The Order of the Companions

Revival of an Ancient Workers' Association in France

by

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There has recently been a revival in France of an ancient international association of workers, the Compagnonnage. *The aim of the association, which is not a trade union and does not aspire to the functions of a union, is to offer young workers a thorough grounding in a trade and an "apprenticeship to life" through the medium of the trade.*

The history of this association, which has branches in a number of European countries, goes back to a time earlier than that of the craft guilds[1]*—popular tradition traces its foundation to the reign of Solomon. In the following pages Mr. Jean Bernard, who has taken a prominent part in the revival, traces the history of the association and describes the services it has rendered to workers in France in the past and the opportunities it offers today. The young French worker of today, he says, can enjoy all the important benefits bestowed by this association on his forefathers; and these benefits are as valuable and necessary to the youth of today as they were to the workers of earlier times.*

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[1] The Order of the Companions must not be confused with the craft guilds, which had certain similar features; under the guild system, as in the Order, it was customary in France and Germany in certain trades for each craftsman who had completed his apprenticeship to travel from place to place learning new methods of work and to perform a piece of work, a "masterpiece", as evidence of his capacity; and during this stage of his career he was known in France as a *compagnon* (English "journeyman"). The Order described here is a very ancient association of workers which unites men of the same trade for the purposes of training and mutual assistance outside the official trade organisations.

THE Order of the Companions has come to us down the ages in many different forms; originally it united the members of a primitive and patriarchal hierarchy of craftsmen in a kind of itinerant working community; later it was limited to actual employees and later still, at the end of the nineteenth century, it was obliged by its own mistakes and the disaffection of the workers to return to a more flexible association. Despite these changes it has always, except at periods when it lost its character and vitality, remained faithful to its essential principle—the practice of a trade. For its object is to hand down a trade—not merely technical ability (a school could do that) but also the formative influences that go with a trade. The order offers the individual a full development of his personality by character training, the development of his skill and a novel and effective form of mutual assistance.

Being primarily an educative influence, the Order has always devoted its attention to the young [1], and travel is an important feature of its programme. Nowhere has the idea of the importance of travel in the training of youth been applied so wholeheartedly, and in France (to mention but one country where the Order has its following) [2] it is essential to the title of "Companion" for its holder to have made the *Tour de France*. The title would have much more meaning if the barrier of frontiers were swept away, and it is perhaps appropriate that the International Labour Office should publish an account of the revival of the Order.

Tradition and History

However much one tries to make such an account realistic, topical and constructive, it is impossible to pass over the historical background to the Order. The groups affiliated to it at the present time have carefully preserved stories founded as much on legend as on fact and are thus the direct inheritors of a centuries-old tradition.

Legend has it that the Order was founded by Solomon when he built the Temple. However, a tragedy, the murder of Hiram, one of those responsible for the building, split the Order into three —the Children of Solomon and the Children of the two followers of Hiram, Soubise and Maître Jacques. According to the legend

[1] The average age is 17-25.

[2] The Order is also very widespread in Germany and central Europe, but is less organised there than in France.

the two followers left Palestine and sailed to Gaul (the birthplace of Maître Jacques himself) and there developed the Order. According to a variant of this legend—one of many—Maître Jacques and Soubise (who becomes Father Soubise, a Benedictine monk) were two mediaeval master craftsmen who split the old Order of the Children of Solomon by founding two new branches of the Order during the building of the Cathedral of the Holy Cross at Orleans.

The truth behind the legend is probably that the Order began to break up in the fifteenth century, one product of the split being a branch of Protestants and recalcitrants who took the name of "foreigners" or "Gavots" (from a farm in the Cévennes where many Protestants had taken refuge) and later, after the French Revolution, banded together under the name of "Liberty". This title is revealing. The story goes that, in order to give themselves the prestige of a legendary group, the rebels claimed that they represented a return to the truth of the original idea and were therefore the real "Children of Solomon". However that may be, from these troubled and obscure beginnings there originated in France, where the Order seems to have taken root, three branches which have come down to us today—the Children of Solomon, the Children of Maître Jacques and the Children of Father Soubise. The Children of Solomon formed the "Order of the Duty of Liberty"[1] and those of Maître Jacques and Father Soubise the "Order of Duty".[2]

In the light of history we may conclude that at the outset the Order was composed of groups of builders united in travelling companies and working under the authority of master craftsmen. This form of team work was the only kind conceivable between the tenth and thirteenth centuries and, in their heyday, these groups provided skilled men to direct the activities of all the local labour that could be called upon to work. Compared with the local workers the members of these groups enjoyed a certain freedom—hence the

[1] The Companions of the Duty of Liberty originally comprised the "foreign" stonemasons of the Duty of Liberty, a branch which has now died out, and the joiners and locksmiths of the Duty of Liberty. In the nineteenth century a further split brought in the carpenters and, later, the coopers, shoemakers and bakers.

[2] The Order of Duty comprised the followers of Father Soubise—carpenters, tilers and plasterers, and the followers of Maître Jacques—stonemasons, joiners, locksmiths, smiths and mechanics, farriers and agricultural mechanics, saddlers and harness makers, vehicle upholsterers, coopers, wheelwrights, coach builders and sheet-metal workers, shoemakers, bakers, weavers and silk spinners.

The tanners, dyers, rope makers, basket workers, hatters, leather dressers, smelters, pin makers, cloth shearers, wood turners, glaziers, stove setters, cutlers, tinsmiths, nailsmiths, linen dealers and clog makers, who all belonged to the Children of Maître Jacques, have now disappeared.

name " freemason ", originally applied in Germany, where the system was particularly prevalent. The building trades were therefore the cradle of the Order, which grew up at a time when techniques were just beginning to develop, though a number of occupations outside the building trades also adopted the customs of the Order. It appears, therefore, that the Order in its original, patriarchal form, preceded the guilds organised in France under the *ancien régime.*

The settlement in the rising communes of sedentary groups of tradesmen—later to become the guilds—was not fatal to the Order. It continued to provide additional workers here and there, and for a long time it served to regulate the flow of labour. It flourished side by side with the guilds throughout the *ancien régime* in France but, unlike the guilds, it came to embrace all who cherished their independence or were unable to enter the guilds or become master craftsmen. Occasionally it waged local battles with the master craftsmen in the workers' interests, and thus has some claim to be considered as the forerunner of all workers' movements. So the Order remained until the French Revolution. The fact that there were during this period several associations of " Companions " so bitterly hostile that they were prepared to massacre one another is explained by historians as an outcome of the wars of religion ; the split in the Order occurred at the same time as the schism in Christianity itself, and the activities of the various branches of the Order were profoundly affected by the disruption of Europe and the resultant rise of nationalities.

The French Revolution found the Order divided but relatively peaceful. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, the dormant conflicts of the past broke out anew. The Revolution, in breaking down the structure of the guilds and suppressing their abuses, simultaneously deprived the worker of all assistance from his fellow tradesmen, all support in his early years and any possibility of obtaining organised instruction. The Order of the Companions alone survived, despite successive blows from the Convention, the Empire and the Restoration. It survived in dangerous obscurity and then expanded out of all proportion, since all young workers used it as the only institution that offered them some guidance in their early years. This sudden growth was disquieting to the authorities and aroused the interest of those who were trying to secure a sphere of influence in the nascent proletariat. In this way the split, which had originally been religious, became political, despite the efforts of Agricol Perdiguier (1805-75), the apostle of the Order. The ensuing discord robbed this noble institution of all its remaining influence over the workers.

It has been held that the development of the railways upset the wandering habits of the Order. Yet technical standardisation (which is far from being universally complete, particularly at the international level) has certainly done more ; travel is no longer necessary for full knowledge of a trade. Specialisation has also been a factor in the decline ; it has robbed the worker of the opportunity of personal achievement. Some of the blame may also be attributed to the decline in the birth rate in rural districts, which have always been the Order's best source of recruits. In large peasant families one or two of the sons often leave home to learn a trade in the local town, and for them the Order is unequalled as a guide and protector.

None of these factors, however, can be regarded as a major cause of the decline of the Order. In our opinion nothing contributed to its decline so much as its manifest inability, from the second half of the nineteenth century, to respond to the aspirations of the working people and to help them to gain their freedom. In France its efforts met with rapturous enthusiasm. A sympathetic and expectant movement formed around Perdiguier, its leader, though he met with considerable opposition within the branches of the Order. The prominent figures of the age supported it, there was no doubt as to its influence and there seemed no obstacle to its advance. Had the Order not missed this opportunity the whole course of the workers' movement would have changed, and the social problems which were to prove such a battleground in the future would probably not have been approached from the same angle. Hence, there can be no doubt that trade unionism as we know it was born out of the failure of the Order.

A knowledge of the above background is necessary to arrive at a true appreciation of the present movement. The Order was born out of the old societies, whose membership in France had fallen considerably after the turn of the century. Between the two wars there still remained a few thousand members and a steady flow of recruits. These belonged to three branches—the Companions of Duty, which included groups from all affiliated occupations, the Companions of thé Duty of Liberty, with a membership of some 200 to 300 carpenters and a few joiners, and the Union of the Companions, a nineteenth-century offshoot which is attacked by the two other branches on the grounds that its structure takes insufficient account of tradition and corporate feeling. It is true that with the fall in numbers there was a rise in the average quality of the membership of the Order. It was no longer the mass movement it had been at the beginning of the nineteenth century (it is not suited for a mass movement) but it was recognised

—and still is—as an Order accessible only to workers of proved skill and high moral standards. In this way the Order once again became an élite, but a somewhat self-centred élite without influence on the lives of working people.

The Revival of the Order

The Order has now been completely transformed. It has thrown open its doors and entered on a period of fruitful activity, whereby it has won the favour of both young workers and employers in France. It effected the transformation by suddenly renewing its interest in social problems after a difficult period when its very survival had seemed in doubt, when the Companions of the various associations had essayed a revival by such remedies as amendments to the rules, the organisation of federations and mutual-aid societies, traditional festivals and exhibitions of works of art—but not once by a resolute plunge into the vital needs of the present day; and yet, as is now clear, it had all the time a magnificent contribution to offer.

It may well be asked what purpose is served by this devotion to an institution which has never been united and which is bitterly divided, apparently beyond all hope of reconciliation. Why persevere with an idea which, though based on perfect solidarity, has nevertheless bred so much lasting discord? The response that the movement has evoked in every generation has established in all its members a sacred bond of continuing devotion. The echo it awakens among working people has ensured its immortality, one might almost say its immutability. What links the present and the future in the minds of those who lead the Order is its extraordinary usefulness and practical nobility and the certainty that if it were to die there would be nothing to replace it, and something would be lacking in the lives of working people. The Order has a stirring history; it heralded the conquests of the working man and was the fountain-head of his purest spirit, that spirit of the early days when the workers had not yet given up their faith at the legendary schism of Orleans and had not yet been deprived of their intelligentsia by the departure—the word treason might perhaps be more fitting—of their thinkers and creative artists as a result of the Renaissance. In later times the Order was the champion of the outcasts, of those who had been abandoned by their wealthier or more gifted brothers, and it was for a long time the sole champion of the workers.

A century ago the Order was the focal point of all those aspirations from which sprang the earliest manifestations of the solidarity

of working men.[1] It was within the Order that the pattern of friendly societies, co-operatives, vocational training and trade unionism first took shape. Admittedly all these broke away like so many golden treasures slowly transformed into a baser metal by the action of men and institutions. It may be objected that in the Order this social progress never got further than the project stage, that it remained a mere intuitive idea or even a vague desire, and that no achievements of any magnitude ensued. This is true in a sense ; the reason is that, in its relations with men, the Order was never able to adapt itself boldly to changing times.[2] On the other hand it was the last refuge of a genuinely popular art, the only institution to keep alive the tradition of the craftsman, and one of the richest sources of folklore. What is more, its "mothers" provided the idea which launched the youth hostels, and the "Mother of the Companions" was the prototype of the welfare worker of today.

What of the present ? Few know that the Order still exists. It is remembered only as an attractive and mysterious, perhaps haunting, chapter in the history of labour. It is only too readily depicted as an obsolete association, mainly composed of craftsmen who meet at festivals. The public (referred to as " laymen " by the Companions) knows nothing of the Order's essential and continuing work in a number of occupations, particularly the building trades. For those, however, who look closely into its new work with all its inherent possibilities there can be no doubt that workers in industry can also profit by it. Moreover, the Order can act as a link between the nations, just as it used to be a link between the provinces in France.

This work, which is the starting point of all the Order's activities, is centred on the adoption by skilled tradesmen of the young worker when he finishes his apprenticeship and on the development of his abilities through actual experience in the trade. The Order regards a worker's trade and the background to it as a means of imparting culture and education. Thus the practice of having young men adopted by their seniors in the trade and the pre-occupation with character training and the development of technical abilities and human values have become the prerogative of the Order, while powerful organisations such as the friendly societies and trade unions have taken over and carried through all that the Order had tentatively begun a century ago for the defence and

[1] This was demonstrated in France by the General Confederation of Labour in 1937, when it devoted the basement of its stand at the Paris International Exhibition to masterpieces and documents relating to the Order.

[2] Once again, this, more than anything else, was the cause of its decline.

mutual assistance of the workers. The Order has left to others such attempts to organise the masses and has turned its attention to quality and the things of the mind. Its role is to act as a leaven—yet another indication of its permanent character, for it also acted as a leaven when it tried to organise the masses. It is evident that there is a need for such a leaven at the present time if the working world is to avoid a decline that would be detrimental to society as a whole.

The reasons for the success of the Order in its present venture —and for its capacity not only to survive down to our time but also to remain young enough in spirit and in constitution to offer, in the form of "social service", an ideally suitable solution to the problem presented by young workers and their education—lie in the principle on which it works and in its organisation. As a member of the Order a young worker finishing his apprenticeship is given shelter and can take advantage of a whole chain of hostels and correspondents; he is thus able to "see the country" and at the same time acquire a full knowledge of his trade and a store of experience through contact with other men. Tradition holds that each member must find himself a technical instructor, and each centre of the Order has the necessary equipment for additional training in the evenings when the day's work is over. When it is remembered that a devoted "Mother of the Companions" is responsible for the good order and well-being of the young workers at each centre and that the young men are in the company of others of their own age who are making the same effort and have the same desire to lay a solid foundation for later life, it will be seen that a Companion will long cherish the memory of his *Tour de France.* He makes it when he is between 18 and 25, at the age that leaves the happiest memories. Everything contributes to make his time as a Companion memorable—the years of happiness and of troubles lightly borne, the possibility of acquiring a thorough knowledge of a trade, of being rescued and supported if in need, of being defended in times of serious adversity. It is easy to see why the Order has survived and why it is now more flourishing than ever. It offers a young worker, in addition to material facilities, a whole programme of technical, cultural and educational advancement. If the Order continues to draw on its traditions and to gather fresh inspiration from contact with present-day conditions it will go on producing very remarkable results.

The Present Experiment

Before the Order was reformed it was divided into clearly separated groups—the Companions of the Duty of Liberty, the

Union of the Companions and the Companions of Duty. The Duty of Liberty had its own *Tour de France,* with a number of hostels which took in young carpenters and joiners only. The Union of the Companions was an association of various trades, forming a kind of loose fraternity without any rigid structure. The Companions of Duty embraced a fairly large number of trades, but each had its own customs, hostels, *Tour de France* and officers. Such was the general situation ; the young members of the Order found scattered over the country hostels affiliated to their group, sometimes with halls where they could receive professional training of a high standard. Attempts were made at a few congresses between the two wars to consolidate the various facilities and the last, in 1938, reached tentative agreement on a general programme. Obviously an Order so divided was incapable of action, and profound changes were imperative if there was to be any useful and genuine revival.

First of all the Order needed to regroup in preparation for the revival campaign, to fix definite objectives and methods in order to ensure maximum efficiency. Nothing, it was felt, was worth starting if the Order was not provided with a working basis. Rules were drawn up uniting all occupations in a joint agreement, a plan was prepared providing facilities for the *Tour de France,* and training programmes were recast. As a result a new association was set up at Lyons in 1941 called the " Workers' Association of the Companions of the *Tour de France* ". However, like all activities undertaken at this time in France, its work was disturbed by the war and the Occupation, and all it did was to draw up a body of rules in the light of past experience. The Association was registered and obtained official recognition. It launched an appeal for union and mutual understanding to all societies affiliated to the Order, though not all responded. As a result the Order reformed around a number of key cities in France which were still sufficiently active centres, and the intention was to provide at least some of them with a headquarters fitted out to offer the best possible accommodation for about 100 youths.

As conceived by the leaders of the Order, these new centres are to take the place of the old pre-war hostels, where board and lodging were not always of the best. Each provincial centre is to be the hub of all the activities in a given area, with a large hostel, a cultural group and an advanced training section open to outside pupils and capable of giving instruction to 250 to 300 young workers. A provincial council, comprising all the presidents of the societies of the Order in the area, is responsible for the centre. Thus there is a representative for each affiliated trade, and the centre becomes a meeting place for a community of trades joined together in a common purpose. At the head of each centre and representing the

Order in the province is a Companion elected for five years by all the Companions in the province. Side by side with the provincial council there is a centre committee, formed of representatives elected by each trade, to supervise the management of the centre. There is also a training committee, similarly elected, which watches over the running and progress of the school and the quality of the training. Among all these men is the Mother of the Companions, the only woman, whose presence mitigates the unavoidable severity of such a group and makes a family of what would otherwise be nothing more than a rigorous boarding school governed by the " Rules of the Companions ".[1] These rules, which lay down the behaviour to be observed at meals and in the bedrooms, workshops and so on, are called the " Duty " (hence the name " Order of Duty "). Their origins lie in a discipline which, though freely accepted, is sufficiently severe to ensure a high standard of behaviour in each community ; everything in the community is made an instrument of education.

Around these provincial headquarters, which are genuine training centres, are other less ambitious units which, in the spirit of the reformers of the Order, continue the hostel tradition of former years and have a few rooms, a meeting hall and a workshop. These smaller centres are similarly administered by the representatives of the Companions in all affiliated trades. They are directly linked to the provincial headquarters and so constitute a regional network with the headquarters at the centre.

At the national level there is an annual general assembly called the " Assizes " of the Order ; this has already met 13 times and is attended by all the provincial officers responsible for a centre[2] and the delegates of all affiliated trades[3]. The Assizes have all the powers of a general assembly ; they supervise the management of the centres and make such changes as are necessary to the Association. They also elect one of the five members of the Council of the Order, who act as permanent executive officers, each entrusted with a given office—president, general secretary, treasurer or equipment or training officer. This brief outline will give some idea

[1] The " Rules of the Companions " are a product of the centuries. They reflect the experience and genuine wisdom of the working man and show a remarkable knowledge of humanity. Some of the rules are surprising ; at meals, for example, dialect is forbidden. In France this ban has been a unifying influence. It is worth reflecting on its possible effect if there were an Order touring Europe or the world, and in that world there were a single language, the only one to be spoken in the centres of the Order. In half a century the differences between the nations might be no more than those subsisting between Alsace, Provence and Brittany in France a century ago.

[2] Provincial officers are elected for five years, but a delegate elected by the Companions of the province accompanies them to the Assizes every year.

[3] Elected nationally by the members of their occupations.

of the structure of the Order and of the assignment of responsibility within it. It is conceived as a network covering the community of trades represented in each centre, the elements of the community being represented as far as the Council of the Order. The corporate spirit is maintained by occupational groups, which are also responsible for the guidance and training of the young. In this way the true characteristics of the Order have been preserved—strong influence of the trades, great character and vitality, and corporate feeling—while the door has been opened to collaboration by the grouping of a number of occupations, so that it has been possible to acquire and equip large centres which would have been beyond the means of a single occupation.

This scheme, which was devised about 12 years ago, was carried out almost to the letter when the war was over. Although the Order as a whole is not united, the entire membership of the Council has changed twice already. The Fourteenth National Assizes of the Order were due to meet in Paris in May 1953. The Companions have tried out their first provincial centre, which has been opened inside a factory at Vaise, a suburb of Lyons ; Perdiguier himself had mentioned the importance of this district to the Companions in their travels. The centre is now flourishing ; it has a hostel with 100 beds and everything required to feed boarders. It has a training section with several workshops for practical and theoretical instruction and a cultural section. All this fulfils the cherished hope of the Companions—the provision of accommodation, as personified in the " Mother ", training and culture, represented by the library, the exhibition room and all the instructional facilities. The whole system is designed to train the character of those staying in the centre.

Once the war was over this centre at Vaise was chosen as the setting for the Order's first experiment, for which all its fund of experience and all its faith were mobilised in the service of the young worker and his vital needs. Since that time 1,500 young Frenchmen, coming from all directions, have passed through this one centre on their *Tour de France,* and in it they have acquired considerable skill. This testing ground has so strengthened the concept of the Order that an entire theory of training and promotion has evolved. The results have been so encouraging that the Association has expanded, and a number of public bodies and municipalities have offered it the use of other buildings or sites (the state of decay of some of the buildings did not daunt the Companions, who set to work at once to put them in order). Facilities of this kind have been offered by the Department of the Lower Rhine, the City of Tours and the City of Paris (which has presented one of its finest sites). From its own funds the Association has acquired extensive

property, on which it has built with its own labour. In this way the Order has in the course of a few years laid the foundations for a network of large centres. Before long they will be turning out 2,000 men a year, all highly skilled and with a sound technical and general education. At present the Association's training centres are giving instruction to 800 youths every year.

A decree issued by the Ministry of Labour has raised the Association's chain of centres to the dignity of a workers' upgrading institute, and a directorate for the upgrading centres of the *Tour de France* has been set up in Paris. The Association also receives subsidies from the Ministries of Labour and National Education, which help it to maintain its training courses. Its increasing success among the young has brought in floods of applications from every quarter, and the Association now finds itself obliged to refuse about half of them every year.

The Order and the Working Man

The Order is intended for the young. At one time the worker, hemmed in by the guild, mistress and guardian of his profession, found in the Order a way of escape—an opportunity of leaving home, of travelling and learning more about his trade. Without the facilities provided by the Order he was doomed to vegetate, without a chance of broadening his knowledge and intelligence. At a later time, after the abolition of the guilds, the Order was the sole occupational association, harassed, it is true, by the authorities, but genuinely organised and active nevertheless. At this time it was the young worker's only source of mutual assistance, contact and support. It trained him in his trade and found him friends, assistance and a job. Today, however, when social activities invade and at times engulf every aspect of our lives, one might ask what tasks are left for the Order. Our answer would be that the essential tasks are still there—that the young worker is today in as great need as ever of what the Companions can offer.

Let us consider what the future holds for the youths leaving the vocational schools. They enter these schools after receiving some rudimentary education, usually without any great enthusiasm, at another school. The decision is made at the elementary school whether the pupils have an aptitude for study, and those that have not are finally condemned to manual work. Usually the boredom continues at the vocational school, for there is still no action—life has not yet begun. Then at last the door is opened. Life has begun for the young man, though his mind and character are as yet unformed—and life for him means going to a factory. And in what

conditions ! If the boy has not a solid family background or an employer sufficiently understanding to take an interest in him, or if he does not find some older workman or well-established workmate to take him under his wing, he will certainly be lost unless he has exceptional talent for making his way unaided. For, as any Companion will explain, the practice of his trade affords the only entry to that long and arduous road that lies ahead of him. His trade will be the basis of his life and of all he builds around him as an extension of himself. His trade will be his meaning for society, his justification before his fellow-men and the measure by which he will be judged. He will find it difficult at first to believe that his trade can ever mean so much to him. How can one love a thing that has been made so soulless ? Surely it is only a means of avoiding starvation.

Yet if his trade fails him the fault lies with society for being blind. Who can say what the result will be if the Order is allowed a hearing ?

The Order believes that it is not enough for a young man to be given training in a workshop or a school. He must afterwards perfect his knowledge, and to do so involves more than acquiring greater technical ability. It means learning to live. But who will teach him ? Certainly not his school, however good ; what he needs is close contact with the realities of life. They must be tackled squarely and often the only way is to tackle them unaided. He may be lucky enough, when starting out in life, to find someone to give him backing and initiate him into the life of his trade. The knowledge thus gained will sustain him in his daily effort and help him to take the long view of that development of his inner self whose consummation takes a lifetime. Here again it is not merely a question of technical improvement ; his entire being is involved. He may, in his early years, have the feeling that he is making rapid strides, but he will come to see that the end of the road is only reached when life itself is over, and that after having taken, he must learn to give, which is yet another form of progress. The key to this life, the life of the working man, of the man who puts his hand to any job, however simple, he will find within the Order, handed down from time immemorial, never losing any of its truth or value, and with it goes the knowledge of that secret bond between the job and the man who does it.

The Order is waiting to receive him. To join it he must abandon everything: his family, friends and daily life. If he is the son of an employer, well cared for in his father's home, he must come with nothing more than his bare hands when he joins the Companions. Their door is open to him. On entering a centre he will start as a novice, but he can at once begin to live and to experience what the

Order has to offer. To begin with, after studying his case, the members of his trade will place him in a job. It will be a job suited to his aptitudes and strength, so chosen that he can learn from it as well as do it satisfactorily. On returning to the centre in the evening he will have to set to work under the guidance of the Companions in the training workshops of their own design. This instruction in the evening rounds off the experience acquired during the day through contact with the various practical difficulties of his trade. These lessons will be shared with more advanced probationers and young Companions, as well as with young persons from the neighbourhood, to whom the schools are also open, for the Order works for all without discrimination.

This, however, is only one of the two aspects of the institution. The other is even more attractive. Its influence is everywhere apparent, it is all-embracing and gives everything a meaning. It is the means whereby everything is rendered possible—moderation, success, attachment and devotion. This other aspect is the centre, the home of a community of men all fired with an ideal, living freely under voluntary discipline, respectful of one another and with a code of honour and a rule of conduct of the highest order. It is a haven of peace closed by common accord to influences outside the trade, protecting generations of young workers and helping them to find their way in life. This protective institution is called " the Mother ", after the woman, the " Mother of the Companions ", who is chosen by them for her qualities to rule over the centre. She runs it, maintains order and watches over everything. She receives the novice on behalf of the Companions and takes care of him ; if he has a family she supplements the family's influence, and if he is alone she takes its place. Such an institution is obviously far more than a hotel or a mere school ; it has its own atmosphere, its discipline and its considerable material advantages. There is nothing to compare with it.

Once a young worker is settled in this fraternity he pays his share of the communal expenses and lives better than elsewhere and cheaper, just as he does at home. But this is to anticipate. He has entered as a friend, but he is still a novice and so he will remain until the Companions have formed their own impression of him. If he proves unsatisfactory he will not be allowed to stay ; if he creates a favourable impression and is looked upon as promising he will be ceremoniously presented with the emblem that he will carry with him on his *Tour de France*. It as yet bears no inscription but on it will be marked the signs denoting his achievements and the virtues he will have to cultivate in order to become a good Companion. He also receives his probationer's staff, the symbol of the Order, and the pass that will establish his identity

when he is travelling. His entry into the Order is a great day in his life.

Now he is ready. He has been adopted, and the cities of the *Tour de France* are waiting for him. He is called by his first name and his home town, e.g., Francis of Lyons or Louis of Nantes. The Companions prescribe the route he is to follow and provide him with everything he needs to start him on his way. He is instructed how to establish his identity wherever he may be. He is assigned to the care of a "Mother" in another town and a job is found for him. Companions and probationers meet together on the eve of his departure, and after drinking and singing the probationer is taken through the town, complete with staff and emblem. On arriving at the appointed town he is given hospitality. Now, however, he has to bear in mind that he is on probation. Here are new faces and new teachers, fresh reasons for learning and observing. He is given certain responsibilities—he must set an example for the novices, particularly in matters of discipline, and has certain duties in the running of the centre. At the training classes and in the workshop a higher standard is required of him. He is trained to be a conscientious, upright and able worker fit to join the ranks of the Companions ; for a Companion is a man whose conscience has been trained to be receptive to his trade. As a probationer he may have to visit several other towns—that depends on his branch, since some branches are more difficult to join than others. [1] In the end he will be admitted to the Order by the Companions belonging to his trade. The marks assigned to him by the various places he has visited will be totalled. On his emblem, so jealously guarded and proudly worn on all occasions, a hot iron will brand new signs into the velvet. He will then be given his Companion's staff and the name by which he will be known within the Order. Only his peers, the members of his branch, are present at this ceremony. It is the culminating point, the long-awaited moment at which he joins the ranks of the members of the Order. He is given certain tasks, for the existence of the Order depends on the devotion of its members. Everywhere, from the training courses to the hostel, he is called upon to make his contribution. So the Order continues from one generation to another in its members and its work.

And so our young worker is now a Companion of the Order. He will go on travelling in exactly the same way—to other towns, perhaps to the colonies or abroad. Everywhere he is given hospitality and help. Yet the Order can have even more in store for him, for if he wishes he can become a Senior Companion after producing

[1] The whole future of the Order depends on the standard of admission ; branches which are not sufficiently exacting pave the way to their own downfall.

a masterpiece made with his own hands. Naturally, he would like to make something useful, but this is sometimes difficult.[1] If he decides to produce a masterpiece he must find a workshop—a back room where he can work and plan alone, in silence and with the knowledge that he is backed by the body of the Companions. Such work will not bring him any decoration, title or distinction. It will be an anonymous achievement and will remain the property of the Companions, a testimony for those to come of a continuity of effort ; and in producing his masterpiece the Companion will have learned a further secret—that he has not yet finished, that the real masterpiece, whose execution still remains unfinished, is himself, to be completed for the benefit of all mankind. A Senior Companion is a man whose conscience is receptive to humanity ; beyond his trade he finds his fellow men.

Certain rites are performed at each stage of this progression, but it must not be imagined that the Order offers a creed or a symbolism with rules and customs after the manner of freemasonry. It is nothing more than a natural and effective outlet for whatever qualities the Companion may possess. The Order not only enables him to discover great possibilities within himself but also teaches him to attribute a profound and personal meaning to his life. It forms his character, makes him conscious of his own powers and prompts him to give of his best according to his capacity, and that is justification enough. According to his capacity, we repeat, for the worker's capacity develops by stages as he progresses in the Order. He has to learn to be a good novice, then a good Companion and finally a good master and a consistently good servant of the Order and of its ideal—in a word, a servant of mankind. The Order brings achievement within the reach of every type of person, whatever his capacities, on the sole condition that he has a feeling for his trade. It offers the young the chance of being adopted by their seniors in the trade. Mankind is seen as a procession in which the youngest bear the treasures of the community under the eyes of their elders, who point the way. In this way, by its work, which tribulations and the passage of time have purified and refined, leaving but the purest essence, the Order brings the vision of the solidarity that links the generations, of a common, uninterrupted task spanning the ages, and a community of labour born of the community of men. Thus fortified it does not shut its eyes to

[1] It often happens that a worker has hardly any chance to practise all the aspects of his trade. Hence, to provide some testimony of his achievement, a Companion may wish to produce a masterpiece, or even several, for his own satisfaction, even though what he produces is entirely useless to society. All this is an education in itself, for the client or employer as much as for the worker.

progress or the duties that progress implies but insists that humanity must come first, that the worker is a human being who must be enabled to take pride in his work and find his full development in it. Thus the Order through its intelligent work, the high quality of its membership and its inspiring example reflects the dignity and strength of labour and points the way to emancipation.