

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES
OF
MOTHER GAMELIN
AND OF HER SIX FOUNDESS COMPANIONS
OF THE INSTITUTE OF THE
DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY, SERVANTS OF THE POOR
KNOWN AS
THE SISTERS OF PROVIDENCE
OF MONTREAL.

Translated from the French.

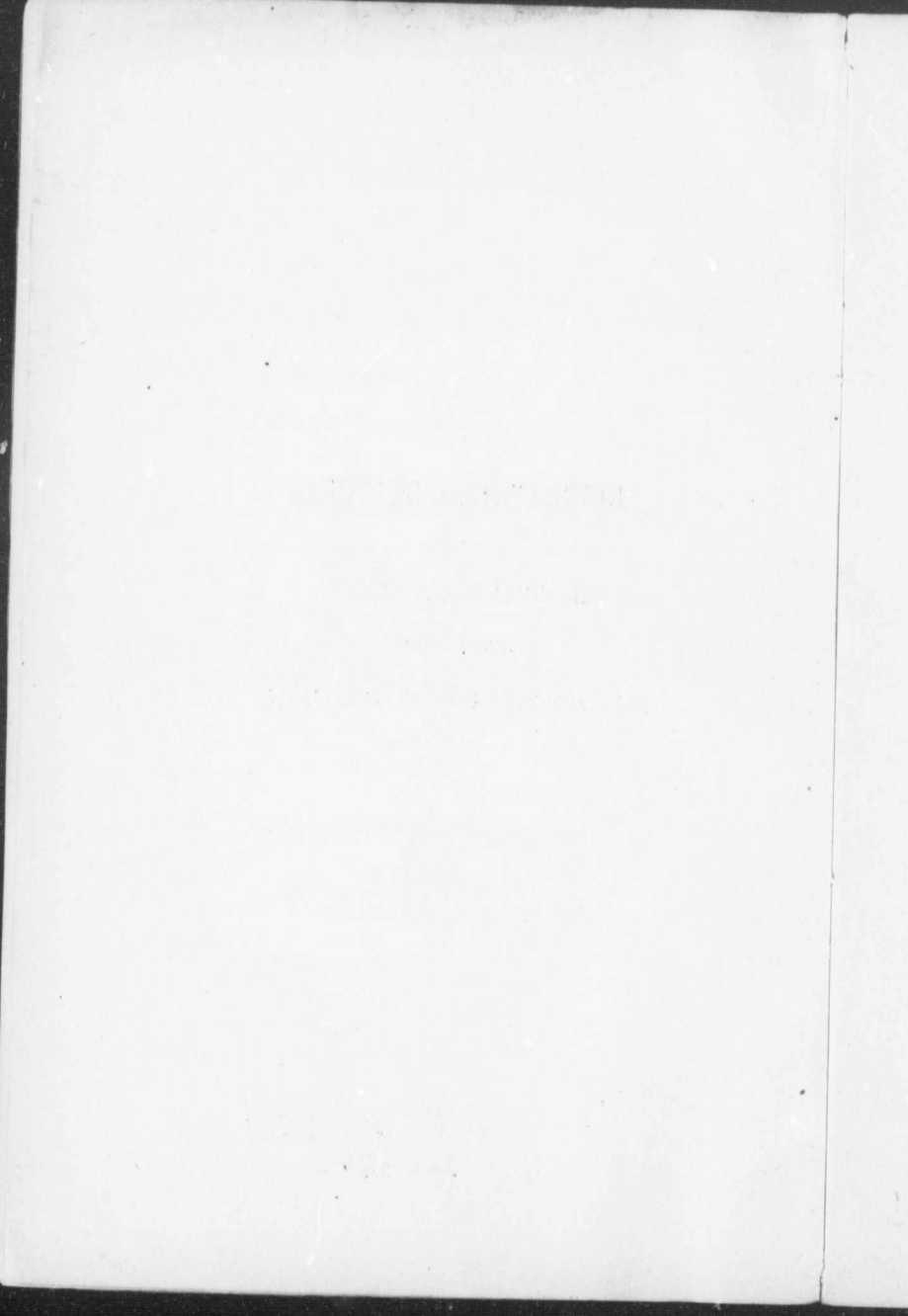


PROVIDENCE MOTHER HOUSE
MONTREAL
1918.

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† PAUL, *Archbishop of Montreal.*

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APPROBATION

OF

HIS GRACE, THE ARCHBISHOP OF MONTREAL.

I cannot be content with placing a simple *Imprimatur* only at the head of the following pages which form most edifying reading matter. I desire to congratulate and thank their author.

They relate the origin of the Institute of the Sisters of Providence, the virtues and the labors of their Foundresses. In very truth, they form the golden book of the Community. In these pages there may be found all that can be seen in the history of great works in the Church and in the Lives of the Saints. The beneficent and protecting action of God is none the less manifest therein than the generous and persevering fidelity of the souls chosen to execute His designs. Those devoted servants of the poor are, verily, the visible Providence of every human misery. Through them Christ continues His works of mercy and of love. Through them again He breathes those words of infinite sweetness: *Come to Me all you who labor and I will refresh you.*

Each of the accompanying biographical sketches contains lessons of every evangelical virtue. What absolute confidence in God! a confidence that never

faltered during the trying years of foundation! What tender compassion for every corporal suffering! Willingly would they fly to the relief of all! Fain would they comfort every sorrow at home, abroad, and in fields afar! In their monastery, what a spirit of prayer, of fervor, of obedience, of love of poverty! What lives of labor and of charity! and what deaths of the predestined!

To these saintly lives naught is wanting save miracles. Yet, is not the marvelous development of their Institute a species of miracle? Founded by a few poor women with no other resource than the blessing of a holy Bishop, the Institute has spread its branches even to the ice-bound regions of Alaska, and numbers more than a hundred houses,—hospitals, asylums, hospices, orphanages and schools,—in different parts of North America. The population of those many establishments includes every category of patients and destitute poor, and totals today over fifty thousand inmates. Most assuredly we stand in the presence of the work of God, and it fills us with admiration. It inspires us with the most lively gratitude. And, why not say it?... It thrills our loyal Canadian hearts with a most holy and legitimate pride!

In the homes, this book will prove an eloquent sermon on apostleship and piety. Dedicated most especially to the Sisters of Providence it will be read by them with filial love. From it they will draw inspiration for the better accomplishment of

their grand and beautiful mission. In it, they will find encouragement in the day of trial. Praise-worthy models are placed before their eyes. Perfect religious, therefore, will they become, if in all things they imitate their venerated Foundress Mothers.

† PAUL, *Archbishop of Montreal.*

January 22, 1918.



FOREWORD

God makes use of the humble to perform great things. In the weakness of His human agencies, He shows forth His power and strength. When comparing the lowliness of the instrument with the grandeur of the results obtained, the most skeptical are forced to exclaim: The Finger of God is there!

The Institute of the Sisters of Charity of Providence, that mighty tree sheltering beneath its wide-spreading branches the unfortunates of every condition in life: abandoned and infirm old age; orphaned little ones; human derelicts bereft of reason; the sick and the poor of every age and of all nations! Like all Gospel beginnings, it had its origin in a tiny grain of mustard seed.

For the sowing of that seed, the Holy Ghost guiding His saints by pathways, obscure but always straight and true, raised up seven Foundresses, unhonored and unknown by the great ones of the world. Gifted with an ardent love of the poor, they were enchanted by the radiant vision of Christ Jesus shining upon them through every form of human misery and woe.

The new apostles were untried in ways ascetical. They knew neither the traditions of religious life, nor the sweetness of divine contemplation; but, trusting to the word of the saintly Bishop Bourget, they abandoned themselves entirely to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the interior Master who teaches all truth. They gave themselves heart and soul to their mission. They spoke little but accomplished much. And, behold! their work has been fruitful beyond compare. So contagious, too, has been their example that an admirable number of vocations has sprung up to help gather in the goodly harvest.

Pious hands have gleaned many souvenirs of their devoted, hidden lives and the whole forms a charming picture of those privileged friends of the compassionate Heart of Jesus. The fragrance of their many virtues refreshes us even to this distant day; for are not the Saints the Gospel story in flowers of fairest hue?

The seven short biographical sketches inclosed in the present volume, and written by a pen, simple, filial and sincere, faithfully trace for us the beginnings of the Institute of Providence. All who read these pages will feel the soft, sweet breath of the holy Evangel passing over their souls.

We bespeak for this book a wide circulation. It cannot fail to edify its readers, to make them better, to encourage them to form strong and courageous resolutions. It will give them higher and clearer appreciation of the vocation of those who trust themselves to the maternal care of Divine Providence, and who spend their lives in assuaging every bodily distress and spiritual misery. It will give additional strength to the tireless feet speeding hither and yon on errands of mercy. It will move the charitably inclined to bestow a modest alms on a worthy cause, and it will cause the indifferent to refrain from a cold, pitiless refusal.

This book will impart greater force and meaning to the inspired word: It is more blessed to give than to receive. And to those others: Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my brethren, you did it to me.

ARMAND CHOSSEGROS, S. J.



LA MÈRE GAMELIN

1800 - 1851

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES
OF
MOTHER GAMELIN
AND OF HER
SIX FOUNDRESS COMPANIONS

I

MOTHER GAMELIN.

Nothing is more profitable for a religious family than a frequent retrospect of its early days of struggle. Reflection on a past, rendered glorious by personal heroism, gives a new incentive to the active pursuit of the end aimed at by its Founders. Indeed, were this neglected, its high ideas would infallibly become dimmed by the passing of the years.

Our Institute has in its possession, thank God, precious volumes wherein are recorded in detail its humble beginnings, together with many other notable facts that bring out in

grander relief the rare virtues of our Foundress Mothers. One among these holds the first place in our affections because it attunes our hearts to the sweetest tones of filial tenderness and love. The blessed pages of the *Life of our venerated Mother Gamelin* are read and re-read with ever increasing interest. From them, as from a family treasure, each one may gather, at will, gems of good example, and lessons of holiness for hourly use in practical, every day life.

The present sketch, of extremely modest appearance lays no claim to the completion of a work already well done and stamped with the seal of approval. Taking obedience for its inspiration, it will but briefly relate the admirable career of our first Mother, in the hope that it may be of some little service to the present and future members of our Community.

The task, considered under its various aspects, is not easy. A person of Mother Gamelin's prestige were well worthy the endeavors of an abler pen. Whether her life be viewed on the side of her natural gifts, or whether it be studied in the clear, white light of faith, marvels of grace and beauty are to be found therein. The tiny seed, destined to bring forth our Institute as its flower and fruit, had

to be cast into the ground and die, ere it could grow and expand in the sunlight, and spread its humanizing influence far and wide. In like manner, the life of our venerated Mother, in its different stages of progression toward the summit of perfection it ultimately attained, had to pass through the refining processes of trial and adversity.

This painful ascension it is our privilege to follow step by step. The grace of God shines radiantly forth in every phase of both her hidden and active life. Let this thought remain uppermost in our minds while studying the scenes unrolled before us, and in which the origin of our Institute and the fascinating life-story of our Foundress Mother are so closely interwoven. In the inevitable struggles of nature and grace in a character so ardent as that of the Mother of the new order of the Sisters of Charity of Providence, we shall admire, above all, her inviolable attachment and complete abandonment to the Divine Will.

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH OF MOTHER GAMELIN

On the western slope of Mount Royal, which stands like a guardian above the his-

toric city consecrated to Mary, ever Virgin, little Emily Eugenia Tavernier saw the light of day on February nineteenth, in the century year, eighteen hundred. In her small person were united two names whose meaning will become strikingly apparent during the course of her life and in her work. The first, «Emily», conferred upon her in baptism, and the second, «Providence», title of the seigniorial fief belonging to her father, and which was the happy home of her infancy. The prophecy is verified, too, in the former, because, like her patroness, St. Emily, our heroine was destined to pass through the state of matrimony before she arrived at the haven of religious life; while the latter, in the merciful decree of Heaven, was preordained to become the name of the future Community she was chosen to found.

A marked trait in the child's early years, shows how strongly inclined her heart was to deeds of kindness. Charged with the pleasing duty of distributing the alms of the family to the poor, she, one day burst into tears because the beggar's wallet was so large and her gift so small that it seemed lost in the depth of his bag. Nor would she be comforted until she had gained permission to give him whatever dainties she could call her own.

The long series of trials destined to bring about her absolute detachment, began at the tender age of six years when she was bereft of both her parents by death. God, who cares for the birds of the air, provided a second mother for the little orphan in the person of an aunt, Madam Perreault, who brought the child to her own home and treated her as one of the family.

After an elementary course of studies at the Boarding School conducted by the Sisters of the Congregation, Miss Emily returned to live with her aunt. No pains were spared to initiate her in all the mysteries of household arts and science so necessary for the perfect formation of an accomplished young woman, and she very soon excelled in domestic economy. Thus at the age of eighteen, she was prepared to take full charge of her widowed brother's home and family. The new lady of the house profited of her title and her liberty in favor of her chosen friends, the poor. Her brother's dwelling soon became a hospitable refuge where they were always certain of finding, in addition to a hearty welcome, a warm shelter and food prepared and served by the young girl in person. From this epoch may be traced the beginning of a life to be wholly devoted, in the not very distant future, to the works of charity;

and we shall see in her maturer years, how well realized were the promises of her youth.

Relieved of her duties in her brother's household by his second marriage, Miss Tavernier returned home with her aunt, and shortly afterward made her entrance into society. It cannot be said of her that she held the world and its vanities in abhorrence, that she had a decided taste for solitude, etc. On the contrary, she found life very pleasant in the charmed circle where Madam Perreault was well and favorably known, and, owing to gayety of character and amiable qualities, she soon became a social favorite in the world she loved, and whose frivolities attracted her. Let us hasten to add, however, that under the wise and prudent direction of her relative, she never deviated from the straight path of duty. All her actions were governed by the quiet modesty and reserve which so enhances the loveliness of a young girl. To her precious gifts of soul and intellect, were joined a natural dignity that impressed itself upon her every word and deed, and added such charm and graciousness to her manners as to compel the respect and admiration of all who knew her. The innocent pleasures she permitted herself, and the delight she took in them, can

best be explained by the fact that grace had not yet purified the ardors of youth. In her after life, it will be touching to see how bitterly the venerated Mother Foundress deplores the part she took in the vanities of the world, and how she will make this period of her life the subject of heartfelt contrition and deepest humility.

MADAM GAMELIN — HER WEDDED LIFE —
HER WIDOWHOOD — HER GOOD WORKS.

On the fourth of June, 1823, Miss Taver-
nier became the bride of Mr. John Baptist
Gamelin, a well-to-do citizen of Montreal. The
nuptial ceremony took place in the parish
church of Notre Dame, Montreal. She had
dutifully prepared herself for this step by
reflection and prayer. The autumn preceding
her marriage, vague desires for the religious
life had manifested themselves in her soul;
but, God who had other designs, did not per-
mit them to develop to such a degree as to
render a higher vocation positive; hence, she
accepted without question, her call to a life in
the world.

Mr. Gamelin was fifty years of age, and
in addition to a respectable fortune, possessed

great virtue. Of a generous and compassionate nature, he was well worthy in every way to further the charitable inclinations of his young wife. Does not this mutual preference for good works betray the motives for an alliance between two whose ages seem so disproportionate? However this may be, their union was blessed by God, and the newly wedded wife could look forward without the least apprehension, to a future opening out before her, rich with smiling promise. Alas! the rare happiness that seemed installed forever beside that favored home and hearthside was doomed, ere long, to take wing before the dark cloud of sorrow hovering near and soon to burst into a fierce storm of human agony. Deprived of her children, one by one, a few months after their birth, Madam Gamelin soon saw her domestic felicity completely shattered by the death of her devoted husband four short years after her marriage. Thus did God destroy in one fell stroke the peaceful existence she had contemplated in the state of matrimony. And yet, all this was but the beginning of her ordeal of fiery trial! As an artist-sculptor rough-hews a block of choicest marble to liberate the graceful form he has in mind, even so does the Divine Master Artist redouble His chastening blows; the ruin of her happiness as wife

and mother opened up in Madam Gamelin's soul the flood-gates of more tender pity and vaster compassion for the unfortunate.

Bereft of every human comfort, Madam Gamelin instinctively turned to God, seeking in prayer and the Sacraments the strength her soul so sadly needed in its hour of bitter woe. Too profoundly christian to enwrap herself in dark and useless melancholy, she strove to find in redoubled care and kindness towards her suffering fellow-creatures, a soothing balm for her wounded heart, a pleasing occupation for her leisure moments, a safeguard for her liberty and increased fortitude for her afflicted soul.

A widow at the youthful age of twenty-seven, she might have resumed her rightful place in the world after the customary period of mourning. Such a course, however, was not to her taste, nor—let it here be said—to her vocation; for God, who ordains and directs all lives according to a general plan mapped out for humanity, was leading her sweetly and surely towards an end unknown to all save Him. The departed Mr. Gamelin had made a dying request concerning a poor idiot whom he earnestly commended to his wife as a parting gift. She willingly accepted a legacy so strange,

as a precious token from heaven, and lavished every care and attention upon the forlorn, stricken creature, who from that moment became, as it were, the corner-stone of the edifice she was destined to raise for the honor of religion.

Bidding a last farewell to her pleasant home on St. Anthony Street, after disposing of the major portion of her property, Madam Gamelin went to reside with her cousin, Madam Nowlan, and began her regular visits to the poor and the sick. In the wretched hovels of the poor outcasts of society, she discovered to what a pitiable state the helpless and aged poor were reduced. Her compassionate heart was touched at the sight of such abject misery, and she speedily determined to find some means of relief. She appealed to the Reverend Father Fay, parish priest of Notre Dame, for guidance and assistance; he immediately placed at her disposal for charitable purposes, the basement floor of a small school house situated at the corner of St. Lawrence and St. Catherine Streets.

On March fourth, 1828, the Asylum,—for such it had already become,—opened its doors to admit a poor, old woman, one hundred and two years of age, amply qualified by her long span of life, for admission to a refuge

specially destined for the aged; many others soon followed. A widow with her two children were also received, by exception, to assist with the house-work. In that modest shelter, the happy refugees daily found clean beds, wholesome food, a cozy fire in winter, and, at all times, the proper treatment required by their infirmities. It proved to be, however, a little center where the querulousness and whims incidental to old age, individual needs and lack of good breeding, raised many a storm which naught but the restraining influence of the Foundress Mother could calm. Realizing the necessity of residing near her protégées, Madam Gamelin rented two adjoining houses on St. Philip Street suitable for her purpose. In one of these she domiciled her old people, and reserved the other for her own dwelling. In this manner she was able to preside at their prayers, attend to their spiritual readings, and keep them all contented under her personal supervision.

But at what a cost in self-renunciation, painful struggles and overwhelming anxieties was all this accomplished! We shall not mention here the covert sneers, open criticisms and harsh censures heaped upon so modest an enterprise; like mists before the morning sunlight, they melted away before the perseverance and

ultimate success of the charitable lady. Encouraged, moreover, by the saintly Bishop Bourget of Montreal, his clergy, and many other eminent laymen, she could afford to brave the scorn and contempt of ignoble minds. Outward opposition, at best, was not her principal torment. She had, besides, to combat the suggestions of the evil spirit, that wily adversary of everything good. Had she not presumed too much on her own strength in a work whose future was so uncertain? Was it not tempting God to incur additional expense for the support of so precarious an undertaking, when already she had to fare forth each morning to market for the daily wants of her poor with an all but empty purse? In answer to these disquieting thoughts, Divine Providence often came to her assistance in a wholly unforeseen, if not miraculous manner; hence the valiant, noble-hearted woman determined to continue a work so visibly blessed by God.

Relying confidently for help from above, Madam Gamelin considered enlarging her house at the moment when her meagre resources were barely sufficient to meet the daily expense. She prayed, and had her old women pray that the price for a new and better location might be forthcoming. Practical in this, as in

all things else, she did not hesitate to address her request, likewise, to a generous citizen of Montreal, Mr. Oliver Berthelet, distinguished chiefly, as God's provider for the indigent poor and sick of every station. Thanks to his liberality, Madam Gamelin and her little company of aged invalids were placed, on May third, 1836, in possession of a piece of property at St. Catherine Street opposite the site of the present day Providence Asylum. This location, known in the Community annals as the *Yellow House* on account of its color, became from said date the cradle of the Institute.

The new refuge, standing almost within the shadow of the episcopal palace, soon took on more active life and energy under the watchful eye of the good Bishop and his devoted clergy. The work grew apace and became impregnated with a forceful character of stability and regularity. In order to increase her revenue, Madam Gamelin had her protégées do different kinds of work according to their strength and ability. She then invited her friends to visit the Home; they came gladly and never left without bestowing alms for the benefit of her wards. The Seminary of St. Sulpice also came to her assistance, and from these various sources, she was enabled, though at

the cost of many hardships, to make ends meet.

Nevertheless, Madam Gamelin did not confine her charities within the narrow limits of her small refuge. She continued her visits to the poor in their homes, and no matter how great the misery she discovered in her rounds, she always managed to find means for its relief. The cholera epidemic which ravaged Montreal in 1832, offered a vast field for her untiring devotedness. The political uprising in 1837 permitted her fellow-citizens to admire anew her universal kindness and charity. On account of the esteem and confidence she enjoyed, Madam Gamelin obtained, without the least difficulty, authorization to visit the prisoners. Daily might she be seen crossing the threshold of the gloomy jail in those troubled times, carrying to the unfortunate victims incarcerated there, in addition to material comforts, loving messages from their anxious families, and the consolations of faith, which only a soul so ardent as hers could inspire in such hours of general distress.

A very serious illness during the year 1839 brought the venerated Mother Gamelin to death's door. But God lent a merciful ear to the pleadings of her poor, and He granted

the boon of health they so earnestly solicited for their cherished Mother. Her strength and vigor gradually returned and she was soon able to resume her ordinary occupations.

ACT OF INCORPORATION — PROGRESS OF THE WORK —
OPENING OF A NOVITIATE — ENTRANCE OF
MADAM GAMELIN INTO RELIGION.

At the very outset of her career, Madam Gamelin had associated with her in her works, some charitable ladies, either relatives or intimate friends, who were all most deeply interested in the welfare of the poor, and well able to second her generous designs.

In the Spring of 1841, she obtained from the Legislature, an act incorporating their Association under the title of « Corporation of the Aged and Infirm Women of Montreal. » Twelve married and single ladies formed the new Association; and their first assembly was held on October twenty-second of the same year under the auspices of the Right Reverend Bishop Bourget. The worthy successor of the late lamented Bishop Lartigue, first Bishop of Montreal, called to his eternal reward on the nineteenth day of April in the preceding year, had already made the work of Madam

Gamelin the special object of his tender care and paternal solicitude. He had accorded the pious Foundress and her aged women the privilege of daily Mass in the humble oratory of the *Yellow House*, and the inestimable favor of keeping the Blessed Sacrament during novenas, the Month of May, and on a few of the most solemn festivals. (1)

Recently arrived from a voyage to Europe, Bishop Bourget was able to impart unexpected glad tidings to the ladies assembled in session, by which their ardor was increased and their hope animated to a wonderful degree. He informed them that while in Paris, the Superior General of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul had promised him some Sisters for the foundation, ready to blossom forth in his episcopal city, and under his immediate patronage. This idea of securing French Sisters, he told the ladies, had occurred to him during his travels abroad; and it seemed to him a direct inspiration from heaven, as no suggestion or agreement had been made to him by any person prior to his departure from Montreal; and, again, because the Superior's promise had been so readily and graciously

(1) The first Mass was celebrated in the *Yellow House* on December thirteenth, 1841.

given. In the sequel, we shall see how all this proved to be one of those illusions God sometimes permits to befall His ministers, the better to hide His secret designs ; without their knowledge, they are already serving Him, and in His own good time and way, the veil will be lifted, and His Adorable Will become manifest.

The good news was enthusiastically received by the ladies. They at once, decided to purchase a site, and to begin the construction of a building amply proportioned for the needs of a Community and the development of its works. At this point in the proceedings, it would seem that Madam Gamelin might be justified in feeling some sadness at the thought that other hands than hers were to gather the fruit of her hard labors ; but it was far otherwise. Personally disinterested, and seeking only the good of the poor and the greater glory of God, she rejoiced at this unhopd-for solution of her grave embarrassment. She unhesitatingly agreed with the ladies in the proposed purchase of a desirable piece of property near the Cathedral at a cost of twelve hundred louis. This was, assuredly, a bold venture ; yet, it was justified by the intervention of Providence. A friend contributed four thousand, eight hundred francs. Public sympathy, roused to action

by a strong pastoral letter from the Bishop, gave liberal alms in favor of the Asylum; the proceeds of a Fair, and a collection take up throughout the city, realized the sum of two thousand, six hundred louis; and, with this sum in hand, the projected construction was begun.

Actuated by a lively spirit of faith, Madam Gamelin could not, meanwhile, keep within the narrow limits of mere human prudence; therefore, in order to draw down the blessings of heaven, which alone could give the enterprise life and vigor, she organized the systematic visit of the poor and the sick by the Ladies of Charity, and opened two general depots where soup was daily served to the needy. Such extraordinary zeal could not fail to produce precious and abundant fruits. The following tenth of May, 1842, saw the blessing of the corner-stone of the new convent. The ceremony was presided by Monseigneur Power, Bishop of Toronto, with great pomp and solemnity in the presence of a large concourse of people.

Everything was moving smoothly and happily towards the desired end, when, suddenly and without warning, there came a disastrous blow, casting consternation in the ranks of the organizers, and plunging Monseigneur Bourget

into the deepest anxiety! A letter from the Superior General of the Daughters of St. Vincent de Paul brought the disheartening news that no Sisters could be sent to Montreal from France as had been so faithfully promised! In such a dilemma what was to be done? The gallant ship was already launched with sails all set; the skies clear and brilliant with promise; friends and acquaintances foregathered on the shore to give glad greetings as the trim craft gracefully breasted the waters, and to pray that wind and wave might speed her safely on the surging tide.... But, alas! at that vital moment both captain and crew ignobly failed to respond.... Like phantoms had they vanished utterly from the scene.... Again and again arose the anxious query: "What was to be done?" Make an appeal to another French Community? That would take precious time; and, besides running the risk of another refusal, it would dampen the courage and weaken the ardor of the willing workers.

God's own hour had now come! The veil that hid His inscrutable design was raised ever so slightly! and the Bishop, after doubtless many a prayer, came to a mighty decision. In his success lay the proof that his inspira-

tion came from heaven. Facing his keen disappointment most heroically, he instantly resolved to found a diocesan Community, similar in aim and rule of life to that of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, and to instal it in the new Asylum. In response to an urgent call for volunteers, five young women of the diocese presented themselves. A sixth, already engaged in the work, joined them. The latter, Miss Magdalen Durand, had been the friend and faithful companion of Madam Gamelin from the beginning, and was the acting Vice-President of the Corporation.

The Bishop accepted these recruits, and made them begin a novena preparatory to the Feast of the Annunciation. The three last days were spent in the exercises of a retreat; and, on March twenty-fifth, 1842, *seven* instead of six novices received the Holy Habit from his hands in the primitive little oratory of the *Yellow House*. Whence came that seventh novice? She had arrived unexpectedly at the Asylum on the eve, or first day of the novena. In the absence of the Bishop, who was making his own retreat with his priests, Madam Gamelin had taken it upon herself to admit her. Fortunately, enough material remained after making the costumes for six, for a seventh

outfit. This fact coincided strangely with an incident that occurred during the Bishop's previous trip to Europe. One day, while gravely preoccupied with the question of establishing the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul in his diocese, he went to the far-famed Cathedral of Chartres; there with many sighs and tears, he implored help and assistance from on high. Hardly had he finished his prayer, when an unknown, elderly lady approached and begged him to accept the seven chaplets of Our Lady of Seven Dolors which she offered him. But, alas! to him there came no enlightening dream the following night as formerly to Bishop Hugh of Grenoble, predicting the arrival of St. Bruno and his six companions, nor did seven bright stars fall at his feet. . . . God, however, foreknew and foresaw all! In His omniscience, He seemed to have established by this mystic number, a harmonious accord between the seven sorrows of His Mother and the seven victims, whom He designated to serve Him in the person of His suffering members, the poor. In very truth, seven victims were immolated on that altar of sacrifice in the *Yellow House* on that memorable twenty-fifth day of March. Even though one of the first postulants returned to the world, seven still remained to pronounce their

vows, and the seven privileged ones wore at their side the chaplets of Seven Dolors their Father had received in the far-away Basilica of Chartres! But who was the seventh? None other than Madam Gamelin herself, who magnanimously stepped into the place left vacant by the dismissed postulant! Again, how did so sudden and complete a transformation occur within so short a space of time? and how intense must have been the struggle before arriving at so momentous a decision! No one can for a moment doubt the unparalleled sacrifice it must have cost the noble, refined lady to venture forth alone toward God on the thorny path of unconditional self-surrender to His good pleasure.

Long ago had she renounced all that savored of vanity and love of ease to lavish her modest patrimony more exclusively upon the poor; yet, it was a far cry from that point to her complete destitution in the religious life. She had already reached the mature age of forty-three years; she had tasted the absolute freedom of doing her own sweet will for the past fifteen years; the good works in which she was engaged were all of her own choice and inclination; and now, to relinquish all that made life pleasant, in order to become a lowly Sister of Charity, — to be as pliant and docile in

the hands of Superiors as the youngest novice,—to learn the first rudiments of the religious life,—all this was a profound abyss through which a soul gifted with superhuman abnegation, alone could pass. But, wherefore the need of so whole-burnt an offering? Could she not remain at the head of the work and direct it by her loving devotedness; by her superior wisdom acquired in the stern school of adversity; by her strong will, purified in the saving waters of affliction; by her firm faith in the conviction that God would strengthen and confirm His work and render its future permanently secure? Might she not rely upon the assured prestige of her position for the present, and the alluring prospect of a happy old age, mellowed and sweetened by the veneration, admiration and respect of her poor, her orphans, and of the young religious whose mother she would always be? Thus did nature whisper to her soul; but grace whispered more insistently still, and finally triumphed. The entrance of her loyal friend and faithful companion, Magdalen Durand, the spontaneous outburst of fraternal charity among the young novices at the departure of one of their number,—all this had made a deep impression upon her tender heart, and had re-awakened her earlier desires for the religious life. Moreover, on the

second day of February, 1842, she had already bound herself by vow to her present state of life; in itself, a secret but virtual step forward to a public and inviolable contract. On that day, she made a vow «willingly and with great joy,» to quote her own words, to live the remainder of her days in perfect continency; to serve the poor to the fullest measure of her ability; to exercise more restraint in her conversations; to retrench from her attire any and all appearance of luxury and personal adornment. «I desire to give myself unreservedly to God» she wrote in her journal. «Let Him do with me whatsoever He pleases. I submit to all with entire resignation. Help me, O my God, in the resolutions I take this day.» Knowing clearly now what it is that God requires of her, she must of necessity submit with good grace. Oh! how our Lord's conditional invitation to the higher life costs poor human nature. Even in our venerated Mother's soul, the conflict between nature and grace was long and hard. The former showed how helpful she could be to the new Community, tortured with the thousand and one difficulties besetting an enterprise wholly unknown, and surrounded with every privation. Grace, on the other hand, held before her eyes the merits and supreme joy of complete self-

immolation... And yet, in spite of all, poor craven nature begged a truce...

Sadly agitated by these and similar disquieting thoughts, Madam Gamelin found in the person of her esteemed spiritual Father, the good Bishop Bourget, a most persuasive interpreter of God's Will in her regard. Acting upon a lively impulse of faith, and with a view of overcoming the last vestige of doubt and hesitation, he invited her to kneel with him in prayer in the chapel for divine light and guidance. After an hour of mutual fervent communing, Madam Gamelin arose, vanquished at last by grace and fully determined to obey the call of God. Her director, Monseigneur Prince, no longer able to urge any further obstacle to a request, seconded by so victorious a combat, permitted her to replace the novice whose departure had caused such desolation in the little religious family.

Before assuming the holy habit, Madam Gamelin was advised by the Bishop and Superior to visit some charitable institutions in the States. She accordingly went to Madam Seton's Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul both in New York and Baltimore, and while there, devoted all her time and attention to learning their methods. She brought back a

copy of their rules to serve as a basis for her new foundation. A few days after her return to Montreal on October sixth, 1843, she had the happiness of receiving the holy habit at the hands of Mgr. Prince. The ceremony took place in the new Asylum whither the aged and infirm had been removed on May eighteenth of the same year. The novices followed six days later, after bidding farewell to the *Yellow House* for the newer and more spacious home, consisting at that date of the chapel and two wings.

And now, the sacrifice was consummated! Madam Gamelin had made it valiantly as became a noble soul, but at what a cost of anguish and desolation, notwithstanding the powerful aid of grace! Well she knew all that the rule and the common life would require of her day by day, nor did it occur to her to try to evade even one of the smallest points of either. From the moment of her investiture, Sister Gamelin was the perfect novice she desired to become, and what the Very Reverend Canon John Charles Prince, Superior of the Community, sternly exacted of her without compromise or exception. Like her Sisters, she was reduced to the extremely meagre fare of the *Yellow House* continued without mitigation in the new convent. The daily meals

consisted of left-overs from the tables of friends; the beverage, of weak tea made from a second infusion of leaves sent in by the neighbors. She did her good share of the hard laundry work on the river bank in summer whither she went with all who could be of assistance. In the winter season the same work was done at the house by means of melted snow! They were forced to resort to methods so primitive, because they were too poor to pay for city water!

Hitherto accustomed to a life of comparative ease, Mother Gamelin sought neither glory nor merit for herself in what she considered a duty, and a cross she was to carry like our Lord, faithfully unto death. He alone knew the extent and value of the manifold acts of generous self-renunciation offered Him in the secret of her fire-tried soul. The high ideal she proposed to herself necessitated absolute immolation; it imposed heroic combats against her natural vivacity of character, and it forced her to the utmost watchfulness over her every word and deed, since upon her devolved the inexorable duty of setting her young sisters a shining example of every virtue. Mother Gamelin neither faltered nor failed in her difficult task. The day of her religious profession found her prepared for that solemn

engagement, and she made it in all the fervor and joy of her soul.

THE LIFE OF MOTHER GAMELIN IN RELIGION.

The first seven novices of our Institute made their religious profession on the twenty-ninth day of March, 1844. Very briefly, shall we here relate the ceremony of that memorable day. Full details may be found in the *Life* of our venerated Foundress Mother.

Before a numerous assembly, the Chaplain of the Asylum read the pastoral letter of canonical institution; he reminded the Sisters kneeling at the foot of the Altar, and their successors, that henceforth the world would know them no longer, nor were they to assist at its feasts or amusements. Their sole duty, hereafter, would be to wipe away the tears of the widow and orphan, to feed the hungry, to nurse the sick, to receive the last sigh of the dying, to enshroud the dead; in fine, to perform all the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. He gave them the rules of St. Vincent de Paul, and the act of acceptance which they signed the following day.

Monseigneur Bourget received the vows of each novice individually, and bestowed upon

each the silver cross and ring, symbol of her indissoluble union with Jesus, the Spouse of Virgins. After the act of consecration to the Blessed Virgin and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the *Te Deum* was intoned. The newly professed Sisters, escorted by the lady benefactresses, the aged women and the little orphan girls, who had all taken an active part in the ceremony, filed out processionally to the adjoining ward, chanting the *Ecce quam bonum*. The Institute of the Daughters of Charity, Servants of the Poor, was now a living foundation! On that day how many hopes were realized! How many tormenting doubts dispelled! And how many adjudged follies became wise conceptions! The wise and merciful designs of God had triumphed over all!

Nevertheless, all was not completed. The outline only of a grand plan was faintly traced. Later on, Mgr. Bourget, in a touching pastoral letter to the Community, will recount the agony of soul he endured during the ceremony of the first religious profession on beholding those seven victims prostrate at his feet, and so trustingly confiding their all to him. He will tell how the appalling prevision of the unhappiness and misery ready to overwhelm them should unforeseen obstacles arise, stamped it-

self indelibly upon his heart at that hour, and seemed to pierce it through and through with one of the swords of sorrow that transfixed the Mother of Dolours at the Foot of the Cross. The firm, unwavering trust of the holy prelate in God's most adorable Providence conquered and put to ignominious flight the wicked suggestions of the tempter. God, Himself had inspired the work. He would bring it to a successful issue.

Meanwhile in Mother Gamelin's heart, did not a minor strain of sadness mingle with the joyous tones of her *Magnificat*? Entering, in company with her Sisters, upon a new mode of life, knowing but little of the methods of persevering therein, and still less of how to guide others in the path of holiness, how could she attempt to lay the foundations of an Institute on a solid basis? In addition to financial worries, there were privations of all sorts to be endured, hard and constant labor to undergo. There were besides, the organization of the different works to be conducted by the Sisters, and the initiation of the members in lucrative industries in order to assure the means of honest livelihood for the Community and support for its protégées. The sight of those various difficulties did not dampen the ardor of the Foundress Mother. Too many times already,

had she experienced, the maternal solicitude of Divine Providence in behalf of the poor and their humble handmaidens, to yield now to temptations of discouragement. She knew that every work from on high must be signed and sealed with the stamp of humility, of privation, and above all, of faith triply refined in the furnace of affliction. The charge committed to her care bore the required marks as proof of its divine origin, and she was content. Elected Superior of the Community on March thirtieth, 1844, Mother Gamelin submitted to God's Holy Will, and accepted the post, not as an honorary title, but as a heavy burden whose obligations she must fulfill to the very letter.

The utter destitution and poverty of those early years of foundation were so extreme, that we, to-day, ask ourselves how our first Mothers accomplished so vast an amount of labor without sinking beneath the hardships they had to endure. Strong in her unalterable confidence in God, our Foundress Mother drew therefrom, the great energy and courage she needed amid the embarrassments and difficulties of an administration growing daily more and more complicated.

She had implicit faith in the power of prayer; and, when too sorely pressed, she could

be seen going through the wards of the sick and the poor, begging her dear children to unite their feeble, quavering voices with hers in singing her favorite hymn, *O douce Providence*. This same hymn, sweet to us as a mother's parting blessing, is still sung with trusting confidence when danger threatens or peril is nigh. Our Mother loved to sing the songs of Sion. We recall with delight how it is related of her, that when clouds of sadness and gloom seemed lowering, she would intone a pious canticle for all to join in pious refrain. Fancy pictures the admirable scene! The Foundress Mother, herself nearly overcome with the weight of her charge, and tormented with her own interior trials, bravely hides her personal feelings, the better to sustain the drooping courage of her Daughters; for their sake, she maintains an exterior ever cheerful and serene.

Mother Gamelin's life in religion was fore-ordained to be of short duration; and, as though she had a premonition of approaching death, she hastened to multiply on all sides, her deeds of benevolence. Like the sower sowing the seed, she scattered her good works broadcast over the land. In the beginning of May, 1844, she opened a ward for the orphan girls. A short while later, she organized, for the

benefit of the poor, the Banquets of Charity which have become traditional in our houses. Nothing pleased our Mother more than to witness the keen satisfaction enjoyed by the old women at these Banquets where the tables were laden with good things furnished by friends and benefactors.

The dimensions of the Asylum having become too small, it was a great sorrow to the worthy Superior to be unable to accept all who applied to her for admittance. She submitted her perplexities on this score to the Sisters and the Ladies of Charity. They, yielding to her entreaties, decided to enlarge the Asylum, with confidence in Divine Providence as their only resource; but the Foundress Mother counted upon the immensity of a treasure that never yet had failed her. The enlargement was accordingly begun, and early in the autumn of 1848, the aged poor were comfortably installed in better and more commodious quarters.

In 1846, Mother Gamelin founded successively the missions of Long Point and Laprairie. Firmly imbedded on the solid rock of poverty and trial, these two establishments, like the Mother House, were destined to make rapid progress, and to become fruitful in good works.

The year 1847, notable chiefly for the

frightful epidemic of typhus fever, afforded our Community the opportunity of becoming the consoling angel of the agonizing victims of that dread scourge. Night and day, our Sisters lavished every care upon the plague-stricken. Our beloved Mother spared no pains to replace those who nobly fell at their post of duty beside the unfortunate strangers within the city's gates. She opened a refuge where over six hundred and fifty children belonging to the Irish immigrants were sheltered. A great number of these poor little ones died of the fever; others were reclaimed by surviving relatives, or adopted into different Canadian families; while the remainder found a home in her community which provided generously for their future welfare. Twenty-seven of the Sisters were stricken down with the disease; of this number, three went to their eternal reward. Profoundly afflicted by the disaster threatening the very existence of the young community, Monseigneur Bourget made a vow in the name of the professed Sisters, to burn seven candles every Friday, in perpetuity, at the Mother House in honor of Our Lady of Seven Dolors. The Blessed Mother heard his earnest appeal; no others took the fever. Very soon all were convalescent and able to resume their duties.

After the strenuous days of that dark period of trial were ended, Mother Gamelin thought not of rest for herself. She was keenly absorbed, at the time, with the question of servants out of employment. For their benefit, she succeeded in finding room for them at the Providence, and she formed them into a society under the patronage of St. Blandine.

The exterior development of the works of the Institute was not, however, the only aim of the pious Foundress. Attentive to interior progress in virtue, and in the spirit which should animate each of the members, she made use of every means to stimulate and develop the zeal and fervor of her Daughters in the path of perfection, serving them in this, as in the outward works of charity, as model and guide. She frequently implored Monseigneur Bourget for the favor of a pastoral visit, or for an annual retreat. The devoted prelate always acceded graciously to her legitimate desires. By his wise counsels and fatherly encouragement, he upheld, corrected, strengthened and fortified his spiritual Daughters. Desirous of firmly grounding them in the true spirit of St. Vincent de Paul, he incessantly recommended to them the practise of *humility, simplicity and charity*; he exhorted

them constantly to make these three virtues their distinguishing characteristic. In his instructions, he often dwelt upon the excellence and the merit of devotion to the Passion of Our Lord and the Sorrows of His Blessed Mother; by constant meditation thereon, he assured them they would, eventually, become true lovers of the Cross.

Mother Gamelin was well qualified to understand these sublime lessons of holiness. Long since, had she learned to seek her only consolation and comfort on the Mount of Calvary; and to the Sorrowful Mother standing beneath the cross, had she ever confided her own anguish of soul. To that Mother's protection now, she attributed the marvelous progress of the Institute. The Passion of our Lord and the Sorrows of His Blessed Mother were the oft-recurring themes of her meditations, and in them she found irresistible attraction. Nevertheless, we do not find it anywhere recorded that she enjoyed the delights of spiritual consolation. The stray notes of her journal rather reveal a soul upon whom God is pleased to lay the weight of interior trial and desolation, with little other encouragement than that of her great faith and confidence in His Divine Providence.

During the year 1849, Mother Gamelin opened the St. James Free School in the City of Montreal, and founded the Mission of St. Elizabeth which she placed in care of Mother Caron as first Superior.

In this same year, 1849, an epidemic of cholera ravaged the city. The venerated Mother could not prevail upon Mgr. Bourget to permit her to devote herself personally to the care of the victims. It was heart-breaking for her to stand aside while her Daughters went courageously forth on the perilous mission she would fain have shared with them. She indemnified herself in a way, however, by opening an emergency hospital for the plague-stricken; God rewarded her zeal, and allowed her the consolation of seeing several Protestants, under the Sisters' care, embrace the true Faith.

In 1850, Mother Gamelin undertook a second trip to the States, in order to qualify herself better for the organization of the works of charity on a broader scale. She visited again the different hospices of the Daughters of Charity at Albany, New York, Baltimore and Emmittsburg. A few months after her return she inaugurated the work of the Deaf-Mutes at Long Point amid storms of protests. Aided by Sister Mary of Bousecours, and in spite of

every opposition, she steadfastly continued the enterprise. In February 1851, she succeeded in opening a class with only two deaf-mutes for pupils! The number gradually increased, however, until the undertaking was finally crowned with perfect success. This grand work in behalf of countless 'souls in prison' proved to be the crowning jewel of our Mother's casket of good deeds.

Proportionately with the increase of her foundations and labors, Mother Gamelin was forced to multiply her acts of zeal, vigilance and abnegation, all of which, necessarily, absorbed her time and consumed her strength. Such unparalleled activity demanded some respite, some time of rest. This well-merited repose, God was soon to give His faithful Spouse. Out of pure love of Him, she had spent herself in the exercise of a charity that knew neither boundary nor limitation, and, now He alone was to be her reward exceeding great.

But, before assisting at the closing scene of so admirable an existence, let us cast a brief glance upon its ensemble. In so doing, we shall perhaps, catch a gleam, faint though it may be, of the mystic, golden thread running through the web and woof of her beautiful life, or mayhap discover the secret mainspring of its activity.

MOTHER GAMELIN IN HER PRACTISE OF THE VIRTUES
OF RELIGION. — HER DEATH.

It is distinctly evident that natural benevolence, or purely human philanthropy, cannot engender acts of abnegation or disinterestedness with the perseverance and energy we have remarked in the person of Mother Gamelin. Virtue, strongly vivified by the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and continually nourished by Him, is required. The soul must make the mysteries of Bethlehem and Calvary its constant meditation, ere it can perceive in the ragged, and oft times repulsive exterior of the poor, Him who has said: «Whatever you do unto these, the least of My brethren, you do it unto Me.» Moreover, as a necessary complement to continued pursuit and success, it is of absolute necessity that the human enterprise bear the stamp of the Divine Will, and that the soul work in harmony with God. None of these conditions are lacking in the person or in the life-work of Mother Gamelin.

Harking back to the humble beginning of the early years, where a few, poor old women are gathered together in a dark and crowded basement room under the gentle care of a devout young widow, and where, by ex-

ception, two orphan girls and their mother are admitted, could one then foresee the tracings of a grand edifice, or discover the tiny germ of two important works of mercy,—the principal aim of a new Institute of Charity,—the vigorous outgrowth of that modest refuge?

Again, let us follow for a while the onward course of the work newly born. The public begins to take notice of it; the Bishop considers ways and means of rendering it permanent. A more commodious building soon arises, and is made ready to harbor the promised Daughters of Charity of France! Nothing, thus far, points to results unforeseen; yet, unknown to all, the foundations of a progressive, diocesan Institute are being deeply laid. The Providence of God is silently directing all events, and in His own good time and way, will He make His designs manifest to the eyes of men!

A totally unexpected incident disconcerts the human plan, and seems to compromise the fruit of many labors. At that trying moment, the heavenly developed project of the Master unfolds itself to view. Out of the humiliating refusal of the first chosen workers, there is born a new Congregation of Daughters to be known henceforth, and with good reason, as the Sisters of Providence.

Studying further the workings of grace in the person through whose instrumentality this foundation is effected, we shall see how the Divine Master accomplished all things in harmony, and in admiration we shall exclaim: *The finger of God is here!* Whenever God chooses a leader for any of His merciful designs for the betterment of mankind, He takes full possession of such a one. He divests her of all attachment to things earthly, breaks the ties that bind her, withdraws her from all worldly pleasures and the too tender affections of the heart; above all, He detaches her from self, from that too absorbing egoism which dries and hardens all impulses to good. Once He sees her freed from the fetters that enchained her, He makes of her a capable instrument for the performance of His All-Wise purpose. We may thus follow plainly His method of operation in the soul of the orphan child, the young maiden, the wife and mother, the woman of the world whom He predestined to be the Foundress of a religious Community. Not all at once did He accomplish His work in that chosen soul. The various stages through which Mother Gamelin's life-work had to pass, undoubtedly required that its growth should be slow, in order to assure its ultimate success. But here, let us

mark it well ; if, at the age of forty-four years, the pious widow had the courage to break the last link of the chain that still bound her to the world and self; if she could take her heart in hand, as it were, and subject it to the yoke of the religious life, it was because of the fact that long before receiving the supreme invitation to the more perfect life, her fidelity to the lesser graces received day by day, never knew diminution of fervor. Doubtless, before becoming altogether pliant and supple in the hands of the Master, our Foundress Mother had to know and to pass through many difficulties. It is illusory to think that the Saints, on their way to perfection, suavely, nay almost passively, obeyed those irresistible attractions, and that they yielded without a struggle. No! the triumph of grace was in proportion to their triumph over self-will, and their victory was dearly won at the cost of bitter agony and deadly combat.

Under the repeated hammer strokes of the Divine Sculptor, Mother Gamelin, too, will feel arising from the innermost depths of her being, the plaintive wail of human weakness; her soul will be sorrowful unto death at sight of the renunciations and sacrifices she must make on that upward path whither she is to

mount higher still, and higher. Fear, darksome and dread, will take possession of her soul ; but, always,—and herein lies the merit—when poor nature shudders at thought of death to self, she will tread steadily underfoot, and one by one, all her hopes of earthly happiness, and she will fix the eyes of her soul on treasures which perish not. God's good pleasure once made known to her, she will unhesitatingly respond : « Here I am Lord, here I am! »

In the exercise of prayer and humility, she will find strength to persevere in the thorny and difficult way. The spontaneous outbursts of her heart in moments of profound recollection, unintentionally reveal to what an extent her soul was tortured by its supernatural longing after perfection ; how she burned with those desires which are, verily, the characteristic of the Saints. Subduing every movement of anger or impetuosity, she in time, acquired perfect evenness of temper, and was self-contained amid contradictions of no matter what nature. With the greatest amiability she would dispense good counsel, soothing consolation and timely assistance. Attentive at all times to the slightest needs of her Sisters, she had for the sick members, more especially, a most maternal and delicate concern. On Sundays, it was her

greatest pleasure to take charge, either of the wards, the parlor or the kitchen so as to give the Sisters in those various departments some relief for the day. When in the kitchen, she made it her delight to prepare some extra dish as a surprise for her Daughters.

What shall be said of her solicitude for the young Sisters of the Novitiate? Whenever she gave them motherly advice, or taught them how to meditate according to the Ignatian method, which she had thoroughly mastered, her expressive features glowed with enthusiasm; words full of sweetest unction fell from her lips, and so abundant were the effusions of her heart that language was too inadequate to express all she fain would say.

Mother Gamelin's deep distrust of self made her seek advice from her ecclesiastical superiors; and she relied implicitly upon their wise direction for her personal conduct, as well as for the guidance of her spiritual family. She willingly submitted her views and opinions to the proper authority, and her confidence in their wisdom was absolute. Neither from herself nor from others did Mother Gamelin seek to hide the petty weaknesses that might escape her. This simple straightforwardness and perfect candor, united to her extreme kindness of

heart, form the most lovable trait of her noble character, and give to her words and actions that marvellous power and influence she exerted over others, and which commanded the good will of all who came in contact with her.

Simplicity,— that virtue which has God alone for its aim,— was the seal indelibly stamped upon Mother Gamelin's life. Never seeking to perform brilliant deeds, our beloved Mother applied herself, strongly and continuously to the one thing necessary ; namely, to accomplish works, modest, common, and oft-times painful to nature, simply in a spirit of faith, and in spite of natural repugnance. In such a lowly sphere did God find her when He called her to Himself.

The eve of her death, she had presided at the Community council, and she had made a most pressing exhortation to her Sisters on the obligations of their state. The session over, her features bore the impress of unusual joy and serenity. Could this be the first ray of that eternal happiness wherewith God was soon to crown His faithful servant? During the evening recreation, her joyousness was most remarkable... Alas! the coming night was to herald the advent of the grim Messenger with all his attendant terrors!... Awakened suddenly

at the early break of day by violent pains, Mother Gamelin, at once, recognized the symptoms of the dread scourge which had already claimed three of her Daughters for its victims. Calling to her companion, sleeping in the same room, she exclaimed: «My dear child, I have the cholera!... I am dying!»...

She was hastily removed to the Infirmary, but no one dreamed the fatal end was so near. In deep affliction, the Ladies of Charity, the poor old women, and the little orphan girls passed the whole day in the chapel, and vied with the Sisters in imploring Heaven to spare their beloved Mother's precious life. This time, however, the final hour had struck, and God would no longer delay the magnificent reward His valiant handmaiden had so richly merited.

Mother Gamelin had always feared the approach of death. Her great terror on finding herself attacked by the fatal malady, weakened her power of resistance and hastened its progress. Profound peace and resignation to God's Holy Will, nevertheless, soon took possession of her heart, verifying the words of St. Vincent de Paul: «Whosoever hath loved the poor during life, shall have no fear at the hour of death.» Fortified and consoled by the Last Sacraments, administered by

Monseigneur Prince, and soothed by the comforting presence and prayers of Mousseigneur Bourget, her habitual calmness of demeanor returned. Surrounded by her weeping Daughters whom she embraced in one long regard of motherly tenderness and affection, she awaited the coming of the Death Angel as that of a beloved friend upon whom she depended to transport her safe to the Heart of her Beloved. Wishing to give her religious family her last, dying recommendation, she faintly whispered a few broken words to the devoted prelate kneeling by: «This is your dying Mother's last will and testament», said he to them in a voice choked with emotion. «Let it be the foundation of your perfection: *Humility, Simplicity, Charity.*»

She lost consciousness at ten o'clock in the morning, and expired as the dial marked the hour of four-fifteen in the afternoon. Thus did Mother Gamelin complete her life's career in fifty-one years, seven months and three days. The sad tidings of her untimely death spread through the wards of her poor, and the homes of her friends and benefactors like the dismal moaning of the wind in a wild tempest. In the hallowed precincts of the Asylum, naught was heard save the weeping and lamentations

of her children who could not be comforted. The poor begged to view the inanimate form of their saintly Mother and to kiss her feet. This human consolation had to be denied them for fear of contagion.

The burial service took place, perforce, the following morning with no outward display other than the mute but eloquent tribute of the anguish of her Daughters, the bitter tears of her aged people, and the innocent prayers of her cherished little orphans.

All that was mortal of our beloved Mother was laid away to rest in the crypt beneath the Chapel on the Gospel side of the main altar; and there she has lain in undisturbed repose to the present time. On the marble tablet, bearing her name and the date of her death, the following words from the Book of Proverbs may be read: *She hath considered a field, and bought it; with the fruit of her hands she hath planted a vineyard;* (1) also the prayer of her Daughters: *Watch over thy children.* Simple the wording of her epitaph, but oh! how vast the meaning!

In silent contemplation before that modest tomb, the soul rises far above the dark shadows

(1) Prov. XXXI, 16.

of death and hearkens intently to the voice of the Divine Husbandman falling like a sunbeam athwart the gloom and obscurity of that lowly vault: *Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.* (1) Then we see the generous handmaiden to whom the Lord entrusted a portion of His field, sowing broadcast from the early dawn of her days, acts of kindness, devotedness and abnegation, in measure sufficient to assure an abundant harvest of merits and eternal glory. God required a still greater yield, and a broader, more intense culture of the blessed seed whose fruit He destined to spread to the far distant lands beyond the snow-capped summit of the mighty Rockies. He bade his willing servant bury in the furrow, with the good seed already sown and dying a fruitful death, her whole will and liberty to be curbed and disciplined by the restraints of the religious life. And now, the grain of wheat has died the death! But, behold! a harvest, glorious and abundant, already arises therefrom! Far and wide it has spread from its home in Canada to the frozen North, and the distant West whose rock-bound coasts are gilded by the last rays

(2) John XII, 24 — 25.

of the setting sun, and washed by the sparkling waters of the blue Pacific.

Foundresses must die; ayè, but the works of God live on foreyer! The entire being of those devoted to His cause; the sweat of their brows, and the tears they shed in their struggles, like heavenly dewdrops on the blossoms of earth, only make their blessed lives more active and ardent. Following in the footsteps of such worthy predecessors, other workers, and their number is legion, will arise. When their own hour of death arrives, they, too, will hear the ravishing words of praise and invitation from the Beloved of their hearts: *Well done, good and faithful servant! Because thou hast been faithful. . . . enter now into the joy of thy Lord.* (1)

(1) Matt. XXV, 21.



LA MÈRE VINCENT DE PAUL

1809 - 1874

II

MOTHER VINCENT DE PAUL.

Magdalen Chevigny-Durand was born of an honest family of farmers in the parish of the Holy Ghost on the twenty-ninth day of January, 1809. We know nothing of the history of her early surroundings or of the awakening of her young soul to exterior influences. Very pure and serene, however, must have been the atmosphere where this fair blossom of promise grew and expanded in the sunlight, for already at the age of seventeen, the gifted maiden dreaded the seductions of the world. She feared to bestow upon any other than the God of her heart, the first fruits of her fair, young life, and without regret for severing the sweet ties that bound her to a happy home, she sought and obtained her parents' consent to leave them for the Hotel-Dieu, Montreal. The principles of the religious life were not sufficiently familiar to her to permit her to aspire to so holy a calling; she, therefore, applied for admission as a secular aid, content in her simplicity to find a safe harbor from the

world, and the means of serving God better. Daily contact with the nuns soon developed her spiritual longings, and the young girl learned to know and to appreciate the advantages and beauty of their holy vocation. So, after a time, she begged for a place in their ranks, even were it the lowest and most humble among the lay members. She had already given four years of hard and faithful service to the care of the sick in the hospital, and the constant labor had somewhat weakened her health; on this account her petition for admission was indefinitely postponed. The suspense became so prolonged that the aspirant, seeing her hopes grow fainter as time went on, left the Hotel-Dieu to associate herself with a charitable lady devoted to the care of wayward girls for whom there was question of founding a religious Congregation. Unfortunately, the directress abandoned her enterprise at its very inception, leaving Miss Durand again in doubt about her vocation and tempted to renounce all idea of entering religion. But God was watching over her and guiding her footsteps whither He would lead her. He had chosen her to be the instrument of His merciful designs in favor of the poor. At the moment when she thought all was lost, when her horizon was darkened by the clouds of doubt and uncertainty, a

powerful hand upheld her, shielded her from the world and its dangers, and kept alive in her soul her ardent desire to consecrate herself irrevocably to His service.

Miss Durand had been employed six months as seamstress when she first met Madam Gamelin. The latter, as narrated in her biography, desired to secure the services of a competent person whom she could make her associate in the care of the poor. By God's manifest design, she found in Miss Durand, one fully qualified to assist her in her charitable undertakings. The meeting was auspicious for those two chosen souls, and both rejoiced exceedingly, though they could not, at that far-off date, foresee all its blessed consequences. We, today, love to consider that fortunate occurrence in the years ago as a special intervention of Divine Providence wisely conducting its works, and procuring for each being the means of accomplishing its mission and attaining its end.

Miss Durand took up her abode in the modest refuge at St. Philip Street on August fourteenth, 1835. She was twenty-six years of age. According to the annals, her admirable act of disinterestedness had no other motive than the burning desire of serving God in the person of His poor, and of devoting herself

exclusively to their interests out of pure love for Him. No hope of earthly gain could influence her in her momentous decision. At her entrance into the lowly dwelling that sheltered the aged protégées assembled under Mother Gamelin's patronage, we see how cheerfully she embraced the hardships and privations of her new mode of life, and how there arose at the same time in her soul, a great fount of pity and commiseration for the unfortunate beings whom the winds of adversity had driven to the depths of bitter poverty in their extreme old age. Already she felt the well-springs of affection for them pulsing through her heart, and the sight of the toils, hard labors and heavy burdens, she must of necessity impose upon herself in their behalf, could not daunt her courageous spirit nor intimidate her generous soul.

Madam Gamelin, having succeeded in her quest for more spacious quarters wherein to install her aged and infirm women more comfortably, found the question of necessary repairs haunting her on account of the extreme lightness of her purse. Her worthy associate, Miss Durand was equal to the emergency. Possessed of rare skill and energy, she valiantly set to work on the house; in a short while, locks were fitted to the doors, shattered window

panes replaced, walls and woodwork deftly repainted, and in a brief space of time all was made ready to receive the bidden guests. The happy transfer was effected on May 3, 1836. Although located in better surroundings, no steady source of revenue existed, and the alms doled out to them by the public barely sufficed to provide for the daily needs of thirty persons. Here again, Miss Durand's wonderful resourcefulness stood them in good stead. She was a most capable house-keeper, well skilled in domestic economy, and she knew how to draw profit out of everything. Many and many a time did she save the charitable Directress of the refuge from grave embarrassment by her tact and foresight.

The beneficent rôle Mother Vincent de Paul exercised in the work of the *Providence*, even before its foundation as an Institute, can scarcely be estimated at its just value. Nor is this to be wondered at when we consider that she, herself, ignored her worth, and that those for whom she labored valued it far less. Well we know that the world reserves the fleeting sunshine of its smiles and the perfume of its incense for brilliant achievements only; the silent, hidden devotedness of obscure lives purposely escapes its distracted eye, or mayhap arouses naught but its scornful pity. Those

who would turn a deaf ear to the siren voice of its praise and flattery must be girded with an armor, proof against self-love in all its devious forms. Miss Durand was indeed strong in her chosen armor of humility, and the fountain of her life found its source far above the petty ambitions of earth. The lowly blossom of total abnegation finds food and sustenance in supernatural thoughts and desires. It is true, one tastes untold joy in forgetting one's self for the good of the neighbor, and no pleasure can compare with that of making others happy; still, in order to balance the joys of christian charity with the pains they entail, the hope of eternal reward must ever be uppermost; while above and beyond all, the strong love of Jesus personified in His poor must predominate. The supreme consolation of a Sister of Charity in her hours of weariness and lassitude—inevitable results of her monotonous and oftentimes thankless task,—is to hear adown the centuries the soft echoes of a beloved Voice, extolling the great excellence of charity towards fellow-men: *«Amen I say to you, as long as you did to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me.* (1)

Seven of the best years of Miss Durand's life had been spent among the aged and infirm

(1) Matt. XXV, 40.

women gathered from the byways by our venerated Mother Gamelin. She never left them for a moment; she shared with them their modest dwelling and their frugal fare, only too happy to be treated as one of them, and to follow the example of the Divine Master to the very letter. Now, the time had come for this hidden soul to emerge from her life of obscurity and apparent contempt to enter into the joy of her Lord by way of a special vocation.

The Will of God concerning Madam Gamelin and her work, was becoming more clearly manifest: a religious Institute was about to spring up, and among the young women who volunteered at the call of Monseigneur Bourget, six were selected as candidates. Already a Sister of Charity in heart, though not wearing the habit or bearing the title, Miss Durand's place among the new Sisters-Elect was marked out for her beforehand, and she was destined to have an important share in the foundation of the proposed Institute.

After her investiture of the Holy Habit on March twenty-ninth, 1843, the favored novice had but to resume her ordinary occupations, vivified henceforth by rule, and to prepare herself worthily for the ceremony of relig-

ious profession to take place on March twenty-fifth, 1844. Madam Gamelin, deeply moved by the courageous example of her esteemed companion and fellow-Sisters, united herself to them the following October. At the elections held a few days after pronouncing the first vows, she was unanimously chosen Superior, while her cherished associate, Sister Vincent de Paul, was elected her Assistant.

In the discharge of her duties as mistress of the orphans and dress-maker for the Community, Sister Vincent de Paul fell seriously ill in the beginning of January, 1845. Her dangerous condition caused her companions the gravest alarm. The loss of so useful a subject at the very moment when the society had most need of her experience seemed a trial almost too heavy to bear. Prayer was their immediate recourse, and the poor, old women united with the Sisters in doing holy violence to Heaven for the grace of her recovery. Their petitions were heard; after four months of forced inactivity, the patient was able to resume her duties. She was made sub-mistress at the novitiate, about this time, and a year later Mistress of Novices in place of Sister Immaculate Conception whom obedience sent to found the mission of St. Isidore. The

post of Mistress of Novices, not necessarily absorbing all her time, we find Sister Vincent de Paul making herself generally useful either in the sacristy, the infirmary, the sewing-room, or wherever else work was to be done, agreeable and obliging at all times to every one. By her ability and zeal for the different works, she became a solid support for the newly-born Institute, a pillar of light for her Sisters and an angel of consolation for her beloved Superior.

Next after the Mother House, the mission of St. Elizabeth reaped the fruits of Mother Vincent's zealous ardor. Replacing Mother Caron as Superior at the latter place on October eighth, 1851, it soon became evident that the choice was a happy one. A great friend of the poor, and always actuated by a true spirit of humility, the new Superior was well worthy, and in every way qualified to take charge of the mission founded two years before, and resting yet upon a very insecure basis. Trials, by which the works of God are generally stamped, were not wanting; but strong in her great confidence in prayer, she triumphed over every obstacle. To Mother Vincent de Paul, as erstwhile to her holy patron, seems to have been given what has

been so aptly styled «the genius of charity.» She had ways and means of her own in bringing her undertakings to a successful issue, of making the most of her modest resources, and of finding solutions for every difficulty. The seven years she spent at St. Elizabeth's were prosperous ones for the mission. She admitted a greater number of poor, enlarged the accommodations destined for their use, built up the place in general, and all this without contracting further indebtedness. Her natural ability, nevertheless, counted as naught beside the gifts of grace wherewith her soul was so amply endowed. Her amiable straightforwardness, her kindness of heart, and the lack of any pretensions whatsoever were her chief characteristics, and they raised her high in the esteem and confidence of all with whom she came in contact. No one could remain for any length of time in her company without feeling the effects of her sweet influence.

When she left St. Elizabeth's in October, 1858, it was to resume her office as Assistant at the Mother House. In the former place, her departure caused the keenest regret, while in the latter her return was hailed with delight. Mother Vincent's great amiability and gayety of disposition made her a general favorite. All

who had the good fortune of knowing her personally, prized her friendship and the rare simplicity of her every word and deed. Formed in the school of our saintly Founder, Monseigneur Bourget, she had learned the art of seeking God alone, while her frankness of character betrayed itself at times by the most charming candor. It was a pleasure to hear her discourse of different subjects; often during the hour of recreation, she would edify the Sisters, all unknowingly, by her ingenuous way of expressing herself concerning the good thoughts that came to her during the day's meditation or on whatever else had done her soul good.

In September, 1863, Mother Vincent was assigned to the St. Alexis Orphanage as Superior. This house, established in December, 1853, had made very little progress, and was in such a state of extreme poverty that the Sisters found their task almost beyond their strength. Perhaps her splendid talent for wise administration influenced the choice made of her; at any rate the annals record that benefactors and material help, in ways providential, came to the house with the advent of the new Superior. This remarkable change for the better may also be explained by the fact that Mother Vincent de Paul had been Madam

Gamelin's right hand long before the Foundress Mother's entrance into religion, and that she enjoyed the friendship and acquaintance of a large circle of charitably inclined persons among the wealthier portion of the citizens of Montreal. Still, we must seek higher up for the source of that prosperity which seemed to follow her whithersoever she went. Fervent religious as she was, Mother Vincent invariably had recourse to prayer before making any venture in favor of her poor; and her unshaken confidence never left her a moment in doubt concerning the grant of her petition. Her supreme trust in God was always fully justified. Saint Joseph was her chosen patron; through his powerful intercession, she obtained not only ordinary graces, but at times, many that bordered on the extraordinary,—not to say miraculous. Did a perplexing situation arise, quickly she gathered her little orphans around her, and kneeling with them before the statue of her amiable protector, she recited some prayers, improvised some touching invocations and intoned a hymn in his honor. Never did she invoke him in vain; the expected answer was sure to come, and, frequently it came while she was yet at prayer. How delighted her dear children were when their prayers were so speedily answered! The good Mother profited of the circumstance

to inspire them with unbounded confidence in dear St. Joseph, and with lively gratitude for their benefactors.

All her debts of gratitude were repaid by prayer; that was understood. A certain number of Stations of the Cross or of rosaries, varying with the value of the gift, was offered by the orphans for the intentions of the donors. Needless to add that this method of payment was fully acceptable, and that continual new debts were contracted on the same conditions.

Mother Vincent possessed, in addition to her lively spirit of faith, the sweet gift of attractive piety, which often manifested itself in a most practical manner. When the house needed repairs, she would exercise great economy in the choice of material, considering always her very restricted income; but, where the chapel was concerned, nothing was too good. The best paint and the finest wall-paper did not appear beyond her means for the House of God. She made an elegant canopy for the main altar with her own hands. At another time during the Forty Hours, the thought occurred to her while she was preparing the common, unbleached wax candles to be burned before the Blessed Sacrament, that Our Lord would certainly pay the expenses were

she to purchase the pure white waxen tapers to be consumed in His honor. She accordingly incurred the added cost, nor did she have cause to regret it, for at the close of the Forty Hours, she received, without solicitation on her part, an alms covering the price of the best candles many times over. Her Eucharistic Lord, Whom she loved with her whole heart and soul, delighted to shower His choicest graces upon her; often at the foot of the Tabernacle, floods of tears betrayed the intense consolation she enjoyed in His holy presence. Whenever she desired to obtain some very special favor, Mother Vincent would hide herself in a corner of the chapel behind her little orphan girls; and there, profoundly absorbed in a sense of her own utter unworthiness, she offered them in their innocence to God, beseeching Him to have compassion on her misery, and to grant her the grace she craved out of consideration for those blameless little ones. Well indeed might she thus screen herself and offer the unconscious merit of childhood's baptismal purity, without in the least detracting from that which belonged to them by every right. For, had she not aided them to preserve intact the priceless jewel of holy innocence? In truth, that was her first care. To teach them to know, love and serve God with all their mind

and heart and soul, was her chief delight, and she spared herself no pains where christian education was concerned. She reserved to herself the pleasing task of preparing her little charges for their First Holy Communion, and of forming them in the practice of every virtue. Long after they had passed from her maternal care, she kept them in mind, and by her gentle admonitions and wise counsels, prevented them from yielding too easily to the allurements of a seductive world. When evil report reached her concerning one or another of her little ones, tempted, perhaps, beyond their strength, her grief was very great.

In return, the children loved their dear Mother Vincent, and surrounded her with every token of filial respect and veneration. When the good Mother saw her little ones flocking about her, her face beamed with joy, while her cheering smile and endearing words of kindness made them happy and quite at ease in the sunshine of her presence. This oft-repeated scene recalled a similar one enacted in the long, long ago beneath the fair, blue sky of Galilee where the multitude gathered to hear the words of the Master while the children played at His feet. His Disciples, fearful lest their noisy gambols might disturb their Lord,

would fain send them away, but He, in gentle tones of chiding said: *Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God.* (1)

The ten years Mother Vincent spent at the St. Alexis Orphanage form an admirable résumé of her religious career. In constant, active service, engaged in pursuits of many kinds, worried with external cares, and devoting every instant of her being to the welfare of her Institute, she filled the measure of her days until the declining years of her fruitful life. At her annual retreat in 1872, the malady, which had been undermining her strength for the past year, grew more intense and condemned her to the Infirmary of the Mother House where she was compelled to seek relief in medical treatment. Being somewhat restored after a few weeks' repose, our dear patient, who could not bide inaction, made unto herself a law not to remain idle; hence when her sufferings were not too acute, she might always be seen plying her needle or making artificial flowers for the altar.

The care of the orphans had marked the beginning of her religious life, so was it destined to be her crowning act. She retained

(1) Mark X, 14.

the direction of the St. Alexis Orphanage until her demise, although she never returned there after her entrance to the Infirmary. The worthy Superior found so much good to be done on all sides that her dread of enforced idleness was considerably lessened, and her courage notably increased.

In the month of May, 1873, a sudden change for the worse caused her to receive the sacrament of Extreme Unction. For many days her condition was so serious that her death was momentarily expected. Mother Vincent's robust constitution conquered once again, however, and she regained sufficient strength to follow the exercises of the annual retreat three months later. But the improvement was only nominal. There no longer existed the slightest hope of recovery, and no one knew it better than the patient herself. On July eighteenth, the eve of her patronal feast, a joyous sunbeam illumined her solitude. Her cherished little orphans assembled in her room to offer her their festal greetings and grateful tributes for the last time. Mother Vincent was deeply moved by this proof of affection coming straight from the simple, candid heart of childhood. Tears of loving tenderness coursed down her cheeks, and her voice trembled with emotion

as she addressed them a few words of maternal advice. It was the final effort of her undying love. Her work for them was finished; notwithstanding her ardent desire of further service, the gradual diminution of her vitality, and the increasing severity of her pains reminded her constantly that the end was drawing near.

The sacraments of the dying were administered a second time on March second, 1874. The patient received them with the greatest fervor; but, from that moment, Mother Vincent was wholly unable to apply herself to any kind of handiwork. This was by no means the least of her many sacrifices; she submitted, however, with good grace, thus giving to the Community, with the last vestige of her bodily strength, the last proof likewise, of her spiritual vigor and heroic virtue. Through the halo of great sufferings, which added to her precious store of merit, her every act shone out with brighter lustre those closing weeks of her earthly pilgrimage.

Prayer and pious reading now filled out the program of her days, and made them according to her own happy expression, days of a long retreat in preparation for the supreme moment. Nor was she the sole beneficiary of those hours of sweet communings; her lowly cell became the center of a veritable apostolate

whence the venerable Elder daily gave necessary encouragement or timely advice to the many who flocked to see and hear her. She loved to speak of the works of the Institute and of the poor in whose behalf she became most eloquent. They were the good Mother's privileged friends. Her life was her only possession and she had consecrated it to them without reserve. Truly might she have said to them as did St. Paul to the first christians: *But I most gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls.* (1)

And now, behold her arrived at the close of her toilsome journey! Her beautiful life, so unselfishly devoted to the destitute and abandoned, is ebbing fast away, and she sees its end approach with the utmost calm. Some weeks previously, she had passed, like many another predestined soul, through the purifying fires of interior desolation and great fear, but all her terrors soon vanished before the breath of obedience, and her last days on earth were blessed with perfect peace of heart. «I am no longer the same person,» said she, «since I abandoned myself entirely to the Sacred Heart of Jesus to do His Holy Will; I am completely at rest.» Thus did the dying exile already entone the first strain of the

(1) II Cor. XII, 15.

glorious, exultant hymn of praise she was to sing forever in the great unending thanksgiving of eternity.

At eleven o'clock in the morning of July seventh, 1874, Mother Vincent gave back her soul to God. In reward, no doubt of her filial veneration for our Father Founder the unexpected favor of having him by her deathbed was accorded her. Although himself a patient under treatment at the Hotel Dieu, Mgr. Bourget felt impelled, as it were, to go to the Providence that day. He arrived just as the patient seemed to be breathing her last, but the glad sight of her beloved prelate momentarily rallied her failing powers. With a plea for one more general absolution from him, her soul sped heavenward just as his blessed hand was raised above her in solemn benediction.

The death of the second of our Foundress Mothers caused universal mourning throughout the Community, while it brought out in more brilliant relief, the virtues and merits she would have kept forever hidden from human eye. How many times during the course of her life had she asked public pardon of her Sisters for the disedification she might have given them; and how often, too, to forestall, perhaps, any praise for her long and laborious career would she say: «How could I become an inte-

rior soul when I did nothing but work all the time?» But this modest ruse deceived no one. The testimony of Monseigneur Bourget bears witness to the fact that the good Mother sanctified herself by her very labors. We may judge how pure must have been the intention which gave her lifework such heavenly value. Exterior works tend to dry up the spiritual life of a tepid and dissipated soul; contrariwise, they enrich the soul given to prayer, observance of the rule, and forgetfulness of self in the performance of works of charity in behalf of the poor. Mother Vincent de Paul was, verily, one such favored soul, for she sought with burning ardor the welfare of the poor in order to glorify God, Who styles Himself in the Sacred Scriptures, the Father of the Poor.

Had Monseigneur Bourget asked the dying Mother what reproached her most at the moment of death, he doubtless would have received the same naive and touching reply that a Daughter of Charity once gave to St. Vincent de Paul: «Perhaps I took too much pleasure in the service of the poor.» God grant this blessed fear be the only cloud to darken our own passing away! Far from being detrimental to our best interests at death's awful hour, it would be the sure pledge of our souls' eternal felicity.



LA MÈRE DE L'IMMACULÉE CONCEPTION

1817 - 1894

III

MOTHER IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

Inseparably connected with the memory of Mother Gamelin, is the loving remembrance of her first companions in religion, and her devoted co-laborers in her work. Among the latter, Mother Caron was destined to contribute, in a marked degree, to the immediate progress of the Institute of Providence by the wise direction she gave it as Superior General. If the weight of responsibilities and duties fell less heavily upon the others, the same cannot be said of the hard labors and bitter sacrifices which were the common lot of all. The generous auxiliaries of our Foundress Mother merit by every right the places of honor assigned them in the history of our Institute. Even had they taken no part whatever in the foundation of our Community, the admirable virtues they have bequeathed us would still justify the affectionate devotion and filial veneration we bear them.

Following the order of the records, we present Mother Immaculate Conception third in our series of biographical sketches. Actually

speaking, she ranked sixth in the order of religious profession; but, by virtue of the office imposed upon her at the elections held in 1844, she takes precedence over her more elderly companions.

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Mary Margaret Thibodeau was born in the Holy Name of Mary Parish, — St. James Quarter,—Montreal, on April twenty-first, 1817. Her father, Mr. Joseph Thibodeau, earned a living for his growing family by hard labor as baker for the Seminary of St. Sulpice. Her mother, Margaret Halde, exemplified in her conduct the valiant woman of the Holy Scripture. Instead of the gifts of fortune, the worthy couple possessed the treasures of faith and probity which they bequeathed to their daughter as her only inheritance.

Mary Margaret's childhood years were spent under the influence of a profoundly christian mother in a happy home circle where honest virtue was held in highest esteem. Formed to the practice of good deeds, both by lesson and example, the child soon became remarkable by her sincerity of soul, excellence of conduct, and the modesty and gravity of her outward demeanor. At an age when rigid

virtue seems premature, she had already learned sufficient self-control to be able to deny herself many a pleasure, and to deprive herself of numberless dainty morsels,—a sacrifice always more or less great for a child.

After finishing her studies at the Congregation Sisters' Convent, Mary Margaret felt within her soul the first aspirations to the religious life. Long had she cherished an ideal far above what the world has to offer its votaries. Her soul, like a fair flower which the sunshine of grace forever turns heavenward, needed the pure and even temperature of God's chaste 'garden inclosed' for its growth and development. She resolved, after seeking counsel and praying much, to embrace the religious state; and, she accordingly applied for admission to the novitiate of the Grey Nuns whose diversified works of mercy corresponded with her desire of devoting herself to the welfare of her neighbor and the working out of her own sanctification. The Community of her choice opened wide its doors to welcome the young candidate, who, freed at last, from all attachment to the world, began to taste in her holy retreat the peace and joy of a soul wholly given to God.

But the Lord had other designs in view for His chosen one, and He soon made them

partly manifest. By this, one is minded to think that He wished to lead her by devious ways to make her feel the lightness of His burden and the sweetness of His yoke, before calling her to scale other heights, none the less glorious perhaps, but far more rugged, and covered with sharper briars and thorns.

The sudden death of her father, Mr. Thibodeau, left the mother and sister of the young novice in dire necessity, and she understood, at once, that her services were needed at home. Sacrificing her own happy prospects on the altar of filial love, she renounced the bright dream of her youth, and left the General Hospital with deepest regret. Here we must pause to admire the extreme delicacy of her nature; having received some gifts from charitably inclined persons to enable her to enter the convent, she first returned all they had given her, then cast about for means of supporting her mother and younger sister. The solid education she had acquired became the means of earning a living, and she opened a small school. Madam Thibodeau, her mother, taught the primary class of children the elements of reading and writing, while her daughter assumed charge of the more advanced pupils. Her establishment shortly attracted,

first the attention, then the interest of the clergy at the Bishopric. They gave the pious teacher every encouragement, even to the extent of organizing distribution of prizes. Thanks to their kindly intervention, the modest school prospered and its revenues were sufficient for the support of the little family.

In her new field of labor, Miss Thibodeau exercised the dual apostolate of filial devotedness and christian charity; for it very soon became known to all that she was a frequent visitor at the modest refuge conducted by Madam Gamelin. One of her friends, Miss Magdalen Durand, associate of the directress, held undisputed sway in her domain of charity, and through her influence, Miss Thibodeau was introduced to the aged and infirm guests, who so charmed her by their destitution and poverty that much of her free time was spent in their company. Her going to and fro in that poor dwelling, hallowed by charity and love, reawakened in her soul the generous desires that had erstwhile incited her to petition her entrance to the Grey Nuns. This time, Divine Providence smoothed out her pathway, and disposed all things for the accomplishment of her wishes.

The Asylum, founded by Madam Gamelin

in 1828, was entering upon its fourteenth year of existence; the number of invalids was growing more numerous, and the directress was sadly in need of helpers. In order to provide for her pressing wants, Monseigneur Bourget had secured the promise of the services of a Community of French Nuns, — the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, — and their arrival in Montreal was momentarily expected. Miss Thibodeau was delighted at the good news, and it confirmed her in her resolve to quit the world and consecrate herself to the care of the poor. But the same reason that forced her to leave the General Hospital still existed, and the ardent young maiden saw the object of her dearest wish again thwarted, unless some unforeseen occurrence should arise to clear away the difficulty. At the opportune moment, God took her case in hand. Madam Nowlan, cousin to Madam Gamelin, and one of our first benefactresses, learning of the impediment in the way of the pious aspirant, volunteered to take good Madam Thibodeau under her protection. Relieved by this kind act of further obligation towards her family, Mary Margaret offered herself and her services unreservedly to the *Yellow House* where she was received with a most cordial welcome in May 1842. Miss Thibodeau was then twenty-

five years of age. Animated by the most tender compassion for the distress of old age with its accompanying infirmities, and fortified by the hope of soon belonging to a religious community, she entered upon her new duties with wonderful ardor and zeal.

She was fully prepared the following year to respond to the call of Monseigneur Bourget, who being compelled to renounce forever the hope of having the French Nuns, finally determined to found a new Institute of Providence. In company with six other young women assembled under the same roof for a like motive, Mary Margaret received the religious habit on March twenty-fifth, 1843. The novitiate training was especially severe for our Foundress Mothers; but no trial, however great, could for a moment weaken our heroine's resolution or dampen her courage. On the contrary, they tended to strengthen the soul of the fervent novice, even as heavy wind storms invigorate hardy trees, and drive their roots to take firmer hold deep down in the bosom of the earth. Sister Thibodeau made her profession of vows on March twenty-ninth, 1844, and the very next day she was appointed mistress of novices. We can easily understand that the newly chosen officers were not left to their own

devices in the charges assigned them by the elections. None, better than Monseigneur Bourget, knew their inexperience in the paths of religion, and the absolute need they had of a wise and enlightened director; hence, he selected the Very Reverend Canon John Charles Prince for that important post. This estimable priest was in every way worthy of the confidence of his Bishop. Endowed with the gift of solid piety, mindful for the welfare of the souls entrusted to his care, and above all, most remarkable for his spirit of order and regularity, he was assuredly, the superior best qualified for the early beginnings of a new Institute. As the religious formation of the novices depended upon him, the Mother Mistress had, necessarily, a secondary share only in the government of the novitiate; hence, her functions were not altogether confined to that peaceful enclosure. She shared with her companions in the different employments, and occupied her spare time in visiting the sick, caring for the sacristy, and in sewing for the household. Moreover, her excellent instruction, and her former experience as teacher, rendering her more capable than the others, she was also given charge of the correspondence and the keeping of the registers.

St. Isidore, the first mission, was opened at

Long Point in the year 1846. With the consent, or rather at the solicitation of Monseigneur Bourget, the work of teaching was inaugurated at that place. Appointed Sister Servant,—a title bestowed in the beginning on all superiors,—Sister Thibodeau once more resumed her rôle of teacher, renouncing through obedience the sweet attraction that had ever inclined her to the personal service of the poor and the suffering.

Her stay at St. Isidore's was of short duration. Recalled to the Mother House the year following, she fell a victim to the typhus fever then raging epidemically in the city, and was soon brought to death's door. Thanks to the intercession of Our Lady of Seven Dolors, she was restored to health, and in gratitude for this boon, she assumed the name, Immaculate Conception, by which title she will be henceforward designated.

In due time after her convalescence, she was charged with the orphans' class and the secretaryship of the local Mother House until 1849. We next find her at St. Elizabeth's with Mother Caron, Superior. During eight consecutive years, Sister Immaculate Conception had charge of the Boarding School and the teaching of classes. Gifted with an un-

questioned talent for forming the mind and heart of youth, she furthermore possessed the precious faculty of winning universal esteem and affection. Her consuming desire of procuring the greater glory of God at all costs, made her ingenious in devising ways and means to inspire her pupils with an intense love of virtue, and to make of each a strong, valiant soul, fully equipped for the inevitable struggles of life. Nor were her labors devoid of success; for among the many young girls whom she formed, several consecrated themselves to the service of God,—a well-merited reward granted the humble religious who desired none other save that of making her beloved Master better known, and loved, and served.

Although almost wholly absorbed in the task of teaching, Sister Immaculate Conception still managed to find time to wait upon her cherished poor, to visit the sick and to lend a willing hand in the hard labors of the day.



In 1857, a newer and broader field of action opened out before Sister Immaculate Conception. Delegated officer of the Hospice St. Joseph, and supervisor of the day-pupils at the St. Alexis Orphanage, the direction of

the candidates, desiring to familiarize themselves with the works of the Institute by a short stay in the house previous to entering the novitiate, was likewise confided to her. In spite of her numerous activities, she maintained, at all times, a calm and dignified exterior. Her punctuality to the exercises, fidelity to the least observance, and the humble submission she always manifested with regard to Superiors, were all so many wonderful sources of edification to her companion Sisters.

At the close of a retreat preached by Monseigneur Bourget in 1863, Sister Immaculate Conception was made General Directress of Classes. From its inception in 1844, the work of teaching had taken ample proportions in the Institute; but it had need of wise regulation to correspond fully to the noble aim which had inspired it. Our holy Founder, drew up the basic rules, which are still retained among us as the priceless *Vade Mecum* of those who are called to the instruction of youth. No one was better qualified than the new Directress of Studies to second the designs of the saintly prelate on this point, and to carry out his episcopal ordinances. She acquitted herself of her duties with such care and precision

that her ultimate success was assured. Rendered more stable and effective by the introduction of safe methods, and placed under the experienced direction of a Foundress Mother, the work of education in the Institute, received from the highest authority a sanction which became its tower of strength in the trials and contradictions it had to undergo, ere it could receive the definite approval of Holy Mother Church.

At the epoch of the elections which resulted in the organization of the first General Council of the Community in 1866, Sister Immaculate Conception was chosen local Superior of the Mother House. This charge was particularly onerous at that time, owing to the greater or less perturbation caused by different modifications in the system of administration. The extreme tactfulness and prudence of the wise Superior soon overcame all obstacles, while her gracious and conciliating ways soothed all agitation and won every heart.

Three years later, she exchanged her post for that of Superior at St. Paul of Joliette; but, she was speedily recalled by the Council to fill the office of Secretary General left vacant by the death of Sister Mary of Providence in the month of May, 1870. In this important

position, Sister Immaculate Conception expended her life's energy for twenty-two years. At each of the four general chapters following her nomination, she was re-elected. She retired in 1892, to prepare herself for the Last Call which came within two years.

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We have rapidly sketched the diverse periods of a beautifully fruitful career in its outward activities. Were our narration to close at this point, what has gone before might prove ineffective by its seeming monotony. In truth, every religious life presupposes a reserve fund of supernatural riches from whence it draws its sustenance, and wherein the secret of its marvellous progress in things spiritual, is kept carefully hidden. The humblest of our fellow-Sisters, living alongside us in positions more or less obscure, giving to her employment the full measure of her devotedness, to her neighbor, the bright example of her truly virtuous conduct and to her God the love and service of persevering good-will,—such a soul, we repeat, may appear simple and of little worth to the shallow-minded,—who only value good works according to their external form. But, on searching beneath the outward covering,

one discovers inexhaustible lessons secreted, like the golden mother-lode in the furthest recesses of the rock, traceable only by the tiny glittering veins upon the surface, and growing richer the deeper one delves.

Let us therefore complete the precious life-study of our cherished Sister Immaculate Conception by penetrating, as best we may, the sacred precincts of her interior castle.

The principal scene of the activities of this worthy religious differed somewhat from that of her first companions. For the major part of her life, she was called upon to renounce personal contact with her beloved poor, the beauty of whose intimate service had so irresistibly drawn her to sacrifice the brilliant ideals of her youth. Although obedience assigned her to another field of labor, still the burning fires of zeal and devotedness, consuming her heart for them, were to be none the less ardent, none the less profitable to her Institute.

After a rich apostolate of fourteen years as teacher, the esteemed Secretary General found herself confined within the seemingly narrow limits of ordinary Community life. Well did she know how to avail herself of her closer fraternal relations with its members, and

to give vent to her noble impulses of charity. By example, by word of mouth, or by pen, she exercised a beneficent influence all about her, whilst exerting herself to the utmost to maintain in the Institute that true religious spirit which Monseigneur Bourget had so profoundly impressed upon our Foundress Mothers, and which she possessed in all its pristine vigor.

We shall not here speak of her spirit of order which left no moment of her busy life unaccounted for, and which reigned supreme in her office, nor of her love of work so aptly proved by her deeds. In fact, we have seen her,— Secretary General and sexagenarian as she was,— offer herself to the Superior to wash the dishes or to do the work in the dormitories. These two secondary qualities were but the natural fruit of the two great fundamental virtues from which all others take their root, namely: charity and humility.

Her charity revealed itself on all occasions by kindly proceedings, delicate attentions, and services willingly rendered in so sweet a manner that no one could suspect the effort, the self-denial or the weariness they cost. Sister Immaculate Conception was a real mother to her inferiors and to her companions in office. Her solicitude included their health and personal

comfort, as well as their progress in virtue. Rigorous to herself with regard to her employment of time, she neglected nothing to procure for them some little pleasure or a short period of rest to lessen their fatigues. Did any one complain in her presence of the conduct of others, the good Mother found many reasons to excuse the culprits, or at least to lessen their guilt in some way. This, no doubt, was the key to her power over souls and the reason of the universal confidence she enjoyed.

The fountains of living waters at the Mother House could not furnish quantities sufficient to quench the burning thirst of this ardent soul; so she fared forth to the mission field afar, and continued her loving apostolate by her correspondence, all impregnated with affectionate interest. In her precious letters to the distant houses, Mother Immaculate Conception kept the Sisters informed of all that concerned the Institute or that could serve to cement more strongly the bonds of fraternal union. To all, she addressed words of comfort and encouragement, dictated by her admirable spirit of faith and tending to re-animate their fervor and zeal.

And now, what shall we say of the humility of the venerated Mother? In her chosen

soul where the gifts of nature harmonized so clearly with the brighter ones of grace, there never appeared the slightest shadow of vain pretension. The title of Foundress Mother, far from being a claim to honor, served her rather as a shield; in it, she saw only a stricter obligation to practice higher virtue, an imperative duty to point out the way, and to be in all things, a model to her Sisters. These responsibilities overwhelmed her. All unconscious of her own personal worth, she ceased not to deplore her frailties, and to withdraw herself with scrupulous care from all demonstrations of filial respect. It was touching to hear her speak in accents of truest sincerity of her incapacity, her utter uselessness in the work of the foundation, and the progress of the Institute. Replying one day to congratulations she had received, she wrote: "In order to show forth His glory to better advantage, the Lord makes use of the vilest instruments for His work. Thus He did with regard to your servant, who has no other privilege but to beg God's mercy for having corresponded so ill to His designs. I am happy when any one has the charity to pray for me, as I hope by this means to obtain pardon for my long life of infidelities."

If at any time, through necessity or other

good reasons, the humble religious happened to mention the bitter destitution and trials of the early days of foundation, it was never to glorify herself or to boast of her share. It was always her most earnest endeavor to direct attention to the power and wisdom of God who had elected to choose seven, poor, inexperienced women to accomplish His merciful designs. We may easily conceive the ascendancy such humble conviction gave her over all hearts. Heedful of sparing them the least annoyance, she, nevertheless found ample reason to accuse herself of unkindness and impoliteness towards them and that in terms of confusion and self-abasement all her own.



One of the supreme joys of Mother Immaculate Conception's long life came to her in the year 1889, when she had the inexpressible satisfaction, nay even the glory, of recording in the archives she had been so carefully compiling for nearly thirty years, the authentic and official acts of the temporary approval of our Holy Rules. Three of the Foundress Mothers were yet living at that memorable date. The auspicious event caused them a happiness indescribable, which had its echo in the

letters written on this occasion by the Secretary General. We feel the heart-throbbings of a grateful religious soul in the glowing words traced by her pen. . . . Oh! how dearly she loved those Holy Rules! They had ever been for her a yoke, sweet and light! She had seen them at first, vague in outline, then growing, little by little more distinct, again launching out in a bold, firm style, taking definite form, and receiving the consecration of common usage during many years. Today, she sees each one of those hallowed prescriptions become as so many precious links in a chain that binds her Institute to the Chair of Peter. We can well understand the outburst of enthusiasm which made her exclaim in transports of joy: « Nothing more remains for me but to say my *Nunc dimittis*: now that I have seen our Constitutions approved, O Lord, let Thy servant depart in peace! » But her longing desire was not yet to find its immediate realization. In high Heaven it was decreed that Mother Immaculate Conception should give her religious family five more years of the salutary example of her fidelity to the Holy Rule. Nothing was dearer to her heart than punctuality to the common observances; and to stimulate the exactitude of her Sisters, she preached continually by her silent example.

The smallest detail had its importance in her eyes. Indeed, to the last moment of her existence, she subjected herself to the multiplied renunciations of nature to so great a degree that she earned the title of *the living Rule*.

Ever serious, modest and recollected during the hours of silence, the good Mother knew how to be affable and joyous during the recreation hours. Among the Saints, an interior spirit does not preclude gayety in conversation. On the contrary, the unction of heavenly joy overspreads their souls and disposes them to serve the Divine Master with greater generosity. It makes them taste the sweetness of the liberty of the children of God.

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Relieved of her official duties by the General Chapter of 1892, Mother Immaculate Conception withdrew into the shadow and silence of a retirement she had long desired. She would not, however, spend her days in absolute repose; so the Superiors, gently acceding to her desires, found means of employing her untiring energy by giving her charge of writing the local annals. An office was fitted up for her use in a room adjoining the Community. There the venerable Mother pursued

her intellectual labors in quiet contentment. Her occupation had become so familiar to her by constant practice, that she was able to accomplish much in spite of her advanced age and weakened eyesight.

Writing and prayer were henceforth the delights of her declining days,—above all, holy prayer. At the foot of the altar she passed every moment whose employment was not specifically indicated in the rule. Even in the hours allotted for work, when forced by extreme weakness to stop for a while, she might be seen seated at her desk, piously reciting her rosary.

Mother Immaculate Conception had the ineffable happiness of celebrating with her beloved Institute, the golden jubilee of foundation, the year prior to her death. What sweet emotions thrilled her heart with gladness at this glorious event! In a letter written to all the members of the Community, she feelingly portrayed her sentiments of gratitude towards God and her fraternal charity towards her Sisters. It was truly the melodious death-song of the graceful swan.

The venerable septuagenarian followed the common exercises with her usual punctuality a few months longer; but a total col-

lapse of her vital powers, in the month of May 1894, forced her to go to the Infirmary, and warned her that the hour of departure was soon to strike. Her preparations for the Great Journey were already made: like a prudent virgin, she had wisely laid up a store of the perfumed oil of good works, and so she calmly awaited in deep peace, the coming of her Heavenly Bridegroom. Not long did He tarry to respond to the ardent desires of His chaste Bride who sighed unceasingly for His coming.

On the last day of June, the dying patient received the Sacrament of Extreme Unction with exceeding great fervor, and three days later, at three o'clock in the morning of July third, she rendered her soul to God. Her death, so peaceful and serene, seemed to the grief-stricken mourners, the ideal crowning of a most edifying and regular life; and yet, it was only a pale reflection of the glory that awaits the humble Sister of Charity in the Promised Land where the true servants of God shall reign eternally.

Mother Immaculate Conception, aged seventy-seven years, two months and twelve days, counted fifty-one years, three months and eight days of life in religion. She was the sixth of our Foundress Mothers to leave us for Heaven,

and she carried with her the regrets and veneration of the entire Community. In return, she left us a priceless inheritance, namely: the bright example of her religious virtues to serve as the foundation stone of the Institute. Their daily practice, perpetuated in our midst, will forever be its happiness, the secret of its strength and the pledge of its prosperity.



LA MÈRE CARON

1808 - 1888

IV

MOTHER CARON.

The name of Mother Caron recalls to mind a personage whose interesting traits of character continue to make vivid impressions by their very strength and sweetness, thirty years or more after her death. The influence of her blessed life, so humble, simple and charitable, extends throughout all the phases of our Community's existence down to us of later birth, and it still seems powerful enough to exert its beneficent sway over generations, yet to come, of the Daughters of Mother Gamelin.

A zealous laborer from the first hour of the day, Mother Caron shared from the beginning in the evangelical works of our Foundress Mother; and continued them in the same spirit long after the latter's departure for a better world. In a most interesting volume, Mother Caron's biographer has depicted the part she had in the foundation of our Congregation, together with the details of her life; all of which show forth the radiant beauty of a soul inflamed with the love of God and the

Poor. From the pages of that *Life*, so aptly portrayed by the pen of a grateful and sympathetic admirer, we have copiously drawn material for the present *Sketch*. Like a tiny rivulet meandering hither and yon, may it bring peace and refreshment to souls, or mayhap, point out the way,— and oh, how gladly! — to others loitering still along its flowery banks, and vaguely dreaming of a vocation similar, but as yet shadowy and indistinct.

MOTHER CARON BEFORE HER ENTRANCE
INTO RELIGION.

Emily Caron was born on May 8, 1808, at St. Antoine, Riviere du Loup, a small village in the diocese of Three Rivers. She was brought up, as were the children of nearly all our Canadian families of that period, in solid principles of christian faith and piety. Her early education, begun by the happy hearthside, fortunately found in the local parish school its full development. She thence drew, along with the knowledge of the profane sciences, that nobility of soul and that graceful charm of manner which stamped her every act in after life.

As a child, Mother Caron knew the bitter pangs of poverty ; she had to do her full share

of work to provide for the most pressing needs of the household, and this she did with cheerful willingness until the day she left her father's house to devote herself to teaching school.

A glance upon her career as teacher of the young will enable us to see how, all unknown to herself, she was tending towards the end whither God was slowly but surely leading her.

The Reverend Father Thomas Caron, her cousin, having been appointed pastor of the parish of the Holy Ghost, invited Miss Emily to make her first appearance there as teacher. She accordingly took up her residence at the rectory with her cousin, following him later on to St. Vincent de Paul and to St. Martin, where he successively became pastor. In the modest young school mistress of those far-off days, the future Mother Caron was gradually being moulded on heroic lines. In the class room, she worked in union with the mothers in the moral education of the children confided to her care; she went even beyond the strict letter of the law with regard to her obligations towards them by employing her leisure hours in forming them to manual labor. Whenever there was any service to be rendered, she was always

found willing and obliging. She presided at the exercises of choir-singing for the young girls; filled the office of catechist during the pastor's absence; replaced the sacristan when necessary; visited the sick and became the confidante and true friend of all. But nothing reveals her striking characteristics better than her relations with the poor. Under her direction, the poor children, either orphaned or less well endowed with mentality, were certain of finding help, protection and loving sympathy. For those who could not attend school regularly on account of their extreme poverty or the too great distance, generous hospitality was provided in her cousin's home.

Thus her days, filled with teaching, works of charity and prayer, passed rapidly onward, all signed with the seal of duty well done and virtue nobly practised. At that peaceful epoch of her life, did Miss Emily Caron sometimes dream that a change would one day come into her existence? Of this we know naught; at that time, however, no marks of a religious vocation were apparent. And yet, like clay in the hands of the potter, her soul was being formed in the hands of God. At a given moment, His soft, low whisper reached her ear. Listening intently to that Voice,

sweeter far than the celestial harmonies of angels' countless choirs, and whose echo has reached down through the centuries, divinely troubling souls, arousing heroism and making saints, she heard the selfsame words: «*If thou wilt be perfect . . . come, follow Me!*»⁽¹⁾ How the loving heart of the devoted teacher must have thrilled with joy when she recognized the Master's Call for the first time!

Still, the easy, independent life she had mapped out for herself answered fully to the generous inclinations of her heart towards an apostolate of charity. Her success in teaching, the esteem and confidence she enjoyed, surrounded her with a halo of glory; moreover, even had she been altogether insensible to human praise and flattery, there remained another obstacle to be surmounted. She had already reached the mature age of thirty-five years; at such a period, one does not readily break asunder the bonds of a life time, especially when its days have been pleasantly spent in the performance of self-imposed duties of kindness and benevolence to one's neighbor. Now, to exchange this comparative ease and comfort, and to enter upon an unknown and uncharted path in pursuit of an aim, as yet

(1) Matt. XIX, 21.

but dimly outlined.... Was it not an illusion?... Louder grew the Voice calling her, stronger and more insistent the words: «*Come, Follow Me!*» Very soon the day dawned and the shadows fell away. The decision of her spiritual director, confirmed by the wise and prudent authority of her Bishop, dispelled all incertitude, and on the sixteenth day of March, 1843, Miss Emily Caron turned her face towards the asylum soon to be known as the Institute of Providence.

NOVITIATE AND FIRST YEARS IN THE
RELIGIOUS LIFE.

Our Community existed as yet, only in the mind of the holy Bishop of Montreal, Mgr. Ignatius Bourget. For its foundation, he patiently awaited the arrival of the chosen few who were to serve as corner-stones. Seven were directed to him by God's grace, and one of this number was Miss Caron. Assembling on March sixteenth, they immediately began a novena, spending the three last days in retreat. On March twenty-fifth, they received the holy habit at the hands of Monseigneur Bourget, and began their novitiate.

The hour of trial had struck for the seven heroic victims of charity! In those days

of fiery tribulation, the exalted virtue of Sister Caron revealed itself most admirably. Each religious formation has, as we know, its individual stamp in the renunciation of self; and, the rigid test our novice underwent bore a deeper imprint of holy immolation than the others. The beginnings of a work, where everything must be organized, are always difficult. Besides, had not the Foundress Mothers of our Institute to acquire for themselves in a supereminent degree, the spirit proper to their vocation, the virtues and even the natural qualities which they were in honor bound to transmit to their future companions? Were they not destined to serve as models to their followers?

Sister Caron understood well the crucifying grandeur of her task, and she resolutely set to work. From the first day of her novitiate, she embraced the practices of the spiritual life with all the ardor of her soul, and she subjected herself to the religious discipline they implied,—not by written rule,—but by the direction of the venerable founder, Monseigneur Bourget. He was ably seconded by the ecclesiastical superior, the Very Reverend Canon John Charles Prince, who guided the infant Community with a strong and somewhat austere hand.

In a material way, Sister Caron was gifted with talents most suitable to the different offices of the house, such as the kitchen, laundry, sewing, etc. The hours she loved best, however, were those when she was permitted to go abroad and pour forth the treasures of goodness and compassion wherewith her heart overflowed. At such times she left the house in the morning, and with a basket on her arm, she went begging from door to door, distributing here and there as needed, not only bread for corporal food, but likewise, words of good cheer to rekindle hope and trust.

A year of such rude apprenticeship sufficed to form the fervent novice in the art of suffering, of self-forgetfulness and of devotedness to others. Her final oblation was set for the twenty-ninth of March, 1844, feast of the Compassion of Our Lady. The ceremony was solemn and impressive, made more so by the simple majesty of the occasion than by the modest adornment of the humble sanctuary. Before the consecration of the Brides-Elect, the chaplain of the Asylum read aloud the Bishop's pastoral letter which conferred on the little Society its canonical and religious existence by means of the Rule of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. Then Mon-

seigneur Bourget, in the name of the Church, received the individual vows of the seven first Sisters of Providence.

Oh, how the soul of Mother Caron must have thrilled with joy at that moment! She was not carried away by an impulse of enthusiasm, nor had she, in a sudden outburst, immolated her whole being to God; she saw ahead of her many painful duties and hours of sharpest agony. Monseigneur Bourget had concealed nothing from his beloved Daughters. They knew that the world,—not that of the down-trodden and oppressed whose cup of sorrow they were privileged to sweeten,—but that other, condemned by Our Lord, would blame their conduct, accuse them of folly and reject them with contempt. . . . *But the disciple is not above His Master.* (1)

Vainly shall we look for self-seeking in the consecration of Mother Caron; fully detached from all personal gratification, she thinks only of turning towards God. And, as God has His accredited representatives, namely, the poor, the destitute—in fact, all the pitiful army of forgotten and despised sufferers; so it is to them her heart now turns, and to them henceforward shall her whole life belong. Yes! she

(1) Matt. X, 24.

gave herself entirely to God, not for the purpose of tasting the sweets of heavenly contemplation; but in the utter deprivation of every comfort, by the ministry of her active charity, to spread abroad the good odor of Jesus Christ in the midst of a careless, indifferent and wicked world. This had ever been her highest ambition, and because, today, God realizes her cherished dream, she may well give free vent to her transports of joy, and chant her canticle of praise in the words of the Royal Psalmist: *Thou hast held me by Thy right hand; and by Thy will Thou hast conducted me, and with Thy glory Thou hast received me.* (1)

Behold our Mother Caron at last, a Daughter of Charity, Servant of the Poor! Let us now consider how she fulfills the duties of her new station in life. The day after her profession, March 30, she is elected treasurer of the little Community, and she has to face life's stern realities. The meagreness of the resources at her command is often the cause of serious embarrassment and grave apprehension; yet, this serves to bring out in higher relief Mother Caron's admirable confidence in Divine Providence. Her firm unwavering trust, almost naïve at times,—and which makes unbe-

(1) Ps. LXXII, 24.

lievers scoff,— certainly obtains miracles. Nevertheless, in spite of the wonderful help she received occasionally to confirm her faith and that of her companions, the worthy treasurer omitted none of the ordinary means; her tact, prudence and rare initiative, forestalled all difficulties and provided for every need.

SISTER CARON, SUPERIOR AT ST. ELIZABETH.

Five years later, obedience assigned Sister Caron as Foundress and Superior of the new mission at St. Elizabeth. The Sisters no sooner took possession of the convent than its doors swung outward to receive the orphans and the aged poor. The work of education was also begun, but the predominant note of the establishment was its active exercise of charity towards the unfortunate. The welfare of the poor is the continual occupation of the Superior. All her energies tend towards their betterment. Like another Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, she gives her bed to a poor woman, and contents herself with a miserable straw pallet for her own use. She harbors the aged deprived of shelter; by sheer force of patience and untiring effort, she succeeds in teaching the elements of religion to partial imbeciles, who, until her coming had had no instruction whatever.

After well-filled days where not a moment is lost, she shortens her hours of sleep in cold, mid-winter nights to keep the fires burning in the great stoves so that all might feel comfortable on rising.

Sister Caron had spent about three years at St. Elizabeth's when God called her to another post. Over a wider domain was she, henceforth, to extend her zeal and devotedness.

MOTHER CARON AS SUPERIOR GENERAL.

Mother Gamelin, the most worthy Foundress and first Superior of the Institute, was called to her eternal reward on the twenty-third day of September, 1851, to the universal regret of her sorrowing Daughters. The general elections chose the Superior of St. Elizabeth, whose virtues and talents were highly appreciated, as successor in the government of the Institute. In humble submission to God's most Holy Will, Mother Caron diffidently accepted the heavy burden of superiorship, knowing only too well the responsibilities the office entailed.

Her great charity soon found ample opportunity for action. A disastrous fire broke out in the city on July eighth, 1852, devastating

the whole St. Lawrence Quarter, and a part of the Quebec suburbs. The Cathedral, the Bishopric and all its dependencies were destroyed. The Providence Asylum stood alone in the midst of the general ruin, a silent but eloquent proof of divine protection due to the trusting prayers of the Superior General. In grateful acknowledgment of this signal favor, Mother Caron, aided by her Daughters, hastened to the relief of the starving victims, and fed thousands who had lost their all in the dreadful conflagration. Two years later in 1854, cholera ravaged the entire city. She again sent her Daughters everywhere to care for the sick and to assist the dying. Powerless to go among the plague-stricken herself, her generous heart knew how to stimulate the ardor of others and to make their heroic deeds of charity a little less difficult.

Mother Caron thirsted for apostolic works. Gladly would she have extended her effective zeal to the farthest confines of the wide, wide world for the succor and evangelization of the poor. Thus do we see blossoming forth under her administration, the distant mission of Chile in South America, and that of Vancouver, Washington, U. S. A. But of the agonies they caused her, we shall not speak! Under her

reign also, the Institution for the Deaf-Mutes made wonderful progress.

These external activities in no wise diminished the interior spirit of the virtuous Mother. She fully realized the ideal of a soul possessing itself in peace and true liberty. With eyes fixed upon duty, she directed the force of her will and the strength of her body, and with the Prophet-King she could say: *My soul is always in my hand.*(1) Her spirit of faith and her trust in God were at all times manifest in her conduct; therefore in these two virtues lies the secret of her remarkable success.

MOTHER CARON, SUPERIOR AT ST. VINCENT DE
PAUL, THEN ASSISTANT GENERAL.

At the expiration of her seven-year term of office as Superior General, Mother Caron left the Mother House to transplant a small colony of the Providence to St. Vincent de Paul. Here the history of the St. Elizabeth Mission was repeated in the renewal of her most touching ministrations of kindness. At every page of her life, we find that 'forgetfulness of self' which connotes devotedness

(1) Ps. CXVIII, 109.

and prepares the way for every kind of heroism. When the slender resources of the house were taxed to the utmost, and there barely remained sufficient food for a single day, the Superior joyfully received all the poor who presented themselves, «in order» as she said, «to force Providence to help us.» And surely enough Providence never failed her! Assistance, unexpected and unforeseen, arrived in time! New benefactors recalled the promises they had made to remember the poor, and, hastening to fulfill them, both the Sisters and the poor were well provided for! Mother Caron, after making her protégées say the pious invocation: «Providence of God, who feedeth the hungry, have mercy on us,» never omitted to add a prayer of thanksgiving to God for their kind protectors. She expressed her heartfelt thanks in such gracious words and winning ways as to charm her compassionate friends and encourage them to return with more gifts.

When the Superior of St. Vincent de Paul returned to the Mother House to fill the position of Assistant General, many a bitter tear was shed. The good Mother, in turn, keenly regretted those who had been her mainstay in trying times,—the Sisters whom she had encouraged, edified and upheld,—and her beloved poor always so near to her heart.

Her dear, dear poor! Later on, it will be her greatest pleasure to send them tokens of her constant affection, and it will always be her delight to speak of them. Her intense compassion astonishes us perhaps; for it may seem that the outcasts of the world, the lowly and the ignorant, the aged and the infirm, are fitter objects for pity than for maternal love. Ah! it is because in them, she has found Christ, the Spouse of her soul, her God! She knows how fascinating it is to love the Lord in the person of His poor, that it is an indescribable sweetness dropping down from Heaven like celestial dew. Again, another reason exists with a more human motive for its source, and it may be compared to that which the husbandman feels when he sees his fields ripening in the harvest. When Mother Caron adopts the unfortunate ones, they are objects of loathing and disgust; but, under her gentle care they gradually become neat and clean in person, nay, attractive and almost lovable, because in the tenderness of her heart she has taught them how to be resigned, meek and contented with their lot. She brought a ray of sunshine to the withered brow of age, and smiles of gladness to childish faces of orphaned little ones grown old before their time; in a word, to all groaning beneath a

crushing weight of sorrow or want, she gave the comfort of her heart's love and sympathy, and taught them the inexpressible sweetness of being the children of God. This was her entire life's work. It was fructified by divine grace, and joy supreme reigned within her soul.

In her new office of Assistant General, Mother Caron will continue to serve her poor, albeit indirectly, by her cordial relations with persons of wealth and distinction, friendly to the Community. St. Vincent de Paul highly recommended this practice to his Daughters as being indispensable for the maintenance of the works of charity. Mother Caron, therefore, availed herself of the benevolence of her prosperous friends with such dignity that neither her disinterestedness nor her efficiency were ever at fault. And how fruitful were her kindly ministrations to numberless persons living in homes where riches and luxury compelled the admiring gaze of the world! The hideous moral wounds, and the scalding tears shed within those gilded palaces of the 'favorites of fortune' could best be told by the valiant Sister of Charity, for she had poured healing balm on the one and had wiped away the bitter tears of the other. The inestimable services Mother Caron rendered every one

drew forth lively tokens of gratitude, and many an offering was placed in her toil-worn hand to aid her in relieving the destitute, and to respond in other ways to the generous impulses of her loyal heart.

MOTHER CARON RE-ELECTED SUPERIOR GENERAL.

At the General Elections of 1872, Mother Caron was again placed at the head of the Institute. The numerical increase of the members and the extension of the works made the charge far more onerous; yet, encouraged by Monseigneur Bourget's promise of help from on high, Mother Caron yielded to the wishes of the Community. Far from seeking a rest, justified perhaps by her sixty-five years, Mother Caron, in imitation of the Saints, and looking upon herself as a useless subject, longed for the opportunity of doing more work for the Master.

At the very beginning of her second term of administration she turned towards her exiled Daughters of the Far West. Strengthened by her confidence in God and the potent prayers of the poor, she undertook the visitation of the distant Western missions in the interest of the souls entrusted to her care. After a long journey, fraught with diverse incidents,

she arrived at our Sisters of the St. Ignatius Mission, Montana. Her coming among them was hailed with the greatest joy. The good Mother brought with her sweet memories of their native land and cherished Institute; above all, the consolations of her wise counsel and the inspiring sight of her beautiful example. Vancouver, Washington, the home of the first foundation, came next in turn. Not a soul was forgotten, from the youngest child of the woods taught by our Sisters to the eldest or holiest nun in the Community; upon each and all, Mother Caron freely poured out the treasures of her heart's love. Throughout that memorable visitation, she presided at new foundations, smoothed away all difficulties, and, by her wise decisions, provided for pressing needs. In very truth she «went about doing good.» Her pathway was marked by deeds of exquisite kindness and goodness, and her memory is to this day held in most grateful veneration.

After an absence, dating from September twenty-fifth, 1872, to October fourteenth, 1873, Mother Caron arrived at the Mother House. Heretofore, we have admired her in the grand undertakings resulting naturally from her pious initiative and the duties of her position.

Let us now study her action in the more restricted limits of the common life. That is where we see the Saints at their best, because in that lowly sphere, enthusiasm has no hold on souls of noble stamp; there, the novelty of natural attraction is dispelled. There, too, we discover the strength of will which unwearingly plods along despite the monotony of every day routine, and there, too, we bow before true and solid virtue.

Fully alive to the needs of her Institute, Mother Caron applied herself to the consolidation of the good works already accomplished, and to the repairing of omissions unavoidable in a hasty first organization. Occupied successively with the foundation of the St. John of God Hospital for the Insane, with an extensive organization for the purpose of raising funds for the construction of the new Cathedral, and with her official visitation of the houses in Canada, she, nevertheless, watched over the minutest details of internal government. Her winning personality inspired confidence, and the most timid Sister could go to her as to the best of mothers. Her Sisters, oh! how she loved them. Her missionary children, no matter how distant their field of labor, were never forgotten; as present to her as though before her eyes, they were gladdened

by her admirable letters brimming over with goodness and love. All unknown to herself, her conduct was the living model proposed to her Sisters for imitation. The fundamental virtues of humility, simplicity and charity which Monseigneur Bourget so ardently desired to see thrive in the hearts of his Daughters of Providence, spoke more eloquently in her actions than in her words.

Far too lengthy would it be to recount here the many proofs of profound humility that, like so many lovely flowers, sprang up along Mother Caron's pathway through life. Never for a moment dreaming that her merit equalled her responsibilities, she was visibly disturbed by the marks of respect bestowed upon her. How joyfully she shared in the tiresome begging tours, and how eagerly she anticipated the scornful refusals that were sure to come at one time or another! «Everything is good,» she would then say, «for a servant of the poor.» Simplicity,—that fair, white blossom of holy humility,—Mother Caron possessed it in its sweetest, most attractive form; and, in return, it preserved her from vain ostentation always seeking concealment beneath the appearance of virtue. The secret of the wonderful influence the worthy Superior exerted over all

about her did not lie in her efficient management or rare ability, although these were acknowledged by every one; nor in her experience so justly prized; nor in her keen, almost supernatural, appreciation of men and things. It lay in her deep humility. None can withstand a virtue that makes its owner forget self for the good of others, that makes such a one meek and lowly towards the meanest and most abject; that makes her ask pardon for the least involuntary fault, or that makes her think of everything and everybody except herself!

MOTHER CARON IN THE LAST YEARS OF HER LIFE.

The six years of Mother Caron's term of Generalship expired in July 1878, and the reins of administration passed into the hands of Mother Amable. The active career of the ex-Superior General was now finished! She had reached her seventy-first year, and her robust constitution was considerably weakened; nevertheless, the Community will have the happiness of possessing her ten years longer, and it will bask in the sunshine of her many virtues. It was meet and fitting that the brilliant light which had so long shone from the heights where God had placed and kept it

burning steadily, should continue the blessed influence of its silent radiance in the shaded valley of obscurity.

Returned to the ranks once more as an humble subject, Mother Caron seemed to forget the many titles which might, perhaps, confer special privileges upon her as her right. Respectful towards authority, faithful to all the observances, she submitted her least wishes to holy obedience, and scrupulously asked the very smallest permissions. Freed now of all responsibility, she will not avail herself of repose in idleness.

At the Residence St. Janvier, she had the consolation of acting for several months in capacity of nurse to Monseigneur Bourget, the holy Founder of our Institute. At Belœil, where she was afterwards sent for her health, she made herself useful, working according to her strength. In 1880, a serious illness forced her to leave Belœil for the Mother House. On growing stronger, she returned to her beloved mission, but was soon recalled and sent to the Providence St. Isidore at Long Point. Submissive as ever, Mother Caron found in the different houses that peace and joy of the heart which seeks God alone. In the calm atmosphere of Community life, surrounded by

her Sisters whom she entertained at the hours of recreation with interesting conversation and witty spiritual repartee, she spent the happiest days of her life.

After dwelling three years at St. Isidore's, a grave attack of paralysis necessitated her return to the Mother House in June 1883. From that date her life was a continued series of restorations and relapses. Only too fortunate to have her again with them, the Sisters lavished upon her every care and attention that filial love could suggest. That comforting sense of sincere, heartfelt affection was all that remained to the venerable septuagenarian of the good things of earth. In the pilgrimage of life, there come to the soul moments of bitter anguish which, in the whirlwind of passing events, are brushed aside; not, however, without leaving the victim a prey to melancholy. It is the hour when, carried away by the vivid impressions of approaching old age with all its attendant train of miseries and weaknesses, one sees only the disheartening vista of useless days ahead. . . How painful that instant must have been to Mother Caron, the intrepid and faithful worker in Christ's Vineyard! Yet, she well knew the infinitely precious rôle of suffering and prayer that was to be henceforth her own!

On her bed of pain, Mother Caron kept occupied either in prayer or at work. She would make use of the last glimmer of life and light to offer it as 'an evening sacrifice' to the Lord. Unable to use any member of her body but her hands, she would knit, at least, for her dear poor! Oh! noble passion of her life! It will rule her till her latest, dying breath!

While she held the office of Superior, her wardrobe had to be closely watched, as she would secretly draw from it for her protégées, and be delighted to go destitute herself. Although she had a thousand little ways of hiding her liberalities, it was an understood thing that her great heart must give and give again. With advancing years this need grew apace. The Sisters delighted in keeping her supplied with the means of making others happy. The numerous little gifts they made her, quickly found their way into the hands of her beloved poor. At the Hospice St. Joseph, near by the Mother House, there were many good old men and women whom the dear Mother visited regularly as long as she was able, and she always brought them something in the line of clothing, medals, scapulars, and even sweets! Those visits were numbered among the last pleasures of her sunset years.

Meanwhile the dread scourge of paralysis was slowly pursuing its course of destruction; the body refused its service longer to the still valiant, ardent soul. From the month of January 1888, until the following August, Mother Caron endured a long physical martyrdom accompanied by mental suffering as well. God permitted this, not only to give the virtue of His faithful servant the full splendor of its coronation, but likewise,—and we love to think it so,—that her patience, her spirit of prayer and her absolute abandonment to His Holy Will might prove a fruitful lesson to her Sisters. In the days gone by, she had spoken to them with wonderful tenderness of the mysteries of the cross, and of the love of a God crucified for us. But mere words were not sufficient. Example was needed to make the saintly Mother's lessons effective. Most eloquently and persuasively was she henceforth to give it in her own person!

Three weeks prior to her demise, Mother Caron was removed to the new Mother House just completed, at Fullum Street. Another wise design of Divine Providence, who thus deigned to bless that sacred cloister of suffering, where in future times, great numbers of Sisters, sick unto death, should come to spend in sol-

itude the long, weary days of their living crucifixion.

In the evening of August thirteenth, 1888, the professed Sisters assembled around their dying Mother's bed to recite the *Te Deum*. After all, what more appropriate words could be chosen to express their sorrowful transports of gratitude, and those of their cherished Mother as well, at the supreme moment when her noble life was drawing to its close, crowned by a death so sweet and beautiful to behold. They were but the prelude of that eternal hymn of thanksgiving, the humble servant of the poor was soon to entone in a Paradise of Bliss. At the versicle: *In Thee, O Lord, have I hoped: let me not be confounded forever*, Mother Caron peacefully expired...

A large number of Sisters, at that date in annual retreat at the Mother House, had the consolation of viewing for the last time, the venerable features of the one who had sustained them for many a long year by her counsels and example.

The funeral service was held on August seventeenth in the presence of a vast number of people, clergymen and nuns from all parts, who had personally known and revered the dear

departed Mother. Great too, was the concourse of the poor. They thronged the chapel, sad and disconsolate. From high Heaven, Mother Caron must have cast a compassionate look of tenderness and pity upon the aged, the orphan, the deaf-mute and other afflicted ones gathered there to honor her memory. And verily, they were the chief mourners at her obsequies. Moreover, were not they the reason of their beloved Mother's exaltation in the mansions of the Blessed, — the brightest jewels in her crown of glory?

O God, grant that we, the successors and children of Mother Caron, may serve You faithfully beneath the same standard. Grant that we may follow in the luminous pathway she has trodden. To us may it be given to understand the vital truth that it is You Whom we serve in the poor! You in the aged! You in the sick! You in the orphan! Because in the days of Your mortal life You said: *As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to Me.* (1)

(1) Matt. XXV, 40.



LA MÈRE ZOTIQUE

1806 - 1893

MOTHER ZOTIQUE.

If virtue is more or less admired and esteemed according to its degree of detachment from created things, how deserving of the highest praise must be the edifying career of the one who is still revered among us as, « Good Mother Zotique. »

Agathe Séné, — as she was known in the world — was born at Pointe-aux-Trembles, near Montreal, on September fifth, 1806, of Paul Séné and Désanges Léonard. The home that sheltered her cradle had been abundantly blessed by the Lord; and numerous children, like young olive branches, graced the patriarchal family table. Thanks to the teaching of a pious mother and the peaceful influence of country life, the young girl's soul readily absorbed the strong virtues and the holy practices so highly prized in her happy home. She early learned to relish the charms of piety. In after years, no joys were equal, in her estimation, to the pure and innocent ones of her childhood. Best of all, she loved the twilight hour when,

the day's work done, all assembled around the cheerful fire in the wide chimney corner, and in perfect union of heart and soul, joined in pleasant talk and gay amusements. Her attraction for a calm, quiet life preserved the young maiden from the multiplied dangers of the world, and enabled her to pass unscathed through the perilous period of youth.

In 1836, probably after the death of her parents, Miss Séné went to reside with her younger sister, Miss Emily, in Montreal. The latter followed Miss Séné into the novitiate and made her profession in our Institute under the name of Sister Emily. In the meantime, both lived with their married sister, Madam Hurtibise, earning their living as seamstresses. Their residence was situated near the Cathedral; and, as they took no part in worldly reunions, they were soon remarked by their regular attendance at all the church offices. Monseigneur J. J. Lartigue, Bishop of Montreal, who esteemed the Hurtibise family very highly, assumed the charge of their spiritual direction in addition to many others of the same neighborhood. A simple incident proves the great degree of interest he had in his penitents. Miss Agathe Séné, although never vain about her toilet, decided one day

to follow the prevailing fashion to the extent of wearing a wide, embroidered collar trimmed with bright colored ribbon. Her holy director frowned upon such vanity and forbade her to wear it. The fact, trivial in itself, fills us with admiration of the obedience practised on this occasion, and on many others no doubt as well, by the future Mother Zotique. It also gives us an insight of the mortified, regular life she led in the world.

Mgr. Ignace Bourget, the successor of Mgr. Lartigue in 1840, soon learned to value the worth of the two Séné sisters now transferred to his spiritual guidance. Having in mind the foundation of a new Institute for the care of the poor, he invited Miss Agathe to enter the ranks of those who were to become its foundation stones. Without the least hesitation, and yet with a great deal of merit, she quickly responded to the good Bishop's behest. The friendly relations she had already contracted for some time past with the inmates of the *Yellow House* made her fully aware of the painful obligations the new Sisters of Charity were destined to assume: but, she was too submissive to question the call of God, or to seek to withdraw herself. Besides, when we consider that divine grace is measured out in proportion to the extent of sacrifices required,

we shall not be astonished to find Miss Agathe Séné, at the age of thirty-six, courageously taking the decisive step and entering religion under peculiarly difficult conditions.

Three young women had preceded her into Madam Gamelin's Refuge. They were the Misses Madeleine Durand, Margaret Thibodeau and Emily Caron. Those following her were the Misses Victoire Larocque, Justine Michon and Delphine Payement. The latter left the novitiate; but the mystic number, seven, was kept intact by the unexpected entrance of the Foundress, Madam Gamelin, into the little society.

Miss Séné and her companions, while waiting for the day of their investiture, adopted a modest uniform, consisting of a white bonnet and cape, which they wore during the preparatory novena. On March twenty-fifth, 1843, in the small oratory of the *Yellow House*, the first taking of the Holy Habit of the Sisters of Charity of Providence was recorded. Mgr. Ignace Bourget presided at the humble but significant ceremony. After announcing their new mission to the novices, the venerated Founder continued as follows: *Fear not, little flock; you will have crosses, you must expect them; but grace will never fail you.*

Events soon justified those first words of the august prelate, and in their light we see how magnificently his promise of divine grace was realized. Mockery and criticism abounded on the one hand, while on the other, interior sufferings arose in the secret depths of their souls, with anguish of heart, disquieting doubts, and weariness of body; yet, nothing of all this could shake the vocation of those fervent novices. Sister Séné had to share the common lot, and she did it with a generosity worthy of the holy ambition that had determined her to flee from the world. Knowing only too well the fatal results to be entailed upon a Community by the slightest weakness on the part of its first members, she applied herself with unflinching constancy to acquire the virtues of her state, and a practical love for the holy Rules mapped out by the pious Founder.

Let us not think, however, that the fortitude of our Foundress Mothers in their trials never knew the shadow of defeat nor the strengthening advantage of great struggle. On the contrary, it was by constantly repeated efforts that they did violence to nature, thus rendering doubly glorious for themselves and consoling for us, the triumph of their virtue. Later in life, Mother Zotique related how in the days of her novitiate, in an hour of utter

dejection, when her courage was on the point of giving way, she found in the wise counsel of Monseigneur Bourget, a stimulant for renewed ardor. And, mayhap, this occurred more than once. God never drives the roots of virtue deeper into the human heart than when He delivers it over to terrible conflicts with temptation. Thus was Mother Zotique's vocation rendered trebly secure. She received the necessary vigor to withstand the most bitter contradictions, and she was given the practical means of becoming a true lover of the cross, a docile pupil to the crucifying lessons of Calvary. On that rocky summit, in union with the Mother of Sorrows, the pious novice prepared herself for the religious immolation that would place her forever under the sweet yoke of Jesus Christ, her Lord and Master.

During that year of stern probation, the most serious stage in our religious history, the Institute, like a young sapling, had been violently shaken by the adverse winds of tribulation; but, far from tearing up its frail rootlets, they only made them take a firmer hold. Henceforth, with the continued help of divine grace, the Institute could bid defiance to still wilder tempests. The pious Founder, hesitating no longer, willingly received the vows of the first seven Sisters of Charity of Providence on

the Feast of the Compassion of Mary, March twenty-ninth, 1844.



Sister Séné, relying more than ever on God alone, and bound to His service by a free and voluntary act, could that day repeat with the utmost abandonment, the words of the Master to His Heavenly Father: *Behold, I come O Lord, to do Thy Will.* Docile and submissive under obedience, meek and humble in commanding, she spread abroad, whithersoever she went, the good odor of Jesus Christ. In the first assignment of offices, she received those of the sewing-room, the laundry and the infirmary. In all probability, they were a continuation of what she had hitherto been doing. Of a strong constitution and imposing stature, she naturally had a prominent share in the forced labors of the foundation period. In after years, the young Sisters grouped about her, will love to hear her tell of the privations, makeshifts and actual penury of those memorable days. Their mere remembrance always evoked sentiments of gratitude in her soul together with sincere affection for the Community.

In addition to the above-named offices, Sister Séné was shortly afterward charged with

the care of the aged and infirm, or sick priests, a work added by Monseigneur Bourget as a choice blossom to the bright garland of charity already adorning our young Institute. The precincts of the Asylum having grown too small for its many different works, a house was secured in 1845 to lodge the ecclesiastical boarders with Sister Séné as their nurse. The new establishment was known as the Hospice St. Joseph. Her only assistant, at first, was an elderly person, scarcely able to do the work; so Sister Séné had to be in turn, nurse, cook, laundress and housemaid. Exhausted with fatigue at the end of each day's labor, the valiant religious never complained of her task; she resumed her duties on the morrow with unabated vigor and calmness of temper, surrounding her venerable patients with every mark of filial respect and maternal solicitude.

Two months of such intense activity caused her strength to give way, and a serious illness necessitated her return to the Mother House where her precious life was for a time nearly despaired of. Our dear Sister received the last sacraments. She quickly recovered, however, and soon resumed, with her old time vigor, all the duties of a true servant of the poor.

In 1847, we find her among the orphaned children of the Irish Immigrants cruelly cast upon our shores, and dying by thousands of the terrible typhus fever. Stricken by the scourge herself, Sister Séné's strong constitution triumphed over the dread malady. In thanksgiving for the favor of restored health, and at the suggestion of Monseigneur Bourget, she took the name of the blessed martyr, Saint Zotique, whose recently acquired relics were amongst the most highly prized treasures of the Cathedral.

Stationed once more at the Hospice St. Joseph, Mother Zotique outdid herself in caring for the illustrious Bishop of Montreal and the two clergymen who had fallen victims to their zeal while ministering to the plague-stricken refugees.

The desolating epoch of 1847, emblazoned in our nation's history in bright, golden letters of charity, was soon followed by another, none the less heart rending. The plague of cholera that swept over America in 1849 awakened new deeds of heroism. The various religious orders, faithful to their calling, renewed their acts of devotedness in the service of suffering humanity. Nor was Mother Zotique the last at the post of danger and sacrifice. After caring

for the outside patients for a time, she was sent to Laprairie to nurse her stricken Sisters in religion. She returned to the Hospice St. Joseph after the passing of the epidemic.

The terrible conflagration of 1852, having reduced to ashes the whole St. Lawrence Quarter and a part of the Quebec Suburb including the Cathedral and the episcopal residence, the priests of the St. Joseph Hospice offered their place to Monseigneur Bourget for a temporary refuge while they in turn, were transferred to St. Isidore, Long Point. Mother Zotique followed them thither in her capacity as Superior of the house. Six years later, she was elected counsellor of the Community. From 1860 onward, she was charged with the different missions of St. James Residence, Hospice St. Joseph,—when the clergy returned in 1864,—and St. Henry of Mascouche. The latter mission prides itself on having had the worthy Foundress Mother stationed there as Superior for eight years. During that period she undertook the enlargement of the convent by the advice of Monseigneur Bourget, who saw how cramped the Sisters and their poor were for lack of room. For Mother Zotique such an undertaking was a source of great alarm and keen anxiety. She had no

tact for construction work, and little energy to overcome those obstacles that generally prove a stimulant to others in combating difficulties. But with Monseigneur's assurance of heavenly protection and her own confidence in God,—founded on the solid rock of obedience to Superiors,—victory was hers. Absolutely without resources of any kind, or rather with the treasury of Divine Providence at her disposal, the Superior resolutely set to work. The new home for the poor was finally completed; yet, no one could tell who contributed most to the work, whether the workmen by their labor, or Mother Zotique and her Sisters by their prayers and self abnegation. Without doubt, it was the fruit of both the one and the other, inasmuch as the second factor is always indispensable to the success of good works.

Mother Zotique was sixty-eight years of age when she left the mission of Mascouche in 1874 to assume charge of the Sacred Heart Hospice, on Mansfield Street. This house, opened for the relief of the sick clergymen of the Bishopric, afforded the Sisters in charge of the Cathedral sacristy a residence somewhat nearer than the Mother House. It was closed shortly after the retirement of Mgr. Bourget at Sault-au-Récollet. The venerable prelate, having received

his discharge from the government of the Diocese of Montreal, his Chapter desired to offer him a dwelling place commensurate with his rank and dignity. His feeble health required a secluded retreat, abundance of fresh air and absolute quiet. These three vital requirements were found in a large and commodious residence at the Sault-au-Récollet, a short distance from Montreal, donated to the Bishopric by Mgr. Janvier Vinet. The house and grounds were accordingly blessed in June, 1877, and christened *Residence St. Janvier*. Mother Zotique was sent thither as Superior with two companions. What ineffable joy it was for her devoted, loving heart to be able to spend the last active years of her life in tenderly caring for the good Father and worthy Bishop who had guided her in the paths of religion. No one was better qualified than she for the noble and laborious functions of her new charge; neither could any one be happier in the performance of her sacred duties towards her illustrious patient. Mother Zotique assuredly lived over again the years of her religious childhood in the service of him whom she looked upon as a saint, and considered as a father. In the glowing sunset of his declining years, Monseigneur Bourget found in his apostolic heart all the burning accents of his youth-

ful ardor; and, on those who lived beneath the charming influence of his virtuous sway, he bestowed the pious lessons and wise counsels that had formerly been the beacon light to guide the faltering steps of our Foundress Mothers at the commencement of the Institute.

In the happy environment of the Sault-au-Récollet, Mother Zotique was not destined, however, to remain for a great length of time. The respectful attention of the acting Superiors, always on the watch where the venerable Elders were concerned, judged that the time had come to provide a suitable rest for those who had generously used the full measure of their strength in behalf of the Community. Consequently, Mother Zotique was recalled from the Residence St. Janvier in August 1879. Although forced by advancing years to retire from active life, she would, nevertheless, continue to serve the interests of God and souls by giving to all about her admirable examples of the most exalted virtue.



As may be seen from the foregoing details, Mother Zotique's rôle in the Institute was not one of the least important. And what most

astonishes us from the present point of view is the unostentatious manner in which she acquitted herself of her manifold duties. Faithful to the slightest obligation of the religious life, she never attempted to outshine others by the brilliancy of her rare virtue or the nobility of her actions. Without exaggeration or self-seeking, her piety consisted in doing good silently and constantly, just as it presented itself in her daily round of duties. It would be difficult to determine which of her good works were the most meritorious, or what period of her long life was the most useful. Never deviating from the lines traced out for the common life, Mother Zotique sought perfection in doing good for God's sake. Her whole conduct enhanced the lowliness of simple, everyday duties well done, far better than the most eloquent discourse. A model in all things to her Sisters, she made herself their servant in the true sense of the word, as well as in the title—Sister Servant—which was borne by all Superiors of our houses in her time. Those who lived with this beloved Foundress Mother could never forget those blessed days of the distant long ago, when they experienced at leisure the delicious fruits of her incomparable sweetness of character. Her little community was a happy family, lovingly united beneath

the eye of God where each one felt perfectly at home. In intimate conversation, her soul poured itself forth like soothing balm on the hearts of her Sisters, and in hearkening to her voice, even the most indifferent soon became her affectionate children. Fully verified in her person were the words: *Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land.* Here, Heaven is doubtless meant; for God manifestly wishes to grant the meek and humble of heart in this world,—the land of the living,—a foretaste of future reward, by giving them the power to reign over hearts by their winning personality and graciousness of manner. From the very cradle of the Institute, the gift of inspiring confidence possessed by Sister Séné was acknowledged by her associates. Madam Gamelin felt its marvelous ascendancy and proved it by making Mother Zotique the intimate confidante of all her sorrows and her joys.

Notwithstanding her quiet simplicity, Mother Zotique could not conceal the dominant trait of her life from her Sisters. Her extreme goodness of heart was imprinted on her many virtues and it beamed upon her countenance. She never dreamed that any one could impose upon her so far as to betray her confidence or act contrary to duty. Her idea was false

in this respect. It was the one discordant note in the harmony of her beautiful career; yet, it had its advantage. Each and every soul is marked with some imperfection here below, and if there is one worth tolerating, should it not be that of being *too good*? The saints, no doubt, are frequently charged with a like excess. Mother Zotique's perfect serenity may be regarded as the echo of her peaceful childhood spent beneath the guardianship of thoroughly christian parents. To the very last days of her life, she preserved that engaging evenness of temper and peace of heart that so attracted every one, and rendered community life so sweet and pleasant for all in her company.

On Mother Zotique's return from the Sault-au-Récollet, her Superiors permitted her to choose a place of rest in any of the houses, suggesting among others, the St. Vincent de Paul Salle d'Asile, Visitation Street. Out of deference for the wishes of the Superiors, she immediately accepted the latter place. The Sisters of the Providence Asylum were much aggrieved at her decision; they reproached her tenderly, and begged her to return to them. In their opinion, the Mother House was the only suitable location for the retirement of the venerable Elders. Deeply affected by such

marks of affection, the worthy septuagenarian speedily conformed to their desires, and came to dwell in the Providence Asylum, there to abide in solitude and prayer while awaiting the summons to arise and rest eternally in her Father's Home.

Extremely delicate in her dealings with others, Mother Zotique practised fraternal charity in all its degrees. Thus in 1881, acting under the impulse of that exquisite goodness of heart so natural to her, she manifested simply to her Superiors the desire she felt to go and stay with Mother Caron at St. Isidore's, Long Point, where the latter lived in seclusion after her many long years of administration as Superior General. Sorely oppressed by many anxieties, the good Mother needed to be cheered and comforted, and who could do this better than Mother Zotique? The Superiors granted her request with the greatest pleasure.

The two venerated Foundress Mothers dwelt four years at St. Isidore's, spending peacefully together the evening hours of their precious existence. It was beautiful to see how closely bound they were by the ties of friendship. On Mother Caron's part, a multitude of kind attentions, anxious cares and solicitude,

betraying the mother and watchful Superior who makes herself the tender guardian of her Sisters. While Mother Zotique, on her side was the affectionate, loyal friend, the sister with the charming ways and the unfailing fund of good humor that made her like unto the sweet angel guardian of the home and hearth-side. Mother Zotique remained a year or more at St. Isidore's after the departure of her cherished companion. Her presence there was looked upon as a signal favor, and every one blessed God for having given them, in her person, a living copy of the fundamental virtues of the Institute.

Mother Zotique was transferred to the St. John of God Hospital in 1887, when the St. Lawrence overflowed its banks and threatened St. Isidore's with total destruction. Soon after her arrival, she fell dangerously ill, and calmly prepared for death. To the untold joy of all, she recovered once more, and was able to return to the Providence Asylum in June 1887. Joyful and serene as she had ever been in the days of her greatest strength and activity, so was she found to be in life's decline, captivating all hearts by the charm of her amiable virtue.

At the completion of the new Mother

House on Fullum Street, Mother Zotique was cordially invited to take up her abode in the spacious infirmary prepared expressly for the sick Sisters and the venerable Elders of the Community. It was to be the last station of her lifelong journey. Her days sped rapidly by under the loving care of her devoted nurse, Sister Philip Beniti. The latter had made her entrance into religion leaning on the strong, right arm of good Mother Zotique, then Superior. Now, Time reversed the order, and the grateful aspirant had, in turn, become the firm support of her aged protectress. We may easily picture to ourselves the tender, filial care she lavished upon her, and with what gentleness she guided the frail form, bent beneath the weight of years, whithersoever she would go. In return for the sweetness and charity of His handmaiden, God permitted her to find a part of her reward in the choice blossoms of true friendship that sprang up along her path, and that caressed her so gently with their fragrance on her way to the tomb.

Mother Zotique suffered with weakened eyesight in her last years; but her hearing remained very acute, and her intellectual faculties were bright to the end. She seemed to forget her eighty-six years when playing her

favorite game of «Perfection» at the recreation hour which she enlivened by her excellent conversational powers.

In 1891, a severe stroke of paralysis, followed by another in the space of a twelve-month, made it clear to all that her precious days were numbered. The second attack violently disturbed a constitution already enfeebled by age; but, before calling her Home, the Lord reserved one supreme joy to His beloved Spouse; namely, that of assisting in person at the grand Jubilee festival of the fiftieth year of foundation which was held in the opening days of June 1893. The triduum of thanksgiving that consecrated so memorable an event, fortunately occurred in time to be the crowning glory of her singularly beautiful religious career. Mother Zotique had now nothing more to live for, nor could any greater earthly joy be hers. At the close of the celebrations, she frankly expressed her innermost feelings on the subject thus: «I don't know how we are made; this day so ardently longed for leaves me in total indifference. I am even tired and anxious for it to finish.» Yes, it will finish as will the few remaining ones. They will vanish forever, —then the Day that knows no shadow, weariness or decline will dawn unto Life Eternal!

Three short months after the Golden Jubilee festivities, on the twenty-sixth of August, Mother Zotique was again severely stricken. This time she received the consoling sacrament reserved by Holy Mother Church for her children on the threshold of eternity. A slight reaction set in but it was too sudden to prove lasting. Complete paralysis soon rendered the patient utterly helpless, yet her mind remained clear. Unable to move hand or foot, and altogether speechless, the good Mother was true to herself to the very last. With the same unalterable kindness and goodness, she would feebly smile upon her attendants when she could no longer express the grateful feelings of her noble heart. The three days prior to her death were intensely painful to the dear patient. Whenever the infirmarian gave her the care her condition required, great tears would roll down her cheeks but not a moan would escape her lips. Sanctified by suffering, comforted by the visit of Monseigneur Fabre, Bishop of Montreal, and purified by a last absolution, our beloved Mother Zotique sweetly yielded her soul to God on the twelfth day of September, 1893, at forty-five minutes past two in the morning. She had completed her eighty-seventh year just seven days before, and had filled out a religious

career of fifty years and six months. Often in life she was heard to say: «*Oh ! how blessed are the dead who fall on the good side.*» That she is one of that favored number no one can for a moment doubt.

Beside her modest coffin in the Community room, there assembled the professed Sisters, the novices, the aged, the orphans, the deaf-mutes and the pupils of the surrounding houses. Tears and sorrowful regrets mingled with fervent prayers about the mortal remains of one who had passed through the world, spreading peace and joy in all hearts. Her features lost none of their serenity in death. The same sweet smile that had always wreathed her expressive face in life, gave a more sublime touch to the majesty which the Angel of Death confers on the greater number he looks upon.

The funeral services were held in the Mother House Chapel on September fourteenth. A large number, both of the clergy and laity, gathered to pay a last tribute of homage and veneration to the humble Sister of Charity, and to exalt the lowliness of an existence wholly devoted to the happiness and welfare of fellow-beings, exiles like herself in this valley of tears. In her lifetime, Mother

Zotique accomplished no extraordinary works. Indeed, her special care was to allow naught but the defective side of her good deeds appear to the eyes of men so that the heavenward side might shine more brightly before God. But He who loves to justify men before His Father, delights likewise in confirming His promises here below. Viewing the large and distinguished assembly come from all parts to add an unwonted lustre to the modest obsequies of the regretted Mother, and to give an eloquent tribute of admiration and esteem to her high virtue, one understands more fully the grandeur of that eternal coronation promised to the meek of heart in those words of the Divine Master: *Whosoever humbleth himself shall be exalted.*(1)

(1) Matt. XXIII, 12.

1816 - 1894

LA MÈRE MARIE DES SEPT DOULEURS



VI

MOTHER MARY OF THE SEVEN DOLORS.

In a happy, peaceful home where honor and all the virtues of olden times reigned supreme, the servant of God to whom these pages are dedicated, first saw the light of day on April twenty-fifth, 1815. Abel Michon, her father, and Constance Lebœuf, her mother, were wealthy farmers residing in the Parish of St. Denis-sur-Richelieu, one of the oldest and most important along the banks of the Chambly River. Honored and respected by all for their staunch integrity, her pious, christian parents imposed upon themselves as a bounden duty, the task of bequeathing to their children the birthright of those religious principles they, in turn, had received as a priceless legacy from their ancestors. An ambition, so laudable in every way, was blessed by God, and the young souls, cultivated with such tender care in the select garden of so virtuous a family, yielded an abundant harvest of flower and fruit.

Justine, the subject of this sketch, was

the third in a family of eight children. She was early distinguished by the keenness of her mind and the liveliness of her disposition. To these gifts was united a remarkable strength of character, which the child soon learned how to turn to profit in curbing the restlessness of her ardent, thoughtless nature. One of her brothers in speaking of his little sister said: «Justine often astonished us by the acts of patience she practised, and the efforts they must have cost her were something heroic.»

Among the happy tendencies pointing towards a possible future vocation, Justine manifested a tender love of the poor. One day, in winter, when she was about seven years of age, a childish notion sprang up in her mind. Promptly, she said to her next older brother: «Oh, if you would only come with me, we could go out and beg for the poor. Bring your sled along, and we will put whatever we get onto it.» The lad, not being so inclined, said they could not do that because mamma knew nothing about it. Quick as a flash, the little girl retorted that all good deeds should be done in secret. There were many other obstacles in the way to prevent the accomplishment of her plan; yet, the child always kept her attraction for the down-trodden and the outcast.

Twenty years afterwards, this same attraction, strengthened by divine grace, will be enabled to resist the rudest assaults of self-love; it will cause her to embrace a life exclusively devoted to the works of charity, where she will carry out, on a broader and more elevated scale, the beautiful deeds of mercy that so captivated her childish heart in the days of her youth.

Placed as a pupil at the Sisters of the Notre Dame Congregation established in her native parish, Miss Michon, soon became remarkable for her strength of character, energetic will and solid piety. She remained at the convent just long enough to acquire a very elementary notion of the rudiments of education. On her return home, the young girl, feeling no inclination for the world, tried to follow the mode of life she saw practised at the convent as that was all she knew thus far. In all probability, Providence did not favor her project, for she soon renounced it in the hope of becoming more useful to her people at home. Her presence and help in the family circle were almost indispensable, as the two eldest had left for homes of their own, and it was manifestly impossible for her mother to attend, unaided, to all the domestic duties of a thrifty Canadian household. Miss Michon knew per-

fectly well what the present moment required of her and she resolutely set to work. The care of the younger children of the family fell to her lot. In after years, one of her brothers, advanced to the dignity of a priest at God's altar, loved to recall the immense debt of gratitude he owed his elder sister for whom he always preserved a most intimate affection.(1)

In her home life, Miss Michon never lost sight of the ideal of that perfection which drew her towards God; and, although living in the world she was not of it. Knowing the high value of simplicity, and the difficulty of keeping her heart mortified and ready for sacrifice, while a slave to the dictates of fashion, she invariably dressed in black. She likewise, fled the occasions of all those worldly pleasures wherein frivolous young maidens find their delight. Austere towards herself, she kept the fasts of the Church, so rigorous in her day, with scrupulous exactitude, and employed herself in the hardest kind of work. The reading of the Lives of the Saints after the hard labors of the day, was her greatest relaxation. It was doubtless in those pages that she learned the art of self-conquest, and the marvelous power of prayer, that mighty weapon

(1) L'abbé Michon.

wherewith she armed herself for continual warfare. Sunday was her day of rest and prayer. Her keenest regret was that she was denied frequent Holy Communion. The parish priest imbued, like a number of the clergy at the beginning of Monseigneur Bourget's episcopacy, with the principles of Jansenism, permitted only the most fervent of his parishioners to approach the holy Table, and that not oftener than once a month! There could be no exception to his rigid rule. Hence, our devout young girl had to submit obediently to a law contrary to the greatest desire of her heart. She compensated herself, for this privation by attending the divine offices more assiduously. Arriving early at the Church in spite of its great distance, she left it only long enough to eat the light luncheon she had brought with her; then she returned for Vespers and remained until it was time to return home.

Such exemplary behavior proves that the paternal roof, far from being prejudicial to the future Sister of Charity, was for her a real sanctuary where her soul was strengthened to ascend the Mount of Horeb there to receive, with the inestimable gift of a religious vocation, her commission of mercy towards her unfortunate fellow-beings.

In the spring of 1843, Miss Michon, hearing of the foundation of an Institute for the care of the poor, felt irresistibly drawn thither. The pastoral letter of Monseigneur Bourget on the subject in question confirmed her in her plan, as yet half-formed, and she could no longer resist the mysterious call of grace. Bravely bidding farewell to the peaceful home of her childhood and youth, Miss Michon came to Montreal with the intention of becoming a nun. On her arrival at the *Yellow House*, a cruel disappointment awaited the courageous aspirant! Monseigneur Bourget had limited the number of the first Sisters of Charity to six, and his selections were already made. Madam Gamelin, being unable to consult the Bishop who was in retreat, could not decide to dismiss the new-comer; besides, the latter was not at all inclined to accept such a solution of the difficulty. She accordingly remained until the end of the ecclesiastical retreat when Madam Gamelin promised to intercede for her with the Bishop. Meanwhile, Miss Michon was employed in making the religious costume of the future novices. The habit at first consisted of a greyish purple merino, a black skirt, a pleated garniture, a white linen cap and a camail as worn at the present time.

The strange fact, many times recounted, and so manifestly providential, occurred at this juncture. The pattern of the new costume, once decided upon and approved by the Bishop, the amount of material required for six outfits was closely measured with a view to the utmost economy. When the six habits were cut out, every one was surprised to find that there was just enough left over to make a seventh complete suit. Miss Michon considered this incident a tacit approval of her design, and she pleaded for permission to make a habit for herself. To make her argument all the stronger, she playfully added that she would certainly need it for the second admission if she could not have it for the first. Madam Gamelin graciously acceded to her request. A few days later, Monseigneur Bourget, informed of the whole affair, admitted the young postulant who was delighted beyond measure to find her dearest wish realized. She made her retreat with her companions and received the holy habit on March twenty-fifth, 1843.

Sister Michon was one of those to whom the trials of the novitiate were especially painful and most beneficial. Accustomed as she was to all the comforts of a free and easy life at home, the young novice found herself all of a sudden reduced to subjection to rule,

to real physical, privations and to the most revolting exercises of charity towards her neighbor. Fortunately, she was fully prepared for the combats of nature against grace, and the struggles she underwent give us a high idea of her virtue.

Well aware that religious perfection is the fruit of constant, daily effort, Sister Michon heroically embraced her new life of labor and self-renunciation. She would do nothing by halves. Therefore, after a year of noviceship, we see her binding herself, joyously and irrevocably to the service of God by the vows of religion on March twenty-ninth, 1844.

On the morrow of that ever memorable day, the seven first Sisters of Providence, like the Apostles of old, divided among themselves the works of their new mission. The Master's Vineyard was vast enough to allot a large portion to each for cultivation. Sister Michon received for her share the care of the linen department, the refectory and the pantry, in addition to her office of caring for the outside poor and visiting them in their homes. She inaugurated that ministry of charity which she was to follow henceforth in various ways until her strength failed her. In 1846, the visit of the prisoners and the direction of the

Daughters of St. Blandine were also confided to her. The latter confraternity had for its object to provide a shelter from misery, and all the pitfalls it engenders, for working girls seeking employment in the city. All this was assuredly a multiplicity of labors for one person; nevertheless, the valiant Sister of Charity found time for all, assistance for every need, and compassion for every distress.

At the period when the typhus epidemic raged in 1847, after devoting herself untiringly to the relief of the plague-stricken, Sister Michon fell a victim to the scourge that had already laid several of her companions low. Monseigneur Bourget, fearing lest the humble Institute which had cost him so much, should be entirely swept away in the wild fury of the storm, made a vow by which our Community engaged itself to burn seven candles every Friday in perpetuity before the statue of Our Lady of Seven Dolors. From the moment this solemn promise was made, not a single member caught the fever, and the ones so desperately ill immediately began to recover. In proof of her gratitude to the Queen of Heaven for the favor of restored health, our dear Sister took the name of Sister Mary of the Seven Dolors, by which title she will hereafter be designated.

In 1851, Sister Mary of the Seven Dolors left the Mother House for our mission at Laprairie where she held the office of Sister Servant until 1858. Those seven years of absence, with a short stay of a few months at L'Assomption, whither she was sent to nurse Mgr. Rémi Gaulin through a serious illness, comprise the entire missionary career of the venerated Foundress Mother. She had the happiness of dwelling more than forty-four years consecutively at the cradle of the Institute. In her mission at Laprairie, Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors revealed the breadth of her charity and the depth of her virtue. Not one of our establishments knew better than Laprairie, perhaps, the extreme rigors of poverty, or the doubtful certitude of a bare existence threatened many times over. In spite of the drawbacks, the Superior faced the task entrusted to her by obedience with absolute confidence in God and supreme hope in His timely assistance. Firm in her conviction that the interests of the poor were at stake on all occasions, she obtained from Divine Providence the help she so earnestly besought. Among the many facts recorded in the annals of the mission we shall select the following from the Life of our Foundress Mother.

One day the parish priest informed the Superior that he could no longer leave the Blessed Sacrament in the convent chapel because there was no veil for the tabernacle door. The small sum of three dollars was all the house possessed for the week's marketing! The Superior, in great anguish, consulted her Sisters, and they unanimously agreed to do without meat for eight days rather than lose their most Precious Treasure. While the Superior was in town buying material for the tabernacle veil, the exact sum that had been sacrificed in favor of their Sacramental Sentinel was handed in as an alms at the convent door!... Another time when there remained not a cent in the treasury, the Sisters appealed to St. Joseph. That very same evening, an unknown traveller called at the parlor and deposited two gold louis in the portress' hand, saying that he had promised an offering for the poor. One may well imagine the fervent thanksgivings that mounted heavenward for such timely favors.

Practical in all things, Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors neglected nothing whereby the stability of the precarious foundation might be made more secure. Charitable contests, begging tours, bazaars, etc., all were called into requisition to provide, if not the comfort, at

least the daily bread for her dear poor, and this, never failed her a single day, thank God!

At the official changes in 1858, Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors was recalled to the Mother House which she was never again to leave. Endowed with a naturally bright intellect and solid judgment, she rendered great services to the Institute in the charges of counsellor, local and general Assistant which she successively filled. But those diverse posts seemed less apt to bring out the brilliant qualities of mind and heart she possessed than her direct, personal contact with the poor. It was, above all, in the active exercise of charity towards her neighbor that the venerated Mother gave the full measure of her talents and of her virtue.

Definitely settled at the Providence Asylum, she resumed her charge of almoner. This, with her office of catechist, which we shall detail further on, was the principal field of her fruitful and meritorious apostolate. The almonry, commonly known as the *Depot of the Poor* was far from being a sinecure at that epoch when the houses of refuge were quite less numerous than at the present time. At the beginning they barely sufficed to respond to the demands of the indigent. To convince

ourselves of this let us follow Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors throughout one of her busy days. It began at seven o'clock in the morning and ended at five in the evening. Long before the poor arrive she is at her post in a room, partly filled with second-hand clothing and provisions for the morning's distribution. The outside doors are scarcely opened ere the apartment is thronged with visitors; the poor of every age and condition, recruits from the police stations, old men with feeble tottering steps, women and children scantily clad, and, at times, entire families from the country, total strangers in the big city, knowing not whither to turn for lodging or food. To all, a good meal is served. Indeed, one might think oneself present at the *agapae* of the early christians when the primitive Church alone spread its tables for the destitute and down-trodden. Whenever the almoner has a moment of leisure she distributes to her guests, in addition to their daily bread, food for their souls,— a good word, a timely warning, a gentle reproach. But quite often her attention is required elsewhere. Here come some to beg for a line of recommendation, for a place to work, or for assistance from the wealthy; others to ask for a ticket to the dispensary; again, there come others bringing cast-off garments or

broken victuals from their tables; while a few who do not belong to her district are given direction how to reach the refuges where they belong. The good Mother answers all clients, keeping an eye meanwhile on a huge kettle of soup bubbling on the fire for the mid-day repast of other strangers. The afternoon is fully as actively employed. The Sister Almoner doles out to the widows the bread donated by the Seminary and the meat given by the butchers. The empty baskets are filled and sent to the homes where they are sorely needed; if there are any sick members in the family, an egg or two will be found carefully stowed away with some other tempting delicacy. In the midst of all her activity, the good Mother is frequently interrupted by a member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society asking information concerning a certain poor person; often, too, she has to reason with an insolent beggar whose demands are exacting and unfair. At times she loses patience with the latter class and replies to their rudness and boldness with such sarcasm that they are completely routed, much to the amusement of the witnesses of the scene. This method of dealing with the vagrants was rather questionable, and it is certain that Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors would never permit her companions in office

to imitate her on like occasions; since she always deplored her great irascibility. On such a battlefield, where she daily found enemies to combat and struggles to endure, the active Mother spent the greater part of her religious life. In passing, we venture to state that shadows of imperfections remain, at times, even in the souls of the most saintly. God wills it so to make them more watchful and humble, and to hearten us the while our weary footsteps tread the royal road of the cross. Moreover in turning importunate and vicious beggars away, the wise Sister Almoner had order and justice in view. Her frankness, impartiality and good common sense, united to unlimited devotedness, make her worthy to be looked upon as a model by her successors in office.

From the foregoing brief outline, we understand how well such a ministry of charity agreed with the aptitude and taste of Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors. She held her position as almoner of the poor for a quarter of a century, seeking neither repose nor relaxation, and attending equally to prayer and labor. In order to care effectively for others, it is absolutely necessary to know how to forget self; and this lesson can be learned only in the school of Jesus Christ. There a deep, sincere and

lasting love for the poor is acquired by souls animated by faith, who know how to assist the unfortunate, because in them they see the visible stamp of the Man-God. Charity does not consist in shedding tears over the sorrows and misfortunes of others; that would be the satisfaction of common virtue. The entire oblation of oneself,—a gift hourly renewed in weary toil that undermines one's strength and vitality for the betterment of human misery,—that, we maintain, is the privilege and the proof of true charity; such was the merit and the glory of Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors,—glory and merit all the more noble because its principles were more supernatural. Her fervor in prayer, her exact punctuality to all religious exercises appear to us the secret source, the well-spring, whence she drew that sovereign efficacy in all her works, and the art of comforting the sorrows of the afflicted appealing to her for relief. To be a real angel of consolation to the distressed and weary-laden, one must first be an angel of adoration at the Feet of Jesus immolated for mankind. A Sister of Charity would spend herself in useless endeavor, if, devoting herself exclusively to exterior good works, she took no pains for her spiritual life, or failed to renew her strength daily in the quietude of peaceful prayer.



After the general elections of 1878, Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors, relieved of the charge of the almonry of the poor, was named local assistant at the Mother House. This position she held for ten years. Industrious, energetic and austere, she seemed inclined, both by nature and by the duties of her state, to the practise of the evangelical precepts. Mistress of discipline by excellence, she contributed not a little, by word and by example, to the perfect observance of the rules and regulations of the Institute. There was nothing morose in her dealings with her Sisters. She was always cheerfully disposed, and none knew better than she how to find the right word and the ready answer to enliven and brighten the recreations without wounding charity. The whole Community lavished all its affection and esteem upon her.

Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors received her final discharge from all employment and responsibility in July 1888. At the express desire of the Superiors, she went to reside at the new Mother House on Fullum Street. Happy at the prospect of enjoying the delights of a peaceful retreat, the venerable Elder would

not consent to end her days without occupation. Hence, at the advanced age of seventy-two years, she resumed the work of catechist as inaugurated by her away back in 1860. Honorable mention is due her efforts as catechist because they reveal our Mother in one of the most beautiful of her aspects of zeal. Teaching the elements of christian doctrine to backward pupils of fourteen, fifteen years and older, is a laborious, obscure task at best, and lightened by no ray of glory. Neither is personal pleasure involved because there is no satisfaction of any kind, except that of performing a deed of mercy having a direct influence on the salvation of souls. Well we know the world selects not such heroes for a niche in its Halls of Fame. But Charity, the Queen of virtues, has free entrance wherever there are bodily miseries to assuage or where spiritual interests are at stake. It is fitting then that our meed of praise be bestowed on those whose disinterestedness proves the height and depth of virtue.

While visitor and almoner of the poor, Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors had ample occasion to deplore the woful ignorance wherein a certain class of children grew up, either on account of their inability to understand the lessons taught at school, or the poverty of the

parents that drove the young to toil at an early age in factory or workshop to help eke out a bare existence. To remedy so sad an evil as far as possible, the good Mother undertook to instruct numbers of such poor children and to prepare them for their first Holy Communion. In this apostleship, she succeeded marvelously well. Nothing daunted by the defective intellect and character of her pupils, she was able to prepare twenty and more a year, thanks to the plain and attractive lessons given in a way peculiarly her own. Hard and thankless as was her self-imposed task, it proved a sweet reward for the devoted Mother, when, after months of weary teaching, she saw her pupils pass a satisfactory examination and approach the Holy Table. She conducted them personally, only too happy to offer to her Divine Master the hearts, now like rich chalices of gold, but formerly exposed to the danger of being lost forever. By the workings of grace they have become a little less unworthy of Him. On that day of days, the privileged ones received from their benefactress, together with the wearing apparel she had collected for them, toothsome sweets and the modest souvenirs that other mothers are accustomed to give their children in honor of the memorable event.

This admirable work was assuredly the brightest star in that crown of glory the good Mother had gained by so many fruitful years in the service of the Master. To the twenty-six years already spent as catechist in the noon-day of her life, Mother Mary of the Seven Dolours will add four more during the lengthening shadows of her venerable old age.

In 1892, ill health forced her to desist from further labor. It was even feared that her days were numbered, and she herself begged to receive the last sacraments. The immediate danger disappeared but left the patient extremely feeble. She resigned her beloved task of catechist to withdraw into absolute solitude. Prayer and pious reading were to be her sole occupation henceforth. Ever a friend of silence and retirement, Mother Mary of the Seven Dolours enjoyed the quiet life provided for her closing years by filial and fraternal affection; and sweetly did she voice her gratitude.

As she gradually descended the downward slope of her allotted span on earth, the venerated Mother's piety grew more tender and expansive. The deeper the depths her body reached, the higher her soul mounted.

After the Golden Jubilee feasts of the In-

stitute, held on June 5, 6 and 7, 1893, her one consuming desire was to celebrate her eternal espousals in Heaven. Long ago had she reached the golden summit of the mountain whose heights she had scaled in trials and sufferings, and her soul was enamored with the Vision Beautiful! Mothers Zoticque and Immaculate Conception, her faithful companions on the journey, begun over half a century past, shared her longings for immortal bliss; and the favored three often entertained one another with the subject so dear to their hearts,— their approaching departure for eternity.

But Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors was doomed to remain the last of the circle on earth. Following the death of her two bosom friends, she tasted in all its bitterness the holy homesickness of the exile,— a true mark of the Elect, which makes them sigh so ardently for the hour of deliverance. She seemed to be in continual communication of thought and desire with our Community in Heaven. The cell where she dwelt, like an anchorite of old, resembled a hallowed sanctuary, whose portals are guarded by silent angels, and where agitated souls come to seek peace and tranquillity.

In December 1894, she witnessed the dedication of the Hospice Gamelin, erected in

honor of the Golden Jubilee of the Institute. Such a monument for the exclusive benefit of the poor was a matter of the greatest rejoicing for one who had so long been their earthly providence. Beneath the shining rays of that last transport of joy, Mother Mary of the Seven Dolours closed her eyes to things of earth five days later on December thirteenth, 1894. The slender thread of life that held body and soul together was broken by a low fever. She retained full possession of her mental faculties to the very end.

Mother Mary of the Seven Dolours was aged seventy-eight years, seven months and eighteen days. Her religious career numbered fifty one years, eight months and eighteen days. As a servant of the poor, she realized to the letter the motto emblazoned on the escutcheon of our Institute: *Caritas Christi urget nos*. As a religious, she often recalled to mind that 'the kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence.' All her life had been a series of combats valiantly fought, and of sacrifices generously embraced. Hence the last moments, so terrible to many, were sweet and peaceful to her who had labored hard, struggled nobly and endured patiently. After the *Stabat Mater* of darksome Golgotha, her liberated soul could exultingly entone the glorious *Magnificat* of

the everlasting hills, and tranquilly await the reward promised the good and faithful servant.

The obsequies of the regretted Mother took place on December fifteenth in the Mother House Chapel. In our cemetery at Long Point, she sleeps the sleep of the just beneath the central cross which overshadows the graves of our Foundress Mothers.

With Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors, there disappeared the last member of that humble group, kneeling half a century ago at the feet of our saintly Bishop and Founder, to receive from his anointed hands the blessing that brought the Holy Spirit upon them and their work. That spirit of humility, simplicity and charity they have faithfully transmitted to their successors, and these are in duty bound to keep it intact as an inheritance precious beyond all price.



LA MÈRE LAROCQUE

1819-1857

VII

MOTHER LAROCQUE

Mother Larocque was the youngest of our venerated Foundress Mothers. Born at Chambly, May twentieth, 1819, of Michel Larocque and Emily Bessette, she was brought up in the beautifully simple ways so thoroughly characteristic of our brave and honest agricultural people. Her stay at school, judging by the very elementary education she possessed, must have been quite limited, still it proved no drawback in her general training. On the contrary, her future career will prove that the moral formation received in a christian home, may at need, supplant all other, while in itself it can never be replaced. Under her mother's guidance, the young girl absorbed the knowledge of a science far more precious than secular lore, for she learned how to love virtue, how to prefer duty above all else, and how to submit to the law of labor and self-denial.

When Monseigneur Ignace Bourget, Bishop of Montreal, desirous of founding a new religious Institute for the care of the poor, made

an appeal to the young women of his diocese to help him in the accomplishment of his project, his invitation was heard by the future Mother Larocque. It fell upon her soul like heavenly seed in well-prepared soil; she was ready to heed the call, and she left all things at once. March sixteenth, 1843, marked the date of her departure from home. In company with five other aspirants, she received the holy habit nine days later from the hands of the pious Founder, and she formed one of the number who inaugurated the novitiate of our Community. At the end of the year of probation, we find her at the foot of the altar on the Feast of the Compassion of Mary, March twenty-ninth, 1844, consecrating herself to God forever by the vows of religion.

Chosen hospitaller of the aged and infirm, she looked upon her beloved wards as the choicest flowers of her mystical wedding bouquet, and she received them with transports of joy from the hands of her Divine Spouse. The dream of her compassionate heart had come true,—to devote herself unreservedly to the care of the unfortunate in a hidden sphere with no other desire save that of pleasing God! Endowed by nature with many excellent gifts, affable and gay in her relations with all,

Sister Larocque appeared among her dear old ladies like an angel of peace. They lavished every mark of love and esteem upon her in return for her kindly care. Her short sojourn of two years at the Mother House was filled with great happiness for her, notwithstanding the dire poverty of the early days of foundation. In her humble employment, Mother Larocque tasted the real sweetness of that celestial charity in whose radiance bodily fatigue and self-renunciation completely fade away. But this period of calm and repose was to be of short duration. Like the three privileged disciples whom the Lord chose to accompany Him on the heights of *Thabor* before He led them into the dark and shadowy recesses of sorrowful *Gethsemane*, her soul would, likewise, be fortified against trial and temptation sure to come, by the ineffable consolations of His Divine Love.

In 1846, Mother Gamelin, at the instance of the Reverend Father Tellier, S. J., pastor of the parish, accepted a foundation at Laprairie. Knowing well the worth of the young hospitaller, the Foundress Mother named her superior of the new establishment a few months later. The post was not attractive to human nature. Already, Mother Larocque began to taste there the first drops of the bitter

chalice God reserved for His faithful servant. A devastating fire had destroyed a part of the village, and considerably damaged the Sisters' convent, while the meagre resources were far from sufficient to maintain the poor and their humble handmaids. Such a sad state of affairs made our Foundress Mother fear lest her Daughters sink beneath the burden, and for a moment she thought of recalling them. But, how prevail upon them to abandon their dear poor? The Sisters pleaded the cause of the unfortunates so well that the refuge was not closed, and Divine Providence soon came to the relief of those who so trustingly confided in it. In spite of embarrassing financial difficulties, Mother Larocque had the consolation of adding to the work of caring for the aged and infirm women, that of sheltering the orphans, an admirable enterprise productive of great good, and which won the good-will and sympathy of the parishioners. In the exercise of the duties of her charge, the energetic Superior gave proof of exceeding great goodness and kindness of heart. The poor worshipped her, while the Ladies of Charity gave her pledges of their esteem on every occasion, and were her ever willing helpers in whatever pertained to the upkeep of her modest refuge.

After five fruitful years spent at Laprairie, Mother Larocque was recalled to the Mother House on October seventh, 1851, to fill the office of Assistant, and to visit the poor and the sick in their homes,— a work especially dear to her heart. Her leisure moments were employed in making ornaments for the altar. All unknown to her, those few months spent in the peaceful round of congenial duty were destined to be a sort of preparatory retreat for the difficult life-work lying ahead of her.

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In compliance with a request made by the Right Reverend Augustine Magloire Blanchet, Bishop of Nesqually, the Community, under the presidency of Monseigneur Bourget, agreed, in 1852, to accept a foundation at Fort Vancouver, Washington Territory. Some days later, the election of the Sisters for the new establishment was made, and Mother Larocque was chosen Superior by a majority of votes. Her companions were Sisters Amable, Mary of the Sacred Heart, Bernard and Denis-Benjamin, all her juniors in age. Mother Larocque's religious virtues, her exceptional correctness of judgment, the domestic qualities she possessed, and which she could place at the

service of judicious activity, made the Superiors' choice of her a wise one from every point of view.

Believing herself absolutely incapable of filling any position of importance, and foreseeing the immense weight of responsibility connected with the direction of so vast an undertaking, Mother Laroque consented to shoulder the heavy burden only after an act of supreme abandonment to Divine Providence. A soul less generous than hers might have withdrawn by alleging reasons strong enough to justify her trepidation at the sight of such a cross. . . . Animated by a lively faith, however, she saw God alone in her bitter trial, and His Holy Will in that of her Superiors; hence she needed nothing more to make her overcome the repugnances of nature, and to be wholly resigned to the inscrutable designs of God in her regard.

The departure of the missionaries was fixed for the eighteenth day of October 1852. For the first time in its history, our young Institute saw its members going forth to mission fields afar. We can well understand the sad farewells exchanged among Mothers and Sisters. On both sides, sobs and tears eloquently expressed emotions the lips failed to utter. Let us cast

a sympathetic glance on that heart-rending scene enacted in the distant past. From it there emerge in brighter relief two distinct virtues deeply rooted in the souls of our Foundress Mothers ; namely, the most admirable *fraternal charity* struggling with the *spirit of abnegation* which attains the lofty summit of heroism in obedience. For,—let us mark it well,—the valiant pioneers who opened a pathway for our Community to unknown, distant lands were first and foremost, martyrs of religious obedience. Uncertain of the fate awaiting them in that far-off country whither they were bound, they departed with no other consolation save that of duty well done. They trusted implicitly in God for ways and means to accomplish the work they were commissioned to perform. In this circumstance, Mother Larocque appears to us as the perfect model of missionaries in a land of exile. A heart so full of tenderness as hers could feel the pangs of separation in all their keenness. No one could forecast the possibility of a return more or less remote. And in truth, for Mother Larocque herself, there was never to be a return to home or fatherland. The parting look she cast upon the Mother House,—upon the Chapel where she freely gave her all to God,—was doomed to be her last !

Every soul has its Calvary rugged, and rocky, and steep to climb. In that solemn hour, Mother Larocque saw her own outlined before her; laden with the cross that was henceforth to be her faithful companion, she at once began the painful ascent. Our travellers were spared no corporal suffering nor mental anguish from the moment of their departure from Montreal until the day, fully a year later, when they could settle themselves definitely for the work confided to them by Heaven.

Divine Providence, destining them for an altogether different field of action, did not permit their establishment at Fort Vancouver, Washington. Insurmountable difficulties arose at every step of the way. Arriving finally at their destination, they discovered that through some unforeseen and unavoidable chain of circumstances, nothing was ready for their reception. After prolonged negotiations, it was decided that the Sisters should return to Canada. They accordingly re-embarked for San Francisco, whence they were to proceed by boat to Panama, cross the Isthmus, and return homeward by the Atlantic. But no boat was to be had; so they were compelled to take passage on a sailing vessel instead, and continue their route by way of Cape Horn. After a stormy

and perilous voyage of seventy days their frail bark was driven into port at Valparaiso, Chile, the seventeenth day of June, 1853.

At last, they had arrived at the place where God awaited the laborers of charity! Their timely presence soon became known throughout the country, and the civil and ecclesiastical authorities resolved to confide to them the charge of the works of mercy in the city of Santiago, Chile. In October 1853, a twelvemonth after their departure from Montreal, our Sisters were transferred to the Chilean capital city, and shortly afterward took possession of the property offered them by the Government for an orphanage numbering eighty children from beginning.



Relieved of further anxiety, and strong in the strength given by obedience, Mother Larocque and her companions applied themselves to make the land of Chile blossom fair and beautiful with the seed of good works which the barren soil of Oregon was not yet prepared to receive. And verily, was it not by God's designs that the long series of hardships and disappointments they had just passed through

rendered them more fit to undertake the works of an altogether unknown mission?

Animated by the example, and directed by the wise counsels of the virtuous Mother, the Sisters brought to the new work a most admirable devotedness which, in turn, was amply repaid by well-merited success. The good, religious spirit dominating the Mother Community flourished, likewise, in the humble Chilean foundation; thus proving the fact that charity, like the sunlight, embraces all parts of the wide, wide world in the radiance of its beauty.

Of a sensitive nature herself, Mother Larocque could readily understand the misfortunes of the orphaned little ones, and she was qualified in every way to lavish upon them the most maternal care. Their welfare was the object of her constant solicitude, while nothing was neglected whereby their pitiable condition might be improved. An educator of heart and mind by nature, she gave her Sisters lessons which modern pedagogy, today, places in the first rank. «We must,» said she to them, «have recourse to methods of persuasion, to principles of christian morality, if we wish our children to become truly upright and thoroughly christian citizens.» And how her

little protégées loved her! The few days of her first absence at the annual retreat in Valparaiso gave them the greatest anxiety. From the moment of her return, they surrounded her exclaiming in their delight: «Our Mother is with us again! We will not let her go away any more!»

Mother Larocque always cherished a tender attachment to the cradle of her religious life, and this strong affection certainly rendered her missionary career more meritorious. She could never think of the *Providence of Montreal*—whereof she was one of the Foundress Mothers,—or of anything that evoked sweet memories of the land of her birth, or of the beings dearest to her heart, without experiencing the liveliest emotion. The cross of separation and exile from home and country had to be taken up anew each day; still, she never once asked to return. Knowing the fecundity suffering gives to the work of the apostolate, she willingly embraced every sacrifice. She thus found in her communings with God, and in her tenderness for His forlorn little ones, sufficient compensation for the loneliness of the weary days of absence from all she held most dear, and which at times, almost overpowered her.

The gentleness of her disposition and her lovable piety gained her the affection and confidence of her Sisters ; and, when they saw her stricken in the prime of life by a serious malady, their consternation was very great. Although the symptoms did not at first appear very alarming, Mother Larocque knew the end would prove fatal when she took to her bed on January twenty-fourth, 1857. So many sufferings had passed over that chosen soul ; so many labors and privations had undermined that body worn out long before its time, that in less than a month, the dread disease had completed its work of destruction.

The Lord, loving her soul with a love of predilection, even as He did that of the young man specially mentioned in the Gospel, invited her to follow Him. Gladly she hearkened to His Voice. Later on, He offered her the thorny diadem of obedience. Instantly she accepted. Once again He speaks ; no longer now to allure her to the painful immolations of His cross. No! His loving invitation this time is: *Come from Libanus, come My Spouse and thou shalt be crowned.* Oh! how sweetly the summons sounded in the depths of the dying Foundress Mother's soul. True, the first sight of Death's near approach made her shudder for a passing

moment. . . . Still, as of yore, she yielded submissively to the Divine pleasure, and she surrendered meekly to the Good Master, who required the sacrifice of a perishable life that He might crown her soul with the splendors and rewards of Life Everlasting.

On February fourteenth, Mother Larocque, after exhorting her Sisters to the practice of *humility, fraternal union* and *holy poverty*, and imploring their pardon for whatever grief she might have caused them, received Holy Viaticum and Extreme Unction. From that moment, far from manifesting any fear, she spoke with the greatest joy of the happiness of being united to God forever. It was most touching to hear her comfort and encourage her Daughters whom the thought of losing their Mother rendered inconsolable.

Illness oftentimes makes its victims selfish and egotistical; yet, in Mother Larocque's case, it seemed only to inspire her with more maternal care and thoughtfulness of others. Her most anxious thoughts were for the missionary Sisters of Oregon who had successfully resumed her abandoned foundation at Fort Vancouver, Washington Territory, on December eighth, 1856. She so well knew the arduousness of their undertaking. Again, her

cherished little poor children were always in her mind.

With entire resignation and the most exemplary obedience, Mother Larocque submitted to all sorts of painful treatment required by the gravity of her condition. The only relief she sought in her intense suffering was recourse to Our Lady of Seven Dolors, that compassionate Mother of Sorrows, who had ever been her refuge in her hours of anguish and bitter desolation. «I hope to go to Heaven,» she said one day, «because after all, whatever I have done, I have always tried to do it for God. My Good Master knows that if I am here, it is through love of Him.» Admirable words arising to her lips in sweet sincerity at the awful moment when conscience beholds all things in the clear light of eternity! Yes! it was indeed for God alone that she had prayed, labored, suffered! In silence she had accomplished the designs of Providence because she had known how to forget self,— how to become meek and humble of heart in imitation of the Master!

The filial affection Mother Larocque cherished for her Community and for her Superiors was apparent to her very latest breath. She rejoiced in the thought of meeting our

venerated Foundress Mother in Heaven. The name of Mother Caron, then Superior General was often mentioned. She had to make the sacrifice of dying without seeing her, and far, far away from the beloved Mother House, the scene of her early entrance into religious life!.. Who may tell the magnitude of that supreme act of total abandonment required of her loving, loyal heart? But, it will be the last, as well as the brightest jewel in the resplendent coronal of her life of continual self-immolation.

During the night hours preceding her death, the patient longed most ardently for Holy Communion; but when morning dawned her precarious condition precluded the possibility of granting her soul's desire. At thirty minutes past one in the afternoon, Mother Larocque tranquilly expired, holding in her hands the little wooden cross,—*her Only Hope*,—a fitting emblem of the many other crosses she had carried in union with Our Lord, and that now merited for her an eternal reward. The day of her death was on Saturday, February twenty-first, 1857. Long after her spirit had taken flight, the bereaved Community still remained by her bedside, weeping and praying. The funeral obsequies were held in the Convent Chapel, and the remains were interred in a

secluded spot, a few rods distant from the house the lowly nun had founded and directed for over four years. The Chilean foundation now stood on a solid base ; hence the Lord removed the human support He had made use of in its establishment.

Mother Larocque was but thirty-nine years and nine months of age, while her religious career numbered only thirteen years and eleven months ; yet, numberless trials had given her youth the maturity of a ripe, old age and singularly fructified all her life's work. After scattering far and wide the seeds of kindness, goodness and devotedness during her short sojourn on earth, her blessed memory still lives among us by the salutary influence of the bright examples she has bequeathed to us as a priceless legacy. Truly may we repeat in her behalf the words Holy Mother Church applies to her youthful heroes whom she crowns with the aureola of sanctity : *Having lived a short while, she hath filled the measure of a long life.* (1)

(1) Wis, IV. 13.

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