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The Affair of the Pigeon Droppings: Rural Schoolmasters in Eighteenth-Century France

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Abstract: This article examines the role played by village schoolmasters in eighteenth-century rural France. Although schoolmasters were not supported or regulated by the state, as they would be a century later, they were able to navigate successfully the complex network of social relationships that existed within early modern rural society. Using the journal of one schoolmaster, Pierre Delahaye, the article demonstrates that in addition to teaching, schoolmasters also worked as record keepers for village notables, as clerks for the parish, and even cleaned the churches and belfries. The schoolmaster's position afforded him a much greater social position than might be assumed from knowledge of only his income and background, and even allowed him to serve as a mediator between the village and the curé. Thus it can be argued that schoolmasters of the eighteenth century were as important to rural society as their state supported counterparts of the nineteenth century.

The French public education system, put into place during the nineteenth century, has received a significant amount of scholarly attention.[1] This treatment in the literature is certainly well deserved, largely because it was during this time that the state took responsibility for creating and administering an extensive network of schools and teacher training programmes in cities, towns, and villages all over France. Because of this literature, historians are largely familiar with the image of professionalised schoolmasters and schoolmistresses who became a sort of social class in nineteenth-century France.[2] Educated at normal schools in Paris and other urban centres, these schoolteachers brought national culture, language, and politics to the rural children they taught, as well as to their parents and communities. Schoolteachers are seen as a key factor in the modernisation of the French countryside and were responsible, as Eugen Weber famously put it, for turning peasants into Frenchmen.

Yet the rural schoolmaster and the village school did not originate in the nineteenth century. Although eighteenth-century schoolmasters were often untrained and unskilled,

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they existed in significant numbers.[3] Some schoolmasters were simply priests who taught parish children when they had time and for laymen as well, teaching in rural areas was often a temporary or part-time occupation. However, a significant number of lay schoolmasters in eighteenth-century France were chosen and supported financially by the communities for which they worked, and they had a unique social status within that community. The schoolmaster worked closely with the parents of his students, with the village notables who watched over his school and provided him with supplemental employment, and with the curé and vicaire, for whom he provided assistance during mass and other church services. As a result, the schoolmaster was a central figure in the complex network of social interactions that took place within the village structure. An examination of schoolmasters can thus tell us both about rural primary education as well as the inner workings of the eighteenth-century French village.

What follows is a case study of one schoolmaster, who, because of the unique record that he kept during his time teaching in a village called Silly, can provide important insights into the social role of the eighteenth-century schoolmaster as well as the social networks of which he was an integral part.[4] Pierre Louis Nicolas Delahaye titled his record 'Account of baptisms, marriages and burials in the parish of Silly-en-Multien, and other remarkable and curious events', and, fortunately for the historian, Delahaye found numerous 'curious events' in the village to write about. Some events are nationally known, like the Flour War of 1775, when the price of grain was so high that people stormed granaries demanding to buy what they needed at a price they set themselves.[5] Marie Antoinette makes an appearance in the record in 1780, when she and members of the royal entourage visited Rousseau's tomb in the village of Ermenonville, just ten kilometres away from Silly.[6] Delahaye describes how the inhabitants of his village reacted to the French Revolution as well, with a clear sense of pride in their growing opportunities to participate in national politics followed by fear and dismay at the reports of violence and unrest coming from both the capital and the countryside.

But perhaps the most interesting events are those that seemingly no one outside Silly would care about and which reveal a complex network of social relationships in the village. Delahaye's minute-by-minute account of the suspicious visit of a married woman to the home of the vicaire ('at 1:20 they both went into the room where he sleeps, after having closed all of the doors, and remained there until 2:10')[7] is unintentionally comical in all its scandalous detail, while his sense of moral outrage comes through clearly in his description of a charivari that took place in 1781 when a man from outside the parish married a woman from Silly and the young men of the village did not approve.[8] These details and many others, including Delahaye's explanation of the circumstances that led to the affair of the pigeon droppings with the *laboureur* Jean François Hervaux, provide a fascinating look into the social status of an eighteenth-century rural schoolmaster. While Delahaye's experience is not entirely typical, the role he played in his village certainly demonstrates that the historian should look to rural communities for the roots of the nineteenth-century educational revolution. The schoolmasters of the eighteenth century, and the village schools that were maintained by their communities, provided the foundation for that revolution, and for their nineteenth-century counterparts in state supported educational institutions.

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In the spring of 1787 Pierre Louis Nicolas Delahaye, the schoolmaster in the village of Silly-en-Multien,[9] made a contract with a farmer (*laboureur*) in which he arranged to teach the farmer's son for a period of five years. Jean François Hervaux agreed to pay the schoolmaster one hundred *livres* a year and in return Delahaye would instruct the boy in reading, writing, arithmetic, and plain chant. But the contract contained another rather unusual stipulation: Delahaye was also obliged to ensure that 'there are no openings in the choir vaults or the chapels of the church that would allow pigeons access to them in any manner whatsoever, and to keep them from getting into the belfry as much as possible'.[10] Most of the details of the contract are fairly straightforward, and it is probably very similar to hundreds of other agreements, written or oral, made between schoolmasters and villagers throughout France in the eighteenth century—except for the bit about the pigeons. Clearly, this agreement was about more than just schooling. In fact, it was about prestige, money, honour, and social standing in the village.

A bit of background about rural schools in eighteenth-century France should provide the context for this unusual contract between Delahaye and Hervaux. First of all, most lay schoolmasters were paid by both the community, in the form of monthly student fees and annual contributions from each household, and the parish *fabrique*. The *fabrique* consisted of all of the property of the parish, including buildings, land, rents, ornaments, and books. Any cash income derived from the *fabrique* was used primarily for the upkeep of the building(s) and the various supplies needed for the mass or the decoration of the church, but it could also be used to help pay for a schoolmaster. Since the community's contributions alone rarely covered all the schoolmaster's living expenses, the parish as a whole supplemented his salary through the *fabrique* and employed him as a parish clerk as well as a schoolmaster. For example, in 1774 the schoolmaster of Damouzy (Ardennes) in the diocese of Reims was paid thirty-four *sous* from each household in the village plus thirty-three *livres* from the *fabrique*. He would have received school fees from individual students as well. The neighbouring village of Houldizy had a similar arrangement, although families contributed grain instead of cash: their schoolmaster received a *quartel* (about a bushel) of grain from each household and twenty-seven *livres* from the *fabrique*.[11] Thus in rural areas where the ratio of priests to parishioners was small, lay schoolmasters served as clerical assistants and performed a wide variety of tasks for the parish, including: teaching and supervising altar boys, assisting during mass, and cleaning the church. Schoolmasters also took their students to mass on working days and taught them catechism during school. Delahaye performed all these tasks and more for the parish of Silly, and thus he titled himself 'parish clerk and schoolmaster'.

Church and community provided other forms of income for the schoolmaster as well. Each time that the schoolmaster assisted at church services like marriages, special masses or funerals, he was entitled to part of the *casuel*, the altar fees paid by the individual or organisation sponsoring the service. Schoolmasters also had the right to collect food items, which could be anything from wine to milk or eggs, on one or two days of the year. But most importantly, the community usually provided a house in which the schoolmaster and his family lived. He also taught in that house, perhaps in the kitchen or the stable, since most villages did not have a designated school building. If no house for the schoolmaster existed, the community or the parish might give him some money for rent instead.

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Delahaye was somewhat unusual in that almost his entire salary came from Silly's *fabrique* which, in the wealthy grain exporting region of the *pays de grande culture*, was particularly well endowed. The parents of his students also paid monthly fees and he had the right to collect some foodstuffs from households in the village on certain days of the year, but the bulk of his salary came from the *fabrique*. Delahaye started in 1771 at one hundred *livres* a year but after completing the first school year he was given a rise of fifty *livres*. After 1779, the Charity of Silly, a separate institution from the *fabrique* that was organised along the lines of a confraternity, decided to pay him thirty *livres* a year to teach a certain number of poor children without collecting any fees from their parents. Apparently he had already been doing this, since the Charity gave him a retrospective payment of one hundred *livres* that year. Finally, he lived rent-free in a home belonging to the *fabrique*.[12]

In addition to what they received from church and community, most schoolmasters did a variety of other jobs for individuals in the village in order to supplement their income. In some cases this was out of necessity, since the schoolmaster's salary might not meet the needs of a large family. The schoolmaster's income was also reduced in the summer and autumn when most parents needed their children's labour at home and in the fields and thus stopped paying their school fees. For example, the curé of Montigny-sur-Vesle (Marne) in the diocese of Reims reported in 1774 that the village schoolmaster had about fifty students during the winter, but only about thirty for the rest of the year. Another curé in Chappes (Ardennes) complained that his schoolmaster only held school for three or four months of the year because that was the only time children would attend, and in any case he was badly paid.[13] In some cases the salary was so meagre that a schoolmaster had to seek a position elsewhere or quit altogether. Delahaye's father had been a schoolmaster in the nearby village of Droizelles for at least twenty years, but had been forced to abandon his position because he could not earn enough to support his large family.[14] Delahaye was one of the lucky ones, and he probably could have survived on just his schoolmaster's salary since he was earning over two hundred *livres* a year once his school fees were collected which was much more than the 150 *livres* recommended by the state, but that did not stop him from engaging in a variety of supplemental enterprises.[15]

Over the course of his career, Delahaye took on a number of boarding students and this activity was probably his most important form of extra income. The first student he mentions is Clement de Champeaux, a boy about eight or nine years old from a town called Chambrefontaine (Marne). Between 1774 and 1776 Delahaye was paid 280 *livres* a year to cover room, board, and tuition, thus doubling his income. Delahaye probably taught this boy more advanced subjects than his village students, and Champeaux went on to a military school after he left Silly. In 1786 he returned to the Delahaye home for a brief visit before joining a cavalry unit.[16] Delahaye mentions other students in passing in his record, and, as noted above, he agreed to teach the *laboureur* Hervaux's son additional skills beyond reading and writing for one hundred *livres* a year.

Delahaye had other skills that helped him earn extra income on a regular basis as well. He mentions several times that various people in Silly and in surrounding villages paid him to clean and maintain their clocks. He also worked as a surveyor for the *laboureurs* of Silly. The curé paid him to take care of his garden and to collect tithes for him. The

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church used money from the *fabrique* to pay him to draw up accounts each year for the churchwardens. Finally, perhaps the most unusual source of income for Delahaye was what he earned for selling pigeon droppings. As part of his parish duties, Delahaye was responsible for cleaning up the mess made by the pigeons that got into the belfry and the vaulting of the church, but he also had the right to sell the droppings to farmers. Bird droppings were commonly used as fertiliser in the region, but because keeping a dovecote or aviary was a sign of prestige associated with seigneurial privilege most farmers could not raise their own birds. Moreover, there were significant risks involved with keeping pigeons. In addition to feeding the birds, farmers had to prevent them from destroying crops or eating seed grain.[17] Delahaye notes that in July 1784 the local authorities issued an order demanding that anyone who did not have a farm of at least fifty *arpents* (approximately forty-two acres) had to destroy their dovecotes. As a result, at least two farmers in Silly had to give theirs up or face a fine of three hundred *livres*.[18] Delahaye thus had the best situation for profiting from pigeons. He simply collected the droppings and sold them, without being responsible for the birds' upkeep or any damages they might inflict.

According to his record, between 1771 and 1789 Delahaye sold 272 sacks of pigeon droppings for as much as three *livres* each and earned just over 666 *livres* in total and he may not have recorded every sale that he made. As odd as it sounds, this was no minor source of income and it probably helped considerably to increase his standard of living. So, by engaging in a number of different economic activities in addition to teaching, Delahaye managed to do quite well financially during the years he served as Silly's schoolmaster. In fact, he even had enough savings to take part in a government land sale during the Revolution: in 1791 he became the proud owner of two and a quarter *arpents* (approximately 1.9 acres) of land, divided into several parcels throughout the village.[19]

Even though Delahaye's income was not typical, it was not entirely unique either. For example, in Bussy-le-Château (Marne) the position of schoolmaster was in the hands of the Gaultier family from 1674 until the Revolution, and their wills show that each generation became a little wealthier. The Gaultiers owned some land, and the daughters of the schoolmasters consistently married sons of *laboureurs*.[20] Furthermore, it is not Delahaye's economic status that is truly interesting about his situation; his social position as schoolmaster and as parish clerk in the village, regardless of his income, set him apart from other villagers. Despite the fact that for the nearly twenty year period before the Revolution that is covered by his journal he owned no land, draft animals, or other significant property, his social circle included those who did own property, as well as the curé and the vicaire of the parish. As we will see, the affair of the pigeon droppings, and other events that Delahaye describes in his account, place the schoolmaster in a prominent position within the social networks of the eighteenth-century French village. Most importantly, schoolmasters like Delahaye served as an important social intermediary between the overlapping entities of village community and parish community in the rural world of the *ancien régime*.

Delahaye's village, Silly-en-Multien, is in a region known as the Multien. It is part of the fertile Paris Basin, the *pays de grande culture*, that also includes the Beauce, western

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Brie, the *pays* de France, the Soissonnais, the Vexin, and the Picard plain. Beginning in the rebuilding period after the Hundred Years' War the Multien and the rest of the *pays de grande culture* became the main suppliers of grain for the ever expanding city of Paris, and large scale cereal farms dominated the economy from an early date.[21] In the eighteenth century Silly consisted of 160 households and 580 inhabitants, and belonged to the diocese of Meaux, the *généralité* of Paris, and the *bailliage* of Senlis. Along with the neighbouring villages of Ognes and Saint-Pathus, Silly was part of a *seigneurie* belonging to the Prince de Conti.[22] The seigneur, a prince of the blood, leased his lands to a number of important farmers in the region. The social and economic position of this class of farmer has been studied extensively by historians, who argue that because of their wide ranging influence they should be called something other than *laboureurs*, from *grands fermiers* to merchant farmers to the rural bourgeoisie.[23] I have retained the use of *laboureur* here simply because that is the term that Delahaye used, but it is certainly true that these farmers had a great deal of influence on village life. The most important farms in Silly were leased by the following six families: Dubois, Vigneron, Deseaües, Carriat, Rommetin, and Vincent. Delahaye collected the tithe on lambs for the curé, and these were the six farms from which he regularly collected. Members of each of these families were also chosen for the municipal government created in 1787 and 1788, and Charles Léonard Carriat was syndic before the Revolution and then mayor from 1790 to 1791.

Delahaye includes the names of all twenty-four men who served in the municipal government in 1790.[24] In addition to representatives from the six *laboureur* families mentioned above, the list includes three other *laboureurs*: François Lefèvre, Antoine Mercier, and Laurent Thuillier (Delahaye's cousin). But other men whose primary occupation was not farming are included on the list and should be seen as village notables as well. These include, among others, Jean Noël Boucard and Etienne Cholet (blacksmiths), Etienne Félix Beuve (*cabaretier*), Nicolas Boileau and Laurent François Joannet (merchants), and Pierre Antoine Denisot (carpenter). Many of these individuals, both the *laboureurs* and those engaged in other professions, also served at least one term as churchwarden. Individuals from these families thus dominated village life, and according to his record Delahaye had the opportunity to build and maintain relationships with many village notables.

Delahaye was chosen as schoolmaster and parish clerk of Silly on 21st April 1771. Three days later he and his wife, Angélique Césarine Ducat, moved from Sennevières, where he had been teaching since 1769, to their new home in Silly. It appears that as schoolmaster Delahaye already had a certain amount of social capital since three village notables (Charlemagne Vincent, Antoine Mercier, and André Vigneron) helped him move. Delahaye's social status was confirmed a few months later when his wife gave birth to their daughter, Isidore, and a member of the Vigneron family was chosen as godmother and Laurent Thuillier served as godfather.[25]

Further references to village notables throughout his career as schoolmaster confirm Delahaye's relationship with the most important members of Silly's local society. Often these relationships were built around Delahaye's job. For example, he drew up accounts for the churchwardens, who were usually *laboureurs* or skilled artisans. He also built business relationships with farmers by surveying their land, such as for Charles Carriat

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in March 1782.[26] And, of course, he taught the villagers' children. On Delahaye's list of men chosen for the municipal government in 1787–8, there were nineteen unique family names and children with fifteen of these names were listed as Delahaye's students in 1786.[27] Although Delahaye did teach some of the children from poor families, the core group of students included children from the families of village notables, providing him with the opportunity to socialise with members of the village of a much higher economic status than his own. Yet given the nature of Delahaye's account, it is possible that the schoolmaster chose to relate events that exaggerated the strength of his social relationships with village notables. Certainly he had many opportunities to do a little name-dropping in his account, and perhaps make it look as though his primary friends and associates were *laboureurs* and merchants. Furthermore, in a small village like Silly it was natural for people of different economic backgrounds to work together on a daily basis: farmers needed the labour and services provided by day labourers and artisans, so they often developed close business relationships. This raises the question of whether Delahaye's relationships were only based on business.

In some cases, Delahaye only mentions *laboureurs* as part of business transactions, but with others there seems to have been genuine friendship. This comes across most clearly with the Carriats, perhaps the wealthiest household in the village. Monsieur and Madame Carriat were heavily involved in the educational institutions of Silly, providing food for school events and supplementing school funds so that poor children could participate. In 1788 the Carriats proposed a salary increase for the schoolmistresses, who were two women from a religious teaching order, on the occasion of Madame Carriat's successful delivery of a baby girl. Based on the Carriats' recommendation, the parish agreed, and the sisters' income was raised from two hundred to three hundred *livres*.[28] Delahaye mentions the Carriats several times in connection with his school, but other incidents seem to indicate that they were friends as well.

For example, in February 1783 Delahaye notes that 'M. and Mde Carriat did us the honor of having supper at our home'.[29] He thus acknowledges that the Carriats were his social superiors, but this was certainly not the first or the last time that they ate together. In November 1784 the whole family had supper at the Carriats' home. The occasion seems to have been casual enough that everyone decided to weigh themselves on the Carriats' scale after the meal; Delahaye was the heaviest at about 210 pounds. In January 1785 Madame Carriat brought a gift of two chickens, a cask of butter, six fresh eggs, and three pots of jam to the Delahayes, perhaps as a New Year's gift, and stayed for the afternoon to make doughnuts. Madame Carriat also arranged for Delahaye to take her nephew as a boarding student.[30] These little details may perhaps seem mundane or insignificant, but they are evidence that the two families had a social as well as a business relationship.

Another important social tie that the Delahayes had in Silly was their relationship with the Dubois family, headed by Marie Madeleine Dargent, the widow of Vincent Dubois. Madame Dubois was the most important *laboureuse* in the village when Delahaye began teaching and even served as churchwarden after her husband's death. She seems to have been something of a mentor for the Delahayes, and perhaps considered Angélique Delahaye to be a friend. In 1781 Angélique helped care for Madame Dubois during an illness, and later she sent the couple a small cask of wine in thanks. In 1784 Angélique

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accompanied Madame Dubois and others to a popular pilgrimage site, Notre Dame de Liesse (Aisne).[31] Delahaye also maintained a relationship with Madame Dubois's brother-in-law, Charles Dubois of Rully. In July 1781 he agreed to supply the farmer with pigeon droppings for a six-year period, at two and a half *livres* per sack.[32]

It is in the context of this relationship with the Dubois that Jean François Hervaux, a miller, first appears in Delahaye's record. In May 1777 Hervaux arranged a marriage with Madame Dubois's daughter, Marie Catherine. This was not the sort of event that Delahaye usually recorded, but we find out a few paragraphs later that he was one of the witnesses when the marriage contract was signed, and that Hervaux presented Delahaye and his wife with gifts, because 'it was my wife and I who were in large part responsible for his marriage with demoiselle Marie Dubois'.[33] Unfortunately Delahaye does not provide details of his role in arranging the marriage, but in any case the event indicates that the two couples had a personal relationship.

Hervaux's marriage to a Dubois daughter gave him an especially prominent position in village society and one that led to significant economic and social controversy. Madame Dubois had no male heirs, and it seems she planned to bestow most of her property upon her daughters and their husbands, but perhaps not equally.[34] In 1786 she ceded a valuable farm to Hervaux, including horses, livestock, and agricultural implements. Her other son-in-law, Claude André Vigneron, protested vigorously and according to Delahaye the village turned against Hervaux: 'everyone protested this transfer [of land] because it is not just'.[35] Uncharacteristically, Delahaye does not include any judgements of his own in the matter and was probably caught in the middle between other important members of the village and his friends, the Hervaux and the Dubois. In any case, the transfer of land from one generation to another was an event of unparalleled importance in village life, and an incident like this one seems to have had social repercussions for Hervaux for a significant period of time after the event.[36]

About a year later, in April 1787, Delahaye's daughter went to the Hervaux home to collect milk as she usually did on Easter Monday. This collection was part of Delahaye's rights as schoolmaster, but Hervaux's wife said that they were no longer going to give any milk because 'no one thinks much of the Hervaux'.[37] Isidore came home with an empty pail. Delahaye then explains that Hervaux was upset because his son had not been chosen as an altar boy that year. In his usual diplomatic way Delahaye said that he had originally planned to admit Hervaux junior but that because two other boys had decided to stay on for another year no place was available. Delahaye had apparently anticipated Hervaux's reaction because he had explained all of this to Madame Dubois a week earlier, promising her that her grandson would be given the next spot. But surely this was small consolation to Hervaux senior, especially since two other boys had already been accepted that year. One boy was the son of Charles Carriat, the future mayor of Silly, and the other was the son of Pierre Antoine Denisot, a carpenter. It is hard to guess which slight would have cut Hervaux deeper, the fact that his son was perceived as inferior to one of the most important farmers in the village, or that the son of an artisan had been chosen first.

In any case, Hervaux was not satisfied with the explanation that Delahaye had given to his mother-in-law and decided that he would take matters into his own hands. The next Sunday he went to the curé, Jean-Marie Bourget, and asked him to call a general assembly

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of the parish to deal with the issue of pigeons in the church and belfry. He claimed that it was the schoolmaster's responsibility to close up any openings in the vaulting of the church and in the belfry in order to keep pigeons from getting in and he wanted the community to force Delahaye to pay for grilles to be installed over the windows. The curé's response is telling: he told Hervaux that he would not call an assembly because it was unnecessary and because surely he could arrange things with Delahaye himself. Bourget understood that Hervaux was not really upset about the pigeons, but was using it as an excuse for revenge against the schoolmaster, who was a convenient scapegoat for his difficulties with the community as a whole. Forcing Delahaye to close up the belfry would be a serious financial blow, since he would have to pay for the work and materials and he would lose the income brought in by selling the pigeon droppings. Hervaux knew exactly how much Delahaye made from this enterprise, since he had paid the schoolmaster forty-two *livres* and ten *sous* for seventeen sacks of the stuff just a few years earlier.[38]

When the curé refused to call a parish assembly, Hervaux immediately wrote a letter to Delahaye informing him that if he did not agree to take care of the pigeon problem then the matter would have to go to the courts.[39] So early on Tuesday morning Delahaye went to Hervaux's home to try to work things out. They argued for an hour and a half, explained Delahaye, over who should pay for the work to be done. Hervaux offered to pay for closing up the vaulting if Delahaye would pay for the belfry, but Delahaye refused to pay for any of it, especially since Hervaux made it clear that this compromise would leave Delahaye indebted to him. Finally, Delahaye brought the real issue out into the open: 'I made him see the fact that I could not reasonably do more for his son than for others even though he wanted to do me this wrong, and I told him with emotion that he would have to put up the grilles at his own expense'. At this point Hervaux seems to have realised that his plot to deprive Delahaye of his pigeon dropping income had failed, and he responded to Delahaye's refusal with the following bargain: Hervaux would deal with the pigeons if Delahaye would take his son as a student. That evening they went to Bourget in order to make their agreement official. The curé immediately quashed the idea of closing up the belfry, pointing out that it would block the sound of the bells and that besides the number of pigeons was not that large anyway, but urged the two men to pursue the plan for Delahaye to teach Hervaux's son. So the affair of the pigeon droppings ended with just a brief line in an unofficial contract, in which Delahaye agreed to try to keep pigeons out of the church and the belfry. The issue of putting up a grille was never discussed again, and it seems that the relationship between Delahaye and Hervaux was restored.

This event highlights the social position of the rural schoolmaster in the eighteenth century for several reasons. First, a good schoolmaster like Delahaye was valued as a teacher, and village notables wanted him to accept their children as students. Although the children of the poor often failed to attend school, causing their curés to grieve for the fate of their intellects and souls, most other children in the village did attend, and their parents valued the education they received there.[40] This was especially the case when the schoolmaster chose the altar boys, as Delahaye did. Just as serving a term as churchwarden was a sign of prestige, having one's son serve as an altar boy was important in gaining or maintaining social status, and as the instructor of those boys Delahaye played a significant role in village society.

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Second, when faced with a challenge from a social superior like Hervaux, Delahaye did not back down. He may have used a self-deprecating tone when writing about his social betters in his record, but his actions speak louder than his words. Delahaye knew that Hervaux was trying to hurt him financially and socially by questioning his judgement over the choice of altar boys and by suggesting that he was not keeping the church as clean as he should, so he argued with Hervaux until they reached a settlement they could both live with. It is certainly possible that since the village was angry with Hervaux, Delahaye might have been pressured about his choice of altar boys, but it is just as likely that the boy was not well suited for the position or that other families had just as much right to have their sons chosen. In any case, Delahaye and Hervaux argued as equals, and as a part of the village community, illustrating the principle asserted by David Sabean in his work on German villages: 'community exists where not just love but also frustration and anger exist.... Villagers grasped community most centrally under the terms "envy" and "hate".'[41]

Finally, the affair of the pigeon droppings provides a glimpse of the relationship between the curé, the schoolmaster, and the laity. By the eighteenth century, Catholic reforms had produced curés who were seminary trained and often university educated. They also had a bourgeois background. This and the fact that they provided the most consistent and accessible religious presence in the parish meant that curés had an unparalleled social status in rural society. Serving as mediator in disputes between villagers was a role that any French curé would have had to play hundreds of times during his tenure in a parish.[42] Throughout the whole affair, both Hervaux and Delahaye saw the curé as the key mediator in their dispute, despite the fact that he tried to get them to work out the matter themselves. When they finally came to an agreement, it should be no surprise that they went to the curé to finalise it, and that he was the one who at last put the issue of closing up the belfry to rest, getting to the heart of the matter as well as appeasing both parties.

The relationship between the curé and the schoolmaster was a special one, however, because the two men worked closely together and performed many of the same tasks.[43] Schoolmasters performed so many duties for the church that they might even be considered as semi-clerical, especially at a time when the line between clerical and secular was not always clear.[44] Their shared interests meant the curé and the schoolmaster often collaborated on various matters. For example, it is clear that Bourget and Delahaye were of one mind on the pigeon issue, even if the curé did have to avoid damaging Hervaux's ego, but that does not mean that they always got along. Fortunately, Delahaye's record provides critical additional information about the relationship between the curé and the schoolmaster, and demonstrates further how the community and the parish functioned on a day to day basis.

Delahaye was used to working with curés even before he became a schoolmaster. He received his education from his godfather, the curé of Droizelles. When the curé died in 1775, Delahaye had nothing but kind words to say about him, and expressed his gratitude to him in his record.[45] Delahaye also got along well with Bourget, who arrived in Silly as curé in 1781. Bourget came from a notable family in the region: one brother was a bailiff and judge in Nanteuil (Oise) while another brother was *procureur*, court clerk, and notary in a suburb of Paris. The relationship between Bourget and Delahaye was cordial, perhaps

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bordering on friendly, despite the disparity in their social positions, but Delahaye wrote about the curé with the same deference with which he wrote about the *laboureurs*. Their relationship was thus characterised by professionalism, but also by a forced familiarity that could be strained and awkward at times.

Bourget's reception as curé perhaps demonstrates this most clearly.[46] On 6th March 1781, Bourget arrived by public carriage in Le Plessis-Belleville, a village just a few kilometres away from Silly. Delahaye, the vicaire, the beadle, and Charles Lefèvre (the curé's brother's farmer) were the first to meet him there, and they accompanied him on his way to his brother's home in Nanteuil. He stayed there for a few days, while Delahaye and the others returned to Silly to get things ready for the curé's arrival. The reception was a formal affair, with bell-ringing, by Delahaye, a procession and tour of the church, and then the official presentation of the curé by the rural dean. Village notables signed the document of reception as part of the ceremony, and Delahaye proudly notes that he signed it with them as well. Bourget gave gifts to the church staff and then the curé left with his entourage and went back to spend the night at his brother's home, again with Delahaye, the vicaire, and Charles Lefèvre accompanying him until they reached the gates of Nanteuil.

It is easy to imagine from Delahaye's descriptions both the pride and anxiety associated with this event. The villagers were certainly curious about their new curé, and they wanted to make a good impression. Members of the church staff, led by the vicaire and Delahaye, arranged the ceremonies and were the first to establish a relationship with him as representatives of the parish and the community. They put their best foot forward and hoped the curé would approve of their efforts. But the formality of the relationship soon gave way to reality. Just a few days later a villager in Silly fell ill and needed the last rites. The vicaire had gone to Paris and the curé was still in Nanteuil at his brother's home, so Delahaye took Monsieur Carriat's horse, described as an old nag, to go and fetch Bourget. The two men rode back together on the horse, with Bourget in the saddle and Delahaye sitting behind him.

The image of the two men sitting together on an old nag, covering the half dozen kilometres between the two villages early on a March morning is priceless. Presumably there was a great deal of awkwardness, but perhaps a growing camaraderie as well. Delahaye does not indicate that the two had any serious disagreements in the ten years they worked together as colleagues, and he wrote often of the respect that he had for Bourget. He cared very much about what the curé thought of him as well and was extremely upset when someone in the parish, described as a monster vomited from hell, slandered him in front of the curé, and only calmed down once other witnesses to the event assured him that both they and the curé were on his side.[47] The incident, although described rather cryptically in the account, does not seem to have caused any serious damage to Delahaye's social standing with the curé or the community in general.

Perhaps Delahaye was especially careful to develop a good relationship with Bourget because his relationship with the previous curé, Claude Henry Marie Fauvelet, had been less than ideal. Things had begun to go sour between them by at least March 1779, when the Charity of Silly voted to give Delahaye thirty *livres* a year to teach the poor children of the parish. He writes that the curé had vigorously opposed this, probably

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due to the interference of his housekeeper Marie Anne Reine Lefebvre (known as 'La Reine'). Delahaye does not explain why Fauvelet and his housekeeper had turned against him, and the issue is all the more puzzling given the fact that Delahaye did not record any other disagreements between them before 1779. The Delahayes had even chosen La Reine as godmother for their son in 1774.[48] But in any event, after the Charity decided to go against the curé's wishes and give Delahaye the extra wages, the relationship between the two colleagues broke down altogether.

It is possible that La Reine had turned against Delahaye because he believed that she had too much influence over the curé, and events following this incident seem to bear this interpretation out. Fauvelet was about sixty years old at this point, and his behaviour seemed increasingly erratic. In April 1779 Delahaye records that while eating supper with the curé, La Reine threatened to break his head with her glass if he tried to argue with her. In May, Fauvelet refused to give communion to Etienne Thuillier, despite the fact that he had given his confession to the vicaire. During the services for Pentecost that year Fauvelet shouted at village notable and future mayor Charles Carriat from the pulpit, treating him like 'a naughty child or a common rascal'. That month he also refused to hold the traditional Fête-Dieu procession, even though the weather was fine. In June when Delahaye was ringing the bells for the curé's feast day, Fauvelet came and stopped him 'explaining to us that he did not want any festivities while he was at war'. Then, in January 1781, the curé made his will: La Reine, and a man referred to only as Sieur Georges, were the primary beneficiaries of about 16,000 *livres*.[49]

The circumstances surrounding Fauvelet's death just a few days later seem to confirm all of Delahaye's suspicions about La Reine. One early morning the curé's servant begged the schoolmaster to come to the presbytery because the curé was deathly ill. Delahaye described what happened next in the following passage:

> The vicaire and I stayed at his bedside until five and as we saw that he was on the point of death we recited prayers for the dying while La Reine and Sieur Georges took clothing from the cupboard that was in the dying man's room. She wanted the vicaire and me to be witnesses to what she was taking, but we didn't want to take our attention away from the curé; on the contrary, we didn't leave his side. She told us that she saw well that we were against her, and she mocked us. The vicaire, seeing that the curé was in torment, asked him if he wanted to change his will because we heard him mumble some words which ended with 'tament' [testament]. He made a sign that he did, and gripped the vicaire's hand, but he didn't have the time or the ability to speak because at that moment he took his last breath, at exactly five in the morning. Immediately Sieur Georges said, 'I'm going to look like the villain, I'd better get out of here', and La Reine had the audacity to go and look at the dead man to check if he was really dead, saying, 'he's gone, let's go'. They left for Paris together.[50]

As soon as the curé's brother arrived an investigation into the circumstances surrounding his death began, and both the vicaire and the schoolmaster were key players. They conducted a thorough inventory of the curé's goods, and immediately ascertained that through the use of a skeleton key La Reine and Sieur Georges had stolen property from Fauvelet, the church, and the Charity of Silly. The matter was then left to Fauvelet's relatives to sort out, while Delahaye looked forward to a better relationship with the next curé of Silly.

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Everyday life for an eighteenth-century French villager consisted of navigating a complex web of overlapping social relationships. These relationships were built around family, business, social status, and religion, with the curé and the *laboureur* families at the centre of the network. Pierre Louis Nicolas Delahaye, as parish clerk and schoolmaster of Silly-en-Multien, had a unique position in this network that came from his occupation and his service to the parish rather than his family or his income level. His status came from several sources. He could read and write better than almost anyone in the community, except perhaps for the curé and the vicaire, and was thus able to provide certain services for people in the parish. He taught villagers' children to read and write, passing on his skills to the next generation. He assisted during the Mass and other church ceremonies, helped with the maintenance of the church building, vestments, and ornaments, and took care of records and accounts for the *fabrique*. Perhaps most importantly, the schoolmaster served as an intermediary between the closely related but not synonymous entities of parish and village. In many ways the schoolmaster mediated the relationship between laymen and the curé, most notably by choosing and training the altar boys for the church. He prepared all his students for a lifetime of church services and ceremonies by teaching them catechism and prayers in his school. The schoolmaster's close but respectful relationship with the curé could serve as an example to other parishioners as well, even if, as the story of La Reine and Fauvelet clearly illustrates, that example was not always followed.

The schoolmaster's unique status did not guarantee him a life free from conflict. On the contrary, Delahaye was probably involved in more conflicts than many of his fellow villagers as a result of the role he played. Furthermore, the village schoolmaster, even one as financially secure and respected as Delahaye, was at the end of the day still socially inferior to the curé and the *laboureurs*. In the eighteenth century the schoolmaster played no role on the national stage, as he and his female counterparts would in the political battles of the nineteenth century. The state had made no investment in primary education and even the church, beyond the local level, paid little attention to schoolmasters. Yet the villagers themselves had endowed schoolmasters with a certain social capital, and, as Delahaye's record demonstrates, an important place in rural society. In their own way, schoolmasters of the eighteenth century were thus just as important to rural society as their state supported counterparts of the nineteenth century.

Notes

1. For general works on nineteenth-century education see especially R. D. Anderson, *Education in France, 1848–1870* (Oxford, 1975); Sarah A. Curtis, *Educating the Faithful: Religion, Schooling, and Society in Nineteenth-Century France* (DeKalb, 2000); Robert Gildea, *Education in Provincial France, 1800–1914: A Study of Three Departments* (Oxford, 1983); Maurice Gontard, *L'enseignement primaire en France de la Révolution de 1789 à la loi Guizot, 1789–1833: Des petites écoles de la monarchie d'ancien régime aux écoles primaires de la monarchie bourgeoise* (Paris, 1959); Joseph N. Moody, *French Education Since Napoleon* (Syracuse, 1978); Mona Ozouf, *L'École, I'Église et la Republique 1871–1914* (Paris, 1982); Antoine Prost, *Histoire de l'enseignement en France, 1800–1967* (Paris, 1968).

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2. Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford, 1976), 303–38; C. R. Day, 'The Rustic Man: The Rural Schoolmaster in Nineteenth-Century France', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 25 (January 1983), 26–49; Peter V. Meyers, 'Professionalization and Societal Change: Rural Teachers in Nineteenth-Century France', *Journal of Social History* (Summer 1976), 542–58.
3. For general works on early modern primary education see Karen E. Carter, *Creating Catholics: Catechism and Primary Education in Early Modern France* (Notre Dame, 2011); Roger Chartier, Dominique Julia, and Marie-Madeleine Compère, *L'Éducation en France du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1976); Willem Frijhoff and Dominique Julia, *École et société dans la France d'ancien régime: Quatre examples Auch, Avallon, Condom et Gisors* (Paris, 1975); Bernard Grosperrin, *Les petites écoles sous l'Ancien Régime* (Rennes, 1984); Martine Sonnet, *L'éducation des filles au temps des Lumières* (Paris, 1987); Jean de Viguerie, *L'institution des enfants: l'éducation en France, XVIe–XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1978).
4. Pierre Louis Nicolas Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école d'Ile-de-France (1771–1792): Silly-en-Multien, de l'Ancien Régime à la Révolution*, ed. Jacques Bernet (Villeneuve d'Ascq, 2000). The original manuscript is found in the Archives départementales (AD) de l'Oise, but all citations here refer to Bernet's edition. All translations are my own.
5. For more on the flour wars see Cynthia A. Bouton, *The Flour War: Gender, Class, and Community in Late Ancien Régime French Society* (University Park, 1993), especially chapter 3, and George Rudé, *The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England, 1730–1848*, new edition (London, 2005), pp. 22–31.
6. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, p. 76.
7. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, p. 72 (May 1779). A *vicaire* in France was an assistant priest, and should not be confused with the English *vicar*. The parish priest in France was known as the *curé*.
8. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, pp. 79–80 (January 1781).
9. Silly-en-Multien is now Silly-le-Long, a commune in the department of the Oise.
10. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, p. 153.
11. AD Marne, 2 G 262, folder 4.
12. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, pp. 70–1, 120.
13. AD Marne, 2 G 256, folder 11; 2 G 267, folder 4. Chartier, Julia, and Compère, *L'Éducation en France*, p. 52, also note that the number of students varied according to the season.
14. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, p. 70.
15. A 1698 edict specified that schoolmasters should be paid 150 *livres* a year, and schoolmistresses 100 *livres*. See François Isambert, ed., *Recueil général des anciennes lois françaises depuis l'an 420 jusqu'à la Révolution de 1789*, 29 volumes (Paris, 1821–33), volume 20, p. 317. This edict was repeated, citing the same salaries, in 1724; see Isambert, *Recueil général*, volume 21, pp. 263–4.
16. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, pp. 58, 134.
17. Jean-Marc Moriceau, *Les fermiers de l'Île-de-France: L'ascension d'un patronat agricole (XVe–XVIIIe siècle)* (Paris, 1994), pp. 260–2, 402.
18. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, pp. 120, 130. A year later the court in Oissery was still dealing with complaints about this regulation.
19. Delahaye was part of a group of twenty-eight individuals who pooled their resources in order to bid for 65 *arpents* (54.6 acres) of land; together they paid 53,100 *livres* for the lot. He does not say how much he paid for his portion. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, pp. 234–37.
20. Jules-Ernest Puiseux, 'La condition des maîtres d'école au XVIIe et XVIIIe siècle', *Mémoires de la société d'agriculture, commerce, sciences et arts du département de la Marne (1881–1882)*, pp. 141–60.
21. Moriceau describes this process in astonishing detail in part one of his *Les fermiers de l'Île-de-France*.

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22. Bernet gives a brief description of the village in his introduction, 'Le journal de Pierre Louis Nicolas Delahaye, clerc paroissial et maître d'école de Silly-en-Multien (1771–1792)', pp. 16-17.
23. Among the extensive literature on this topic see especially Moriceau, *Les fermiers de l'Île-de-France*; Jean-Pierre Gutton, *La sociabilité villageoise dans la France d'ancien régime*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1998); Jean-Pierre Jessenne, *Pouvoir au village et Revolution, Artois 1740–1848* (Lille, 1987); Georges Lefebvre, *Les paysans du Nord pendant la Révolution Française*, rev. ed. (Paris, 1972); Pierre Goubert, *Beauvais et le Beauvaisis de 1600 à 1730: Contribution à l'histoire sociale de la France du XVIIe siècle*, 2 volumes (Paris, 1960); Antoine Follain, *Le village sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris, 2008); Jean Jacquart, *La Crise rurale en Île-de-France, 1550–1670* (Paris, 1974).
24. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, pp. 208–10, 227.
25. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, pp. 53–4. Isidore's full name was Marie Elisabeth Isidore, and she was the only one of Delahaye's five children to survive to adulthood. Four boys, born in 1767, 1770, 1774, and 1775, all died before reaching their first birthday.
26. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, p. 95.
27. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, p. 136.
28. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, p. 165.
29. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, p. 103.
30. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, pp. 124, 127, 173.
31. For more on the pilgrimage of Notre Dame de Liesse, see Bruno Maes, *Notre-Dame de Liesse: Huit siècles de libération et de joie* (Paris, 1991).
32. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, p. 89.
33. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, p. 66.
34. According to parish records, Madame Dubois, née Marie Magdelaine Dargent, married Vincent Dubois in 1755. They had five children, three of whom survived to adulthood; their only son died in 1766. Vincent Dubois died in 1776. AD Oise, 1 MI/ECA 619 R2, p. 410.
35. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, p. 142.
36. For more on inheritance patterns and property transfers among farmers in the region, see Moriceau, *Les fermiers de l'Île-de-France*, pp. 475–502.
37. The incident described here and below is found on pages 151–3 of Delahaye's record.
38. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, p. 112 (September 1783).
39. This was not an empty threat. Early modern villagers often used the courts in all kinds of property disputes. Delahaye himself used the court system to recover some money that his brother-in-law owed him, by calling upon the bailiff of the court in Nanteuil to send him a formal warning. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, p. 145 (1786).
40. Carter, *Creating Catholics*, pp. 198–226.
41. David Warren Sabean, *Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and Village Discourse in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 28.
42. See especially John McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France*, 2 volumes (Oxford, 1998), volume 1, pp. 321–83; Timothy Tackett, *Priest and Parish in Eighteenth-Century France: A Social and Political Study of the Curés in a Diocese of Dauphiné 1750–1791* (Princeton, 1977); Philip T. Hoffman, *Church and Community in the Diocese of Lyon, 1500–1789* (New Haven, 1984); Joseph Bergin, *Church, Society and Religious Change in France 1580–1730* (New Haven, 2009); 183–207, 216–26; Dominique Julia, 'Le prêtre au XVIIIe siècle: La théologie et les institutions', *Recherches de science religieuse*, 58 (1970), 521–34.
43. This relationship has not received a great deal of attention from historians who study either the parish clergy or education. For example, John McManners includes a chapter on 'Collaborators of the Curé' in his comprehensive, two volume study of the eighteenth-century church, but the collaborators that he examines include only the housekeeper, the

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vicaire, and other resident priests. McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France*, pp. 384–98.

44. Dominique Julia, 'The Priest', in Michel Vovelle, ed., *Enlightenment Portraits*, translated by Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago, 1997), p. 361.
45. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, p. 62.
46. The following events can be found in Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, pp. 84–6.
47. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, p. 109 (June 1783). The record provides no clues as to the identity of the slanderer.
48. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, p. 58.
49. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, pp. 71–2, 80. La Reine was to receive 5,000 *livres* and the remainder went to Georges, including 8,000 *livres* that the curé owed him, and 3,000 *livres* of interest.
50. Delahaye, *Journal d'un maître d'école*, pp. 80–1.

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