Brothers be sent immediately to Verdélais.(61) However, Champagnat still resisted Chanut: he knew him from earlier days and he also knew that trouble was brewing between Chanut and Colin. In May, Colin asked for a passport to Bordeaux so that he could see, at first hand, the work of Chanut. This was the beginning of a substantial confrontation between Chanut and Colin, which led to the dismissal

56. Verdélais had a special sanctuary for Our Lady which attracted many pilgrims annually. France abounds in shrines. Visiting them is a national summer pastime and an average shrine receives fifty thousand pilgrims between May and October.

57. Verdélais was a centre for missionaries.

58. Chanut went to Verdélais on 8th August 1838. He was a Marist Father who had commenced his seminary training at St. Irenaeus in 1828. He became a Deacon on 28th May 1831 and the following summer sent to the Hermitage to complete his theology studies. He was ordained priest on 17th March 1832. (Coste & Lessard, O.M., Vol. 4, pp.223,224.

59. "Lettre du Père Colin au Père Champagnat", archives générales des pères maristes, Rome, 914:113.).

60. "Lettres du Père Colin", FMS Archives, 122/26: 22 fev 1839.

61. "Lettres de Diverses Personnes au Père Champagnat", FMS Archives 129/65: Lettre de M. Chanut au P. Champagnat (6 mars 1839).

of Chanut from the Society of the Marist Fathers.(62) Thus, no Marist Brothers were sent to Verdélais during the life-time of Champagnat.(63)

The year 1838 saw the founding of the following new establishments: La Grange-Payre (Loire), Izieux (Loire), Barjac (Gard), Rochegude (Drôme), Thueyts (Ardèche), Largentière (Ardèche), and Saint-Pol-sur-Ternoise (Pas-de-Calais). (64) Thus, Marcellin must have felt proud, in spite of the still unsuccessful attempts to gain authorisation from the government, that he now had over forty establishments and well over two hundred Brothers. In addition, an increasing number of communes were strongly requesting his Brothers for their schools. What was more, something very close to his heart, he had been able to send a further three Brothers to the missions.(65)

On the first day of the New Year, 1839, Marcellin acquired, to his great satisfaction, a property opposite the Hermitage on which certain items (such as a fulling-mill) were probably often a nuisance to the Brothers. It was rather costly - 39,000 francs, but Marcellin thought the acquisition was needed and it meant that the Hermitage had greater privacy since it now possessed property on both sides of the valley of the Gier.(66) The bought property had belonged to the Patouillard family. Also, on this day, as was his custom, Marcellin circularised all the Brothers to pass on his best wishes for the coming year and to give them news on the Institute that might interest them. (67).

62. After quitting Verdélais on 17th July 1843, Chanut was accepted by Cardinal de Bonald for the position of Chaplain at Saint-Louis-des-Français at Rome. In 1847 he returned to Lyons and became Parish Priest at Cours. In 1856 he began a new novitiate with the Marist Fathers and rejoined that Society. (Coste & Lessard, Origines Maristes, Vol. 4, p. 224.)

63. Since 1982 the Marist Brothers have had at least one Brother there, living in community with the Marist Fathers.

64. "l'Etat de l'Institut 1838", FMS Archives.

The school at St.-Pol-sur-Ternoise made great progress for many years and in 1842 a novitiate was added to the Brothers' establishment there.

65. Ex Archivo Sanctae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, Rome, X, 558.

66. Avit, Annales, p. 181.

67. Ibid, p. 179.

Amongst the twenty-two novices who were given their religious soutane on 2nd February was Brother Caste. This man, already a skilled mathematician and mechanic, would later make a new set of iron beds for the Hermitage.(68) Nevertheless, we must remember that Marcellin, now aged fifty (on his birthday this year) was attempting to deal with a greater number of issues than in former years. The work he had to do to keep in touch with his ever-expanding number of establishments and Brothers must have been colossal. He never forsook his life-long convictions. Hence, on 15th June this year, he must have been glad to have been able to send yet another Brother to the missions in Oceania. On this day, Brother Attale departed for Oceania with the Marist Fathers Petit-Jean, Viard, J-B. Comte and Chevron.(69) Shortly after this, the Bishop of Autun asked Fr. Colin to use his friendship with Marcellin as a means of obtaining from him the setting up of a novitiate for Marist Brothers in his diocese.(70) Marcellin, however, requested time to fully investigate the matter. He said he needed a year, during which time he would point out to the Bishop that he could not have his Brothers receive the same type of treatment that had recently taken place there with respect to the Brothers of Sémur.(71) Marcellin would be careful to have the Bishop understand that there would be no establishment there of Marist Brothers until suitable living quarters had been found.(72)

68. Ibid, p. 184.

69. Ex Archivo Sanctae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, Rome, XI, 464.

70. This letter was written on 17th July.

71. At Sémur the Brothers had to live more or less among the seminarians and were not treated very well. Frère Vincent (who built later at Lavalla) was mentioned as being very much among the games and pranks of the seminarians. There was no separate house for the Brothers, hence they could not live as Champagnat intended. As Marcellin was writing this letter, news had just reached him that part of the Brothers lodgings (at Sémur) had collapsed. He decided he would take those Brothers away and have them available for the new novitiate at Vauban. F. Avit, Annales de Sémur, FMS Archives, Rome.).

72. "Lettres de M. Champagnat", FMS Archives, C - RCLA - p.127; SII.127. (17.07.39).

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

CHAMPAGNAT'S FINAL ILLNESS AND DEATH

In 1839, between 25th August and 3rd September, the Marist Fathers held their Retreat together at Belley. Father Champagnat was asked to speak to the assembled priests. However, after speaking for a short time, he had to retire, and excused himself for having wasted their time. He was obviously rather seriously unwell. One of the priests present, Fr. Mayet, later wrote down what Marcellin had said. According to him, Marcellin's words were:

"For us, who are at the commencement of our work, we are but raw stones, thrown into the foundations; one does not use bright (polished) stones for that. There is something marvellous in the commencement of our Society. What is marvellous, is that God has wished such people to accomplish his work.." (1)

Marcellin's state of health was a big worry to Fr. Colin, who wished that there be someone appointed to govern the Brothers in the event of Marcellin's death. Marcellin, after his illness of 1825, had always felt a pain in his side which was a great discomfort to him when walking or whenever he had to do hard manual work. To this was added, later on, a strongly marked inflammation of the stomach. (2) His gastritis reached a chronic state and he had been frequently seized with vomiting before his trip to Paris in 1838. His wearisome journeyings and trials at Paris had so exhausted him that after his return to the Hermitage, as Br. Jean-Baptiste put it, *"It was easy to see that his end was fast approaching."*(3)

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1. Archives générales des pères maristes, Rome, "Mayet, 'Reflexion du P. Champagnat' - 1, 6, écr."
 2. Br. Jean-Baptiste, Vie de Joseph-Benoît-Marcellin Champagnat, Lyons, 1856, Vol. 1, p. 260.
 3. Br. Jean-Baptiste, VIE, Vol. 1, p. 260.

Credit must be given to Fr. Colin who was the first to perceive the gravity of Marcellin's health and took the trouble to organise a successor. So, at the close of the Brothers' Retreat at the Hermitage, on 12th October (1839), an election took place for one of the Brothers to be elected Director General. Colin had taken the initiative of going to the Bishop to gain his approval. Then, as Superior General of the Marist Fathers (of whom Champagnat was a member) he told Marcellin that he would organise an election for one of the Brothers to become Director General. Marcellin quite willingly agreed. (4) Colin decided that the ninety-two professed Brothers (5) should each have one vote, but they would write three names on their piece of paper. (6) Since Brother François gained more votes than anyone else (he was given 87 of the votes) he automatically became Director General. The next two: Brother Louis-Marie with 70 votes and Br. Jean-Baptiste with 57, became his Assistants. (7)

Next month, which marked the beginning of the school year, Marcellin felt he should do something special for the students of La Côte-St.-André, the place where he had almost been forced to close the school. Although he was obviously most unwell, he went there and preached a Retreat for those students. Apparently he could still enthuse people to whom he spoke. Br. Jean-Baptiste said that the boarders there (for whom he had given the Retreat) preferred to go to Confession to Champagnat, rather than to the other priest who had gone there to cooperate in giving this Retreat. It was said that the students would say to one another, "*This priest is a saint.*" (8)

4. Ibid, p. 262.

5. Altogether there were 112 professed Brothers but some were away in the Missions and others away on other duties. A professed Brother, of course, is one who has taken vows.

6. Br. Jean-Baptiste, *VIE*, Vol. 1, p. 263.

7. Ibid, p. 264. Brother François never took the title of Superior General; he kept the title of Director General until he resigned in 1860. His successor, Br. Louis-Marie took the title of Superior General and such title has continued to the present day.

8. Br. Sylvestre, *Mémoires (du Père Champagnat)*, St. Genis-Laval, 1886-87, p. 195.

Marcellin couldn't bring himself to stop. Straight after giving this Retreat he went to Autun to speak to the Bishop there about the setting up of a novitiate at Vauban. This novitiate was begun on 5th December of this year, with four Brothers: Brothers Cassien, Paulin, Babylas and Theophile being the first ones sent there to manage it. (9) Then, on 19th November, Fr. Loinon de Guinaumont, who was Vicar-General at Chalons-sur-Marne and who had requested from Champagnat both a school and a novitiate in his Diocese, was the recipient of a letter from Marcellin telling him that such would not be possible until at least 1841. Marcellin's letter reveals how meticulous he still was for the well-being of his Brothers. He wrote:

"... we are quite ready to support your zeal for such important work as the religious instruction of your dear children, but before commencing the establishment you have requested, it will be necessary for you to let us know in detail by what means you can assure our well-being there. Firstly, what are the resources of the Parish for which you request our Brothers? Would it be able to fulfil the conditions of our Prospectus which I am forwarding to you?

2. Would the novitiate you request be directed by a priest of our Society? This is one of our essential conditions.

3. Would it be able to be entirely dependent on the Mother House of our Society? It is essential that it be thus; then we could supply to the dioceses in proportion to what we receive from them.

4. Would a two-years delay be acceptable to you? We do not see how it can be possible for us to provide you with Brothers before 1841.

Please, Sir Vicar-General, examine these diverse issues and let us know what you think...." (10)

9. Br. Avit, *Annales de l'Institut, St. Genis-Lavaï, 1884, (Annales, de l'Institut divisées en neuf étapes: Redaction commencée en 1884 - 9 cahiers, 860 p.), p. 201.*

10. "Lettres de M. Champagnat", *FMS Archives*, Rome, C - RCLA p. 152; SII.173.

With the new novitiate at Vauban having just started, Marcellin went there to inaugurate it officially on 8th December, the date being chosen by him since it was one of Our Lady's main annual feast days: the "Immaculate Conception". (11) Marcellin, though frail and ill, must have been inwardly rejoicing at the fantastic expansion and widespread acclaim that so favourably marked his Institute. At the end of 1839 he had 250 Brothers in 43 establishments, with over 5,500 children attending their schools. Yet it was not so much the significance of having 43 establishments, as the fact that he had a further 85 requests for establishments, that pleased him. (12)

The Institute's new foundations in 1839 had been: Saint-Chamond (Loire) - a small orphanage, Usson-en-Forex (Loire), Craponne (Haute-Loire), Le Cheylard (Ardèche), and Les Roches-de-Condrieu (Isère). Then, in addition, there was the new novitiate at Vauban. This latter had been established in an old château that the Bishop of Autun had put at the Brothers' disposal. It began, as mentioned, on 8th December. When Champagnat arrived there for the opening ceremony, he could not help remarking to the Brother who had accompanied him, "*What a difference there is between this house and the poor cot* (13) *which became the cradle of our society!*". (14)

Perhaps one of the most amazing things about the progress of his Institute was the fact that most of its members were very young men: "boys" would more aptly describe many of them. When, in 1839, they elected their first Superior General, the person elected, Brother François, was only thirty-one years old. (15) His senior Assistant-General, Brother Louis-Marie, was only twenty-nine years old (16),

11. Br. Jean-Baptiste, VIE, Vol. 1, p. 266.

12. "l'Etat de l'Institut en 1839", FMS Archives, Rome.

13. i.e. at Lavalla.

14. Br. Jean-Baptiste, VIE, Vol. 1, p. 267.

15. G. Chastel, Le Frère François, Paris, 1948, p. 38.

16. Frère Ignace, La Vie d'un Grand Organisateur, Genval (Belgium), 1955, p. 11.

whilst the other Assistant-General, Brother Jean-Baptiste, was the "old man" of the Brothers' first General Council, being aged thirty-two. (17) Reviewing the ages of the early Brothers provides another source of wonder if we research the ages of the other two main chroniclers of Champagnat's life, Brs. Sylvestre and Avit. Sylvestre, born 1819, entered the novitiate at the Hermitage in 1831 and took his first vows the following year, aged thirteen. Of course, the vows were only temporary ones and, because of his youth, Marcellin would allow him to take them but for a few months at a time. Nevertheless, it must strike people today as something most strange. (18) Avit, born in 1819, commenced his novitiate at the Hermitage in 1837 (aged 18 years).

One tends to shudder today when it is learnt that the average age of the first 49 Brothers when they died in the Institute was 21 years. However, in France in 1830, life-expectancy was but 30 to 35 years; what is more, the average age of the deceased Brothers was less than the average age of all those living in the Institute at that time. (19) We should also remember that, not long before Marcellin, some quite young men were among the select few founding the United States of America. For instance, the so-called "Father of the Constitution", James Madison, was only twenty-eight when he was elected to the continental Congress in 1779, (20) whilst Benjamin Franklin had actually gone into retirement (21) at the age of forty-two. (22) Finally, a noted English Prime Minister - Pitt the Younger

17. J. Coste & Lessard, Origines Maristes, Rome, 1961, Vol. 2, p. 764.

18. During Marcellin's life-time, Canon Law had not yet regulated temporary and simple vows. Rome, in its Canon Law of 1908 decreed that no one less than fifteen years of age could be allowed to commence a novitiate.

19. Br. G. Michel, "Préface", Abrégé des Annales de Frère Avit, Rome, 1972, p. VI

20. Encyclopedia Americana, New York, 1971, Vol. 14, pp. 552-555.

21. Born 1706, he owned his own printing establishment and started producing the newspaper Pennsylvania Gazette in 1732. He soon did most of the printing of the province, became clerk of the Pennsylvania Assembly and Postmaster of Philadelphia, operated a bookshop and expanded his printing interests. Of course, after his "retirement" in 1748 he did later take up politics.

22. Thomas Payne, born 1737, had been perhaps the most influential writer during the War of Independence through his political appeals titled Crisis. In 1785 Congress voted him \$3,000 for his great work during the war. (Ibid, Vol. 21, p. 105.)

(1783-1801 and 1801-1806), attained this office when he was but 24 years old.

The next year, 1840, would be Champagnat's last year on earth. Yet, he must have wished above all to achieve legal authorisation before his death. So, on 4th January he wrote another letter to the Prefect of Loire to find out if anything could still be done to expedite this matter. (23) The following week, on 10th January, Marcellin (with Brother François adding a small section near the end) circularised all the Brothers to remind them of the main items that were essential in their teaching and in their living together in community. It was a long circular which stressed that, besides religion being taught very well to the children, it was necessary to instruct them well in "... writing, grammar, arithmetic, history, geography and even, if required, drawing, geometry and book-keeping." (24)

Marcellin, ever-mindful of St. Paul's words, "*I live, not now I, but Christ liveth in me*" (25) readily agreed to the departure, on 12th February, of two more Brothers for Oceania. Brs. Claude-Marie and Ammon set off with Marist Fathers Tripe and Pezant. (26) Two days later, since the city of St.-Etienne had asked for Brothers to establish a place there for deaf and dumb children, Marcellin wrote to Monsieur le Baron de Gérando to request the admission of two of his Brothers to the Demonstration School in Paris for the dumb and deaf, so that they could better prepare themselves for their coming work at St. Etienne. (27) On the same day he wrote on the same matter to Le Comte de Bastard in Paris, who had helped Marcellin when he was in Paris in 1838 on his quest for government authorisation and who, Marcellin knew, also had an interest in the deaf-and-dumb establishment there. Marcellin did not fail to mention also that he would

23. As mentioned above in thesis. (pp. 394, 395)

24. "Lettres de M. Champagnat", FMS Archives, Rome Circulaire: C - AFM 111/50.

25. Gal. II, 20.

26. Ex Archivo Sanctae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, Rome, XIII, 267.

27. "Lettres de M. Champagnat", FMS Archives, Rome, C - RCLA p. 171; SI.208.

greatly appreciate anything further that this man might be able to do to help authorisation. (28)

On the last day of this month of February, Father Colin told the Marist Brothers and Champagnat that, since they were now two separate societies, he would no longer be sending his Brothers Joseph to the Hermitage for their novitiate. This separation of the two groups of Brothers had been decided upon the previous September when the Marist Fathers had voted on this matter during their Retreat. (29) It seemed to be a wise decision, especially since it left both Champagnat and his own Brothers free from any further embarrassment. (30)

28. "Lettres de M. Champagnat", FMS Archives, Rome, C - RCLA p. 174; SII. 205. (No. 325)

29. Colin had commenced his Coadjutor Brothers in 1832 when three of these Brothers were helping him at Belley. Colin had recruited these three men quite independently of Champagnat. It seems that Colin had now completely settled ideas regarding this group. His petition to Pope Gregory XVI on 23rd August 1833 represented them as a section of the branch of Marist Brothers; yet in the Summarium regularum Societatis Mariae (Archives of the Sacred Congregation for Religious, Rome, Ant. textus, fasc 1, pp. 78 and 80-81) brought out in December that same year these Coadjutor Brothers figure in the chapter on priests and not in that devoted to "fratres laici". Fr. Coste has written that Colin considered there to be but one type of Brother and in 1834-5 he sent his three Brothers to Champagnat's Hermitage to make their novitiate. They also received their religious costume at the Hermitage. (J. Coste, Lectures on Society of Mary History (Marist Fathers) 1786-1854, Rome, 1965, pp. 188, 189). Colin would ask Champagnat to let him have Brothers to do the work of his Brothers Joseph whilst they were at the Hermitage. The whole thing became a complex problem, for at times Brothers would be concerned about whether they would become teachers or become Coadjutor Brothers for Colin. There was the case, given above in thesis, of Brother Marie who, in 1835, asked Marcellin permission to take vows, but Marcellin referred the matter to Colin. Colin wrote to Brother Marie and in his letter he said a Marist Brother was the name given to you when you taught in school, whilst a "Brother Joseph" was anyone in other work such as work in the kitchen, or in the tool shed. ("Lettres du Père Colin au Père Champagnat", FMS Archives, Rome, 122/14). He had strongly requested that Brother Marie return to Belley, but this particular Brother now joined the Marist Brothers under Champagnat (many of whom, of course, were occupied in other work besides teaching). The approbation of the Society of the Marist Fathers by Rome (1836) did little to change the situation. When the matter had been put to the vote in 1839, Champagnat had opposed the separation (as long as he lived he kept hoping for an all-encompassing Society of Mary - of priests, brothers, sisters and a Third Order).

30. Circulaires des Supérieurs Généraux de l'Institut des Petits Frères de Marie, Premier Volume 1817-1840, Lyons, 1914, pp. 316-318.

On the first day of the Catholic Church's liturgical season of Lent this year (4th March 1840), Marcellin was seized with a violent pain in his back, which never left him till his death. (30) This pain became so acute when he lay down that he could scarcely remain in bed. During the winter his legs had occasionally become swollen; but now the swelling increased and never abated. Yet, as the Brothers remarked who tended him at this time, he was always calm and cheerful. (31) One day, when a Brother was rubbing his legs in an attempt to reduce the swelling, Marcellin remarked to him:

"Many a time, after my death, you will be telling the Brothers how you rubbed my legs. I am exceedingly grateful to you for this act of charity, for it is not a pleasant thing to rub the limbs of a corpse, and still less those of a sinner." (32)

Yet the amazing thing is that Marcellin refused to confine himself to his bed. He would be normally present at the various community exercises. (33) On the feast of St. Joseph (19th March) Marcellin remarked to a Brother alongside his bed, who was helping him say a long prayer called the "Litany of Our Lady", that this would be his last celebration of this particular feast. (34) Earlier this day he had gone to the Chapel and had said Mass and given "Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament" to the assembled Brothers. (35)

Three days later (22nd March) in the presence of a lawyer, Marcellin ceded by Will all his possessions to the Institute at the Hermitage. (36) Then, on the Thursday before Easter, (37) he expressed the wish to say Mass at La Grange-Payre. The Brothers tried to dissuade him from undertaking such exertion, but he replied, *"Let me go, for this is the last visit I shall be able to pay those good Brothers and their children."* He went on horseback, and after celebrating Mass, he went to see the boarders and he said to them:

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30. Avit, Annales, p. 212.
 31. Br. Jean-Baptiste, VIE, Vol. 1, p. 269.
 32. Ibid, p. 269.
 33. Especially, of course, their community prayers.
 34. Sylvestre, op. cit., p. 198.
 35. Br. Jean-Baptiste, VIE, Vol. 1, p. 270.
 36. Avit, Annales, p. 210.
 37. Called "HOLY Thursday" in Christian churches.

"My children, God has bestowed a great favour on you in providing you with these good teachers, who are always giving you good example and solid instruction in truths of religion. Be careful to follow their advice and imitate their virtues ... if you have great confidence in Mary, she will certainly bring you to heaven, this I promise you." (38)

On arriving back at the Hermitage, Marcellin made the remark, "I have seen La Grange-Payre for the last time..." (39) On 3rd May he celebrated Mass for the last time. He apparently had the intuition to perceive this, for he said later that day:

"I have celebrated my last Mass, and I am pleased that it was that of the Holy Cross; for it is by this Holy Cross that we are saved, and that our Divine Lord himself left this world." (40)

From that time forward his sufferings daily increased, and did not leave him a moment's rest. Then, realising that his strength was leaving him quickly, he told Br. Stanislaus (41) to assemble all the Brothers in the community room, "... so that I may see them all together, say a few words of consolation to them, and bid them farewell." (42) At five o'clock that evening, with all the Brothers and postulants present in the community room, Marcellin entered, clothed in his surplice and stole. (43) He received the last Sacraments (44) and then spoke to the assembly:

38. Br. Jean-Baptiste, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 271.

39. Sylvestre, op. cit., p. 200.

40. Avit, *Annales*, p. 213.

41. Who had been his most constant attendant on his sick bed.

42. Br. Jean-Baptiste, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 275.

43. These vestments are those worn by a priest when he is about to officiate: the stole is indicative of the person's priestly status in life.

44. In the Catholic Church, the liturgical rites performed for a person in danger of death are known as Extreme Unction or Holy Anointing.

"... My very dear Brothers, we are all assembled here for the last time, and what I recommend to you above all things, before I leave you, is that you love one another. Remember that you are Brothers, that Mary is your common mother, and that you are called to the same inheritance, which is heaven. Love one another then, as Jesus Christ loves you; as Mary, your mother, loves you. In proof of this love, bear with one another, and never forget that it is by the practice of charity that the religious life will be for you a life of sweetness, a heaven on earth. You must be thoroughly united; so accustomed to bear with one another, to make one another happy, that these words of the Holy Scriptures may be applied to you, 'Behold how good and how pleasant it is for Brethren to dwell together in unity'. (45) Love your vocation, preserve it; it is by your vocation that God wishes you to be saved, and you will certainly be saved if you have the happiness of dying in the Society of Mary. I have seen a great number of Brothers die. I have not seen one who, on his death-bed, regretted having become a Religious, having persevered in his vocation, and having died in the habit of a Brother of Mary." (46)

At these words his voice became weak, his strength failed: he stopped for a short time, then added:

"... I cannot say any more, I will conclude by asking pardon ... for all the bad example I have given you ..." (47)

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45. Psalm 132, 1.
46. Br. Jean-Baptiste, op. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 276-277.
47. Br. Jean-Baptiste, VIE, Vol. 1, p. 278.

Then all the Brothers, who had been listening most intently, went onto their knees. Many of them were sobbing, and they all joined their leader when he said:

"Oh, Brothers, it is we who ought to beg our venerable Father's pardon." (48)

During his last days, whilst on his sick bed, he would often speak to Brother François about certain worries still on his mind. For example, he felt most distressed at not having yet done something in connection with a most generous proposal made to him from a lady at Lavalla. (49) She had offered him a house, together with a large property, for the setting up of a type of farm where orphans and deserted children could be occupied, looked after, and become better prepared for their future lives. What was more, other interested people had offered funds for helping establish this work. It took all of Br. François' wit and intelligence to make Marcellin know that he had done so much that he must never reproach himself for omitting something.(50)

Marcellin was keen to leave the Brothers something in writing that would express his dearest wishes and sentiments. He tried to write it himself, but the task was beyond him. Hence he would dictate items to Brother Louis-Marie who would then write them down. This affair took some days, and every item had to be read back carefully before Marcellin would give his final approval. Then, on 18th May, all the Brothers of the Hermitage community (about twenty) were assembled in his bedroom and corridors and Br. Louis-Marie read this document - the "Spiritual Testament" (51) of Marcellin. When he had finished, Marcellin spoke a few words of confirmation. (52)

48. Sylvestre, op. cit., p. 207.

49. Such utopian schemes abounded at that time - probably a reaction to industrialisation and part of the "back to nature" proposals. They had no future.

50. Sylvestre, op. cit., p. 209.

51. This "Spiritual Testament" may be seen in the Appendix.

52. Br. Jean-Baptiste, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 289.

Of course, the word had got around that Marcellin was approaching death and from now on there was to be a succession of priests coming to see him. (53) Marcellin's stomach could not retain any food at all, yet his vomitings became more frequent. On 4th June he received Holy Communion for the last time (54) and two days later, 6th June, he died. Just after 2 a.m. on that morning he had entered into his last agony. Towards 4 a.m. his breathing became slow and difficult. The Brothers of the community went to the Chapel and sang the "Salve Regina" and then said further prayers, especially to Mary. Of course, Saturday had always been the day of the week that Marcellin's Brothers had been taught to make a special day (e.g. by special prayers) for Mary. Br. Jean-Baptiste later wrote:

"Several times during his illness, he had expressed a desire to die on a Saturday; but he always added, that he did not deserve such a favour.... Not only was that grace granted to him, but it was given him to die during the very hour which, for more than thirty years, he had devoted to meditation and union with God." (55)

The news of his death obviously affected many people. A very large crowd assembled at the Hermitage on 8th June 1840, the day of his burial. Amongst the concourse could be identified all the clergy from the surrounding parishes and also a large number of the principal townspeople from many areas. (56) The funeral ceremony was presided over by Father Thiollière du Treuil P.P. of St.-Chamond. (57)

53. Colin arrived on 24th May, Mazelier on 25th May, Fr. du Treuil (Parish Priest of Saint-Pierre parish in St.-Chamond) on 1st June; Fr. Janvier (Parish Priest of St.-Julien-en-Jarez on 3rd June. (Ibid. p. 297.

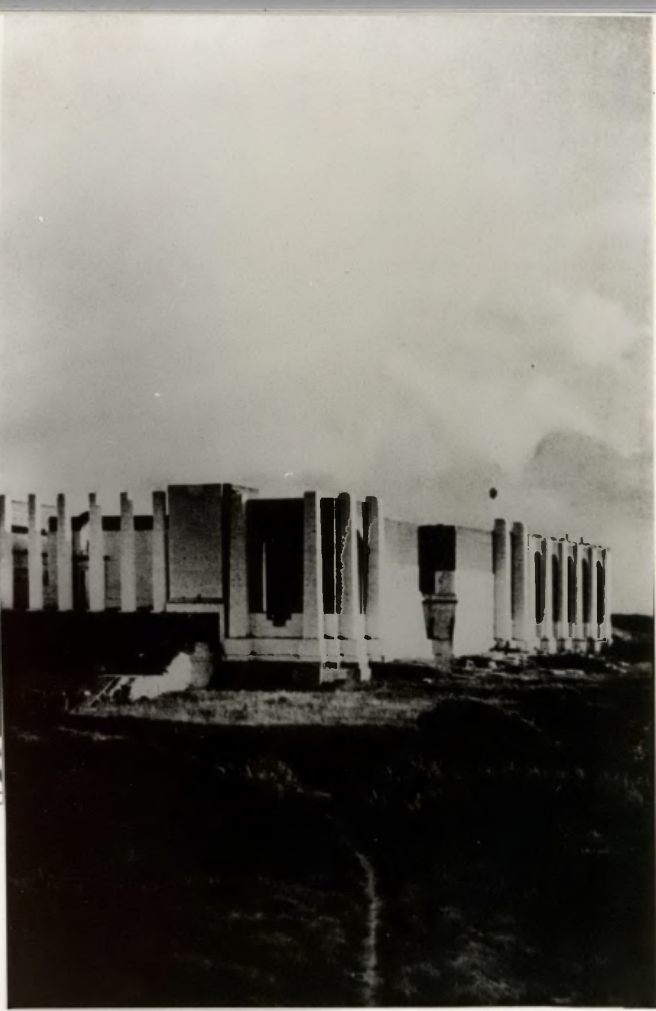
54. Sylvestre, op. cit., p. 221.

55. Br. Jean-Baptiste, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 304.

56. Sylvestre, op. cit., p. 227.

57. Avit, *Annales*, p. 220.

His mortal remains were to lie in the cemetery at the Hermitage for nearly fifty years. On 12th October 1889 they were exhumed, in the presence of an ecclesiastical commission, and placed in a room, from which, on 14th June 1890 they were transferred to the chapel where, under a modest monument they remained. His Beatification by the Catholic Church in 1955 permitted his relics to be placed on an altar in a new chapel at the Hermitage, and his altar (shrine) has become a place of special pilgrimage for Catholics.



The above three photos show parts of the unfinished building for Italy's Department of Agriculture and Forests. Mussolini had intended this building to be one of the showpieces for Rome's World Exposition (Exposizione Universale di Roma) in 1942. World War Two prevented its completion. This was the site upon which the General House for the present-day Marist Brothers' Institute has been built.



The above two photos show the General House of the Marist Brothers in Rome (E.U.R.) shortly after its erection in 1960. Nowadays the land in both foreground and background has been developed, principally for residential areas.



The main entrance to the present-day Marist Brothers' General House in Rome.



A view of the main building of the Marist Brothers' General House in Rome.



A view of part of the present-day General House of the Marist Brothers, (Casa Generalizia dei Fratelli Maristi) situated at Piazzale Champagnat 2 in Rome E.U.R.



A wing attached to the General House in Rome where Marist Brothers may live when occupied, for instance, in studies for Jesu Magister courses at Rome.