

THE FOX OF FRANCE

Chapter 5: The Matter of Money

Louis the Great School not only offered prestigious scholarships but also had a well-earned reputation for high-quality education. Its origins could be traced back to 1563 when it was known as the "Clément School," a church school under the Jesuits. The school's practice of offering completely free education to day students drew the ire of the University of Paris right from its inception.

For over two centuries, Louis the Great School engaged in a relentless struggle with the University of Paris. In 1762, the University of Paris emerged victorious when the Paris Parliament passed a resolution to expel the Jesuit administrators, handing over the school's management to the University. To please the reigning King Louis XV, the school was renamed Louis the Great School. It seemed that the University of Paris had won the two-century-long marathon. However, they could not foresee that their real competition would emerge from within the school they now controlled.

In 1766, Louis the Great School began conducting teacher qualification exams and later established a corresponding teacher training institute to aid the candidates. This teacher training institute would later become one of France's most renowned universities, the precursor to the Paris Normal School.

Joseph was now hoping to enroll in a school like this.

Typically, for students from other provinces, passing Louis the Great School's qualification exam was no easy feat. First, the student needed a recommendation from a local bishop, and then they had to pass the school's selection process. However, for Joseph, these weren't significant hurdles. As

the Archbishop of Minie's pupil, securing a recommendation was not difficult, and passing the selection process was also achievable for a time traveler who had obtained a master's degree in a future era. The obstacle standing in Joseph's way was the cost of attending this school.

Joseph knew that his father didn't have much money. Carlo had served as a deputy officer for Paoli and fought for Corsica's independence against the French. Although he eventually submitted to the French, he needed to maintain his noble status, which required him to appease the Corsican governor, depleting much of his savings. With six other children to support, Joseph didn't expect his father to have much money left.

Joseph wrote a letter to Archbishop Minie, seeking his help. He knew that Archbishop Minie was sympathetic to the Jesuits (at this time, the Jesuits had been suppressed by Pope Clement XIV, but their influence lingered, and many of Archbishop Minie's practices were clearly influenced by the Jesuits). In his letter, he specifically referred to Louis the Great School as the "Clément School" and subtly hinted at his interest in theology.

Soon, Archbishop Minie replied to Joseph's letter. He praised Joseph's devoutness but also advised against joining the Church at such a young age.

"Child, God has many paths for people to follow. Becoming a priest is not the only way to fulfill God's will. I believe you are still too young to make such a decision. Perhaps you should experience other things like love, wealth, and power. Afterward, you might truly understand the path God has prepared for you.

Moreover, I wholeheartedly support your desire to receive education at a better school, my child. In my heart, you are like my son. Seeing my son's determination, what father wouldn't be filled with joy? At this moment, when he extends his hand for help, which father wouldn't be willing to lend a helping

hand? However, you know I'm not a wealthy man, so I can only provide you with 150 francs for now.

Considering you're just an eleven-year-old child (I sometimes tend to overlook this), and Paris is quite far away. Leaving you alone in such a distant place worries me. Alfonso, the missionary, has some business in Paris, and I calculated that his departure date is not far from yours. So, I've asked him to bring you the 150 francs and accompany you to Paris.

Living in Paris is very expensive, and 150 francs alone won't last long. Unless you reside in those areas filled with the lower classes. In fact, living there is not a bad idea. In my youth, I also lived in such places, where you could see even darker darkness than darkness itself and find even whiter whiteness in that darkness. Those places can broaden your horizons and even temper your soul. If you were a bit older, say sixteen, I would think you could live in such a place for a while. But for now... the security is chaotic, and leaving you in such a state is like throwing a lamb into a wolf's den. So, I've found a place for you.

Between the Latin Quarter and the Saint-Marceau district, there's a small chapel belonging to the Franciscans. The head priest there, Jean-Jacques, is my friend. I believe he can provide you with a simple but relatively safe place to stay."

On the day Joseph received this letter, his younger brother Napoleon also received an admission notice to the Brienne Military Academy. The ten-year-old Napoleon bid farewell to his older brother, eager to embark on his long-awaited journey to the school.

"My foolish brother," Joseph couldn't resist poking fun at Napoleon's joy, "Do you really think the crows at the Brienne Military Academy are white? I guarantee you it's the same as here, full of self-proclaimed aristocratic fools. You're just jumping from one fire pit to another."

"Joseph, do you even know anything? I'm going to Brienne to learn, and whether there are fools there or not doesn't matter. Do you think just because there are fools, the sum of the angles in a triangle in their textbooks won't be 180 degrees? As long as I can gain useful knowledge, what does it matter?"

"Of course, it matters," Joseph remarked. "My foolish brother, even Damascus steel needs a hammer and an anvil to take shape. When you're surrounded by a quagmire, where do you forge your sword? So, when you're there, remember to write me often, so I can guide you properly. I don't want to see you rusting away in a quagmire."

"You're the biggest quagmire in the world," Napoleon retorted.

"Hahaha..." Joseph laughed heartily.

After bidding farewell to Napoleon, two weeks later, it was almost time for Joseph's entrance exam at Louis the Great School. It was at this time that the Alfonso missionary mentioned in Archbishop Minie's letter also arrived at Aix-en-Provence.

After securing leave from school, Joseph joined Alfonso on the carriage heading to Avignon. It was May, the most beautiful season of the year. The carriage departed from Marseille, speeding along the road to Paris. The warm spring breeze wafted in through the window, carrying the mixed scents of wildflowers that bloomed profusely along the roadside. Looking out of the window, they passed fields of emerald green wheat, interspersed with various colorful flowers – pink wild thyme, lavender, red and yellow roses.

Occasionally, they spotted a few small lilac lilacs swaying in the spring breeze.

Inside the carriage were six people, including Joseph, a priest, a child, two middle-aged men dressed as merchants, and a young couple. Everyone, except the lady, was wearing long trousers (in France, nobles often wore tight-

fitting breeches with knee-high stockings, while commoners wore long trousers).

With not much to do during the journey, the passengers engaged in casual conversation.

"Father, are you also going to Paris?" asked one of the skinny merchants.

"I have some business at Notre Dame," replied Father Alfonso, "This is our bishop's student; he's going to Paris to take the entrance exam at Louis the Great School. I'm accompanying him."

"Ah, it must be quite challenging for such a young boy to leave his hometown for Paris," remarked the thin merchant.

"Attending school in Paris can be quite costly," the other merchant added, "It probably costs several hundred francs per year."

"In fact, studying at Louis the Great School itself doesn't require a lot of money," the husband from the young couple chimed in. "The school offers generous scholarships, but the requirements for students are high. First, you need a recommendation from the church, and then you have to pass the entrance selection."

Turning to Joseph, he asked, "Child, which subjects are you good at?"

Joseph responded, "I can read and write Latin, and I also enjoy mathematics and natural philosophy."

"Mathematics is the language God used to create the world. Natural philosophy is another path to draw closer to God," the young man said. "It's great that you have an affinity for these subjects."

"Drawing closer to God is only through the Church, my boy!" Father Alfonso said solemnly.

"You're absolutely right," the skinny merchant hurriedly agreed, making the sign of the cross on his chest.

"The Church and the Bible are indeed the only ways to draw closer to God," the young man also quickly retracted his previous statement, but he couldn't resist adding, "But isn't this world God's creation? Admiring the world ultimately amounts to admiring God."

"I like that perspective," Joseph interjected.

Father Alfonso was about to say something more but fell silent after hearing Joseph's words.