

The Church in Canada.

Under this heading will be collected and preserved all obtainable data bearing upon the history and growth of the Church in Canada. Contributions are invited from those having in their possession any material that might properly come for publication in this department

THE GREY NUNS IN CANADA.

[Note.—For the following sketch of the Grey Nuns, the first religious order of women founded by a Canadian, we are indebted to the *North West Review*. It is from an address delivered by the venerable Archbishop of St. Boniface, on occasion of the Golden Jubilee of Sister St. Joseph, one of the founders of the Order in the North West. Ed.]

I.

Deus sanctus in omnibus operibus suis.—Ps. 67.

"God is holy in all his works,"

All the works of God are holy; all tend to the sanctification of souls, since, as the apostle Paul tells us, "The will of God is our sanctification." In view of that it is that the author of every perfect gift is not content to place at our disposal the means absolutely necessary for our salvation, but He has deigned moreover to multiply, with a kind of prodigality, works, whose beneficent action comes to the aid of humanity, to enlighten, fortify, guide and sustain it.

We are united on this occasion, my brethren, to bless God for the favour he has granted us by the establishment of religious communities in general and especially by the establishment amongst us of the Grey Nuns of Montreal. The event which occasions this assembly is the Jubilee feast of a member of that community.

On the 1st June, 1838, Miss Gertrude Coutlee, following the example which her elder sister had given her six years before, allied herself finally to the Grey Nuns of the General Hospital of Montreal, consecrated irrevocably her existence to God by the vows exacted in that institution and took the name of Sister St. Joseph. We are now at the fiftieth anniversary of that act, which may appear a very small thing to the weak and short-sighted eyes of human thought; but that act had a great import in the large and penetrating sight of Divine Wisdom, who disposes everything for the sanctification of souls; for the sanctification in the first place of those who have consecrated themselves to Him, and furthermore of others who benefit by that consecration.

Such is the circumstance which brings us together.

That your humility may not be alarmed, good sister, I will not wound you by eulogizing you, and therefore I have not taken for my text the words of the Holy King David: "God is admirable in His saints;" but that other exclamation of the Prophet King: "God is holy in His works." I intend to develop only three thoughts which are connected with to-day's incident and which are comprised in these words: "A Grey Nun; fifty years professed; forty-four years in mission work at the Red River.

First. A Grey Nun:—What is a Grey Nun? A person who, at the inspiration of God and with the approval of her legitimate Superiors, makes a religious profession in the institution founded by Madame Youville, and who in the different branches of this institution performs the works for which the venerable founder established it or which circumstances, always with the approbation of its legitimate authority, have added to it.

It was in 1731 that a Canadian gentleman, after having become illustrious in European wars, returned to his native country. Born on the banks of the St. Lawrence, Monsieur Gauthier de Varennes de La Verandrye, had ascended the great stream to its source in the North West. There the Laurentian chain presented an obstacle as yet unsurmounted. Everywhere beyond these mountains there were lands unknown and important to be discovered. Accounts uncertain and indefinite gave the idea of the existence of lakes and rivers leading to the Pacific Ocean, that Western Sea, the object of the dreams and the aspirations of all who have pushed their discoveries across North America.

Nothing more was necessary to excite in Monsieur de La Verandrye the ambition to add his name to the list of intrepid discoverers who had penetrated into the interior of the continent; to excite in him the ambition to endow his native land with

the rich domain which extended itself to the west of Lake Superior and with the incalculable benefits which would be the consequence of the discovery of a passage connecting the waters of the St. Lawrence with those which were thought to flow into the Western Sea.

Canada, although sparsely inhabited, seemed too small for her ambitious son—it ought to be enlarged, it ought to be enriched; and this was why on the 8th of June, 1731, Monsieur Pierre Gauthier Varennes de La Verandrye left Montreal to go, at his own expense and peril, to discover Western lands and to push his explorations to the shores of the Pacific Ocean.

A niece of Monsieur de La Verandrye, a young widow of thirty years of age, had seen dissipated one after another the illusions which rank, fortune, and the world cause to glitter with so much *eclat* in the eyes of their favourites.

The world lost its seductions, fortune threatened to smile no more: in a word the earth became too small for the heart of Madame Youville—it was necessary for her to make discoveries; to find a passage across all the hardships and all the billows of life in order to reach an ocean of peace, where her heart, wounded, lacerated in contact with the things of the world, could taste the repose which would be for her the source of incalculable good.

In the month of June her uncle de La Verandrye had said good-bye; in the month of July, her youngest son was laid in the tomb at the side of his father, who had died the previous year, and Madame Youville, weeping over all her losses and separations, took, in the summer of 1731, with the advice of her director, Monsieur du Lescoat, the resolution to give herself entirely to God and to work only for him and the unfortunate.

It is then exactly at this period that a thought of legitimate ambition impelled to the discovery of the country which we inhabit; that a thought of generous self-denial impelled to the foundation of the institution of the Grey Nuns, which in the design of Providence was destined to come to plant itself on the borders of the Red River, the Assiniboine and the Saskatchewan and on the banks of all those rivers discovered by the noble family of de Varennes—uncles and cousins of the venerable foundress of the Grey Nuns.

The inspiration of Grace guided so surely and so quickly the heart of the young widow towards the unknown regions of the most complete self-denial, of the most entire devotion, of the most industrious and active charity, that after having taken to herself three companions, who had the same aspirations and the same generosity, she made to God an irrevocable offering of her whole being, pronouncing the vows of religion on the 31st of December, 1737.

On the first day of the year 1738 is then the first day which dawned upon the nascent community of the Grey Nuns. The institution has therefore existed for one hundred and fifty years.

Let us trace in outline the development of the first community founded by a Canadian, and this during the first century of its existence.

Naturally in a work so new and in a new country its beginnings were slow and uncertain; want of sympathy and consequently the absence of a perfectly defined end, caused the institution at first to languish. Then God wished to give it time to take deep root in the soil in order to be able to nourish and sustain more hardily the gigantic trees which we admire to-day.

Some "Freres Hospitaliers" had in 1604 founded at Ville Marie an establishment for the exercise of charity known under the name of the General Hospital. This establishment underwent during half a century various vicissitudes which nearly brought about its ruin. Its ruin was, however, averted when the Brothers transferred their place to Madame Youville and her companions, who entered the Hospital in the last part of 1747, that is to say, about ten years after the making of their first vows for the first time.

This hospital, which was called the General Hospital, was far from corresponding to its name, since it had been founded to receive and in fact did receive only infirm old men.

The new *hospitalieres* extended the sphere of action which its founders had traced for it; they received the infirm of both sexes, invalid soldiers, the insane, incurables, abandoned children, orphans, and, as extremes meet, they admitted as boarders ladies of family, and opened an asylum to women of bad life; in a word, the new community appeared to have re-