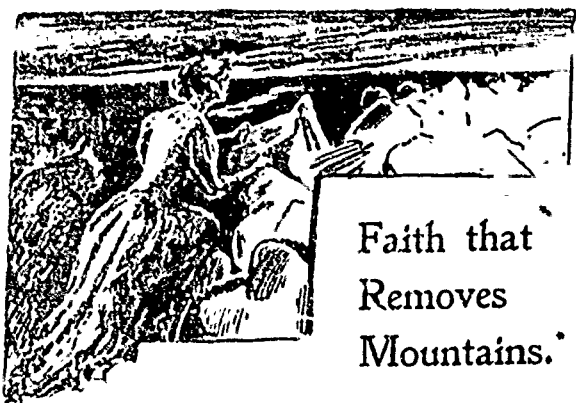




Faith that Removes Mountains.

JUST as the bells in the great towers of old Notre Dame Church, in Montreal, were striking the hour of ten, a gust of October wind, more fierce than its fellows, bore down upon the trees in the French Square fronting the church, tore from them multitudes of leaves, brown and crisp and dry, drove them past the ancient church, along Notre Dame Street, across the Champ de Mars to St. Dominique Street, and heaped them sportively in the doorway of a quaint French-Canadian cottage.

There huddling apprehensively together, the door opened, just as the wind with renewed vigor beat down upon them once more. For a few moments a weird, bent figure, crutch in hand, stood in the doorway gasping for breath, her claw-like hands brushing away the leaves, which clung to her as if affrighted. The weight of years bore upon her so heavily that she scarcely had strength to close the door in the face of the riotous storm. As she stood panting and wheezing in the little parlor, into which the street door opened, she made a remarkable picture. She was clad in a dark, ill-fitting dress, fastened around the waist by a broad strip of faded yellow ribbon; about her neck the parchment-like skin hung in heavy folds, while her entire face was seamed over and over with deep wrinkles, giving it a marvellously aged appearance.

At length her strength returned, and she muttered as she hobbled across the room: "The storm is worse; I fear she cannot go out to-night." Reaching an ancient door, from which the paint had faded years before, she turned the handle, when a strange sight was revealed. Kneeling before a plaster cast of the Virgin, with a string of bone prayer-beads in her hands, was another aged woman. Ranged on either side of the statue were two colored wax candles, lighting up the face of the devout worshipper, whose hair the years had bleached white as snow. She was twenty years younger than her crippled sister, who had defied death for nearly a hundred years.

On seeing the image and the worshipper, the sister in the doorway painfully fell upon her knees, clasped her hands, and also began to pray. Finally they both rose. Putting aside her beads, the younger sister—whom the neighbors called "Little Mother Soulard"—took up an ancient-looking bonnet, which she proceeded to fasten by two immense strings under her chin. She was short in stature and inclined to be stout; her face, though heavily lined, was still pleasing to look at. "Is it storming as badly as ever, Delmia?" she asked, turning to her sister, who stood watching her putting on her things with a dissatisfied countenance.

"The storm is worse than ever," Delmia answered peevishly. "Do not go out to-night. You, too, are old, and it is a long way to the Bonsecours Church. I fear the storm will be too much for you."

"But think, dear," replied her sister, commiseratingly. "how our poor nephew will be think-

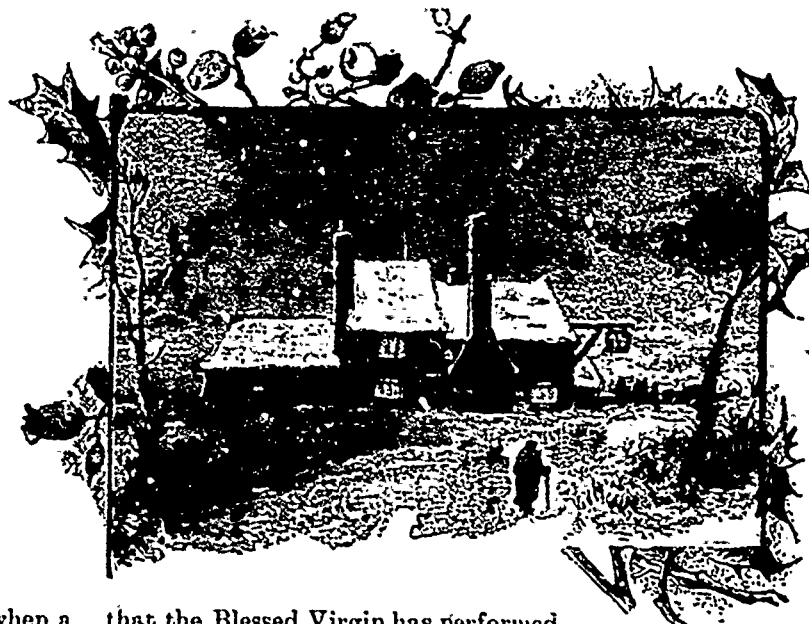
ing of us in that dreadful place, and think, too, of her who was this day to have been his wife. They both sorely need my prayers this night. I must—I must go, Delmia."

"But," contended Delmia, persistently, bringing her crutch sharply down on the floor, "why not pray here" (turning and looking at the statue) "to the Virgin, instead of going out this fearful night to pray to her in the church?"

The Little Mother let the shawl she was dragging around her shoulders fall to the floor, as she heard the question, and walking over to her venerable sister, said excitedly, as she grasped her by the arm: "Have you not heard, Delmia, of the wonderful answers to prayer that the Virgin has given in the Bonsecours Church? Only yesterday two more miracles were reported. Madame Dubuc told me about them this morning. Two women who had been afflicted with lameness for years were fully restored to health, and they left their crutches in the church, where they can be seen by anyone."

Her excitement was infectious: the aged Delmia's eyes also began to gleam with religious enthusiasm, while her trembling hand caused the crutch to keep up a soft tattoo on the floor.

"And guess why the Virgin answered their prayers, Delmia?" she went on in a hushed voice; "because they prayed in the church from midnight until daybreak. Nearly all the miracles



that the Blessed Virgin has performed there have been for those who have denied themselves for her in this manner. The night is rough and she knows how old I am. Who can tell what she may do for me if I go out on a night like this to the church and pray to her?"

"It is wonderful! wonderful! Blessed be the Virgin! It was wrong of me to tell you not to go. I spoke in ignorance. It may be that she will hear you, and cause a miracle to be worked, so that our nephew will be restored to us again. I cannot bear to think of him having to stay there for four long, long years."

"That would be too much to ask of the Virgin," answered the Little Mother in a voice as though she feared to pursue the thought, "but I will pray to her that he be comforted, and that little Marie be restored to health again." As she spoke Mother Soulard glanced in the direction of the little bedroom where hours ago she, who that day was to have been a bride, had retired to rest.

Poor Marie! On this woful night she had persisted in sleeping at their house. Her parents had tried to soothe her, but she had grown so violent that, stormy and all as it was, they could do nothing but bring her to her lover's home. She was now in the little bedroom which had been Ovide's since he was a boy, but which he had not slept in for six months and would never sleep in again.

Delmia turned her dimmed eyes in the direction of the room and said with a sigh of relief: "Marie seems to be sleeping well, sister!"

As they stole, hand in hand, past the bedroom toward the street door, the Little Mother replied: "Sleep is the only thing that can save her now. She has hardly slept at all since Ovide went away, and her reason is nearly all gone with sorrowing for him. Everything depends upon her sleeping to-night. Ah, such trouble! I must go and pray, sister. If Ovide only knew how she suffers, it would kill him." Turning with a hand on the door she added earnestly, "If you hear the slightest noise in the room, Delmia, go and soothe her, and tell her I won't be long."

"Had you not better open the door now, and look at her? She has been asleep so long," answered Delmia, uneasily.

"No! no! Delmia; we might disturb her." The next moment the door opened, a gust of cold air swept into the room and she was gone. If she only had glanced into the room to see if Marie was sleeping!

The storm had grown more violent, and great clouds, ominous with rain, were now overcasting the sky. Her sister could hardly have reached the corner of the street, when Delmia thought she heard a slight noise in the bedroom. She bent her head and listened attentively. "It is nothing; my ears often deceive me now," she mumbled as she laboriously seated herself on a maimed rocking-chair, which creaked dismally as she rocked herself to and fro. Its querulous protestations prevented her hearing the sound of a falling window which came from the direction of Marie's bedroom.

"Yes, yes," Delmia rambled on, "my hearing is very bad now." Presently she stopped, leaned her head toward the door and listened again. "Marie sleeps soundly," she said with a tired, contented sigh. Poor Delmia!

The strangely-clad figure, which had sprung through the window, crouched close to the side of the house, and with rapidly-beating heart listened to hear if Delmia had heard the noise the treacherous sash had made as it fell behind her. She knew there was no danger of the Little Mother being aroused, for she was listening at the bedroom door and had heard her go out; she had only the aged Delmia to fear.

There was no need for alarm; Delmia had not heard.

The rays from the gas-lamp cast yellow flickering shadows on the lane and the side of the old brick house, and at intervals upon the crouching figure. Suddenly Marie sprang to her feet and started to run; but before she had gone many steps, something white and cloud-like, which was fastened about her head, and which unperceived by her, had become fastened in the window, caused her to halt abruptly. She caught the tremulous thing in her hands and began to pull; there was a sound of tearing and then she was free. As she ran across the sidewalk under the lamp, her strange attire was distinctly revealed; it was that of a bride! Strikingly grotesque in the storm appeared her long white dress, flowing veil, and white kid shoes.

On reaching the opposite side of the road, where the shadows were deep, Marie paused and looked back at the little house which she had so suspiciously left. Finding that she was not being pursued, she turned, regardless of the storm, and began to walk toward the east, where lay, some six miles distant, the great penitentiary of St. Vincent de Paul. As she sped along in the shadow of the houses, she began to talk to herself like a pleased child. "This is our wedding-day, and he will be so glad to see me," she chattered.

Suddenly the smile died out of her face, and she said anxiously: "But how shall I know him, now that they have changed his name?" She wrung her hands distressfully. Soon the smile returned to her round, sweet face, and she went on: "But