

VILLA MARIA.

THE CONGREGATION OF NOTRE DAME.

The splendid exhibit to be sent to the Chicago World's Fair. An account of the material collected, and of the courses of study

It would be impossible, in the space of an ordinary news paper article, to do justice at once to such an institution as the Villa Maria convent and to such an exhibit as the sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame are about to forward to the World's Fair. Consequently we will leave to some subsequent issue the account that we purpose giving of the institution above mentioned, and confine ourselves, for this week, to the more immediate subject of the grand collection of materials taken from the works of pupils in different houses of the Order and forwarded as educational samples to the great Exhibition.

However, for the information of those readers who may not be intimately acquainted with the origin and history of the Congregation of Notre Dame, we will preface our remarks with a few details upon the subject. In 1653 the Venerable Marguerite Bourgeoys came to Canada, under the protection of Governor de Maisonneuve, the founder of Montreal. During four years she went about instructing the Indian children and the little ones belonging to the few white colonists. In 1657 M. de Maisonneuve gave her possession of a stable, or shed, adjoining his residence and in that lowly abode—how like the Mother of God in the supreme moment at Bethlehem—the venerable and energetic woman commenced the work of instruction, of giving birth, as it were, to the light of Christian truth in the souls of many a dusky child of the forest. In 1658 she founded the order, which she called the Congregation of Our Lady, by associating with her, in the glorious work, a handful of the devoted daughters of the pioneer settlers. In those days Alexander VII was on the throne of St. Peter; Mgr. Laval de Montmorency was first Bishop of the colony, and the renowned Father Olier assumed the protection of the newly founded order.

Since then time has marched two centuries and a third, and civilization and Christianity keep pace with time. We cannot enter into a detailed history of the Order, from then till our day, for such would be the story of two hundred and fifty years of Montreal's and of Canada's progress. Let us leap the expanse of so many years and stand for a moment at the door of Monklands, the residence of our Canadian governors of half a century ago. Up on the slopes that undulate and swell into the beautiful western side of Mount Royal, there stand the two magnificent structures, the Villa Maria Convent and the Mother House of the Congregation of Notre Dame. What a mighty change! Yonder, as we look down upon the glorious landscape, are scenes once haunted, in the days of primal wildness, by the Indian children, and frequented by Marguerite Bourgeoys and her companions: here beside us is a glorious institution with its bright spires and grey walls, the outcome of so much labor and sacrifice.

Villa Maria is the Mother House of over one hundred institutions of female education, all under the direction of the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame, and scattered over Quebec, Ontario, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and the States of Maine, Vermont, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York and Illinois. In these are to be found about 24,336 pupils. And from thirteen of these houses, in Canada, comes the splendid exhibit which is now being sent to Chicago, and which we had the pleasure of inspecting on Friday last.

All the work to which we are about to hurriedly refer has been collected since last July, and consists of samples of what the pupils in different Canadian convents, under the direction of the Congregation of Notre Dame, have performed in the ordinary course of their classes. It is wonderful how compactly so much has been arranged, and apparently the task of choosing samples was no easy one, for certainly there was an *embarras de richesses*.

In the first place there are samples of

the daily work prepared in a number of small copy-books conveniently united with slight steel chains. The whole curriculum, in these as in the larger volumes, is represented. From the child of seven years, writing a letter, to the graduate penning an essay on some scientific subject, there is something from each class, grade and establishment. We might remark that the sisters follow, in their system, no cast-iron rules: they accommodate the studies to the requirements of the locality, the province, or country in which each particular house is situated, and they follow, as much as possible, the trend of modern ideas, and the necessities of the age.

Of the larger volumes there are thirteen in all. They contained the classified work of the pupils, as above mentioned. In the preface to each volume we find different marks, in red ink, made by the teachers. These correspond with similar marks throughout the book. One denotes faulty construction, another bad spelling, a third omissions, and so on. Thus the compositions remain to be examined exactly as they have been written, giving an idea of the pupil's progress and knowledge, as well as an idea of the teacher's capacity in correcting. These compositions represent all the subjects taught by the community. A few of which are general mathematics, geometry, algebra, trigonometry, astronomy, chemistry, physics, hygiene, philosophy, zoology, botany, mineralogy, geology, stenography, typewriting, Latin, German, French, and English literature, rhetoric, moral philosophy, domestic economy and many other branches, more or less, the off-shoots of the above. There are also samples of freehand drawing, pen and ink and Indian ink sketches of birds, fishes, etc., illustrative of essays on these subjects. We might also add special articles on politeness.

Turning from those splendid specimens of the writing and studies of the pupils, we find ourselves in presence of the plain sewing and fancy work. Here we find some pure Canadian wool and the articles of wear made from it. The wool is from sheep kept by the Sisters, it is carded and spun by hand in the convent in the olden way, then it is used to make the clothing for the members of the community, and also in the fabrication of ornamental and other objects of most delicate texture. The samples of crocheting and knitting are varied and most beautiful, giving an idea of the different kinds of stitches taught. There is an exquisite piece of hair work, one that certainly surpasses anything we have seen for many a day. Hair work is some what antiquated in our time, but, as poor Keates says, "A thing of beauty is a joy forever." More especially were we attracted by the plain sewing. There will be sent one set—a trousseau complete for a girl of twelve years—every stitch of which is done by hand. The tucks in the robe are so fine that the work seems almost microscopic.

Here we might incidentally remark that there is a set of sacerdotal robes, the painting and workmanship of which challenge the admiration of the keenest critic, and all done by an aged sister of the community. There is also a nun—now in her eighty-fourth year—who is working a carpet for the new chapel. It is composed of every piece of rag that can be picked up, but so delicately tinted or dyed and so deftly woven that the squares present a series of most admirable bouquets and fruit clusters. When completed it will vie with a real piece of mosaic. All this, however, is outside the exhibits for the World's Fair. We only refer to these things incidentally as showing the cleverness and industry even of the oldest members of the community.

We now cross the corridor and enter the room of art. There is an immense portfolio, or scrap-book, if we can so call it, which contains the drawing and painting exhibit. As in all other cases samples are sent from the pupils of the different houses. Each sample is accompanied by the rules taught. The theory, as expressed on these pages, is the work of the teachers; the application of that theory is the work of the pupils. The convents and academies have no special class of painting: it is only taught when required by the pupils. But as soon as a girl has reached a certain class she is always taught linear drawing, which is considered almost as requisites as penmanship. The samples to be sent commence with free-hand drawing, then

drawing with instruments, followed by perspective, shading and so on upward. In crayon, as well as painting in water-colors and oil, the pieces commence with copies from engravings, reliefs, nature dead and animate, landscape, human figures and thus from the most elementary up to the most complete application of the theories taught. These are followed by samples of architectural drawing. Flowers, fruit, foliage, landscape, animal life, human features, from nature and from imagination, thus does the series run. This vast copy-book—so to call it—affords the judge or observer a chance of seeing the work and understanding the methods of teaching in a very condensed way and in a most complete manner.

It would take volumes to do justice to the exhibit, and each volume would have to be supplemented with several hundred pages to tell the story of the work that has been done during two and a half centuries by the daughters of the Venerable Marguerite Bourgeoys, of the immense good that has been performed in our midst by the present splendid institutions of education under their guidance, in fact, of the details of what is being done in any one house of the order. Needless to say that we wish the sisters, of the Congregation of Notre Dame, all imaginable success with their exhibits at Chicago. The approval that they must meet with will reflect upon the country and redound to the glory of our holy religion. We will come again, in the near future, with a history of Villa Maria in particular, its system of instruction, its successes in the past and the prospects, so bright and glowing, that the future shall certainly bring. Meanwhile we wish the good sisters and their Congregation the choicest of blessings and the success they so well deserve: from the fulness of our heart we say to the Congregation of Notre Dame, *esto perpetua*, may your temporal crown of prosperity and encouragement be only surpassed by the eternal crown of happiness and reward that awaits each individual member in the realms of eternity.

Mother of exiles! Driven from home and country, flying by night, biding in a strange land and among strangers! Is there comfort in that thought for those of us who know, alas, too well, the sorrow of exile? We have heard the wailing cry of those who part from friends and country; we have, perhaps, ourselves, shared in the bitter grief of those who go and those who stay. Have we never thought that Jesus was himself an exile, and that His Mother, Mary, may well be invoked as the Mother of exiles by those who know the bitterness of her sorrow.

Mrs. New Lee Wed: You are a failure, John. You've never had any luck.
Mr. New Lee Wed: Yes, once; I was born single.—*Brooklyn Life*.

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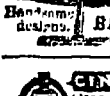


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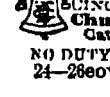
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Very cunning people are like a pin, sharp at the point and small at the head.

The misfortunes which would be the hardest to bear are those which never come.

The rarest feeling that ever lights a human face is the contentment of a loving soul.

Is it not a gift, exceeding all other gifts, that God shall call man His child, and man shall call God his father?—*St. Leo*.

Heaven sometimes hedges a rare character about with ungainliness and odium, as the burr that protects the fruit.—*Emerson*.

Sin is like giving a note at a high rate of interest. It is so easy to spend the money you received from the note, and so hard to pay it back.

A friend is more apt to believe in a bad story about you than an enemy. In hoping it is true an enemy fears it is not, but a friend hoping it is not, believes it is.

When one person casts off the responsibility of life it always falls on the shoulders of somebody else. Responsibility never lie as a cast-off burden by the wayside.