

First Women Educators in Canada.

Many years passed after the founding of Quebec three hundred years ago before the women of this western world really came to their own. A French girl of the seventeenth century had no such liberty to work out her own destiny as have the American and Canadian women of today. Regardless of her tastes, capabilities or aspirations, she was usually predestined to an early marriage, and she might count herself happy if she were permitted to decide for herself. Yet the women of old France were not generally nonentities, and despite the restrictions that hedged them round about, those who first came to Canada have left upon it the impress of strong individualities.

For the first few years, indeed, Champlain's log fort at Quebec was solely a bachelor establishment; but the great Frenchman was determined to found a colony, not a mere trading post, and to this plan women were a necessity. Accordingly, in 1617, he persuaded several men to bring out their wives and families. With the women came all kinds of fresh interests—weddings, baptisms, and little household fetes—and one of the newcomers, Dame Hebert, wife of the first settler on the historic rock, soon showed herself ready to mother the whole colony from the hard-working missionary priests to the little red-skinned infants whom they claimed for the Church by baptism. Nay, upon one occasion of dire starvation she earned the gratitude of the stalwart Governor and his garrison by well-timed succor in the shape of two barrels of peas. So highly valued were they that they were eaten almost by count!

For three years Dame Hebert had made her home in New France, when Champlain ventured to try the experiment of bringing out his own wife, whom he had wedded in her childhood, and for a brief period we may imagine Madame de Champlain (a graceful, somewhat shadowy, presence) gliding through the forest trees beside the St. Lawrence, teaching the catechism to Indian lads and lasses, and rewarding them for attention by glimpses of their own dusky faces in a little mirror, which, according to a fashion of the time, she carried at her girdle.

Helene de Champlain left behind her little trace of her four years' sojourn in Canada, but in course of time a wonderful ardor for the conversion of the savages seized some of the greatest ladies in France, and in 1639 a little company of seven women missionaries set sail for Quebec.

One of these, Madame de la Peltrie, notable as the foundress of the Ursuline Convent at Quebec, was a beautiful and wealthy widow, who had left youth behind, but retained to the full its burning zeal and enthusiasm. Her history can hardly be summed up in a paragraph; suffice it to say, however, that bereavement,

sickness, strange visions, full experience of the pomps and vanities of the gay world had all worked together to turn her thoughts to a life of self-abnegation in the Canadian wilderness.

There many privations awaited her, and also much that brought joy to her kindly, sentimental soul. At Quebec she and her companions were received with mighty rejoicings. As they landed, and flung themselves down to kiss the very dust of the new land whither they had been led, the cannon roared a noisy welcome. They were taken in glad procession to feast at the Chateau St. Louis, and the next day they hurried off to see an Indian village, utterly stupefying its stolid inhabitants by the eager fashion in which they ran from lodge to lodge and kissed and cried over the children. But the Indians, old and young, liked the vivacious French women, and soon Madame de la Peltrie had a class of little savages, tricked out in stiff Norman caps and kerchiefs, learning to sew and to make elaborate courtesies like French queens of fashion.

The quondam court lady longed, however, to plunge deeper into the wilderness, and soon we find her at Montreal, decking a sylvan altar for the first Mass with fire flies and wild flowers, and taking part in a pilgrimage to plant a cross on the summit of the mountain. She would have pressed forward into the perilous Huron missions had not some adroit father persuaded her to return to her deserted Ursulines at Quebec, and there in the shadow of the convent and the society of the Mother Superior she passed the remainder of her days.

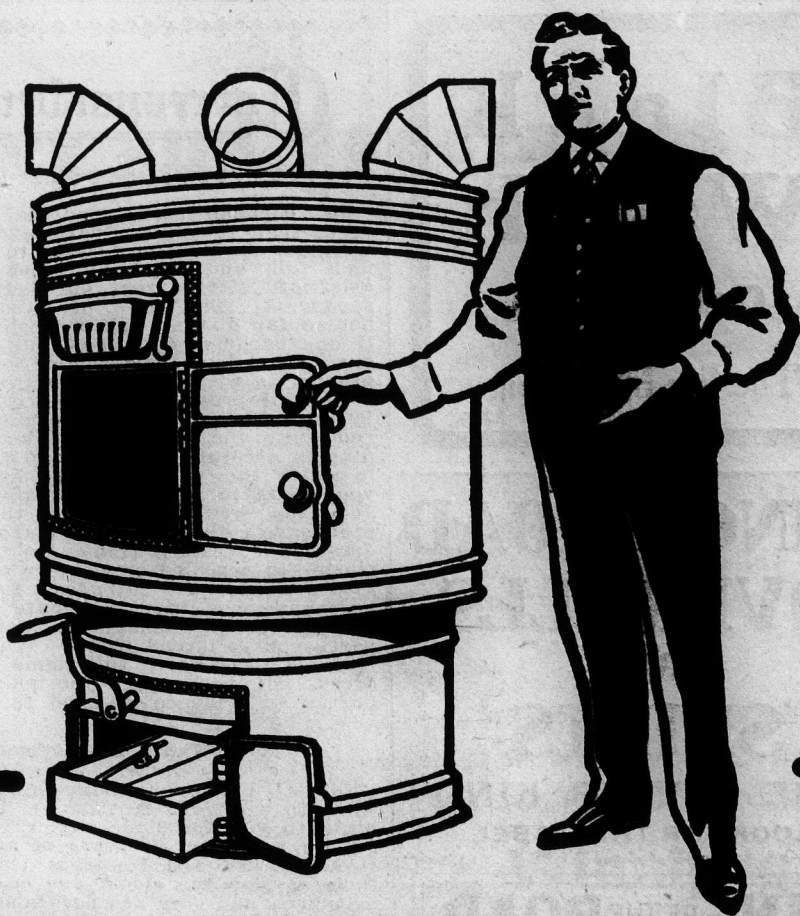
Another nun, Marie de l'Incarnation, was also a widow, who had been influenced by strange visions and revelations, but was made of sterner stuff than her friend and patroness. She had left for the convent an aged father and a little orphan son, and she encountered all the difficulties of pioneer life with masterful fortitude, turning her hand and mind to anything from letter-writing and embroidery to compiling an Indian dictionary, aiding to defend her convent when besieged or working like a day laborer to rebuild the house after its destruction by fire.

To this woman was confided for years the education of the little maids of New France, and under the impress of her steadfastness and fervor it is not wonderful that many of them thought the life of a professed religious the only life worth living. Amongst the pupils of the Ursuline Seminary were Jeanne Le Ber, the extraordinary recluse of Montreal, who spent thirty-five years immured in a solitary's cell, and later pretty Marie Marguerite de la Jemmerais, who, after wrecking her happiness by marrying a handsome, worthless young scamp, founded in her widowhood the Grey Nunnery at Montreal.

TWO SOULS.

WITH minds intent upon their noisy play,
Two towed boys, with hands and feet
Begrimed from playing in the street,
Obstruct my way.
I start to roughly thrust them to one side,
For I am hurried—then the sense
Of two Immortal Souls and Influence
In fullest time
Comes over me, and mutely there
I bless the youngsters unaware.

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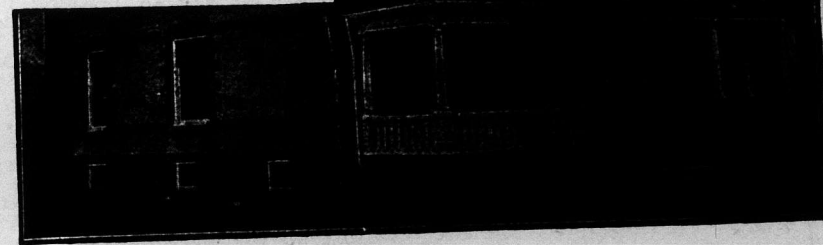
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