

LIFE  
OF  
MOTHER CARON



MONTREAL

1914





LIFE

OF

MOTHER CARON







MOTHER CARON

LIFE  
OF  
MOTHER CARON  
ONE OF THE  
SEVEN FOUNDRESSES AND SECOND SUPERIOR  
OF THE  
SISTERS OF CHARITY OF PROVIDENCE  
1808-1888

---

BY  
REVEREND ÉLIE-J. AUCLAIR  
Of the Archbishopric of Montreal  
DOCTOR IN THEOLOGY AND CANON LAW  
HONORARY PROFESSOR OF LAVAL UNIVERSITY  
SECRETARY OF THE EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT OF  
" LA REVUE CANADIENNE "

*Translated from the French*

BY  
ANNA T. SADLER

---

MONTREAL, 1914.

BX4457

Z8

A82

---

Entered according in the Act of the Parliament of Canada, in the year one thousand nine hundred and eight, by the Sisters of Charity of Providence, at the office of the Minister of Agriculture.

---

### *Declaration of the Author*

---

If in the course of this work, the titles of saint, of blessed or of venerable have been employed, if more or less extraordinary occurrences have been related, or finally if mention has been made of favors obtained through the intercession of our heroine, we declare, that by none of these things, has there been any intention to anticipate the judgments of Holy Church, and that we wish to conform ourselves, in all things, and for all things, to the decrees of His Holiness, Urban VIII.

*Nihil obstat.*

CAROLUS LECOQ, Censor.

May 8th, 1908.

*Imprimatur :*

† PAUL, ARCHBISHOP OF MONTREAL.

May 8th, 1908.



## PREFACE



*The author is fully aware that prefaces are no longer in fashion. However, at the moment of laying down the pen, after having written the twenty chapters of the book now presented to the public, he believes it useful and in a sense necessary,—for otherwise it would be committing an injustice,—to give in the form of a preface a few pages of preliminary explanations, as to the nature of this volume, and the circumstances and occasion which have made him its author.*

*He may be pardoned for declaring in all sincerity that the LIFE OF MOTHER CARON has given him such joy of soul as to more than compensate for the labors and vigils it has cost him.*

*Religious families are always happily inspired when they preserve with jealous care all those memories which attach them to the cradle of their origin. Such memories should be, as it seems, preserved like so many relics of the past. To revere these relics, to surround them with a*

*species of veneration, without violating in the slightest degree the wise laws by which the Church regulates these delicate matters, is, in most instances, to create a praiseworthy tradition, and to transmit from generation to generation edifying examples and fruitful lessons.*

*Amongst the Montreal Sisters of Providence, secondary only to that of the venerated Mother Gamelin, the memory of her six companions in the work of foundation is affectionately and respectfully preserved. But amongst them all, as the writer has been frequently assured, none of these traditions has been more carefully guarded, or has retained a more vital interest, than that of Mother Caron, the immediate successor in the office of Superior to Mother Gamelin herself. Having passed her eightieth year, forty-five of which were spent in the Community, she was for a very considerable period, the soul, the brain and the heart of the work of Providence.*

*Now it happens, that precisely in this year (\*) occurs the hundredth anniversary of that la-*

---

(\*) The original French Life was published in 1908.

Trans. note.

*mented Mother's birth, for she was born on the 8th May, 1808, and died twenty years ago, full of years and of merits.*

*It has therefore been thought appropriate, since the occasion suggests it, to publish the LIFE OF MOTHER CARON this year. For it is justly considered that such a biography must prove useful to the Sisters of that dear Community and profitable to their spiritual welfare, and consequently to the success of that work which is being perpetuated by her daughters. This publication will serve, moreover, as a continuation of the LIFE OF MOTHER GAMELIN, which was written some years ago. To this end, long and patient rearcheses were begun months before, and in the very bosom of the Community. Archives were ransacked, surviving contemporaries questioned, notes and correspondence, materials of various sorts, were accumulated. The book, in fact, was ready made, and the writer had only to apply himself to its general arrangement, and taking up the pen, — and writing as it were, breathlessly, — to bring to life again the very simple, very human, but at the same time very christian and very beautiful life of Mother Caron.*

*The author was asked by the present Superior General (that was in 1908) Reverend Mother Marie Antoinette, to put this ready-made volume into shape, and His Grace, the Archbishop of Montreal added his authorization, in the words of St. Paul to one of his disciples: "Labor as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." (\*) He has but one regret, that of having proved unequal, though through no fault of his own, to the task thus imposed. In any case, he is conscious and only too anxious to repeat here, that in mind and soul he has literally lived over again the beautiful life which he has here striven to reproduce.*

*The name of Mother Caron is deservedly amongst those that must remain in benediction in the House of Providence. Happy, indeed, shall her biographer be, and fully repaid for the labor this narrative has cost him, if by his humble efforts, he has contributed to make that venerable name better known and more familiar to the minds of the generations of religious who, for long years to come, may be called by heaven, to the wonderful work of the Providence.*

---

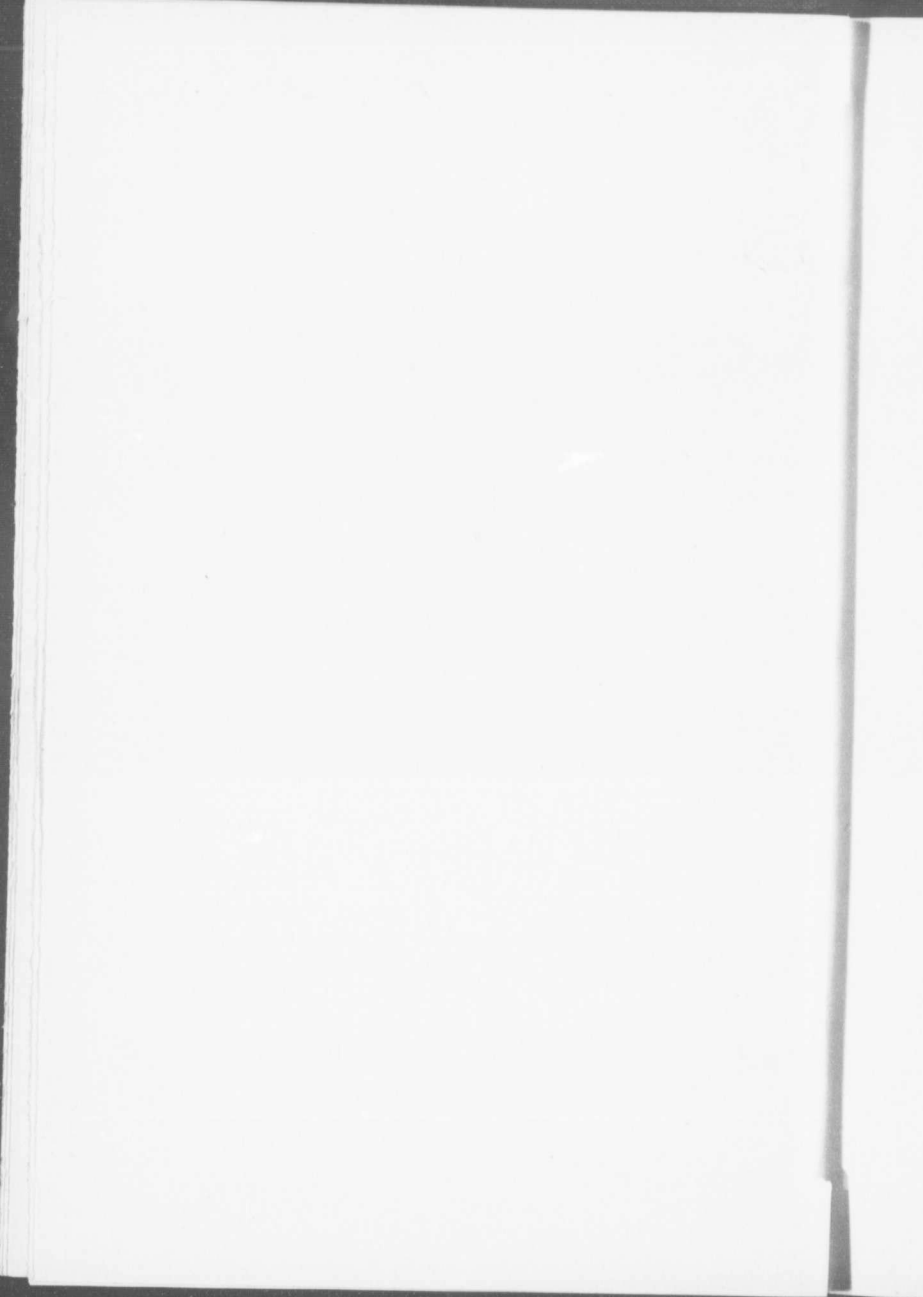
(\*) Tim. II - 3

*By her humility, her confidence in God, her religious spirit, with its component parts of simplicity, love of work, poverty and mortification, above all by her indefatigable charity towards the poor of Christ and towards her fellow laborers in the practice of good works, Mother Caron, as shall be seen in the special chapters devoted to her practice of religious virtues, has well merited to be cited as an example and proposed as a model. Happy and forever blessed be all those who shall follow in her footsteps.*

Montreal, May 8th 1908,

ELIE J. AUCLAIR, *priest.*

---



**LIFE**  
OF  
**MOTHER CARON**

ONE OF THE SEVEN FOUNDESSES AND SECOND SUPERIOR  
OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY OF PROVIDENCE

---

CHAPTER I

BIRTH AND YOUTH OF MOTHER CARON

1808—1826

---

NUMEROUS indeed have been the families of French Canadian origin who have given forth vigorous and noble offshoots. It has become a commonplace, especially in St. John the Baptist oratory, to compare French Canadian families with those patriarchal ones of the Old Testament. Whatever may be thought of this comparison, it is certain that, in this respect, our race has been particularly favored.

Now it is a circumstance worthy of note, that in many instances, the families who have thus multiplied, have been precisely those who have given the greatest number of celibates to the priesthood or to the religious life. So that in the majority of cases our priests and

religious live over again, in the interminable theories of nephews and nieces. The tithes of flesh and blood have not proved detrimental, but rather the contrary, to the fecundity of families or of the race.

Mother Caron, the humble Sister of Charity whose story is here written, belonged to one of those Canadian families visibly blessed by heaven. For although she herself had only one brother and three sisters, her relations were numerous, and in many instances, distinguished.

She first saw the light in the parish of St. Antoine, Rivière du Loup, diocese of Three Rivers, and was baptized under the name of Emmelie, in the parochial Church, on the 8th May, 1808, feast of Joan of Arc, by the pastor, Father Bertrand. Her uncle, M. Joseph Caron, and her cousin Madame Louis Caron, were her god-parents. Her father, Ambroise Caron, (1) and her

---

(1) The Caron family was originally from the diocese of Vannes, Morbihan, in Brittany, France. Robert Caron arrived in Canada about 1635, and settled at Ste-Anne de Beaupré. His property, was about half a league from the parish Church. Descendants of his are still living there. He had several children, and one of his great-grand children, Michael, was the grandfather of Mother Caron. He died in Rivière du Loup, on the 11th of June 1800, at the age of sixty-six. Buried in the cemetery of the old church, his remains were exhumed to be re-interred in the present church, which dates from 1807. Ambroise, the eleventh child, was the father of Mother Caron. He established himself, according to the phrase employed in the Province of Quebec, on the concession of Petits Bois. This portion of the parish was afterwards annexe to Maskinongé, and there Mother Caron was born.



mother, Marie Josephite Langlois, were honest and worthy scions of the farming class, little favored with the goods of fortune, but fervent Christians and enjoying the esteem of their neighbors. Emmelie's brother, Ambroise, was married to a sister of the Abbé Paquin, the Curé of St. Eustache, who became celebrated during the *troubles* of 1837. He took up his residence precisely in that parish of which his brother-in-law was pastor, and enjoyed there the highest consideration. A worthy brother of her whose whole life was to be devoted to charity, he constituted himself the protector of the poor.

A veritable Providence to the indigent, his pastor, Father Paquin, placed in his hands the parochial alms, of which he made a prudent and equitable distribution. He brought up a numerous family, thus, in the fear of God and the love of the poor. In his latter days, he went to live at St. Vincent de Paul, Ile Jesus, where he died. He spent his last strength in the service of the Sisters of Providence, to whom he had for several years acted as confidential advisor.

One of Emmelie's sisters, Marie Rosaire, married Mr. Duguay, a farmer of St. François-du-Lac. She too, was the mother of several children, one of her daughters being at a later period Superior of the Gray Nuns in Ottawa. It was, no doubt, in consequence of this marriage that the father of Mother Caron went to end his days at St. François-du-Lac.

It may be added, in concluding this family chronicle, that the former Lieutenant Governor of the

Province of Quebec, the late Hon. Edouard-René Caron, father of the more recently deceased Sir Adolphe Caron, was a cousin-german of Michel Caron, the progenitor of our heroine. Also, that two of her uncles, Michel and Charles were members of the Legislative Assembly for the County of St. Maurice, and that two cousins, Mother St. Michel and Mother St. Charles, were both religious in the Ursuline community of Three Rivers.

It has been sufficiently shown, therefore, that the Caron family was such as does honor to a Catholic country. Whether in the shadow of the altar, in the life of the cloister, or in the exercise of civic and social virtues, it has been faithful to the best traditions of our race and of our faith. That is perhaps why, — or so it is permissible to believe — that God willed to choose from this family a particularly favored child, of whom to make in a special manner his servant and friend by associating her with the work of the venerated Mother Gamelin and Bishop Bourget. For they were to reproduce upon our shores the work of St. Vincent de Paul and of Mlle Legras, and to give us those other Sisters of Charity who are known as Sisters of Providence.

Very little has been recorded of Mother Caron's earlier years. What we chiefly know of that initial period is that her happy disposition, her frank and open character, and her tender and generous heart, augured well for the future. She was almost totally free from those faults so common to childhood, of thoughtlessness

and levity, and she grew up under the eyes of her worthy parents in the calm of a life that was already serious and to which purity and innocence lent their charm.

The school at Rivière-du-Loup had the advantage, which was sufficiently rare at that epoch, of possessing an excellent teacher, in the person of Miss Burroughs, a fervent convert, and a member of a distinguished English family. This lady was in later years the first lady-boarder of the Providence Asylum. She took up her abode there in 1844. After several years, she returned to her family where she died. One of her sisters, also a convert, became an Ursuline religious, in Three Rivers, and for several years filled the important office of mistress of studies, a detail which serves to show that the Burroughs family were capable of giving a solid and even elaborate education.

The intellectual and moral training of the youthful Emmelie, who was besides very highly gifted, did great honor in the sequel to her distinguished and devoted instructress. Mother Caron expressed herself in simple language, but with a remarkable nicety and precision, as well as a rare refinement. Her clear and concise style was both easy and correct.

In the designs of Providence, Mother Caron had to experience in her youth the privations and the inconveniences of poverty. Despite his brave efforts,

fortune had never smiled upon her father. He and his family lived decently, but poorly. While still quite young, Emmelie was called upon to assist her family by the labor of her own hands, and to add to the resources of the household. She was employed in the plaiting of straw, and the instrument of which she made use in this humble calling is still religiously preserved at the "Providence." It was obtained through Mademoiselle Angele Caron, a near relative and intimate friend of the future Superior. She survived her only two years and died in the mission of St. Vincent de Paul, where she had resided for several years.

So, Mother Caron, in her youth, was a worker in straw, and knew, if not actual misery, at least the stress of poverty. This was beyond doubt, in the designs of God, a grace and a preparation for her vocation of Sister of Providence and helper of the poor. For it seems, that all things being equal, she was better qualified to relieve the misery which she had herself endured. For whosoever has suffered is more truly compassionate towards the sufferings of others, for the reason that he better understands them.

---

## CHAPTER II

## MOTHER CARON'S LIFE IN THE WORLD

1826—1843

EMMELIE CARON grew up in the practice of poverty, docility towards her parents and the fear of the Lord. The years glided quietly by, in prayer, manual labor and study. And so were ripened in her soul those seeds of virtue which heaven had sown there. She grew in wisdom and in age, after the example of the Divine model, the Lord Jesus, to whom she was later to make an entire consecration of herself. But, at the time when a young girl ordinarily thinks of choosing a state of life, there is no evidence that she had any intention of becoming a religious; God was reserving that for a later period. We know from the example of the apostles that it is He who chooses, and that He chooses in His own time. "*No vos me elegistis, sed ego elegi vos.*" You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you." (\*)

But those whom He chooses, the Lord also prepares; all are not stricken like Saul, on another road to Damascus. At the age of twenty years, or thereabouts, Emmelie left the paternal roof, to enter upon a career

---

(\*) St. John, XV, 16.

which her spirit of faith and piety caused her to regard as an apostolate. It served, in fact, as an admirable preparation for her future life. Under the guidance of a wise and enlightened priest, her cousin, Father Thomas Caron, who was at that time pastor of Saint-Esprit, the young girl undertook the laborious but meritorious duties of teacher. Well aware of the virtues, the talents and the intellectual abilities of his kinswoman, which were sufficiently rare at that period, Father Caron invited her to make her home in his presbytery ; and from that time onwards, in each of his successive pastorates, the young teacher accompanied him.

As the author has already written on the occasion of the Pedagogic Congress, which has been held for some years, successively in one or other of the larger cities of the province of Quebec, "a teacher who is conscientious in fulfilling her duties is in reality a second mother. Whilst the mother according to nature," wrote he, "gives her blood and her life to the child, that teacher imparts to him something of her mind and her heart. This second maternity has not, it is true, the sublimity of the first ; but it is not without its noble prerogatives and exalted responsibilities. According as the child increases in age and strength, its tendency is, alas ! to withdraw itself from the maternal influence. Fortunate, indeed, if the prevailing influence where circumstances have placed the child, namely that of the school mistress, be indeed a second maternity, marked by the self-sacrifice and devotedness of a real

mother. The school mistress, especially in rural districts, finds herself without any transition period, substituted for the mother whose place she takes and whom she represents." (\*)

This life of the second mother necessarily implies self-denial and self-immolation. But Emmelie Caron was fully alive to the importance of her mission. Realizing that the future of her pupils depends in great measure on their early training, she gave herself up to the work of instruction with a zeal and self-forgetfulness, which are to be admired, in those who love souls above all things for God. Her gentle and affable demeanor won from the very outset the love and respect of her pupils. She knew the secret of lending a charm to every lesson. This was quickly remarked, and in many cases, fully appreciated by the parents of those entrusted to her care. Her pronounced success in teaching, her great kindness to each and every one, together with the modesty of her bearing, prepossessed all in her favor, and gained universal esteem and affection. She inspired all those with whom she came in contact with a confidence to which she responded by redoubled zeal and devotion.

Besides the general instruction which she imparted in the school-room, this devoted teacher, who was truly a second mother to her scholars, cheerfully availed

---

(\*) *L'Enseignement Primaire* (Primary Education) Oct. 1904, p. 70. Article *Les Secondes Mères*, (Second Mothers.)

herself of every opportunity to continue her beneficent action in their regard, by lessons which she imposed upon herself outside of the regular hours. As for instance, when in the absence of the pastor or his curate, she willingly undertook and with the greatest diligence, the teaching of Catechism to the children of the parish. Local tradition records that she excelled in this kind of instruction.

She was also very fond of singing. Gifted with a fine voice, she organized a choir of singers amongst the young girls of the locality. It met with marked success and added considerably to the various ceremonies of the Church, contributing also to the piety of the faithful. A good old woman hailing from the mission of St. Vincent de Paul, who had been in her youth a member of that choir, still spoke of it with pleasure as late as 1888.

"All the young girls of the parish," she said, "were attracted to Mademoiselle Caron by her irresistible charm of manner. She was so charitable, she willingly took the blame upon herself for the faults of others, being always anxious to save them from reproach." "We all loved, her," she exclaimed, upon another occasion, "and so much enjoyed those singing exercises which she directed, that neither distance nor bad weather nor expense prevented us from attending them. 'Don't fear,' she used to say, 'nothing disagreeable will happen to you.' And thus reassured, we were always faithful to the practices."



Such testimonies may be trifling, indeed, but to the thoughtful mind they mean much.

Even in those early days, Emmelie loved to give. Despite the paucity of her resources, she found means to give alms. She did so, according to the counsel of Tobias. Never was the door of her school closed against children who were unable to remunerate her. But rather in such cases, she procured for them material help. She often obtained permission for those who lived far from the school to remain, in severe weather, over night at the presbytery. Naturally, upon such occasions, it was she herself who prepared their meals, made them pray to the good Jesus, and after some motherly advice given in her gentle fashion, tucked them into the little beds in which they were to sleep. Needless to say that she made these occasions more, rather than less, frequent. Now, it was because of the cold, or because of the snow, or because it seemed likely to storm. The good pastor was not, however, deceived. He very soon realized that his young cousin had above all a kind heart.

Her charity was already very active, so that, as has been said, she very soon possessed the confidence, not only of her pupils but of all those who came in contact with her. Witnessing her angelic piety, her assiduity in assisting at the services of the Church, and her fervor in approaching the Holy Table, those poor people who were themselves full of faith recognized in her a saint. She was the confidante of many of them

in their numerous troubles and their trusted adviser in countless difficulties. Her own kind and merciful heart was always ready to receive the outpourings of other hearts in affliction. Her great panacea for all evils was prayer, the prayer of children, the prayer of the pure of heart. Frequently did she offer a holy violence to heaven, obtaining priceless favors for those who recommended themselves to her prayers.

But as was natural, the warmest corner of her large heart was reserved for children. That was why they all loved her, and through the whole course of their lives, in many instances, held her in affectionate remembrance. Though careful to guard against all imprudent familiarities, she was truly a second mother to every one of them. Though, of course, some amongst them knew better than others how to manifest their regard and to remain faithful through the years to their former teacher of Saint-Esprit.

To cite a sufficiently notable example: The Messieurs Duvernay, proprietors of "La Minerve," in the character of old pupils, gave her continual and unmistakable proofs of their regard. They paid her an annual visit and begged that she would call upon them at any time for anything that she needed. Good Mother Caron never imposed upon their kindness, but when occasion offered, she went to them with confidence and was always sure of an excellent reception. One day, she called at their office and found them both absent. But one of the brothers went that very evening to the Prov-

idence and handed Mother Caron a considerable sum. "It is for your poor," he explained, being very well aware that was the best means of giving her pleasure.

Father Thomas Caron, having been promoted from the pastorate of Saint-Esprit to that of St. Vincent de Paul, and afterwards to that of St. Martin, Emmelie Caron accompanied him to each of these posts, together with her cousin Angele, who was the sister of the priest.

During her residence at St. Vincent de Paul, she was attacked by cancer of the nose. This was cured, but at the cost of very drastic treatment. By a species of providential compensation for this affliction, she retained, for the benefit of her charitable work, the secret of curing that terrible malady.

At St. Vincent de Paul and at St. Martin, as at St. Esprit, she made herself, according to the beautiful saying of St. Paul, "all things to every one." Her compassion, her charity, her devotedness, won for her, once more the confidence of everybody and the veneration of the people. In these latter localities, she led however, a more, isolated life than she had done in the preceding ones. For she was not so exclusively occupied with the work of education, but devoted herself likewise to the care of the altar and the presbytery, with works of charity towards the sick, the infirm, and the afflicted of all sorts. Her cousin Angele was in every respect, a worthy companion of that pious and charitable life.

Prayer and self sacrifice, or Charity — *Caritas Christi*— may be said to have summed up in two words,

her whole life, until that day when she became one of the six cooperators of the beloved and venerated Mother Gamelin, in the foundation work of the Sisters of Providence.

---

### CHAPTER III

#### MOTHER CARON TAKES THE HABIT

1843

---

IT is unnecessary here to enter into a detailed account of the foundation of the Sisters of Providence. The "Life of Mother Gamelin," published several years ago, by a religious of the Institute, contains all needful information on that subject. But for the proper understanding and coherency of the biography here undertaken it will be useful to retrace at least the broader outlines of the plan, and the initial features of that work, whereof our heroine was one of the Seven Foundresses.

In 1828, a pious and wealthy widow of Montreal, Madame Jean Baptiste Gamelin opened an Asylum for a few poor women, who were aged and infirm. The priests of Saint Sulpice, to whom the Metropolis is indebted for so many benefits, encouraged and assisted the good lady in her foundation. Mgr. Lartigue, first

Bishop of Montreal, and subsequently, his successor Bishop Bourget, willingly granted their exalted patronage to that modest undertaking, the practical utility whereof caused it to extend so speedily and considerably.

Then, too, Madame Gamelin numbered amongst her acquaintance many who belonged to the wealthy and influential classes, and they were not sparing of their sympathy. The work quickly prospered; the grain of mustard seed had been sown in good ground. Bishop Bourget, that illustrious and saintly prelate to whom Montreal is indebted for many and fruitful institutions, was very quick, as has been said, to appreciate the work of Mother Gamelin. Only such an Institute as she devised could take root and be of practical utility in the poor district where it sprang into life. During the course of one of his visits to Europe, the charitable Bishop approached the daughters of St. Vincent de Paul with a view to securing their services, and thus graft the humble offshoot which had spontaneously germinated in his episcopal city upon an already vigorous tree. The negotiations were about to be concluded, and the Sisters of Charity were to come a few months later to the Canadian Metropolis, when all at once His Lordship of Montreal was notified that it would be impossible for them to fulfil the contract.

Far from being discouraged, the holy prelate saw in that event a secret ruling of Providence. He resolved to found a congregation essentially Canadian, and to this end he made an appeal to the devout young women of his diocese.

To this appeal Emmelie Caron responded, and in the manner which shall be here described. Mother Gamelin's first assistant, Madeleine Durand, had been for sometime in friendly relations with the pious and zealous young teacher, and kept her informed of the admirable project in which Bishop Bourget and the saintly widow were interested. The voice of the Chief Pastor, calling upon his daughters to serve under the banner of charity and of Divine Providence found an echo in the very depths of Emmelie Caron's heart. As has been seen in the preceding chapters, she had long been preparing for the more perfect manner of life that now smiled upon her. A marked attraction towards the religious life had been developing in her soul for many years. Her director, Father Caron, had thitherto advised her to wait: "Your hour has not yet come," he had said on more than one occasion, when she had returned to the charge. His advice had invariably been to wait. But no sooner had she spoken to him of the project which Bishop Bourget and Madame Gamelin had in view than he decided, after one of her confessions: "Go, the time has now come, and it is there that God wants you."

She was then introduced by her friend to Madame Gamelin, and the latter invited the new aspirant to spend some time with her friend and in that way to make trial, in her company, of the holy but arduous duties to which she desired to devote herself. Towards the close of the year 1842, she spent three months

there. She naturally met Bishop Bourget, who encouraged her in her resolve. She, however, returned for a time to her cousin and to the beloved retreat of the presbytery, there to mature her plans and to test both her own constancy and the solidity of her attraction.

That final decision was a severe trial to her. She was then thirty-five, an age at which habits of life are not changed without painful effort. The legitimate popularity which she enjoyed had moreover created for her many special ties, which were not readily broken. Besides, she would have been welcomed with open arms by more than one community. Well aware of this fact, and conscious also of the good that was being done in those houses wherein she had friends, she could not regard without pain a separation from them all, and which would be forever. In addition to all this, was the circumstance that her idea once known, excited considerable opposition. Efforts were made to modify her decision, or to direct her towards one of the oldest and most honored of the Montreal communities, where pecuniary conditions were on a solid basis, and where life consequently would be more peaceful. But the interior attraction which she felt towards that house, soon to be called the Providence, prevailed over all other considerations.

Mgr. Bourget had said to her: "Come" and Father Caron had said to her: "Go". She obeyed, and on the 16th march, with five companions, namely: Madeleine Durand, Agathe Séné, Marguerite Thibodeau,

Victoire Larocque and Delphine Payement, she was faithful to the rendez-vous proposed by the Chief Pastor. With the above mentioned she began a Novena, the last three days of which were turned into a Retreat, under the direction of Canon Prince. Finally and always with the same companions, on the 25th of March she was clothed with the holy habit.

The 25th of March in that year fell upon a Saturday, which was also the eve of Passion Sunday. The ceremony of the clothing took place at a quarter past six in the morning, in Madame Gamelin's little Hospice, which is also known in the history of the Providence community, as "the yellow house;" and in a small room which served in the beginning as a chapel. Mgr Bourget presided, assisted by Canon Prince, afterwards first Bishop of St. Hyacinthe and the Abbé Ginguet, a retired French priest, who lived at the Bishop's Palace, and collaborated with Canon Prince in editing the "*Mélanges Religieux*". (\*)

Because of the limited accommodations, only a few relatives of the novices and the members of the household were admitted to the ceremony. To all appearances and from a human point of view, these first beginnings were very small and very humble. But Mgr. Bourget had the deep, far seeing eye which permitted him a vision of the future; and from that moment the novitiate of the Daughters of Charity Servants of the Poor was inaugurated.

---

(\*) Religious Miscellaneous, a publication of that period.



Mother Gamelin's little Refuge, "the yellow house," as it is styled in the annals of the Institute, which was the scene of that first ceremony of investiture, the first act in the religious life of the Sisters of Providence, was not however the initial dwelling, which had been occupied by Mother Gamelin and Madeleine Durand. They had undertaken the care of a few aged and infirm poor women in a residence on the corner of St. Catherine and St. Lawrence Streets, which Messieurs Fay and St. Pierre of the Sulpicians, from Notre Dame, had placed at their disposal. They had later become installed in "the yellow house," through the munificence of Olivier Berthelet, that man of innumerable good works, whose name so frequently occurs in the history of the charitable foundations of Montreal. "The yellow house" was situated on the corner of St. Catherine and St. Hubert Streets, but on the opposite side to the present House of Providence. It was a simple, wooden structure, two stories in height, measuring forty by thirty feet and with an English roof. It was there, that, as already mentioned, on the 25th March, 1843, in company with Mother Gamelin and the five other foundresses, Mademoiselle Emmelie became Sister Caron.

Scarcely two months later, on the 17th May of the same year, the seven foundresses left the "yellow house" to take up their abode in the Providence Asylum. This was on St. Catherine St. facing Labelle, and in the immediate vicinity of St. James' Church. At first, it consisted

only of the main building and the chapel flanked by two annexes. In 1845, that wing was constructed which now fronts on St. Catherine St., and in 1859, the one which can be perceived from the garden side. The first, was the fruit of the labor and industry of the Sisters, assisted by the donations of the charitable public; the second was due to the munificence of Mr. Olivier Berthelet and his sister, Mlle Therese. The "yellow house" after the departure of the Sisters was let to a merchant. It was destroyed by fire, on the 11th September, 1844, and the ground was soon afterwards sold to Mr. W. Coffin.

The Asylum itself was built upon Labelle St. near St. Catherine, rather than on the latter street. This explains—since Labelle St. was not continued—the somewhat singular appearance presented by the principal façade of the actual edifice. Instead of being in full view on St. Catherine, it fronts upon the garden, in the direction of St. James' Church. Entrance is on Labelle St. of which the continuation would have served, as was believed, as an avenue of approach to the Asylum.

These topographical details cannot be altogether a matter of indifference at the beginning of this narrative. For it is well to become acquainted with these places, illustrated by the events here related, for, in that way, it is easier to follow the action of the various personages through the course of the narrative and to understand their proceedings. The short weeks of religious life in the yellow house

served to imbue the Institute of the Sisters of Providence with a spirit which has remained peculiarly its own. No doubt, a vast distance separates those humble and difficult beginnings from the splendid Houses of Providence that are variously known as the Mother House, the Hospice Gamelin, the Longue Point Asylum, the Incurable Hospital, the Deaf and Dumb, the Hospice Bourget and the Hospice Auclair. But it is only necessary to follow the Sisters ever so little, in their every day work amongst the sick and the infirm, the aged and the orphan, to become convinced that the spirit of the "yellow house" and of the first Asylum still lingers, as the soul of that work created on the 25th march, 1843, with the blessing of the great Bishop, by the Seven Foundresses of the Providence.

Amongst the pious and holy women who have contributed to keep alive this spirit, as the sequel of this biography will show, there is one who deserves to be placed in the front rank after and with the illustrious Mother Gamelin, and that is she who was known as Sister Caron, pending the time, when becoming, in her turn, Superior, she assumed that title which history will retain, and which the generations to come shall hold in benediction, that of Mother Caron.

---

## CHAPTER IV

## MOTHER CARON IN THE NOVITIATE

1843—1844

THE novitiate is for every religious soul the great preliminary test. It means not alone the generous acceptance of the Cross, but the carrying thereof, hour by hour, day by day, year by year. In that must the novice be exercised before the coming of the blessed day of profession. And this exercise, beautiful though it may be to the eyes of faith, costs a great deal to poor human nature. Nor is this, furthermore, a matter for surprise when the true spirit of christianity is understood, and the precise meaning of the sacrifices demanded by the Counsels that are called evangelical. When the young man mentioned in Holy Writ held with Our Lord that conversation which is so often quoted and so constantly commented upon to novices of every Order, when Jesus had made known to him that in order to be His follower he must sell all that he had, the sacred text relates, that "he went away sad." There are many ways of going away, there is but one of remaining faithful. And once more, that way is painful to our pride and sensuality.

Jesus, our Divine Master, deigned to give us the example, even unto the end. In the Garden of His Agony, in face of the Chalice which the Angel of the Most High offered Him to drink, He deigned to hesitate, to demand that the chalice pass from Him, and if we may dare, in all reverence, to use the expression, He was afraid, to the extent of sweating blood mingled with water. Merciful Providence of Him, who thus became the model, no less than the Master of all those, who, in the course of ages, should be destined to follow Him, even to the sublime folly of the Cross. Yet, in that very moment of hesitation, He was ready; when His Body was cast down, even as the ripe grapes are crushed in the wine-press, His soul was preserved strong and valiant; and when He cried out: "Let this chalice pass from Me," He added immediately, "But nevertheless, O my Father, not my will but thine be done."

The novitiate is as the slow acceptance of that chalice, and the carrying of that Cross. Rash, indeed, are they, who hope to attain such results in a first attempt, and without experiencing the rebellion of nature.

It may well be believed, that if all novitiates have much that is painful from their very nature, that of the seven first Sisters of Providence was marked by a special character. It has been remarked by many writers that the works of God usually pass in their inception through a purifying crucible of suffering.

Nor was the House of Providence any exception to this rule. If the grace of God and His choicest blessings were poured out in full measure upon "the yellow house" and the first Asylum, great generosity of soul and an inexhaustible fund of self-denial and devotedness were none the less required from the foundresses. Their way was not yet clearly indicated, and everything was in process of organization. Mother Gamelin was happily endowed both in the order of nature and that of grace. She had the faculty of inspiring others, and of urging her companions onwards in that steady march for God and for His works. To be fully convinced of this truth it is only necessary to read the VIIIth chapter of the beautiful volume dedicated to her by a religious of her Institute. But one thing, above all, she was obliged to exact from her daughters, and that was the abnegation of self. In addition to the care of the poor in the Asylum which dated from the year 1843, the novices had to visit the poor in their homes and to collect alms for their work. Two of them set out every morning, with a basket on their arm, traversing the streets of the great city. A difficult task, indeed, for those of a delicate nature.

Canon Prince, whom Bishop Bourget had appointed as director of the House of Providence, though always kind and sympathetic, could, on occasion, show himself both firm and austere. He was not sparing of trials, penances and humiliations to his novices. His Lordship himself came occasionally to preside over the spiritual

reading and to expound the rules, which were similar to those of St. Vincent de Paul to his daughters. He likewise took upon himself the duty, which was also a pleasure, of initiating the Sisterhood into the methods of prayer of St. Ignatius. All of which was no doubt very beautiful, edifying and consoling ; but it was also sacrifice, it was the chalice, it was the Cross !

Sister Caron's fervor was always equal to those sublime and holy demands upon her. Eager to follow Jesus, she knew how to deny herself and to carry the Cross. So well, indeed, did she understand that secret that her courage very often sufficed to strengthen and support that of her Sisters. Her virtue, which had been fully tested, soon became conspicuous. She speedily found occasion to be useful to her Sisters, even guiding and directing them through the difficulties of every day. Very soon, too, though quite unconsciously, she began to exercise over them a relative superiority which arose from her wider experience of life and her particular knowledge of a variety of subjects. This superiority, however, was never offensive to any one. Others, in fact, turned to her with an instinctive appreciation of her large and loving heart, and her intellect, clear and penetrating as that of a good general.

The future Mother Caron, Superior General, was already to be found, in embryo, in the humble novice known as Sister Caron. That ascendancy over others, which she never imposed, but to which every one yielded, had been previously exercised in the world, where she

was long remembered for her practical knowledge and unusual skill in manual labor. These things would not in themselves have explained her influence, but it could be readily understood, when taken in conjunction with her gentle and reserved disposition, the delicacy of her heart, and her discretion that was proof against everything. Her active and laborious life in the world had been, in fact, for Mother Caron a prelude to that other. The ascendancy thus gained over others, her remarkable activity together with her boundless generosity of soul, were turned to good account. All sorts of work, employments of every kind, were intrusted to her. She was by turns in the kitchen, or busy with washing and ironing, when she was not engaged in the higher service of visiting the sick or the aged in their homes, distributing alms, caring for old men or orphans, the sick or the infirm.

She was always equal to herself, always enterprising, always energetic and so became one of the strongest supports of the nascent community. Was any one beset by trouble or anxiety, difficulties of any sort, forthwith she ran to Sister Caron! For her unusual aptitudes, her considerable experience of life, despite a certain natural timidity, imparted to her a stability, a confidence, that very soon enabled her to dispel the trouble or anxiety and to lessen the difficulty. Nor was the secret of her success in the works she undertook a mystery to any one. More than half a century later her Sisters and the companions of her noviciate recall



with emotion her spirit of faith and her idea of obedience, whereof Sister Caron gave an example at the very cradle of that religious foundation. Her obedience had in it ingredients, of humility, self abnegation, charity and devotedness. Whosoever is thus obedient through supernatural motives, as the Sacred Scriptures declare, shall gain the victory. (\*) "The obedient man shall speak of victory." *Vir obediens loquetur victoriam.* Her lively faith inspired her with a holy respect for all that even remotely concerned God, and at the same time with strength to overcome all natural repugnances and to conquer self. To the time of her noviciate belong, for instance, those often quoted words of hers: "My Sisters, take care. For to speak evil of His ministers is to touch the very apple of Our Lord's eye." Another of her sayings was: "In such circumstance," (that is, when some sacrifice was demanded of her) "I think of hell, and that thought gives me courage to conquer myself. In view of that abyss of fire nothing seems difficult to me. I can wrest the greatest sacrifices from my cowardly nature."

As before said, the noviciate means the acceptance for one's whole life of submission to the law of sacrifice. It means a perpetual drinking of the chalice and carrying of the Cross. It has here been shown how fully and practically Sister Caron understood that acceptance, and thus prepared herself for more solemn obligations.

---

(\*) PXXI, 28.

## CHAPTER V

## MOTHER CARON'S PROFESSION

1844

ON the Feast of the Compassion of Our Lady, and consequently on a Friday, March 29th, 1844, took place the first Profession at the Providence. Bishop Bourget, who had himself preached the preparatory retreat, beginning on the 25th of March, also presided over that ceremony, which was assuredly most solemn. The *Mélanges Religieux*, (\*) of the 21st April of that year, published a detailed account thereof. But since that description has been reproduced in full in the "Life of Mother Gamelin," it will be sufficient to give here a summary of its chief points.

The seven novice-foundresses, according to the rank assigned them in the episcopal act of canonical erection, were: Emmélie Gamelin, Madeleine Durand, Emmélie Caron, Agathe Séné, Marguerite Thibodeau, Justine Michon and Victoire Larocque. The Ladies of Charity, the old women of the Refuge, and the orphans took an active part in the ceremony of that first profession. This is as it should be, for the Sister of Charity of

---

(\*) *Religious Miscellany*, a publication of that day.—

Trans. note.

Providence constitutes herself, for the love of God, the guardian of orphans and the servant of the poor; and her vocation also demands that she should depend to a certain extent upon the active charity of people of the world; which latter is a truly christian inspiration. For in this way not only does the Sister of Providence give herself, but so arranges matters that others shall give through her and because of her.

At that ceremony of the first profession were, then, to be seen the seven novices, responding to that mystical appeal made to them when the assistants of the officiating prelate entone the antiphon: *Prudentes virgines, aptate vestras lampades.*—“Ye wise virgins, prepare your lamps,” after which each of the seven novices holding a lighted taper, advanced to the altar, preceded by an orphan carrying upon a platter the insignia of profession, and supported upon her right hand by a lady of charity, acting the part of another Cyrennean, and upon the left by an infirm old woman, one of the forty-two poor and aged ones who had already found shelter in the Refuge.

That exquisitely touching scene would have made a beautiful subject for the brush of a talented artist. He could find his inspiration in the figures of the chief personages, or still more in their impressive attitude, as they wait that breathless moment when the poor, aged woman places upon the finger of the novice her espousal ring; or when the lady of charity lays upon her breast that cross which she is symbolically aiding her to carry;

or again, at the moment, also historic, when the lady of honor bestows a considerable alms upon her god-child, which the novice passes on to the aged, or the orphan. O charity, how beautiful, how sublime thou art!

The ladies of honor of the seven foundresses were : Mesdames Cuvillier, Delorme, Nowlan, Lacroix, Fabre, Gauvin and Mademoiselle Thérèse Berthelet.

To that spectacle, thus described by the chronicles of the time, should be added the beautiful words, to which were given their full meaning, and which are according to the ceremonial :

“ My daughters, what do you ask ? ”

And they answer that it is Jesus Christ whom they seek and that their whole ambition is the service of His poor. The question is repeated three times, and answered in similar fashion, after which comes the voluntary oblation, which each one, prostrating herself, makes aloud. The pronouncing of vows did not, however, follow immediately, since it was necessarily preceded by the canonical erection of the new community. That erection took place, at that precise moment, in the reading by Canon Prince of that magnificent Letter, with which the Sisters of Providence are so familiar, but which must be recalled before the conclusion of this chapter, at least in the form of a summary.

After a renewed interpellation by the Bishop, each Sister pronounced her vows and laid her written act in the hands of the officiating prelate, by whom it was

laid upon the altar. Their habits were blessed, and put on in an adjoining room, whither the seven privileged ones were led by their ladies of honor. Returning, they received the prescribed benediction, together with ring and cross, in the manner already described, and that was all. The seven first Sisters of Providence were made. It only remained to entone the *Te Deum*, in thanksgiving to God, and the *Ecce quam bonum*, for the fidelity of the Sisters and the Community.

All this took place, doubtless, far more rapidly than it can be told, and the same scenes will recur innumerable times in the future life of the Institute of Providence; but solemn and infinitely precious must have remained to the infant congregation that day and hour of the first profession. As already mentioned, the pastoral by which Mgr. Bourget gave them the religious and canonical life, was read to the seven foundresses during the ceremony. It has been reprinted in full in the "Life of Mother Gamelin," but may be given here in part, for the benefit of those reading the "Life of Mother Caron."

That beautiful episcopal epistle remained as the charter and rule of their religious faith for the seven favored ones of March 29th, 1844. It is, therefore, just and logical when the life of one of them is to be studied in detail, to recall what in the judgment of that great bishop should be the spirit and the life of all. Mgr. Bourget regarded as essentially hers the task of relieving human misery. He declared that, "according to the

holy man, Job, the pastor should be," an eye to the blind, a foot to the lame and the father of the poor. (\*) But it would be impossible, for him to do all this of himself; he must have co-operators. Hence it is that he encourages religious women to live in communities. Behold how at this moment they are confirmed in their new state of life, wherein they desire to be established forever. The Bishop accepts them in the name of the Church, of which he is the representative. Consequently, he has canonically erected the Asylum of Montreal, in the House of Providence. He has also canonically established the Sisters of Charity Servants of the Poor; he permitted them to take vows; he gave them rules, similar to those of the Sisters of Charity founded by St. Vincent de Paul; finally, he blessed his dear daughters, repeating for their encouragement the consoling words, which Jesus Christ will utter on the last day: (†) "Come ye blessed of My Father. . . . For I was hungry, and you gave Me to eat; . . . . I was a stranger and you took Me in; . . . naked and you covered Me; . . . sick and you visited Me, . . . I was in prison and you came to Me. Come, in your turn, to possess the Kingdom prepared for you."

It can easily be understood how such words, falling from those august lips, and under such circumstances, should impress themselves upon the soul of each

---

(\*) Job XXIX, 15.

(†) Matt. XXV.

and every one of those seven foundresses; and notably upon that of Mother Caron, whose life, as has been shown in the preceding chapters, had been surely, if slowly, tending towards that noble and exalted end of the vocation, which was indicated by the Bishop.

When she was learning her prayers at Miss Burrough's school, or plaiting straw at Rivière du Loup, or conscientiously fulfilling the duties of teacher or second mother at Saint Esprit, Saint Vincent de Paul or St. Martin, Emmelie Caron, loving poverty, had already found time to serve the poor.

Fully, indeed, had this wish of her heart been realized, and fervently must she have blessed the Lord Jesus on that 29th day of March, 1844. The Lord, for whom she had longed in all sincerity of soul during those many years, had become her inheritance. There is little doubt that in union with the venerated Mother Gamelin and with all her Sisters, she had cried out from the very depths of her soul as she knelt at the feet of the founder-Bishop to receive his blessing. "The Lord is the portion of my inheritance. I shall be, O God, thy servant, in the person of the poor, forever—*Dominus pars hereditatis* (\*) — *Ecce ancilla Domini*. — "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." (†)

---

(\*) Ps. XV—5.

(†) Luck I—38.

## CHAPTER VI

MOTHER CARON AS TREASURER

1844-1849

THAT memorable and vitally important ceremony, which has formed the subject of the preceding chapter, had then placed the seal on the work of the holy Bishop Bourget and that of the saintly Mother Gamelin, and the Institute of the Daughters of Charity Servants of the Poor had been created. It only remained to perfect the details of its organization in that religious life which was henceforth its own. So far there was neither Superior nor Council. In the course of the ceremony of profession of March 29th, 1844, that act of dependance, which the novices before pronouncing their vows, then and ever since, have been accustomed to make at the feet of the Superior General, had, on that occasion, to be offered to Canon Prince, who in the capacity of spiritual director, represented the future Superior. And the seven foundresses addressing that Act to him, also on their knees before him begged that pardon, which their humility, rather than there transgressions demanded.



On the day following, March 30th, Bishop Bourget accompanied by Canons Prince and Plamondon, assembled the newly professed. Canon Prince caused them to sign the act of acceptance of the Rules of St. Vincent de Paul, after which the Bishop, having read to them the article concerning the elections, proceeded to the choice of the principal officers. Sister Gamelin became Superior; Sister Vincent de Paul, (Madeleine Durand) Assistant; Sister Thibodeau, Mistress of Novices and Sister Caron, Treasurer.

In the VIIIth chapter of the Rules of the Daughters of Charity, Servants of the poor, (\*) it is stated that the Sister Treasurer should be a living image of Divine Providence, penetrated with the idea that she exercises an office similar to that of St. Joseph, in watching over the temporal welfare of the religious family, and that she "should work, as if God would do nothing, and yet expect everything from Him, and as if she had done nothing."

That is, indeed, a fine programme, completed by details that are truly suggestive, and we should reproach ourselves if we did not make some effort to recall them here. The revision of the Rules of the Daughters of Charity dates back to 1858, and it seems more than probable that Sister Caron, who had been Treasurer since 1844, and who became Superior for the period extending from 1851, to 1858, had concerned herself

---

(\*) Edition of 1858. Part II, p. 26.

therewith. There is no doubt that she had before her eyes the Rules which St. Vincent de Paul had formerly given to his Daughters of Charity. But the memoirs of the time lead us to believe that Sister Caron, as Treasurer, had herself lived what she had later set down for those who had succeeded her, or who should in future succeed her. Here, then, in its eloquent simplicity is Article 4th of the Rules for the Treasurer: "She shall display her intelligence in business affairs, buying provisions at suitable times; her obedience, in acting only under the direction of the Superior, and according to the decisions of the Council or of the Community; her charity, in anticipating the needs of the Sisters; her patience, in receiving kindly those who may be importunate in their demands; her wisdom, in putting everything into the best possible order; her modesty, in not too warmly contesting at the markets; her spirit of poverty, in incurring no useless expense; her economy, in managing everything, and in causing necessary repairs to be made in time; and finally, her vigilance, in leaving nothing in arrears, but especially payments to be made or to be received."

Well, Sister Caron showed herself thus intelligent, obedient, patient, charitable, wise, modest, poor, economical and vigilant. Her initiative and her conciliatory disposition sufficed for all. The Community was not yet very numerous, and naturally was somewhat wanting in experience. Sister Caron knew how to form capable officers. Her straightforward and methodical way of acting made

her an ideal directress. Being unable to do everything herself, she had the good sense to allow a certain freedom of acting to the Sisters who were associated with her in the different offices; while adroitly supplying them with useful information and direction. So that she put them at their ease and rendered their labors less arduous, while strictly maintaining general order, and that watchful regularity of which she had the honor and the charge. If it became necessary for her to reprove any Sister, she accomplished that duty, which is in some instances so very delicate, with a tender and never-failing charity, according to the familiar saying: *Suaviter in modo fortiter in re.* "Strongly as to the fact, sweetly as to the manner."

Should it happen that one of those whom she governed incurred blame from the Superior or the Director, Canon Prince, the kind Sister Treasurer strove as far as possible to minimize the fault, or even by some innocent stratagem to take it upon herself. She profited by those days, for instance Sunday, when her occupation did not call her out of doors, to lend a helping hand to the cooks, thus permitting them greater freedom in fulfilling their religious duties; or, again, she prepared in advance certain kinds of food, thus lightening their work, or sparing her dear Sisters some fatigue. Needless to say that this thoughtfulness met with affectionate appreciation; and that such a mode of action tended very much to increase that ascendancy over others which Sister Treasurer had so long enjoyed.

Her reputation for kindness went beyond the walls of the Asylum, as it had previously passed the portals of the "yellow house." The sterling qualities and the merit of the revered Mother Gamelin's valuable auxiliary soon became known to the Ladies of Charity and in a general way, at least, to those outside. From the nature of her duties, Sister Caron was brought into contact with a great many people, and everywhere she attracted universal love and esteem. Her modesty and affability, her politeness and urbanity won all hearts. Her entire forgetfulness of self and her ever watchful charity were universally attractive. When the friends and admirers of the nascent work had paid their respects to Mother Gamelin, they eagerly sought opportunities of testifying their love and esteem for the beloved Sister Caron. The tradespeople with whom Sister Caron had frequent dealings invariably had to congratulate themselves on their relations with her. It was even said that she did not always choose the best in her purchases. So anxious was she not to inconvenience some poor merchant, or to lend a helping hand to some deserving one, that she readily accommodated herself to what was offered. When there was question only of herself personally, very little was required to please her. If it chanced that she had to go out at meal times, it was observed that she often contented herself with a piece of dry bread, which she ate as she went.

The spirit of renunciation and of charitable liberality did not lead her, however, into imprudence or indis-

cretion. Despite her charity or, perhaps, because of it, the Sister Treasurer was in the best sense of the word, a business woman. It may be remembered that before entering religion she had had experience and a knowledge of the world, that proved exceedingly advantageous to the infant Community from the very outset. It is certain that her capability and the influence which she enjoyed, had a considerable effect in that impulse towards material prosperity of which the work of Mother Gamelin had evident need for its growth and development both of which were so magnificent and so consoling. It is, of course, God, in the first place, who gives to works of charity, as to the grass of the field, that increase to which the Apostle Paul refers: *Deus incrementum dabat*. "God gives the increase."

But the Apostle also explains that it had first been planted, and then watered by his disciple Apollo: "I planted, but Apollo watered."

In the same manner, Mother Gamelin had planted in good soil the work of Providence. Her dear daughters, and none more so than the Sister Treasurer, had helped her to water that precious seed by their tears and the sweat of their zeal and self sacrifice and God himself, the all-powerful Master, gave the increase, *Deus incrementum dabat*.

---

## CHAPTER VII

SISTER CARON AS SUPERIOR AT ST. ELIZABETH

1849-1851

During the first year of its religious life, the Institute of Providence, like everything that has a vital principle within it, showed a tendency to increase, and more than once the laborious hive of the Asylum had sent forth its swarm, when in 1849 was begun the foundation at St. Elizabeth, the sixth in point of time, since the beginning. Sister Caron was named Superior. She was then only forty-one years of age, and her career, though only in its inception, was clearly full of promise. The mission of St. Elizabeth, in the County of Joliette, had been made at the request of the parish priest, Father Quevillon. The worthy priest had not, however, come previously to definite agreement with his parishioners on the subject of the Convent, so that many vexatious misunderstandings arose. It is an unwritten law of history, that difficulties and contradictions must mark the beginning of every important undertaking. But when the Sisters accepted the good pastor's invitation to found that new house, they could not have anticipated the storm that would be raised. It is permissible to believe that this was allowed for more than one reason. One of which is, that

it brought into bold relief those qualities of order and of stability, of exalted charity and of Christian prudence that were characteristic of the new superior.

Spending their lives in that remote district, at a distance from the great centres, and accustomed to strict economy rather than to liberality, even where religion was concerned, the parishioners of St. Elizabeth did not offer a very fertile field of exploration for works of charity. They were too much afraid of opening the purse strings and spending money.

The Canadian *habitant* has always been hospitable and charitable to the poor, but as for building houses, asylums, convents, it took a long time to persuade the good country folk that all that was not sheer extravagance. So the same thing happened at St. Elizabeth as had often happened elsewhere, and the coming of the Sisters was, at first, regarded with apprehension. It should be well understood, however, that the author does not mean to infer that the parishioners of St. Elizabeth did not want the Sisters. It was only that they received them with a certain hesitation which might, however, in some cases, be perfectly justifiable.

Now here was precisely an opportunity for Sister Caron to show her capabilities. She had already suffered from misunderstanding when she was a teacher in country districts. But she had also learned to know what hearts of gold are hidden under the frieze coats of the country. And she had also discovered the best way to

reach those honest hearts. So she confronted the difficulties of her mission with a smile upon her lips, with frank and genial countenance and with a soul burning with love for Christ, in His poor and His works. The convent, owing to the opposition that had arisen, was only in course of construction, and the sisters were obliged to take up their abode in a house in the village. But the Superior, throwing herself into the breach, at once inaugurated various good works, and began to receive boarders. "It was good to see Sister Caron with the worthy people of the district, how graciously, and with what kindness and charity she received them. She knew how to put them at their ease, and to make herself useful to them. Therefore, an interchange of good offices was soon established between the new Superior and the neighboring farmers. They soon learned to regard her with entire confidence, to esteem, and finally to love and venerate her."

The Sisters hastened to take possession, as soon as possible, of the new foundation house, a large wooden structure, painted yellow, like that one on St. Catherine St., Montreal, wherein had been temporarily installed Mother Gamelin and her first companions. And there, as always at the Mother House, she began to admit poor and aged women and orphans. And those two works, that of the education of children, and that of the disinherited of fortune, who were welcomed there, grew up and flourished side by side. Sister Superior had an eye on everything. While she was



never tired of giving a kindly welcome to the poor, she was ingenious in organizing and directing affairs in such fashion that it seemed as if she frequently renewed the miracle of the multiplication of loaves and fishes. She depended upon Providence, but she left nothing to chance. If on the one hand, she exacted a certain remuneration from her boarders, understanding the people, and the situation with which she had to deal, she so accommodated herself on the other, to their circumstances, as to accept the price of board and tuition in kind. And, moreover, she forced herself to watch over everything, to measure, to balance one thing against another, and to divide up the provisions, mouth by mouth, amongst her pupils. In a word, nothing was too much trouble for her. As at the time when she was Sister Treasurer and followed the method of St. Ignatius, she worked hard: she organized and directed everything, as if God would do nothing for the house of St. Elizabeth, and yet, as if she expected all things from Him, and had herself done nothing.

The writer, when taking notes for the life of Mother Caron, made it a point to visit the house of St. Elizabeth. How much had happened in the course of sixty years, and what a transformation! The old Convent, which was simply the yellow house enlarged, had disappeared in the conflagration of 1876. Nor had it been rebuilt on the same site, but on the other side of the King's road, and facing the beautiful new church,

which is one of the most attractive in the Province of Quebec, and which was of quite recent construction. The visitor was shown the large and spacious edifice, which lodges under its roof two hundred and eighty-nine persons, including religious, pupils, orphans, old people and lady boarders. He visited the establishment from top to bottom, and from one end to the other, and was moved by a deep and sincere emotion, when in the baby class, he heard the little ones lisp out : "We are indebted to God for all that we have." Oh ! if the Superior of 1849 could have suddenly come to life ! How many young girls were formed to virtue during those sixty years. More than two hundred vocations have sprung from the hallowed soil of St. Elizabeth. It seems quite natural that the children of Mother Caron should give themselves to God.

" We attribute the number of vocations," said the actual Superior, "to the sacrifices of the Foundress". And the visitor felt tempted to add, "And to the zeal and self sacrifice of those who follow in her footsteps."

Numerous anecdotes are told of Sister Caron's life at St. Elizabeth, and their repetition here will serve better than any other consideration to give an idea of her work and explain why and how, by the blessing of God, it was rendered so fruitful.

Sister Caron was one day told of a poor idiot, who through privations of every sort was rendered miserable to a degree. She went in search of him, made him the object of truly maternal care, interested her-

self in relieving his physical infirmities, while striving and with some success to bring glimmerings of truth to his darkened mind. God blessed her efforts so that contrary to all predictions and to general expectation, the intelligence of the poor sufferer was sufficiently awakened to make it possible for him to receive the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist.

On another occasion, Sister Caron heard of a poor lunatic, whom her relations, wearied and irritated by the care of her, had begun to ill treat. Sister Caron immediately sought her out, for here was a precious jewel wanting to the collection with which the Asylum had abundantly supplied her. In vain was it represented to her that there was no room; that the limited resources of the house were already overtaxed. Her decision remained inalterable, and she brought home with her that poor lunatic, for whom the Lord would provide. A few days later Gritton (such was the poor creature's name,) was comfortably installed in Sister Caron's own bed, while she slept upon a miserable pallet until another bed could be found for her protégée. To those who expressed surprise, Sister Caron replied: "Sisters, we must not forget that the poor are our lords and masters, and that we are their servants." Another time, a beggar was found by the wayside; he had no other home. He was a stranger, poor and old, abandoned by every one. Those were sufficient titles in Sister Caron's eyes to her compassion. Therefore, those who picked him up carried him upon a stretcher straight to the

house of Providence. They were quite certain that the good Superior would receive him. She did so with her usual kindness, accepting the old man, and caring for him with tender solicitude. His physical needs were supplied, and being taught the virtue of resignation, his soul was also consoled and strengthened; he died shortly after, fortified with the Sacraments and blessing God. The Angel of Charity had sweetened his last moments and prepared him for his eternity. Nor was that all. Sister Caron charged herself with providing for him a decent funeral, and the service that was held for Sister Caron's beggar man was an event long remembered.

The hapless idiot, the poor lunatic, the aged mendicant, were all the lords and masters of the Superior of St. Elizabeth. Her two works, for children and for the poor, flourished side by side and speedily attained prosperity in a manner to astonish every one. For works of charity and of education are not necessarily detrimental to each other, but may as at St. Elizabeth be made mutually helpful. For the children give some assistance in caring for the old people, and they in their turn helped by edifying the children.

The pupils of the boarding-school were thus trained by the good Superior in love for the poor and in the practice of charity, while being formed at the same time to habits of piety and industry. They considered it a favor, and were permitted as a privilege, to aid the

Sisters in their charitable works. For certain it is that in the formation of character the cultivation of the mind should be coincident with the culture of the heart, and that thus the education received by the children at the Convent of St. Elizabeth, was greatly enhanced in value. Sister Caron was always foremost in giving an example to every one. She took care that the pupils should be taught their lessons diligently, and with method. She neglected nothing that could tend to the welfare of those whom she governed, especially the boarding pupils, watching over all with motherly solicitude.

Her former pupils still relate with emotion how often, Sister Caron rose in the night to stir up the fire in the big stoves, so that every one would be comfortable when getting up in the morning. And already we have heard what she did for the poor. In order to stimulate the zeal of others, she was often seen with a smiling, happy face, taking her share of the work in the fields. For the neighboring farmers, who had long since relinquished their first attitude of reserve, often placed at her disposal pieces of ground for cultivation. Others brought her, as it were, tithes of their produce; while still others helped her in difficult moments by their work. And the excellent Superior, glad to give pleasure to others and anxious to secure the means of helping her poor, accepted everything. They had learned, in fact, to love and venerate her, and to realize that she was intimately united with God, even amidst the most distracting occupations.

Sister Caron, beyond all others, had the faculty of mingling action with prayer, and prayer with action. She never hesitated to reprove, after her own gentle fashion, those who forgot themselves during the time of recollection. As for instance when on one occasion a young Sister addressed her jestingly during the hour of silence. Immediately, Mother Caron, said, though in a friendly way, "Sister, let us observe silence."

She was kind and compassionate to every one, and her reputation extended far beyond the Convent walls. She was called "the Saint," and thus it is related, that a poor man who had been engaged to drive her to the next village, wished to do so bareheaded, in token of respect. Outside the Convent, it was in the house to house visitations, and in exercising the functions of a sick nurse, two works always dear to the Institute of Providence, that she particularly won from the inhabitants of St. Elizabeth that love and esteem which she continued to enjoy to a marked degree. Once, in fact, the villagers resolved upon giving her a public demonstration, which considering their habits of simplicity was in itself highly significant, and therefore worthy of being noted here.

A certain Sunday chanced to fall upon the 31st of May, St. Emily's day, and consequently the patronal Feast of Sister Caron. Coming out from Vespers, a number of the notables of the place assembled outside the church, and sending for Sister Caron, gave appropriate expression to their sentiments, and presented

her with a gift, which, as shall be seen, was very happily chosen. The drawing of water from the river which was some acres distant from the village, was a real drugery for its inhabitants. Hitherto, the Sisters, especially when they had need of great quantities of water, as for laundry work, had to depend upon the good offices of their neighbors. The latter proved most obliging, but it was none the less inconvenient for them. Now the villagers were desirous of giving pleasure to the beloved Superior, but without doing any injury to themselves, — for the Canadian has a good deal of the Norman in his composition. — So they offered Sister Caron, on her feast day of St. Emily, as a gift to mark the occasion, a strong horse, with a cart, bearing a barrel duly provided with a cover. It was, thenceforth, only necessary to drive down to the river, and fill the barrel. Needless to say that Sister Caron fully appreciated the present.

Scarcely three years had glided by however, when the Superior of St. Elizabeth was called to a new scene of labor. But she had already accomplished her task, and established a variety of works, which were to perpetuate her memory and keep it in benediction amongst numberless families.

The much esteemed Mother Gamelin, Foundress and first Superior of the Providence, had just died, in September 1851, and in the elections at the General Chapter, held on October 7th, of the same year, was called to the dignity and the burden of succeeding her,

the religious who was to be thereafter known as Mother Caron. All the Sisters who had been at least two years professed took part in the Chapter. Elected thus by the free suffrages of her Sisters, Mother Caron in spite of her fears submitted to the will of God, and went to Montreal to undertake the direction of the Community.

---

## CHAPTER VIII

MOTHER CARON SUPERIOR OF THE PROVIDENCE

1851-1858

---

To succeed Mother Gamelin in the government and direction of the Community of Providence was, indeed, a heavy task and was so regarded by Mother Caron. For ill inspired in truth are they who venture to desire honors or dignities, since the higher one is exalted in posts of command, the greater the responsibility in the sight of men, no less than that of God. This reluctance must not be carried to exaggeration, and once the will of heaven is clearly manifested, one has but to bow before it.

On the 3rd of August 1904, Cardinal Satolli said to Cardinal Sarto, "God, who has given you strength



to direct with such ability the Gondola of St. Mark, will give you sufficient to guide the Bark of Peter. "And despite his fears and the apprehensions that from a human point of view were so fully justified, the gentle and holy Patriarch of Venice, in accordance with the suffrages of the Sacred College, became, next day, Pope Pius X. But on the other hand, rash, indeed, would it be to desire honor or high station. It is related that the saintly Father Emery, Superior of St. Sulpice, made use of a terrifying expression in answer to a prelate who remarked that, although he had been dismissed from the Seminary for some prank, that circumstance had not prevented him from being made a Bishop.

"Oh, my Lord," he said, "perhaps that is but the continuation of my punishment."

Mother Caron was certainly not deserving of punishment, but it was assuredly with fear and trembling that she bowed beneath the yoke and accepted the position which had been so highly honored by the Foundress of the Institute. Her lively faith in Divine Providence, together with the sincere and filial affection of her Sisters, gave her courage. The warmly expressed approbation and sympathy of the various patrons of the work and notably Bishop Bourget, Canon Prince and the priests of Saint Sulpice, also had their effect in persuading her that she was but doing the will of God in consenting to walk first, though as far as her personal inclination was concerned she would have dearly,

loved to go last upon all occasions. She found herself supported and encouraged, too, in high places, as well as in all her surroundings.

The ladies of the world, who had known her as a novice or as Treasurer, felt quite at ease, in coming to offer her their generous assistance, her sisters in religion, those by whom she had been elected and the others, vied with each other in their holy zeal, to make the task easier and the burden lighter. Above all, her heart, like that of the Apostles, was so sincerely united to God, that in all truth and simplicity, she could apply to herself those words of Holy Writ: "My yoke is sweet and my burden light." ( St. Matt. , XI—30 ). Her light was no longer hidden under the bushel. Placed at the head of her dear Community. Mother Caron devoted herself to its welfare with that ardor of good will, with which heaven had so richly endowed her ; and more then ever with entire submission to the Bishop, who had been the first to bless and encourage the work of the Providence. Her first term of office as Superior lasted for seven years, from 1851—to 1858. It is not our purpose to recount with over much detail the various incidents that marked that particular phase of her life,—nor yet to show— since that subject will be touched upon later, —in what fashion Mother Caron practiced the virtues of Superior, as of religious. For although life itself is made up of repetitions, and history is but a perpetual beginning over again, it is advisable in a biography like the present to avoid any

risk of wearying the reader by continual reiterations. We shall, then, merely permit ourselves to dwell for a moment upon the more important events of Mother Caron's administration. And for the rest it may be safely said that her most beautiful qualities appeared to shine forth and to be developed, according as her position gave more ample scope for edification. Since as has been admirably written, "the sun when in its meridian shines with greatest strength and beauty." Mother Caron had only been Superior, inhabiting the Providence Asylum, on St. Catherine St. for a few months when, on the 8th July 1852, a conflagration took place which reduced to ashes the whole St. Lawrence Ward, with a portion of the Quebec suburb, Bishop Bourget's Cathedral, with his palace and its dependencies. These edifices, as may be remembered, then stood at the spot where now (1914) stands the Church of St. James, at the corner of Saint Catherine and St. Denis Sts. Now, it was, to say the least, singular, that the Asylum, occupying then as now the neighboring square, at the corner of St. Hubert St. and thus in the very centre, or hearthstone, of the conflagration, should alone be spared by the destructive element and alone remain standing. Tradition declares that the fire having destroyed the Cathedral and the Bishop's house, crossed to the other, or Southernly side of St. Catherine St. only to return an instant later beyond St. Hubert St., and continue on the line of its first point of departure. One thing is certain,

that the Providence alone was left intact, in the midst of smoking ruins. The secrets of God are impenetrable, and nothing happens without His permission. And though it is not necessary to cry out immediately that here was a miracle, it is in order to admire how God, whilst inflicting trial and sacrifice upon Bishop Bourget, gave him at the same time the consolation of knowing that his dear Asylum was saved from disaster on the night of the fire.

As a result of that disaster, and as if by a flash of inspiration, His Lordship of Montreal chose a site in the west end of the city, whereon to erect, at the cost of the most generous sacrifices, and to the glory of God, that Cathedral of St. James, which is a beautiful, though miniature, reproduction of St. Peter's at Rome. And there it stands to day, surrounded by numerous churches and magnificent institutions, which have caused Montreal to be styled "the Rome of America." Whereas, both the Asylum and the work of Providence continued to find their chief centre of action in that very quarter of the city that had seen their birth.

However that may be, it is important to observe that the prayers and the sublime confidence of Mother Caron may have had a good deal to do with that divine decree, by which the House of Providence was saved that day from the fury of the conflagration. While the fire was raging with the greatest violence and all around the Asylum was in flames, approaching

so near that the frames of the windows and the door were actually blistered by the heat, Mother Caron made a promise to God that if He spared her dear house, she would receive therein the sufferers by the disaster, and give them shelter under her roof. And she began, in fact, at once to offer them hospitality. However, God permitted that, according to human foresight, it had become necessary to provide for the safety of the poor and the aged inmates of the Asylum. They were transported to some waste lands on the heights of what was then called, *Côte-à-Baron*, (\*) at the head of St. Denis St. It is probably the very spot, where the Deaf and Dumb Institute now stands. The clothing and furniture were also removed to a place of safety. But the Mother Superior, retiring to the chapel, remained praying before the Statue of the Blessed Virgin. Some one came with the suggestion that the Madonna should be taken down from her niche, but Mother Caron at once replied, with the childlike faith so characteristic of her: "No, if Mary does not save us, let her perish with us."

---

(\*) There were at that time, upon this plateau of the *Côte-à-Baron*, on land belonging to the Hon. Denis-Benjamin Viger, a small grove where the old women of the Asylum were in the habit of going to take their holiday. It was later bought from Mr. Viger by the Hon. Côme Séraphin Cherrier who bequeathed a portion thereof to the Sisters of Providence, whereon, at a later period was erected the present splendid edifice for the Deaf Mutes.

The strong-minded may smile at such an anecdote, but we, who know better and who remember that at the mere word of Jesus, Saint Peter walked upon the water, must bow in respect before an act of faith that was truly capable of moving mountains. Certain it was that Mary saved the Asylum and herself with it. A poor woman, who had neither shelter nor resources of any kind, made a tearful complaint on the day following the fire to one of the visiting Sisters and was told by the latter that she must have confidence in Providence.

"It is true" answered the woman, mistaking the sense in which the visitor had spoken, "the Providence cannot be burned." That was a very simple expression, but beautiful also and profound. Until very late on the night of July 8th, the Sisters of Providence, following in the footsteps of Mother Caron, circulated amongst those melancholy remains, and in and out through the ruins, seeking to console the afflicted and to give some help to the injured.

In his pastoral letter upon the subject Mgr. Bourget said: "All that we know is, that that fire blown by the breath of God's anger could not be controlled by the hand of man. That is enough for us. He choose to enkindle that devouring flame at the very moment when our reservoirs were dry. He Himself traced out its path for that fire which seemed to become in some sort intelligent, sparing that which He willed should

be spared, and destroying that which He willed should be destroyed. And in all that He is adorable''.

If the Asylum were spared, it was, then, because God willed its preservation. Another establishment founded by Mother Gamelin, and of which Mother Caron, during her term of office as Treasurer had been directress, conjointly with Sister Séné (later known as Sister Zotique), was burned to the ground. This was the Hospice of St. Jerome-Æmilianus, which in 1847 had received many of the Irish orphans from families ravaged by the Ship Fever. It had first been installed in the house of Mrs. Nowlan, on St. Catherine St. in 1852, but had later been removed to the old Convent of the Good Shepherd, in the Quebec Suburbs.

At the time of its destruction by fire, it was full of the injured, or of orphans, who after the great conflagration had been divided between the Providence and the Hôtel-Dieu. Nor were these, as may be readily conjectured, the only recipients of the charitable benevolence of Mother Caron and her Community. They constituted themselves, in fact, for sometime after the disaster, a visible Providence to the sufferers. The better to show her gratitude, Mother Caron charged herself with the trouble and expense of feeding thousands of hungry people, who flocked to the Providence as to the house of God. They took their meals there, or came with baskets or pails, to procure food for the family, encamped out somewhere in the open air. And when

later on the municipal authorities began to make provision for the needy, it was once more to the Sisters of Providence that they had recourse for the distribution of help, from house to house, or more particularly, in the sheds, vast temporary pavillions which were placed at the disposal of those who had no other shelter than the canopy of heaven. The Sisters, under the direction of their Superior, naturally accepted this post of honor which was theirs by right, and acquitted themselves thereof in a manner to deserve the gratitude of every one.

In fine, through the whole history of that conflagration of 1852, it was hard to say which was most to be admired, Mother Caron's simple and entire confidence in God, or her farseeing and ingenious charity towards the unfortunate. In any case, it gave her an opportunity of inaugurating her reign as Superior in a manner befitting a true daughter of St. Vincent de Paul, and so as to gain by new titles the veneration of the citizens.

Two years later, in 1854, Montreal was desolated once more by an epidemic of cholera. Swifter and more deadly in its effects than the fire, that new plague made considerable ravages in a short space of time. It was Mother Caron's desire that her Sisters should be amongst the first to show courage and heroism. At every hour of the day and night they were to be found at work. They nursed the sick, they buried the dead and exhorted the living. Shoulder to shoulder, always



in the breach, they fought that formidable enemy with the most untiring devotion. It would be hard, indeed, to appreciate such charity at its full value, or to estimate the number of those to whom the Sisters proved the chief source of consolation. One thing is certain, that Mother Caron was the soul of all that work. Innumerable were, in fact, the testimonies afterwards rendered to her zeal and charity, no less than to her tact and discretion.

But although these extraordinary occasions may have thrown into higher relief the noble qualities of the Superior of Providence, they did not by any means exhaust her activities. It was rather in every day life, in the direction of her community, in the formation of the novices and younger Sisters that she most usefully employed herself. It has often been remarked and with reason, that it is not by exceptional cases that the true servants of God are to be measured. It is in their life, from one day to another, in the constancy of their efforts for good, and in that long carrying of the Cross which is forever beginning over again. The sanctification of others, no less than her own, is required from a Superior. In a word, however humble may be the post of a Superior, it carries with it something of the nature of the priesthood. Of it may be said, and that is true of all dignity: "Noblesse oblige."(\*) At the very time, when under her direc-

---

(\*) Literally nobility obliges, a familiar term, best rendered in the French.

tion, Mother Caron's religious were lending there aid to the fire sufferers of 1852, or the plague stricken of 1854, the Community was still limited in number the household rather restricted, and the needs, pressing and multiplied.

Mother Caron had the art of providing for all, without allowing any to suffer. Her confidence in Providence remained unshaken through every trial, and she proved herself equal to every demand upon her. She was extremely generous and gave to an extent that was occasionally alarming to her Sisters and advisers. But her charitable confidence was never disappointed. Neither her Sisters nor the poor ever wanted during her administration for the material assistance necessary to their support. Sometimes that help came in an unexpected and wholly surprising fashion. So that when the time arrived for the general elections and the rendering of accounts, it was discovered, to the astonishment of many, that Mother Caron had brought the Institute to financial prosperity, and considerably lessened its liabilities.

The Community of Providence became flourishing also in another direction. Other works began to spring up about the Mother House. The reputation of the Superior and her humble religious began to spread far and wide, and being informed of the good they were doing in Montreal, demands came for them from elsewhere. Mother Caron, who had had much experience

in the foundation of the Convent of St. Elizabeth was thereby enabled to enter, with the broadest views, into negotiations for similar establishments. She was ambitious of the apostolate, not only for herself but for her Sisters. Thus it came about that while she was Superior, three important foundations were made, those of Chili, Vancouver, Wash., and that for Deaf Mutes in Montreal. The foundations of the two former were attended by vicissitudes as striking as those that fill the pages of a well written novel of adventure. What the good Mother had to suffer under these circumstances, in anxiety, anguish of mind, can best be imagined by a simple recital of the facts.

In the year 1852, Bishop Augustin Magloire Blanchet of Nesqually, (Vancouver—Oregon), asked for the Sisters of Providence. They set out for those distant regions, under the guidance of a priest, Father Huberdeau. On arriving, they discovered that through some unforeseen and unavoidable chain of circumstances, nothing was prepared for their reception. After prolonged negotiations, it was decided that the Sisters should return to Canada. They got as far as San Francisco, where they were to catch a boat which could take them to Panama, and thence, by crossing the Isthmus, homeward by way of the Atlantic. But no such boat was to be had. So they took passage instead upon a sailing vessel, which after doubling Cape Horn, was to bring them back over the Atlantic to their country. The vessel upon which they

sailed was called the "Star of the Sea," but, Alas! the Star of the Sea kept them seventy days upon the ocean, buffeted by storms and, finally, it was hard to say how, they made land at Valparaiso de Chili. The Sisters were obliged to rest there for sometime and the Bishop having made their acquaintance was unwilling to let them go. And such was in brief the history of the foundation in Chili. (\*)

Meantime, Bishop Blanchet of Nesqually had not given up hopes of ultimately securing the Sisters of Providence to put the charitable institutions of his diocese into good shape. Circumstances being more favorable, he made another attempt four years later, and that time, the house of Vancouver, now one of the most flourishing of the houses of Providence, was founded.

And what shall be said of the mission for Deaf Mutes, which dates from 1851 and had its first beginnings at Longue-Pointe! In that foundation, Mother Caron had been especially interested, and, as it is well known in Montreal, it has been through all vicissitudes especially blessed by heaven. In the setting on foot of those important operations required by foundations of the nature here indicated, it is evident that much of the labor must fall upon the Superior. It would be useless here to recapitulate all that Mother Caron showed

---

(\*) The house of Chili is now separated and independent of the Mother House.

forth of zeal and anxiety in behalf of her dear missionaries, encouraging them from afar, giving them the example of submission to the Divine will. For it would be necessary to reproduce every one of her letters, which could scarcely be done in the space of a single chapter. Already, however, we know enough to be able to imagine what that loving Mother said to her cherished daughters. And oh, how pleasing to her would have been the task of hastening to the assistance of those dear missionaries of the Gospel in distant regions. In fact, when everything seemed to have failed in Vancouver, she would fain have flown to the support of that far off mission, which, so to say, died before it was born. Great then was her consolation when it ultimately proved a success.

So passed the seven years of Mother Caron's term of office. At the end of that time, and according to the tenor of the Rule, she resigned her charge three days before the general elections, leaving the government of the Community in the hands of her Assistant. The ceremony of resignation was carried out, according to contemporary chronicles, in this wise: It took place upon Friday, when the Sisters and novices were assembled for the culpe of their faults. Mother Caron for the last time raised her voice, which, even in the exercise of authority had always been humble, and which was more than ever maternal. She addressed herself first to the novices, recommending three things in particular: Ist, to reflect upon the obligations im-

posed by their vows; 2nd, "To ask of Our Lady of the Seven Dolors the virtue of self abnegation." 3rd, "To have recourse to St. Vincent de Paul, for the obtaining of charity."

Then having dismissed her dear novices, she poured forth her soul in an intimate and touching conference with her beloved daughters, the professed Sisters.

"Take care, my very dear daughters," she said, "lest you should make a breach in the heavenly ramparts of the religious life. Love each other, bear with one another's faults; never be guilty of the indiscretion of exposing your grievances to those who are powerless to remedy them. Have recourse to your Superiors, as the rule so wisely prescribes." After which she went on to speak of the confidence that should be theirs, in Divine Providence, with perfect submission to the will of God and devotion to St. Vincent de Paul. In language the most forcible she reminded them that they could not be Sisters of Charity if they desired merely to rest and enjoy themselves. "O my Sisters," she cried, "when the question arises of rendering service to another, of devoting oneself, never be heard to say 'It is not my affair.' Give no thought to your surroundings, nor to your own comfort, whether in the matter of clothing or of furniture. If you wish to be happy, give yourself without reserve to the holy duties of charity. I may have, perhaps, appeared extravagant on this point; it

is possible that I may have embarrassed you; but for myself, I confess that my sole regret is not to have been more charitable."

She finally recommended an entire submission to their new future Superior, and kneeling down, she asked pardon with tears for the faults she had committed and thanked them for the kindness and consideration they had shown her. She declared in conclusion, that she felt the necessity of leaving the Mother House, and begged them therefore not to think of reelecting her.

Her desire was respected and a new Superior was chosen, Mother Caron being appointed directress of a new mission which had just been accepted at St. Vincent de Paul, (Ile Jesus). That was in October 1858.

At the moment of her departure, she wanted to leave some practical advice to her children of the Novitiate in the form of a spiritual testament, and this is what she wrote and signed with her own hand:

"How good it is to live under the care of Providence! Forget, my dear little Sisters, all that you have left behind you in the world. Calvary is in the very midst of your novitiate. Go there to immolate yourselves, every day. Let all your desires, all your longings be directed to God alone. The Cross and the poor. Nothing, nothing more."—Sister Caron. That edifying epistle is still preserved with religious veneration in the house of Providence.

---

## CHAPTER IX

MOTHER CARON, SUPERIOR AT ST. VINCENT DE PAUL.

1858—1866

St. Vincent de Paul is a pretty village, situated upon the shore of the Rivière-des-Prairies, about nine miles from Montreal and upon the smallest of all those islands adjoining that upon which moves the vast metropolis. And it was precisely because of this proximity to the former Villemarie that it received the name of l'Ile Jesus. Enclosed, as it were, between the arms of two rivers, that of Mille Isles, and that of des Prairies, or les Ecores, lying to the northward of the great Island dominated by Mount Royal, Ile Jesus has somewhat the appearance of a child asleep on its mother's breast. That child, however, is big enough to form a fine county, that of Laval, and to be divided into five or six parishes, of which that of St. Vincent de Paul is not the least important.

The priests of the Seminary of Quebec have been, since the time of the French, the Seigneurs of Ile Jesus. (\*) Many of the families resident in St. Vincent

---

(\*) L'Ile Jesus—or as it is now written Ile Jesus—according to Mr. Pierre Georges Roy, in an interesting volume on the geographical names of the Province of Quebec, published at Levis in 1906, *Noms géographiques de la Pro-*



de Paul came thither from Quebec and its environs. (\*)

*vince de Québec*--as also, some other adjacent Islands, were conceded, on the 23rd October, 1699, by Hector de Callières, Viceroy, and Jean Bochart, Intendant, to the Bishops of Quebec and the gentlemen of the Seminary of Quebec. Its original name was *Ile de Montmagny*, but shortly after the concession its new proprietors thought proper to give it the name which it bears at present.

(\*) The writer may be pardoned if he offers his respectful homage to the family whose name he bears, and which has given some of its children and connections to the Institute of Providence. The Auclair family came originally from La Rochelle, France, and thence to Charlesburg, near Quebec, in Canada. *Jean-Baptiste* was the son of *François* and grandson of *André*, the latter with his brother *Pierre* having come from France about 1680. He came from Charlesbourg to St. Vincent de Paul, in the interests of the priests of the Seminary, and was there married to *Françoise Grenon*. He left one son, *Jean-Baptiste*, who in his turn, married *Josephite Belanger*, in 1783, and had three children. In 1787, he was married a second time to *Françoise Paquette*, who had nine children, of whom four were boys, of these, three, *Jean-Baptiste*, *Pierre* and *Jean-Louis*, founded families. The last named married *Catherine Taillon*, in 1806, and had nine children, of whom five were sons, respectively named: *Jean-Baptiste*, *Louis*, *Magloire*, *François-Xavier* and *Gédéon*. *Jean-Baptiste*, was married in 1822, to *Flavie Gravel*, and had fifteen children, of whom five sons lived. Two of these became priests, *Magloire*, late pastor of St. Jean-Baptiste Church in Montreal, and *Zéphirin*, pastor of St. Polycarpe de Soulanges. Two others had sons, *Jean-Baptiste* and *Elie*. Another son *Joseph* had no children. One of the sons of *Jean-Baptiste*, *Wilfrid*, formerly mayor of St. Vincent de Paul: the other *Elie*, was married in 1862 to *Caroline Leclerc* and died in 1866, at the age of 26. He left one son, the Reverend *Elie J. Auclair*, D. D., the author of the present volume.

Fifty years ago, St. Vincent de Paul was far from being as important as it is to-day. The Canadian Pacific Railway did not then, as now, send thither from ten to fifteen times in the day, its trains laden with passengers, nor did the government as yet entertain there its "boarders" of the provincial Penitentiary. But the people lived comfortably, were very fond of discussion, deeply interested in politics, supporting their respective opinions with considerable heat. On arriving at St. Vincent de Paul and catching sight from the opposite side of the river of the village, or rather town, dominated by its two great towers, with silver arrows, and peaceful to all appearance, none would ever suspect the ferment of life that is stirring there. And it was always very much the same.

When in 1840, Lord Sydenham was anxious to defeat Mr. Lafontaine, he tried to force the people of that county — for at that period Terrebonne formed part of Laval—to go and vote in New Glasgow. But a squad of determined men were found there, ready to break the heads of the supporters of Dr. McCullough, (the pseudonym of the Governor), who could only be quieted by the exertions of Mr. Lafontaine. But if they had hot tempers, the people of St. Vincent had warm hearts, as shall presently be seen.

In 1845, Father Mercier, pastor of that place, who died in 1850, a Canon of the Cathedral in Montreal, offered to the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, then estab-

blished at St. Jacques l'Achigan, a piece of land situated in his village, together with a stone house and its dependencies. The offer was accepted and those religious ladies pledged themselves, according to the intentions of the donor, to receive and instruct the poor female children of the parish, as long as they were in the enjoyment of revenues accruing from the designated property.

They erected there a large convent with its dependencies. Quite unacquainted with the severity of the climate, since those religious were at that time all Frenchwomen, coming directly from France, they did not, perhaps, understand the proper employment or adjustment of the building materials, with the result that expensive repairs were very soon required. Moreover, as St. Vincent de Paul was separated from the Island of Montreal by a river, communication was rendered difficult. So that, in short, the Ladies of the Sacred Heart presently decided to establish themselves elsewhere. In the month of August, 1858, they finally quitted St. Vincent de Paul to take up their abode at Sault-au-Récollet.

About the same time Mgr. Bourget made it a request that the Sisters of Providence should cede their mission of Sorel, which had been founded May 2nd, 1850, to the religious of the Congregation de Notre-Dame, and under the following circumstances.

Mgr. Prince, Bishop of St. Hyacinthe, had the advantage of seeing established in his episcopal city the Provincial House of the Sisters of the Presentation, who had come to Canada in 1853, and taken up their residence at Ste-Marie-de-Monnoir. He was anxious to install them in a Convent which had hitherto been occupied by the Ladies of the Congregation. The latter, understanding that the Bishop would naturally be interested in possessing his diocesan Institute, fell back upon Montreal. Bishop Bourget then proposed an arrangement by which the Sisters of Providence should offer Sorel to the Congregation, by whom it was accepted, while the former Community went to St. Vincent de Paul.

Father Norbert Lavallée, at the suggestion of the Bishop and with the concurrence of the church wardens, made the following arrangement with the Sisters.

The Community pledged itself, in consideration of the usufruct of the land, while reserving the right to practice there works of charity,—to fulfil the conditions prescribed in the act of donation by the late Father Mercier.

It was to this mission of St. Vincent de Paul, the fifteenth in order of time since the foundation of the Providence, that by the elections of October, 1858, Mother Caron was charged to proceed, and to undertake its direction, in the capacity of Superior. She went thither on the 7th of October, with Sisters Francis Borgia, Agnes and Helen. She had already been preceded there by Sisters Ignatia and Marie-Angèle for

the opening of the classes. The Superior's first act on entering that immense house was to go and prostrate herself before the altar. For what was to be the upshot of this work that she had undertaken! She knew not, but was only aware that the circumstances were exceedingly difficult, and therefore it was to God that she first addressed herself. Local chronicles relate that in that otherwise bare chapel Mother Caron was deeply touched to see hanging somewhere upon the wall an old picture representing St. Vincent de Paul, the admirable apostle of charity. And the good saint seemed to smile upon her.

She lost no time in setting to work. The first years promised to be thorny ones for the Convent. The revenues from the celebrated piece of land seemed to be richer in obligations than in anything else. The parishioners, who in the first instance had permitted themselves to be too easily carried away by the persuasive eloquence of the pastor, very soon recovered from those earlier impressions. They perfectly understood that the revenues secured by the gift of their former pastor were to be employed for the instruction of the poor female children of the parish. But they were disposed to give to the word *poor* a very wide significance, and to include therein some who were only *middling*. Many amongst them, as previously at St. Elizabeth, saw with apprehension the arrival of these Sisters, who, unlike the Religious of the Sacred Heart, would not devote themselves exclusively to the work of education. Mother Caron nevertheless felt confident of success.

She relied in the first place upon God, and also a good deal on the pastor, that priest of the heart of gold, who left at St. Vincent de Paul the reputation of being, above all else, charitable. The older people still recall, how always eloquent in the pulpit, he was never more so than when he spoke of charity. Mother Caron could also depend upon the zeal and good offices of her cousin, Father Thomas Caron, in whose household she had spent so many years, and who had quite recently retired and come to live at St. Vincent de Paul with his sister Angèle, and within a stone's throw of the convent. He died there on the 30th July, 1862. It was, in fact, that excellent priest who in the early days of that foundation said Mass and preached for the Sisters in their chapel.

For the rest, Mother Caron, by that gracious kindness with which we are already familiar, soon made influential friends amongst prominent ecclesiastics, and other distinguished personages, whose names are to be found in the Community annals. As for example, Mgr. Vinet, Father Brunet, pastor of St. Rose, Mr. McKay, a wealthy resident of the place, the Messrs. Pierre and Narcisse Quevillon and especially Madame Masson, Seigneuresse of Terrebonne. (\*)

---

\* The title of *Seigneur* or *Seigneuresse*, still by courtesy retained in Lower Canada, belonged to the former, somewhat feudal arrangement, in the French era, when landed proprietors had tenants or tithe payers under them, who were grouped, in fact, round these lands of the manor.—Trans. note.

Now, benefactors are very necessary, since nascent works very soon begin to grow in importance. In eight days after the arrival of the Sisters, an old woman of seventy-five, Madame Dusablon, and an old man of seventy-eight, named Petit, had been already admitted to the Convent, while before the end of the first year eleven old women and twelve old men, were recipients of its hospitality. Six ecclesiastics, Professors in the College of Laval, also obtained admittance there; besides four ladies and twenty-six pupils boarders. The Sisters also taught seventy-nine day scholars. Though always deeply interested in the work of education, Mother Caron appears to have occupied herself in a special manner with her much loved poor. As each one arrived at the house she exclaimed, addressing herself with full confidence to God: "Dear Lord, another mouth to feed." And frequently, indeed, did she repeat that favorite maxim of hers: "The poor are our masters, even before we are provided with necessaries they must be well treated in our houses. It is they who bring us prosperity."

That was why she exercised such ingenuity in finding means to admit more and still more. She, in fact, refused none who presented themselves, and even accepted some who, as the annals prettily express it, were almost gentle folk, *un peu monsieur* and could contribute a little towards the expenses of their maintenance.

And if Mother Caron did not scruple to ask, and to receive a little here and a little there, and in a hundred ways, it was neither for herself nor for her community. For a considerable time, the sisters had to be content in more than one apartment of that too spacious house, with stumps of trees cut to the required height, as a substitute for chairs.

The Mother Superior always took care to make her poor people pray for their charitable benefactors. They recited aloud that touching supplication: "Providence of God, who dost feed the hungry, have pity on us!" Following the practice of St. Vincent de Paul, who desired that his daughters should keep up friendly relations with ladies of the world in order to obtain their patronage for the poor, Mother Caron did not forget to organize and to utilize the zeal of the principal women of the village or of the parish.

In the winter of 1859 she inaugurated a sewing-room, where meetings of the Ladies of Charity were held. The Bazaar which followed in 1860 realized a sum approximating two hundred and forty dollars. In 1861 took place the first dinner of the poor, known as that of St. Elizabeth. Nor was that all. In the month of January, 1860, when Mother Caron had gone to Mascouche to undertake the care of the pastor, Father Gagné, who did not however die until 1867, word was brought to her that provisions were about to fail at St. Vincent de Paul. The idea immediately occurred



to her, and which having received the necessary authorization she put into immediate execution, of going to take up a collection in her native parish of Rivière-du-Loup. She brought back from there eighty-four dollars in money besides many other donations in kind.

Another time, in the course of the following year, when the parish priest, Father Lavallée, was in Europe, and her cousin, Father Thomas Caron was taking his place, Mgr. Bourget came to pay his pastoral visit at St. Vincent. Mother Caron obtained permission to follow him in his visitation of the other country parishes, and to ask help for her work, as it were in the radius of those blessings which he seemed to bring everywhere.

On the 23rd December, 1861, an event occurred at St. Vincent de Paul which was to have important results for the future prosperity of the locality, and in which the Sisters of Providence were directly interested. The land which they owned, with the Convent and all its dependencies were sold to the government of that day, at the head of which was Sir George Etienne Cartier, for the sum of 4,500 louis, or 18,000 dollars. And there was, at first, installed the reform School for Juvenile Delinquents, which had been transferred thither from Ile-aux-Noix. Eleven or twelve years later, these boys of the reformatory were succeeded by the prisoners of the Penitentiary. It was, in fact, on the 20th May, 1873, that a steam-boat brought to St. Vincent de Paul those formidable

pensioners of the State. That was one of the few times that so large a vessel ventured as far as the base of the Ecores rapids. So that those who visit to-day the great, bare corridors and cells of the prisoners in the Penitentiary of St. Vincent de Paul, are treading the ground which witnessed the efforts and drank the sweat of the first Sisters of Charity in that vicinity.

Mother Caron went forth with her Community, who were scattered about in all directions; in the presbytery, in the college, in the town hall, in rooms belonging to the Notary, Mr. Germain, in fact wherever they could find lodging, until places had been secured for every one. As a new presbytery had just been erected, the former parochial residence and the lands thereunto adjoining were at once ceded by the Church wardens to the Sisters, who proceeded to the construction of a new convent, exactly upon the site of the old Church, and on the banks of the river.

On the 5th January, 1862, twenty-six boys of the Reformatory replaced the Sisters, their poor and their orphans, in the commodious dwelling formerly inhabited by the religious of the Sacred Heart. The annals of that time make mention of a bell which gave considerable trouble to Sir George, E. Cartier and his successor in office, Mr. Dorion.

The Sisters were desirous of taking away their bell; Sir George, who was negotiating the affair with the pastor and the Notary Germain, did not wish that the bell should be specified in the contract, though he

gave his word that he would permit the Sisters to remove it. But, meantime, he fell from power and Mr. Dorion was called upon to succeed him. The latter gentleman did not consider himself bound by anything that was not distinctly stated in the contract. But, in short, to get rid of the affair, Mr. Dorion paid the Sisters for the bell out of his own pocket.

No apology is necessary for the introduction of these details which will no doubt prove interesting from the touch of local color which they lend to this narrative. But to return to those works which engaged our heroine's attention.

One of these, and not the least beautiful and conspicuous, was the help which she continually gave to the boys in the reformatory. She visited, encouraged and consoled them. She brought them little presents, as, for instance, a pail of apples, which she sometimes carried thither herself. A young Sister who accompanied her on one occasion was about to hand the pail to a guard, when Mother Caron gently reproved her: "My little daughter," she said, "it is not nice to be proud." She was always ready to excuse those poor children of the Reform School, on the ground of their youth and inexperience; it even appears that she pleaded their cause with the Warden when there was question of punishment. Therefore she was so much beloved by these poor fellows that when any of them were punished they sometimes made it a request that "Aunt Caron" should not be told.

But it was especially in the great fire of 1864 and in the typhus epidemic of 1865 that Mother Caron showed her devotion to these young delinquents. The people of St. Vincent de Paul, at least, those of the preceding generation, will recall the terrible conflagration of the summer of 1864. It was Mother Caron, herself who gave the alarm. Judge of her grief when the fire having taken on the lower story, she saw "her children" writhing behind the iron bars of their prison window and in danger of being burned alive, uttering heart rending cries for help. Happily, all, with the exception of two were saved, and Mother Caron wept over the two who had perished and redoubled her solicitude for the survivors. In return for her good offices in their regard, Senator Bellerose succeeded in obtaining for her from the government two hundred and forty dollars.

However, there were numberless other calls upon the attention of the energetic Superior. Scarcely had she begun to rest after one work, when another was imposed upon her. Her old men and women always had a large share in her heart. Amongst these was a certain *Céleste*, a half crazy woman, who had become so troublesome that it was thought better to consign her to the Asylum at Beauport. But, as she was being taken from the house, in the absence of the tender-hearted Superior, who did not wish to witness her removal, the creature became possessed with the unfortunate idea of throwing herself down, and broke

her arm in consequence, she was nursed by Mother Caron for the next two months with truly maternal care. For it seemed to her only fitting that the Superior should take that onerous charge upon herself.

It was a pleasure to see her in gardening time, out in the fields, in sun or in rain; or again, within doors, occupied in washing, in housework, or in cooking.

To these things, as to the visiting of the sick or other external works, she applied herself with the greatest good humor and cheerfulness. She particularly excelled in the culinary art, so that the Sisters and the children who were trained under her direction or called to assist in those operations, were really taking, though without themselves suspecting it and very unostentatiously, a course in a school of Domestic Economy, which was later considered as something quite new, in Montreal. The Superior somewhat later made a little collection of the receipts she most frequently employed, which being printed in the workshop of the Mother House was distributed through the various institutions of Providence. It naturally became known outside, and that receipt book is now in its seventh edition and about eight hundred are circulated every year.

And through all these various and very simple happenings, because of the limited space at her command, and because the Superior had always the faculty of attracting towards her and of retaining more people than could be conveniently accommodated, she herself

was lodged somewhat at hap-hazard. Now, it was in a little place under the staircase, or in some hole or corner whence there was no possibility of dislodging her.

Needless to say that she had become an object of very general affection long before she was called upon, in 1866, to leave St. Vincent de Paul. Since the beginning of the mission and under the direction of Mother Caron, thirty-four Sisters had passed through St. Vincent, and sixty-four persons had died there. Six pupils of the Institute had entered religion, and of those, four had persevered. The household all told, reached the high figure of two hundred souls.

At the present time, the Convent of St. Vincent de Paul occupies a piece of ground which is valued at one hundred and fifty-four thousand dollars, and those composing the household, in 1913—1914, reached a total of three hundred and thirty-two persons.

---

## CHAPTER X

MOTHER CARON ASSISTANT GENERAL

1866—1872

MOTHER Caron had spent eight useful and fruitful years at St. Vincent de Paul, and the House of Providence in that locality had, from every point of view, progressed. It was through her and by her that the Sisters and their works were best known. Mother Caron included them all in her own person, or personified them all. Some years ago, in Montreal, a certain parish priest, who was witty and original, used to designate a whole very meritorious community by the name of one of its most eminent members. This community of Redemptorists was always spoken of by him as "the Father Strubbes". So that had any one been suddenly transported to St. Vincent de Paul, in 1866, he or she might have been tempted to believe, according to the testimony of a Sister, who was then a child, but who subsequently became Superior of one of the most important houses of Providence, that the Sisters were all "Mother Carons."

But if Mother Caron left behind her at St. Vincent memories which must live forever, she also took with her many that would never die. The parting from the members of that household was a severe sacrifice, and one of the hardest she had ever known. She departed

therefore as secretly and unobtrusively as possible, excusing herself for that mode of action in a letter, which the author was permitted to read :

"You must forgive me," she wrote to the Sisters there, "that I did not wish to renew my sacrifice. Continue, I beg of you, to do all your works in union of charity with me. I recommend myself to your prayers. Your poor shall also be mine."

And she added in conclusion :

"Several times every day, I go in spirit to make a little tour of the house at St. Vincent and that of Angele (her cousin). "Tell her that I never forget her. The poor old men, the poor old women, oh, my warmest remembrances to them all! Farewell; to each one of you courage and confidence."

On the day after Christmas, she wrote another letter addressed to the pupils boarders. She spoke to them of the Infant Jesus, and urged them to give themselves while still young to that loving Saviour, that they might thus be able to endure the miseries of this poor life." For the rest, Mother Caron never forgot St. Vincent. To any one who might be setting out towards the River Ecores she repeated as often as three times lest it should be forgotten: "Salute all our poor people for me."

That did not, however, mean that Mother Caron failed to give herself with her accustomed zeal to the duties imposed by her new office. For she had only left the post of Superior at St. Vincent de Paul to under-



take at the Mother House the more important one of Assistant General.

It was not yet a quarter of a century since the Providence Community had been founded ; in fact, in the year 1866 it had reached its twenty-third year, and already by the blessing of God, the work had assumed vast proportions. Somewhere about twenty houses and almost one hundred and fifty professed Sisters looked to the same Superior for direction. It was evident that a Superior General had become necessary. As, however Mgr. Bourget was in Rome at the time of the regular elections, in 1864, Mother Philomene's term of office had been prolonged for two years while awaiting the return of His Lordship for the settlement of that grave question. In 1816 there was nothing to interfere with that settlement, but on the contrary, it was generally acclaimed. So the Generalship was founded, Mother Philomene was elected Superior General and Mother Caron first Assistant General.

The first thought of the General Superior must undoubtedly have been thanksgiving to God for having deigned to make use of their humble Institute and still more humble persons to accomplish such great things. The second, a sensation of holy fear at thought of their increasing responsibilities. The service of God is unquestionably for His greater glory and consequently very beautiful ; but its burden is sometimes very heavy for human shoulders and to the vision of unaided human nature. God had evidently blessed that Institute which

had taken root in the great heart of Bishop Bourget, and which the charity of Mother Gamelin and her daughters had created, while He gave the increase,—*incrementum dabat*.—In the measure that those appeals were heard for new houses or for the extension of those already in existence, the voice of God spoke to the hearts of Catholic young girls and the phalanx of the Sisters of Charity Servants of the Poor augmented in numbers. But it remained for the directresses of that pious and charitable movement, like other St. Pauls and other Apollos, to plant always and still to water the fields of the Lord.

Mother Caron understood this truth in an admirable degree. Her active and laborious life had already, as has been seen, given her the advantage of much valuable experience. She came, better prepared than ever, to the cradle of that dear Community. In the capacity of Treasurer, and in that of superior, she had already entered into the most cordial relations with many of the most prominent Montreal families, who had supported the Institute from its inception by their sympathy and influence. Amongst these may be mentioned the Viger, Larocque, Berthelet, Lacroix, Nowlan, Delisle, Fabre, Levesque, Tavernier, Leclair, Perreault, Cherrier, and many others.

Now that the burdens of the Providence Community were so wonderfully augmented, it was highly important that these valuable connections social should be maintained, and others again, formed. The spirit of St.

Vincent de Paul, as previously noted, ordained that his sons and daughters should not only practice charity themselves, but induce others to do likewise. It was to this delicate work that the new Assistant was called by the very nature of her duties.

Without, in any wise, neglecting the homes of the poor, whither, in fact, her heart forever inclined, Mother Caron at that time visited more especially the dwellings of the rich, seeking to enkindle under every roof the divine flame of that charity which is especially characteristic of Christians. That which the Romans said of the first disciples of Jesus Christ, "See how those Christians love one another," might very well be said of her. For truly she loved all her brethren in Jesus Christ, both the rich and the poor. To the latter she preached resignation, to the former, charitable liberality. If, as frequently happened, she collected offerings for the disinherited of fortune, she never failed to bestow upon the rich the alms of good counsel and of pious thoughts. Strangely is the world mistaken in believing that in order to be happy, it suffices to be rich. Good Mother Caron in her repeated visits often attained a twofold end. While inciting to charity, or the love of God, she frequently was enabled to apply a balm to bleeding hearts. It is related that on one occasion Louis Veuillot remarked to a missionary Bishop of the Canadian Northwest. (\*) "You should not thank us, my Lord, for the modest alms

---

(\*) Mgr. Grandin of St. Albert.

which we have been so glad to contribute for your savages ; but it is rather we who should thank you for having giving us an opportunity which we might not otherwise have had of practicing charity." And so might many of those have spoken who were honored by the visits of Mother Caron.

Whenever an occasion offered, and unhappily it does offer often enough, even in great centres, or in centres that are Christian, Mother Caron accepted the somewhat delicate task of what she jestingly called, "mending broken glasses." Who can describe the infinite tact and the earnestness with which she applied herself to this mission ! Now it was a household at strife, which she restored to harmony ; again, it was a mother-in-law, who found it hard to agree with a son's wife ; or, it was the son or daughter of some respectable family who had strayed from the right path. Mother Caron was very frequently asked to exert that influence which resulted from the ascendancy she everywhere acquired. Her words, full of sweetness, simplicity and humility, soon brought a smile to every lip and dispelling the clouds, showed that the blue sky was still shining overhead.

She was particularly assiduous in visiting the sick, and through them was often enabled to reach others. Her devotion to the sick in the higher ranks of society often proved a very fruitful apostolate indeed. From a bed of sickness the Christian has a clearer understanding of the vanity and misery of this poor life. A voice like

that of Mother Caron speaking at once authoritatively but sympathetically of piety and charity, plants the seed of a good word in a soil that is already prepared and deeply stirred. This is always a touching and consoling ministry. In that sense, the Sister of Charity—and she should always bear it in mind, is the most powerful auxiliary of the priest. Mother Caron was sublimely aware of this fact, and therefore her visits were exceedingly profitable to her patients. And, as was perfectly right and fitting, they were, on the other hand, very advantageous to the Community, and the occasion of much generosity in its regard. Every one was willing to give alms to Mother Caron for her poor. Thus, for example, a lady one day offered her a hundred dollars for the Asylum, and needless to say it was accepted. Where there was question of giving herself or of receiving anything for the poor, Mother Caron was quite unable to refuse.

Her charitable ministry at the bedsides of the sick she found most consoling and very dear to her heart, since she thus assisted in their last moments some of the most distinguished friends and benefactors of the Institute: amongst others, Mr. Olivier Berthelet and Mrs. Nowlan, a relative of Mother Gamelin. She was glad, indeed, to be able to remind those truly Christian souls, on the threshold of their eternity, that Our Lord has promised to show Himself compassionate to those who have shown mercy, assuring them that even a glass of water given in His name shall not go unre-

warded, and that to those who have fed and clothed and visited Him in the person of the poor, He shall say on that last tremendous day of judgment : " Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess the Kingdom prepared for you since the beginning of the world. "

Mother Caron, as Assistant General, had moreover to a great extent and without encroaching on the duties of others to interest herself in the various houses of the Institute, most of which were still in their infancy. Every one came to her with a confidence that included reverence. " She is so kind " was the universal verdict, to which might have been added, " and so capable. " Bazaars and other charitable gatherings were at that time greatly in vogue. They were then less exposed to the objections urged against them later; they were of undoubted practical utility; they usually netted a considerable sum, and every one could have a share in them. But what an amount of work was involved in the preparation for those entertainments and those lotteries! Mother Caron busied herself most zealously with all such matters, during her free time. Recourse was had to her from every side, and she never failed to oblige all comers. Innumerable were the dolls she dressed and the fancy articles she manufactured. Then she would repair to the place where the Bazaar was being held to aid the Sisters there in their difficult task. It was necessary also to prepare meals, and as already mentioned, no one was a greater adept in the culinary art than Mother Caron; none

knew better how to set out a beautiful or elaborate table. Wherever she went she seemed to bring with her the key of success. Therefore it was that she was needed everywhere at once; and as far as possible, the kindly Mother Assistant responded to all these demands during those six years from 1866 to 1872.

In the spring of the latter year, the Mission of Laprairie, being without a Superior, the Assistant General was temporarily placed in charge of that house. There, as elsewhere, she showed herself kind, gentle and cheerful, being useful to all and in everything. There her talent for cooking was brought into request. "Everything" writes the annalist of that mission "was frugal, but excellently prepared." Every one was in heaven, but especially the poor, to whom she illustrated her favorite maxim that God's poor should be the lords and masters of the Sisters of Providence. In her free time, at Laprairie, Mother Caron occupied herself in spinning. In the annals of that house, the memory of the good Mother's sojourn there is preserved with filial pride.

Her stay at Laprairie was, however, very brief. Events were leading to another change in the life of our heroine. In the general elections of 1872, she was called to succeed Mother Philomene, and for the second time, placed at the head of her Community; this time, in the capacity of Superior-General. She was now sixty-five years of age, and had been thirty years in religion.

---

## CHAPTER XI

MOTHER CARON, SUPERIOR GENERAL

1872-1878

*—Her Visits to Distant Missions—*

IN 1872, at the time when Mother Caron took up the reins of government, the Institute of Providence had been nearly thirty years in existence. The seven houses of its first days of existence had been multiplied as if by enchantment. Two hundred and forty professed Sisters and novices, not to speak of tertiaries, demanded the bread of religious life from the Community. Two hundred and fifty-five old people of both sexes had there found an asylum. Nearly four thousand pupils and hundreds of orphan girls and boys had received there the advantages of a sound moral training as well as material assistance. At least a score of lunatics and two hundred Deaf Mutes had also been sheltered. All of which means that as the work had thus visibly prospered, the burden of its general supervision had been growing heavier from year to year.

But the voice of God had spoken, and Mother Caron, bowing her head to the yoke, became Superior. Though prematurely aged by the incessant toil of her extraordinarily active life, she redoubled her confidence in God. She was, no doubt, fully aware of the



struggles that awaited her tender and generous temperament, in striving to satisfy the noble impulses and charitable longings of her merciful and compassionate heart. But what did that matter? The only thing of real moment to her was that she should accomplish the will of God. She pronounced her *fiat* with a generous and submissive heart. The true servant of God, instead of sighing after rest, only asks, like St. Martin of Tours, to be allowed to labor for God, His service and His glory. "*Non recuso laborem.*"

The news of Mother Caron's election was received with universal joy, even amongst people of the world, upon whom she had lavished her maternal care at the sick beds of the wealthy, — as quite recently, at the pillow of a notable benefactor of the Providence, Mr. Olivier Berthelet, — the choice of the chapter was warmly approved. In the Community, where she was naturally better known, it occasioned, as the annals declare, "a veritable explosion of joy."

The spiritual heritage of Mothers Gamelin and Philomene could not fall into better hands, as was well known and openly acknowledged, while thanksgivings were offered to God. Mother Caron, in fact, received in innumerable ways such decided proofs of this general gratification as could not but have proved pleasing to her tender and sensitive heart, which was both deeply touched and grateful. But it is only right to remark here that it was, above all, from God that she sought approval. The confidence of her Sisters in religion, the

suffrages of people of the world, amongst whom were the patrons and friends of the Institute, were no doubt a source of strength and consolation, but her soul had need of the strength and consolation that come from above. God gave her the interior joy of feeling herself visibly supported by Him. "My daughter," wrote Bishop Bourget, "your election is to-day preconised. You are one of those who began the noviciate. You have seen all, followed all and suffered much since the foundation of the Community. You have had the fullest experience. Propagate the spirit of the Institute. God will help you, in the measure of your need, to increase the works so happily begun. Govern the Community according to the power given you by the Constitutions, and the confirmation which your Bishop now makes of your election."

These beautiful and consoling words were a powerful source of encouragement to the new Superior General. It is well known that the great Bishop exercised a very remarkable influence over the people of his diocese, and particularly over those chosen souls who by their vocation are grouped around the foot of the altar or in the shadow of the cloister. Mgr. Bourget was a man of God. His career was long, he had been a bishop since 1837, and had administered since 1840, the affairs of that diocese which had been so prolific in institutions of all sorts.

It was he, as it may be remembered, who had been desirous that the modest refuge of "the yellow

house," should become the germ of a work which had already assumed grand proportions. He was, therefore, in the best possible position to judge and judge correctly of the real needs of that dear Community, over which, since 1843, he had never ceased to watch, and it was he who wrote to Mother Caron, "God will help you in the measure of your needs." So what was there to fear!

A very rapid prosperity has its dangers for a religious Community. Distant foundations are especially prone to lose something of the spirit which constitutes the strength and very often the actual life of an Institute. There are two means by which this difficulty may be obviated: uniformity of training in the novitiate, and the visits of the Superior General or her delegate, to missions at a distance.

When its members are formed to the spirit which is the very life of the Community, when they have drunk of the clear and limpid waters of its source, when they have been fed by the substance of its Constitutions and its particular set of rules, the sense of that formation is better preserved, together with the taste for that Mother stream and the love of those Rules and Constitutions. And even should the exigencies of different climates, or of new conditions, permit or perhaps demand certain modifications as to details, nothing is better calculated to prevent the weakening of the spirit of the Order than the visits of those whom Providence has appointed to watch over

the general direction of a Congregation or Community. And that is why the Church in giving its approval manifests care to preserve uniformity of training in the novitiate and regularity in the missions through the visits there of Superiors General.

One of the first events marking the administration of Mother Caron as Superior General was the visit which she undertook to the distant missions. That will form the subject of this chapter, since all that relates to the government of the Institute at its centre of action will be reserved for treatment in a subsequent section of the work. A circular letter of the 23rd September, 1872, soon after the election of Mother Caron, announced, in fact, her departure for the missions of the American West. The mission of the Rocky Mountains, for example, had been in existence for eight years, and circumstances had been such as to preclude their visitation. Mother Caron recommended her journey to her daughters in terms which left no doubt as to her sentiments of lively faith in Divine Providence: "This is a great undertaking," she wrote, "and might appear to be beyond my strength but that I abandon myself entirely to Providence. I rely a great deal upon the help of your prayers and that of your poor." On the 25th September, she left Montreal.

The circumstances attending that departure are related at length in the annals of that time. About seven in the evening, Mother Caron and her travelling companion, Sister Mary Victor, made their farewells in

the Community room. All the Sisters were present, shedding silent tears, and the good Mother also had traces of emotion in her voice as she spoke. She promised never to forget any one of them in her prayers, during her travels, and laid much stress upon the help she expected from their fidelity in praying for the success of the journey. That spiritual help, she said, was very necessary, since of herself, she could be only an obstacle to good. The travellers were to make the journey with five religious of St. Anne, and also with Father Seghers, (afterwards Archbishop,) but at that time, Vicar-General of the Island of Vancouver. They all met in the parlor of the Bishop's palace, where Mgr. Bourget, accompanied by Canons Hicks, Fabre and Dufresne received them. A quarter before eight, at the sound of the bell, the clergy of the Bishop's household assembled in the sanctuary of the Cathedral, while the Sisters occupied the front pews of the aisle. "My Sisters," said Bishop Bourget, "you are about to undertake a long journey, which shall redound to the glory of God and the salvation of souls. You will not go alone; the holy angels will be your companions, especially the Archangel Raphael, who will not fail to cover you with the mantle of his protection, as of old, the young Tobias. We shall now recite in common that beautiful prayer which the Church addresses to heaven for travellers."

After the prayers of the *Itinerary* had been said, the Archbishop consecrated those who were setting out

to the Immaculate heart of Mary, and gave them his blessing. From the palace Mother Caron and her companions went straight to the Bonaventure Station, whence the train steaming out a few moments later, bore them away to the West.

Travelling in the West was much more difficult and uncomfortable thirty-five years ago than it is at present. The American Continent, at that period, had not yet the net-work of railroads by which it is now intersected in all directions. The travellers had to make great part of their journey through that vast territory by stage, that public conveyance of former times, which is but little known at present. Setting out on the 25th September, Mother Caron had only got as far as the Rocky Mountains by the 10th of October. The course of that journey was not wanting in a variety of incidents. Thus Mother Caron makes mention of a restive horse, which nearly precipitated them into a ravine; of a trace that broke in descending a high hill; of an old woman to whom they paid a visit on the way, and who presented them with a pair of chickens, which she had especially roasted herself; of a good German, who deprived himself, in their favor, of a bottle of the wine of his country and a basket of splendid apples. In short, Mother Caron seemed to live over again that journey in the picturesque details which she supplied. In one letter she made mention of brigands who would be a treasure to story writers. A fellow traveller of theirs got into a quarrel

with some individual at one of the stations, and fired three shots in quick succession from his revolver. The balls missed their aim, but the alarm of the good Sisters may be imagined in having to pursue their journey in company with a gentleman of that calibre. One passage in Mother Caron's narrative is striking enough to be worthy of reproducing here and in her own words. It shows conclusively that Mother Caron was imbued with the true *spirit* of the Providence, which is never to lose an opportunity of asking for alms, because they are advantageous to the poor.

"We could not succeed" she wrote, "in getting any reduction on the stage fare. An American, however, who had undertaken to plead our cause, not meeting with success, handed us ten dollars. At another stage on our journey a Protestant physician paid for our breakfast, and on still another occasion a third person paid for our dinner, at the rate of a dollar a piece." And the worthy Superior added in all simplicity, "May God bless those generous hearts." It was doubtless that from some faces goodness shines forth in such a manner as to soften hearts and open purse strings.

At the mission of St. Ignatius, in the Rocky Mountains, great was the joy of the Sisters and their little savages. The much esteemed Mother arrived at the mission somewhat sooner than she was expected. It was the little girls of the house who suddenly saw her coming. Mounted upon boxes, they began to cry

out, and the Sisters came running. They could not believe their eyes and they wept for joy; a joy which can be very easily understood, indeed. Remaining there, as it were, in exile, in that remote and almost inaccessible corner of the Rocky Mountains, those worthy daughters of Charity had had their heroic share of sufferings and privations. And now Heaven had at last vouchsafed them that sweet consolation.

Wherever there is a poor person to be assisted, or a child to be instructed, there, as these good religious very well knew, a Sister of Providence is at home. But the Sisters of the mission of St. Ignatius in the Rocky Mountains were none the less grateful to God and to their Reverend Mother that for a few months, at least, they were permitted to fortify themselves by the illusion that their home in those mountains was identical with that of Montreal. Soon putting a check however, upon the very natural and quite justifiable outpourings of her tender heart, the Superior General set herself to the settlement of two affairs of paramount importance, namely, the financial situation of the house of St. Ignatius, and the foundation of an Hospital in Missoula, a small town some forty-three miles distant.

Hitherto the mission of the Rocky Mountains had been entirely dependent, as regarded temporalities, on the Jesuit Fathers. According to primitive conventions those good Fathers were charitable and considerate providers for the needs of the Sisters. But that state of affairs, if perpetuated, must necessarily become



embarrassing on both sides. And this despite the fact that they were in entire agreement with each other and that the most friendly relations existed between them.

The same was true of the establishment of an Hospital. The people of the locality were anxious to have it and had more than once asked for its foundation. The Jesuits were also very favorable to the project since there was good to be done in that way. The new house could then exchange visits with its neighbor, which, in case of need might come to its help. Mother Caron decided on its establishment and in the Spring of 1873, it was inaugurated. Mother Caron's late travelling companion, Sister Mary Victor, was named Superior, and associated with her was a Sister from St. Ignatius.

The Sisters of the Rocky Mountain mission were enabled to keep their reverend Mother during the whole Winter of 1872—1873. It was a compensation granted them by Providence for their long privations. And they profited both temporally and spiritually by her presence. By her example no less than by her advice, Mother Caron strove to confirm them in their vocation. Henceforth, they would the more fervently acquit themselves of their ministry of charity towards the children of the wilderness. That nothing might be wanting to their complete edification, Mother Caron had occasion to give them the always touching example of perfect resignation. She fell into a cellar and broke her arm. Nor did the most devoted care succeed in

effecting a radical cure. So that it was only at the end of three months that she was able to use her arm. During all that time, however, she never ceased to show her entire conformity to the will of God.

All this time, however, she did not forget the Mother House and whatever might be happening there. Mother Philomene, as first Assistant, governed the Montreal houses in her absence. The Superior was anxious on her account, fearing that she might fall ill, or find herself overburdened by the cares of administration. She dwelt particularly upon this point in one of her letters, dated Dec. 2nd, 1872, having dreamed the night before that her excellent viceregent was ill. She also expressed, in that same epistle, her lively satisfaction that the Sisters "were all at work and full of good will." She finally declared to her correspondent, who was one of the officers of the Mother House, her gratitude for the active part taken in the Golden Jubilee, Oct, 30th 1872, of Mgr. Bourget, of which she had read an account in "The New York Tablet." "I thank you most cordially," she wrote, "for your generous contribution to the Golden Jubilee of our dear Father Founder. I was pleased to hear of the trouble taken by our Sisters to enhance the splendor of that festival. It was for us a duty of gratitude. That good Father must have been deeply touched thereby, for his sensibility seems to grow with the passage of years."

Mother Caron left the mission of St. Ignatius to proceed to the Provincial house at Vancouver, where

she was eagerly expected. That which constitutes the happiness of some, in this life, very often causes the sorrow of others. Her departure from St. Ignatius was the cause of general regret, the more lively that she was obliged to make the greater part of her journey alone, though her arm was still infirm, and she was not yet in a condition to travel comfortably alone. But little that mattered to the courageous Superior General, who had never been daunted by distance nor fatigue. Sister Mary Victor accompanied her for a hundred miles on her way, after which she had to return to her mission.

At Corinne, the good Mother met some of her daughters, arriving from Canada. One of these latter, Sister Blandine of the Holy Angels, was to accompany her to Vancouver, Wash.; three others were on their way to the Rocky Mountains, going to the assistance of their companions there. It was on the 20th of May, about five o'clock in the afternoon, after an exceedingly rough crossing and much suffering, that these travellers reached Vancouver. The venerated Mother was met by a magnificent demonstration, so very fine, indeed, that she felt quite humiliated, and wept, saying, as it is testified by a former Superior of that distant Mission: "If I had known they were going to receive me in such a way, I should never have set foot in Vancouver."

Mother Caron, as may be remembered, had already concerned herself with the Mission of Vancouver when

she had been previously Superior, though not Superior General, having assumed the government of the Community in immediate succession to Mother Gamelin. This was in 1852, when Mgr. Blanchet had sought to obtain Sisters for that territory in which Vancouver was situated, which was then known as Oregon. (\*) She had known and had suffered from the failure of that first attempt at foundation. It has been related in a former chapter how much she had desired, at that time, to fly to the help of her dear missionaries. Behold, how the very reason that had previously prevented her from setting out, namely the duties of her office, now led her to those very missions of Washington, which if, the expression be permissible, were the child of her thought and of her sorrow. In the life of the apostles, of all times, those blessed hours occur when God seems to give by anticipation the compensating joy which is ordinarily reserved to be the supreme happiness of the heavenly country, that of seeing the accomplishment of the good whereof they have dreamed. Mother Caron, more than any one else, must therefore have rejoiced at sight of the immense good accomplished by her Sisters in those non-Catholic regions.

---

(\*) The present States of Oregon and Washington were originally organized as one territory. But in the year 1853, they were divided into two, the southern one retaining the name of Oregon, and the northern one receiving that of Washington. Some years afterward, the territory of Idaho was formed from the eastern parts of the two former.

The late lamented Bishop Blanchet had been the active and zealous protector of the Missions of the Providence in Oregon. But at a time when everything was in the creative stage, the most elementary prudence demanded considerable reserve. The poverty of the country and its limited resources would not permit of vast constructions. The first thought had to be of the church and its necessary dependencies. If then in the sixteen years of its existence the foundation had from a moral point of view wonderfully progressed, it had not been possible from a material standpoint to accomplish a great deal. The Sisters had been obliged to content themselves with a number of small separate houses, which formed altogether, at the time of Mother Caron's visit, a picturesque group, which had been named "the Providence suburb" — *Faubourg de la Providence*. To all appearance, as in reality, poverty and simplicity reigned supreme there. This was in no wise displeasing to Mother Caron, who highly appreciated that virtue, dear to St. Francis of Assisi. But the arrangement of these little houses offered many inconveniences and it was evident that it could be only temporary.

Mother Caron very soon decided upon laying the foundations of a house that could accommodate under one roof the diverse elements of that hitherto scattered mission. To the local Superior, who considering their poverty, was alarmed at the idea, Mother Caron said simply: "Don't be afraid. Go forward with confidence, Divine Providence will never fail you so long as you

do not depart from the beautiful simplicity which should be the luxury of religious houses." A short time later, on a Wednesday, which had been particularly chosen in order to interest St. Joseph in the undertaking, Mother Caron, accompanied by her councillors and her orphans, proceeded to the building-site, to turn the first shovelful of earth, and not long afterwards, she also assisted at the solemn ceremony of the blessing of the corner stone of the new edifice.

But there was something still more important to the real success of the Mission of Providence than the building or enlargement of its material edifices, and that was the perfecting of the interior and moral life of the religious, whose devotedness and self sacrifice are the soul of such works.

It is related somewhere, that Paul Bert, Minister of Public Instruction, in the Gambetta Cabinet of 1881—1882, had occasion to visit the principal colleges of Paris, in company with a delegation of Austrian political economists. In one of these colleges, directed by the Jesuits, the Father Rector did the honors on a liberal scale, and Paul Bert, though very graciously, expressed his surprise, that he though representing the Government had been permitted to see and study in detail the method and curriculum of the institution, where instruction was wholly gratuitous and which was entirely devoted to the Church. "Are you not afraid, Father Rector," he inquired, "that we might steal your methods and your plan of work?" "Oh," res-

ponded the Rector, "there is something which is quite sufficient for us, Mr. Minister, that you cannot steal from the Church and her institutions:" "And that is?" "Devotedness!" was the reply.

And it was true, devotedness is in exact proportion to renunciation, and never is renunciation practiced so perfectly as from supernatural motives. But, once again, it is that, above all, which must be practised. On the day of the clothing and the profession it is easy enough to give oneself to God. It is far more difficult not to take oneself back a little in the struggles of daily life. And that is why it is necessary in the religious life for each and every one, and all, to refresh themselves from time to time. "Come to Me, all you who labor and are burdened and I will refresh you,"— *et ego, reficiam vos!* For one is *refreshed* by prayer, by meditation, by reflection, by consideration of the duties of her holy state; in a word, every one is renewed by a Retreat. In the Spring of 1873, with their revered Mother presiding, the sister missionaries of Washington gave themselves up to the holy and strengthening exercises of the Retreat, which was preached by a Father of the Society of Jesus. The Sisters of the Rocky Mountains had also about that time the same inestimable advantage. And thus it was under the ægis of their Mother Superior General, that the Sisters of the West labored in the school of Jesus to renew in themselves that life of abnegation and self sacrifice which should be theirs. Thanks to the wise counsels

of their Mother, they were better prepared to hear the word of God and to steep themselves, once more in the source of all faith and all charity.

After the conclusion of these holy Exercises, and in spite of an attack of malignant fever, which very nearly brought her to the grave, Mother Caron visited every one of the Missions which the Institute then numbered in the district of Vancouver, Walla-Walla, Steilicoom, Tulalip, and Colville, the latter a new foundation just accepted. In all these, as everywhere she went, she excited admiration by her prudence and wisdom, as well as by her kindness and maternal solicitude. There was not a need which she did not discover and which she did not as far as possible, supply. But, above all, there was no weakness which she did not set herself to eliminate. She showed kindness, indeed, but she also showed strength. If by her words she declared that it was necessary to follow Jesus and St. Vincent de Paul, she showed the true way by her example. For she followed that way herself. In act as in speech, all was humility and simplicity, mortification and generosity, sweetness and charity.

"Mother Caron," wrote the annalist of Vancouver, "has visited all our establishments. Everywhere, she has encouraged, consoled, and given the example of religious virtues." "Her visit," wrote another, "has left on every side many and holy memories. People came from everywhere to see and recommend themselves to her prayers. And that good impression has



been lasting. The people of the places through which she passed love to tell their children of the virtues of that aged religious, whose goodness and modesty they so much admired."

In the course of that important visitation, of which imperishable memories remained in the West and in all the houses of Providence, Mother Caron decided that in each establishment of the Institute a register should be kept, on the occasion of the visit of the Superior General or her delegate, whereon should be inscribed a report of the visit, together with the opinions or judgments which might be deemed useful or necessary. This is still practiced, we believe, and with profit in all the houses of Providence.

The settlement of business affairs, the pious exercises, and the journey from one mission to another, left, as it is easy to believe, little, or more properly speaking, no leisure to Mother Caron. Nevertheless, she found means to keep up a tolerably active correspondence with her daughters in Montreal. On the occasion of the Feast of St. Emily, her patron, the 30th of May, they sent her their good wishes, to which she replied on the 10th of June, 1873. After a touching reference to Mother Gamelin, who also bore the name of Emily and to the celebration in her honor which had already taken place, and which the saintly foundress had loved, because it provided an occasion of pleasant recreation to the poor, Mother Caron assured her daughters of

the Mother House of her continual remembrance of them before God, and concluded by this judgment upon the Sisters of the West, which it is best to give in her own words: "Our Sisters of Vancouver are doing a great deal of good. Besides the sixty orphans, who are a source of great consolation to them, they have schools and an Hospital, where many conversions are made."

With the approach of Autumn, she had to think of returning to Montreal. But before leaving those western regions, the Superior General desired to pay a visit of courtesy and of religious fraternity to the principal mission in those parts of a sister-community, the Daughters of St. Anne, which in 1850 had also sprung from the initiative of Mgr. Bourget, and the object of which is the education of young girls. It was a pleasure for Mother Caron to show that mark of sympathy and encouragement to those excellent daughters of Mother Mary Anne, who were doing a splendid work out there. She doubtless conferred with them on the duties of their holy state and of their absent country, promising also to go and give news of them to their Mother General, on her return to the East. We may be permitted to remark here, that it was the glory of all those communities claiming the illustrious Bishop Bourget as their common Founder, while preserving his memory, to keep themselves united by the sweet bonds of a mutual and altogether fraternal charity. It was certainly not that they failed in the respect which

they owed to the venerable Institutes of the Congregation of the Hôtel-Dieu, or the Gray Nuns. But it was natural that they should consider themselves bound by special ties to those who had issued from the same mind and the same heart.

On the 24th September, 1873, Mother Caron left Vancouver, accompanied by two Sisters, Agnes and Amarine. At the same time, with them and with our Mother Caron, travelled Mother Stanislaus, Superior General of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, who was also coming back from an official visit to the houses of her Community established in thy West. Like the Sisters of St. Anne, the Sisters of the Holy Names likewise owed their religious life to Bishop Bourget, and had the same end in view, the moral and intellectual training of young girls. Like the Sisters of Providence, their foundation dated from 1843. Needless to say that Mother Caron was very glad to have the company of Mother Stanislaus. The progress of their respective missions rejoiced them both. No doubt their conversation was intimate and confidential; feeling assured that the desire of their common Founder and Father was their mutual edification and the only rivalry, free from every taint of jealousy, was in doing good.

Sisters Agnes and Amarine, who were going on a collecting tour through various centers of the United States, were to part from their Superior during the course of her voyage, and this circumstance permitted

Mother Caron to effect her return to Montreal in that modest fashion which was dear to her heart. She took care not to notify any one of the exact date of her arrival.

The Sisters in Washington had not the same motives for silence, so that, through information received from them, the return of the venerable Mother was not unexpected. Nevertheless, she contrived to reach the house unknown to any one. On the afternoon of October 14th, a sister of the Mother House, passing through the chapel, saw Mother Caron kneeling there in prayer. She was in all simplicity rendering an account to God of her journey, just as if she were returning from a visit to some sick person in the neighborhood.

The joyful news spread immediately through the house. By the express permission of Mgr. Bourget, there was benediction of the Blessed Sacrament that evening, and a glad *Te Deum* bore up to heaven the rejoicings of the whole family of Providence. It was only on the next day that free rein was given to the official demonstration. In accordance with the Reverend Mother's taste it was as simple as possible. There were no elaborate decorations, no studied compliments nor flattering addresses, all of which were a perfect nightmare to Mother Caron. But a holiday was proclaimed—a splendid holiday if ever there was one—and various little gifts were offered to the traveller. Each Sister, as the annals relate, had begged her own offering.

They were either for the adornment of the altars or something that would be suitable for future Bazaars, or for the poor. That kind of homage, which was altogether profitable to the cause of charity, was most agreeable to the Superior General. And so she thanked her daughters with a full heart. For that was her idea of holidays and of presents; nothing for herself, but all for God, for His works or for the poor.

---

## CHAPTER XII

MOTHER CARON SUPERIOR GENERAL

1872-1878

—*Government of the Institute in its Centre of Action*—

---

**T**HAT which constitutes the strength of an army taken in conjunction with the vigor of its soldiers and their respect for discipline, is first of all the keen eye and the military genius of its generals. Regiments placed in the hands of an Alexander, a Cæsar or a Napoleon must everywhere and always accomplish wonders. So it is with the great army for

good, and that is also wherein consists the great strength of religious communities. They are composed indeed, of individuals, but all are merged in one, all are obedient to constituted authority, with an entire and constant self-immolation, so that they become "like corpses", *perinde ac cadaver*, which expression has been used in relation to the Jesuits. But also, it may be remarked that in every community there is one brain that thinks for all, and one heart whose office it is to reanimate and vivify the whole. The Superior may be assisted by a Council, but she remains the soul of the work.

On returning to the Mother House after her brief visit to the missions of the West, Mother Caron did not resume her control of the general administration, for the simple reason that during all her travels it had never been abandoned. But it is certainly true that she gave herself up to its various details with greater ardor than ever. The burden of her office grew heavier from year to year, but she never even thought of complaining. She had her eye on everything. Not a single event marked the life of the Institute during that period in which she was not actively concerned.

If there was question, for instance, of rendering any services to the benefactors of the house, she was heartily at their command. Thus about the time with which this portion of the narrative is concerned, she was to be found at the bedside of Mr. Antoine Lévesque, a benefactor and, through his wife, a connection of the

lamented Mother Gamelin. For the rest there was no affliction of any sort that left her untouched. And as we shall have occasion to show in the course of this chapter, with what consideration and solicitude she treated those devoted daughters whom Providence had given her in that Institute of which she was not only Superior but Mother. So that to write the history of Mother Caron, especially while she filled the office of Superior, would be simply to write that of the Providence.

A work which demanded her immediate attention on her return from the West was the care of the insane. That work was not new, but it was gradually growing in importance. Even before she had opened her little refuge, wherein was received "a few poor women aged and infirm", that is to say, previous to 1828, Mother Gamelin had charged herself with the care of a poor idiot who had been left her as a legacy by her pious husband.

The annals of the Mother House and those of the mission of St. Elizabeth and of St. Isidore at Longue-Pointe testify that the work for lunatics had existed in the Providence from the earliest days of its foundation. People, even of fifty or sixty years of age, may remember the little "yellow house" in the garden of the Providence Asylum, where in the necessary reclusion, and with the proper safeguards, some lunatics who were dangerous or at least very troublesome, were kept for several years. That "yellow house" of the Sisters

has long since disappeared, but the work of which it was the germ has assumed vast proportions. Still under the care of the Sisters, it is continued at Longue-Pointe. Precisely in yesterday's paper, (March 9th, 1908) is published the official report of Dr. Villeneuve, Superintendent of the St. Jean-de-Dieu Asylum: and it shows that 324 patients were admitted there, last year, of whom 184 were from Montreal.

Now it was Mother Caron who, in 1874, acting with the approval of Bishop Bourget and in conjunction with Sister Mary Godfrey and Sister Thérèse de Jésus, negotiated with the Government of Quebec for the permanent organization of that beautiful work of charity in favor of those deprived of reason. Two years later, on the 19th January, 1875, Mother Caron received the following telegram from Hon. Gédéon Ouimet:

"Motion passed; your contract is ratified. Congratulations."

The good Mother hastened to assure Mr. Ouimet of her gratitude, in terms which seemed to imply that he had done everything for her and that she was the one obliged. But history must needs declare that though the governmental solicitude for the insane was very happily inspired, it had only to second and to support the charitable initiative of Mother Caron and her assistants.

A very interesting work in which Mother Caron desired that her Sisters should take an active part was



that for the Cathedral. As already mentioned, after the conflagration of 1852 Bishop Bourget had changed the location of his Cathedral, placing it in the west end of the city. But that Cathedral had to be built, which was no easy matter since money was urgently needed. In 1874, a great Bazaar was projected, and under the direction of Canon Dufresne the priests of the Bishop's household proceeded to a vast, general plan of organization. Three centres of action were established in that city : at St. Joseph's in Richmond St. ; St. Alexis Orphanage. St. Denis St., in the hall of the Asylum, on Visitation St. These were in charge of the Sisters of Providence, with the Committee of the Ladies of Charity, who shared the inevitable and protracted fatigue of keeping up and superintending those offices connected with the great Bazaar.

"My little Sisters," said Mother Caron to her daughters, of whom twenty-eight had been designated for that office, "bear your fatigue patiently. Do your best to make everything go off well and try by every means in your power to help the priests of the Bishopric and His Lordship. For in that way we shall be but acquitting ourselves of the immense debt we have contracted to our Father and Founder. Remember that he himself collected for us at the beginning of our Institute."

We may well believe that if these noble words reached the ears of the venerated Bishop they must have given him great consolation. His charity was reaping

what his charity had sowed. In any case, the active and zealous cooperation of the Sisters of Providence and of their Superior contributed not a little to the success of the great Bazaar of 1874.

In the Spring of the same year, that is in May, 1874, the annals of the Mother House deal with the official visit of Mother Caron to the numerous Missions of Canada, and those quite adjacent in the State of Vermont. What passed in the course of these visitations belongs rather to the private history of each house and need not be detailed here, except to remark that from the lips of the saintly Mother Superior fell the wisest and most practical advice to her Sisters, her daughters, as also to the poor of various sorts and the orphan boys and girls whom they sheltered.

For example, at the St. Alexis Orphanage the memory is still happily preserved of the good Mother's maternal words. And still are repeated to the young, just climbing the hill of life, those pronouncements made by Mother Caron thirty-three years ago, on the obedience and gratitude due from the orphans to the Sisters who are truly their second mothers. She particularly exhorted them, when they should have gone out into the world, to lead pious lives, and whenever possible on Sundays and holydays, to assist at high Mass. Of course, the obligation could be fulfilled, by being present at a low Mass, but our fathers understood much better than we do that the parochial office, by excellence

is that at which the pastor makes the announcements and where the beautiful latin prayers are sung. For the pious Superior had a real devotion to those Catholic usages of our forefathers. It was probably during her administration, on the 18th September, 1876, (\*) that Mgr. Bourget, who had also been to the very last a strict observer of those pious customs, decided, with the permission of the Holy See, to give up and did in fact, give up, the administration of the diocese of Montreal to his successor, Mgr. Fabre.

This is not the place to attempt an appreciation of the wonderfully fruitful career of the great Bishop. He had been at the head of affairs in the diocese for nearly thirty-six years. The point of present interest is, however, the assistance and protection which religious communities and works of charity received from him. Many owed their birth to his initiative, for, from a canonical stand-point he had given them life. But the Providence, amongst them all, could claim by special titles that blessed filiation.

Therefore, it was not without emotion, and even the shedding of tears, that they resigned themselves to the will of the Most High when they saw that revered

---

(\*) He had sent in his resignation on the 11th May, 1876, and on the 18th September, permission arrived from Rome, in the form of a brief, dated July 10th, to transfer the reins of government to Mgr. Fabre, who took possession of the See of Montreal on the 19th.

and much loved Father go to bury himself alive in the solitude of Saint-Janvier, Sault-au-Récollet.

Oh, never did Mother Caron, even in thought, rebel against Providence in the slightest degree. But it was impossible that her heart should not suffer. Her letter of the 26th September, 1876, to her Community deserves to be quoted as a model of tact and delicacy. Mgr. Fabre was no stranger to the Providence. His family was even related to that of the Foundress, Mother Gamelin, and his proverbial gentleness had made him already loved. He had, moreover, become the depository and the representative of authority. "Already, it was to him that recourse must be had for every privilege, for all permissions and for all advice." And, as Mother Caron reminded her daughters, "The new Bishop of Montreal must be the messenger of God to them."

Nevertheless she wrote: "We have also, my dear Sisters, a duty to perform towards our venerated Father and Founder. Needless to recapitulate all that he has done for our Community. God alone knows what it has cost him, in anguish, in anxiety, in solicitude. But what we do know is more than sufficient to secure for him our lasting and inalterable gratitude. He has marked out our duties for us by his instructions, his advice and his writings. These writings, which have been carefully preserved, will form, if they are ever published, a series of several volumes. Raised up by God to found our Institute, he has received specia

inspirations in its regard, which he has faithfully transmitted to us. We shall ever cherish his words, and in all respects strive to conform thereto our lives, our mode of action, and the government of our houses."

And, certainly no one was better qualified than Mother Caron to offer homage to the great Bishop, and especially where the work of Providence was concerned. Although it may be proper to remark here that the whole Community shared in that pious veneration, which never grew less at the Providence, during the lifetime of the saintly recluse of St. Janvier's Home, the Archbishop of Martianopolis, nor until the hour of his death, June 8th, 1885. Mgr. Bourget bequeathed his heart to the Providence, and though always in conformity to the prescriptions of the Church, in such matters, it should be seen with what reverence that heart is preserved and with what veneration it is regarded at the Mother House.

Upon the very day that Bishop Bourget gave up the administration of the government to Mgr. Fabre, Mother Caron addressed a circular letter to her Community, dated September 11th, 1875, wherein she dealt with an event that was to become an epoch in the annals of the institute. The 23rd September was the anniversary of the death of Mother Gamelin, and the following year of 1876 would mark the twenty-fifth recurrence of that Feast. No doubt they had always remembered in a special way the demise of their saintly

Foundress. But, as Mother Caron wrote, on the occasion of that species of Jubilee, "it was proper to give a particular solemnity to the celebration of that mournful anniversary."

At the suggestion of the Superior General, and, needless to say, with the approbation of Mgr. Bourget, a small volume was compiled, containing fourteen motives for admiration taken from the Life of the Foundress.

The letter before mentioned served as a preface to the booklet and was a touching commentary upon those words of Ecclesiasticus: "Remember what things have been before thee, and what shall come after thee." "The memory of the Foundress," it declared, "should remain in the Institute to be its strength and consolation. It should be kept ever more and more alive and the celebration of that event would lend itself to that result. "The more you remember Mother Gamelin," Bishop Bourget had said on September 4th, "the more you will live by her spirit."

Therefore, His Lordship had granted in perpetuity, for the 23rd of September, General Communion in the morning for all the Sisters, and in the afternoon Benediction, in all the missions of his diocese. The Mass on that morning should be more solemn, and the officiating priest should be asked to recite at its conclusion, the *De profundis* for Mother Gamelin and the other deceased Sisters.

"The best way," wrote Mother Caron, "in which to bring a memory to mind is by recalling at the same time, the virtues which enshrine that memory. It is to revivify the memory of our Foundress and to make her better known to all our Sisters that I send you this circular, wherein the principal features of her life are set forth."

"You seek," wrote Bishop Bourget, on the 22nd of September, "to make this anniversary a family festival, to draw closer those bonds which bind you to that good Mother, and unite you one with the other. I must necessarily approve of that pious project with all my heart." "You will find great edification," he continued, "in meditating on the fourteen subjects for admiration drawn from the Life of Mother Gamelin. She will appear to you as the model of the orphan, of the young girl in the world, of the valiant woman. She gives the example of submission to the holy will of God in the choice of a state of life, of resignation in the midst of trials and of all embracing charity towards the mentally defective and the insane, the widow and the forsaken, as well as towards souls who are struggling against their passions. In a word, she will there be set before you as a bright exemplar of fidelity to the Rule, of devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, to the Passion of Our Lord and to the Dolours of Our Blessed Lady. That is the substance of the whole book which has been prepared for you in preparation for the celebration of your family festival."

His Lordship concluded that beautiful letter by assuring them that though he could not be present at the celebration, he would unite himself with them in spirit. And having thanked the Sisters for their fervent prayers, which had brought him back to life, he signed himself :

“Ignace, the Bishop who resigned. *L'Évêque démissionnaire.*”

Three months later, Mother Caron had to endure another trial and one which she took much to heart. The Convent of St. Elizabeth, where she had lived and which she had founded, almost at the outset of her religious life, became on Christmas night, a prey to the flames. The fire took from some unknown cause, and in ten minutes the Convent had become a vast brazier with crumbling walls. The Sister in charge of the dormitory was awakened by one of the pupils. She had barely time to give the alarm, and the children to leave their beds, when the flames burst through one end of that same dormitory. A pupil, hoping to do some good, threw water upon the flames, thereby producing a thick smoke. The tragic sequel was that a dozen children and one old woman remained buried in the ashes, and all that remained of that establishment was the house of St. Vincent, which twenty-seven years before, in 1849, Mother Caron, had helped to build with her own hands. No sooner was the dreadful news conveyed to Mother Caron than she flew to the scene of the disaster, bringing thither material help, together



with maternal consolation. Her presence there contributed no little to encourage the good parishioners of St. Elizabeth, and enable them to rise up generously from their misfortune. The pastor, Father A. Dupuis, showed great strength of soul, and it was his brother, Father Hildege Dupuis, who delivered at the grave of the victims a beautiful sermon, which went far to console the bereaved families and the Sisters. They bowed beneath the blow with true Christian resignation, only to rise up again with renewed hope and confidence.

It is most touching to read the letters written by the Superior, under these sad circumstances to Mgr. Bourget and to the Community. They were dated from St. Elizabeth, since Mother Caron could not bring herself to leave those dear afflicted ones until the first difficulties connected with their temporary instalment were over. And though she never mentions her own work, it is easy to read between the lines, that upon her and the parish priest fell the chief burden of everything.

In a year after the catastrophe, all damage was in great measure repaired, and the Mission of St. Elizabeth had taken a new lease of life and a new power for good. Like so many other works of God, it had been strengthened by trial. But the fire of the 25th December, 1876, at St. Elizabeth remained, none the less, throughout the administration of Mother Caron, an ever sorrowful anniversary to her loving heart.

Nor did Providence spare her troubles of various sorts. These are necessary to the true servants of God.

They enter into his designs, being the all too frequent tests of constancy. Certain persons went so far as to bring law proceedings against the good and compassionate Mother, who would never willingly have done harm to any one. Despite her advanced age, somewhere about 1875—1876, she was obliged to appear before the Court, defending the rights of her Community as regarded the "Compound Syrup of Spruce Gum." People are always found to declare, that the Sisters enter into unfair competition with business people. But they do not take into account that these servants of the poor only keep the barest necessities for themselves; that whatever they can earn by their industry is for the benefit of their works. Also that it requires much ingenuity to feed, clothe and lodge the poor; and that finally the large houses which they build are for the accommodation of the needy of every description, and that in such establishments, they are obliged to meet all expenses, and to support a great number of people. These cavillers will not see that in the exploiting of some commercial article, as for instance, medicine, that the only reason it can be sold cheaper by the Sisters is because each one does her share of the work, simply for her keep, and then, they cry out upon the house tops that a wrong is being done. Poor short-sighted humanity! Some of the very persons who have spoken so strongly against the Sisters may be only too glad, some day, to find an asylum with them, for themselves or for their relatives. However, it was only after a great

deal of trouble that Mother Caron won her case against her opponents, in the matter of the "Compound Syrup of Spruce Gum" which at that time had quite a vogue.

"For the first time," she wrote, to one of her daughters, "We have been brought before the civil tribunals. God alone knows what a sacrifice it was to appear in a court of law. It is only the desire of God's glory and the good of the poor that could give the necessary courage. Heaven has vouchsafed to bless that act of self-denial by permitting us to win our suit."

One of the characteristic notes of a good Catholic is devotion to the Pope. The Roman Pontiff is elevated in dignity above all others in the Church of God. He is the visible representative of Jesus Christ upon earth and a pillar of His Church. It was to Him in the person of St. Peter, Chief of the Apostles, that the Divine Master gave command to "feed His sheep, to feed His lambs," namely, the pastors and faithful. It is upon him that He had built His Church, declaring that the gates of hell shall never prevail against her. That is why, in exercising the supreme magistracy he has a right to the obedience, respect and affection of all the faithful throughout Christendom, and very specially the affection or rather devotedness of those chosen souls consecrated to the religious life. It may be emphatically declared that Mgr. Bourget was penetrated in the fullest degree with this love for the Pope. He loved Rome and everything that recalled Rome. Even the very form of

that Cathedral which he had planned for his episcopal city would sufficiently prove this truth, since it is the faithful reproduction of St. Peter's of the Vatican. Therefore, he always sought to inspire the communities which he founded with a great love and devotion to the Sovereign Pontiff, and to Rome. The Sisters of Providence were not slow to become imbued with this spirit, which was particularly marked in Mother Caron. On two special occasions, during the course of her administration, she had an opportunity of testifying her love and respect for the Pope.

In October, 1877, Mgr. Conroy, Apostolic Delegate to His Holiness Pious IX, having come on a mission to Canada, desired to visit the principal establishments of the Providence; the Deaf and Dumb Asylum, and the St. Jean de Dieu, Insane Asylum. His Excellency was received by Mother Caron with that profound consideration which took nothing from the gracious simplicity so characteristic of the Superior General, and which struck the Apostolic Delegate.

"Mother Caron," he declared, "is one of the most notable religious I have met." A year later, in 1878, Pope Pius IX died, and Mother Caron was anxious that her community should honor the memory of the great Pontiff of the Immaculate Conception and of the Infallibility, by a public profession of its faith and piety. A very solemn service was celebrated in the chapel of the Providence Asylum for the repose of the soul of the lamented Pope.

Twenty-eight years afterwards, on the 2nd June, 1906, another Superior General of Providence, Mother Marie-Antoinette, with her secretary, Sister Benedict, had the honor and happiness of bending the knee, in Rome, to receive the blessing of a successor of Pius IX.

The present Pope, on hearing of the works accomplished by the Community since the days of Mgr. Bourget, Mother Gamelin and Mother Caron, said to the Reverend Mother and her companion: "You have rendered great service to the Church. Continue, for I too will pray that you may do a great deal of good." We may piously believe that Mother Caron, who would never have ventured to expect such an honor for her dear Community, must have given fervent thanks in heaven above.

The 4th March, 1878, a new opportunity offered of paying homage to the memory of Mother Gamelin. For that was the fiftieth anniversary of the date in 1828, when that remarkable woman inaugurated her work of mercy in favor of "a few poor women, aged and infirm." So solemn an occasion could not be permitted to pass unnoticed. Mother Caron addressed a circular letter to her daughters, recalling that event and exhorting them to beg of God in a special manner for His grace by which they might be filled with the charity of their Foundress. At the Providence Asylum that was a great festival, with singing at Mass, a holiday for the old people and a long "God be blessed,"

for the Sisters. (\*) The Superior General and her Assistants reserved for themselves, that day the privilege of waiting on the poor old women. Before the performance of that pious duty, Mother Caron addressed to her Sisters this little instruction, which is here given verbatim: "My dear Sisters, we should be penetrated, today, by a lively joy and gratitude towards our venerated Foundress and also towards our dear old women, for it is quite certain that our Community would not have come into existence at all if there had been no old women to take care of. It is to them that we owe, in a certain sense, our vocation as Sisters of Charity. Well, we should love these dear old women, and to prove it rejoice with them on this anniversary, which recalls so many and such beautiful memories."

These many and beautiful memories were commemorated again at the end of the same month, the 25th day of March, which was the thirty-fifth anniversary of the taking of the habit by the Seven Foundresses.

As Mother Caron was just then completing her term as Superior, and it was known that her great desire was that she should not be re-elected, it seemed possible that this would be her last celebration under her administration. It was, indeed, foreseen that owing to her advanced age it would be hard to do violence once more to her humility by placing her again at the head of her Community.

---

(\*)This corresponds to the *Deo Gratias* of the pupils.

They gathered, then, around her and the other survivors of the foundation, with a sentiment of particular emotion. After the manner of soldiers in a powerful army, who, aware that their General is about to be retired, press about him with an affection the more lively that it is mingled with regret.

On New Year's day, 1878, her address of good wishes bore some resemblance to a farewell discourse.

"I thank you very much, my Sisters, "she said" for the charity you have shown in being willing to bear with me. But do not be content with practicing that virtue solely in my regard. You should apply yourself with love and zeal to the works of the Institute. God gives to the Founders and Foundresses of Religious Orders the spirit proper to their Institute which He has called them to found. The Lord has put into my heart the spirit of the works of our Institute. If I have not practiced them as I should, it has been a want of correspondance on my part, where as you have resolved to labor in acquiring the spirit of your works, but without sadness,-- no one has a right to be sad in the service of God." — And the beloved Superior distributed her last New Year's gifts to the Sisters, bestowing upon each a medal of St. Vincent de Paul and a copy of the formula of the canonical examination, which had to be undergone before the clothing and profession. Mother Caron's last official circular letter to her Community also bore date at the end of the year 1877. "Behold

another year," she wrote, "that has come to an end and gone to join those others that have already glided away from us.....Let us imitate the skilful merchant, who before embarking on new enterprises, pauses, and attentively considers his profit and loss...."

In face of the eternal years, which are approaching, let us see what we have done with those that are gone." And Mother Caron drew up the balance-sheet of the works of the community. After thirty-five years of its existence, the Providence could count thirty-six missions established, of which twenty-one were in the diocese of Montreal and fifteen in outside dioceses. For her part, Mother Caron had directly contributed to the foundation of twenty-nine of these missions. "How many thanksgivings do we not owe to God," she wrote again, "Who has deigned to make use of our humble persons to accomplish His merciful designs." And later on, in the same letter, she added: "After having thus considered the sum total of our exterior works, it befits us to enter into ourselves and to examine before God what value these actions have had in His eyes....Let us love prayer, let us consult Our Lord in all our undertakings, let us call upon Him for help in all our difficulties. In order to please Him, let us be scrupulously exact in the fulfilment of our duty. Let us never hold back when there is question of going to the relief of His suffering members. We are Daughters of Charity and Sisters of Providence: let us show real Charity be a real Providence to all the afflicted...I will make but one



wish for you," she said in conclusion, "and I wish you that with all my heart ; that you love one another and show mutual forbearance, in bearing with each other's defects and love the poor as your masters. This is my most ardent wish for you." These expressions seemed, in fact, strangely like the wording of a testament. In truth, it was the spiritual testament of Mother Caron, in the capacity of Superior General. But she was only seventy-one years of age and was to live for another decade of years, until 1888. But her active work as Superior was nearly at an end.

At the elections of the following summer, in fact, at the close of the retreat, July 1878, the Council elected to succeed her in that office, the Reverend Mother Amable, who, in the world, had been a member of the Dorion family.

The administrative career of Mother Caron, as has been seen by these extracts from her last circular letter, and in the course of the last two Chapters, had been singularly fruitful and specially blessed by Heaven. Now the secret of success in those works which are accomplished by the servants of God, always consists more, or less in their co-operation with grace and the practice of the various Christian virtues. Therefore we shall now endeavor, in some special chapters, to show how Mother Caron understood and practiced these virtues of a Christian and of a religious.

---

## CHAPTER XIII

MOTHER CARON AND THE PRACTICE OF RELIGIOUS VIRTUES

*—Her Humility—*

SIDE by side with the greater history, there is the less, which consists of little details and personal anecdotes. Some one has said, that no man is a hero to his valet, a saying that is in great measure exact. Yet it scarcely seems as if it could be true in every case, and it may very well be doubted if it applies at all to the saints, those blessed ones whom the Church has placed upon her altars, and proposes to the imitation of the faithful. For not only were they truly great, but greatest of all to the eyes of those who were associated with them in every day life. They did nothing, or almost nothing, that appears extraordinary; but they never relaxed in the practice of daily virtue. No doubt they had their struggles, but they never grew weary. They began again, every day, and they never ended. And they went on growing, almost unconsciously to themselves, in age and wisdom. Now that beautiful labor of theirs was nothing more than the work of grace, consisting less of extraordinary deeds than of fidelity in those little things which can be readily grasped and studied by every person living. The Life

of Mother Caron thus far has been traced upon its broadest lines ; her work, in conjunction with others, and certainly the lesson which it conveys, is a noble and exceedingly valuable one. This narrative has now reached a point where the venerated Mother has ceased to occupy elevated positions, and has retired into silence and forgetfulness.

But in looking backwards over that wonderfully active life, during those thirty-four years in which she had been a religious, and in examining the details of her daily actions and her writings, it shall be seen, without in any way anticipating the judgments of the Church, to what a remarkable degree she practiced the virtues of the religious and of the Christian.

A traveller climbing the slope of a mountain, having arrived at the summit and before descending the farther side, pausing, will strive to fix permanently in his memory those scenes which, step by step, he has traversed. This is precisely what should be done by a biographer.

That virtue, which is the most necessary and at the same time most difficult to acquire by those who consecrate themselves to God, is humility. Properly understood, it in realty presupposes or includes all the rest. But it is, above all, their foundation. He who seeks to follow Jesus Christ must not alone take up the cross, but must deny himself. For the Gospel maxim,

"Deny yourself."— *Abneget semetipsum*, precedes that other, take up your cross,— *tollat crucem*. (\*) Now to deny oneself is to be humble; and to be humble is hard for poor human nature, which so often seeks itself, even in doing good. And since it is hard for any one to be humble, it is particularly so for those who occupy exalted positions, and for that very reason apt to confuse their own person with their office, and their caprices with what is demanded by the common good. So that those who govern have a very high degree of merit in being mild and gentle, without ceasing to be firm, and who are capable of denying self whilst maintaining their authority. And thus it was with Mother Caron, who, while loving and practicing humility, was both firm and dignified. "The less we are in our own eyes, "she used to say," the greater we are in the eyes of God, and the more abundantly shall we draw down His blessings upon us."

"My Sisters," she said upon another occasion, "be always ready to put aside your own judgment. Consider yourself to be like the broom of the house, which is hidden away in the corner once it has performed its office."

And these exhortations were always illustrated by her own example. Anything was good enough for her, and, as is testified by many witnesses, she seemed

---

(\*) *Abneget semetipsum, tollat crucem*.—Let him deny himself, let him take up his cross.

altogether incapable of taking offence. No one ever took less thought for her person or the arrangement of her dress. She perfectly understood that it was necessary to be perfectly clean and neat. But neither for her Sisters nor for herself did she desire anything that savored of fastidiousness either in costume or deportment. So that if any of the novices or younger Sisters seemed over particular in these details, she reproved them gently, saying : "Take care, my little Sisters, such delicacy borders on vanity. That is not the spirit of God." And in proportion as she advanced in age her horror of vanity and her taste, if we may venture to so express it, her indifference in regard to dress became more marked, this gave a certain negligence to her appearance, especially in the bustle of every day affairs, so that superficial observers might have mistaken Mother Caron for a good, simple, old woman ; and in point of fact, nothing would have pleased her better. For she dearly loved that saying of the Imitation : *Ama nesciri*. "Love to be unknown."

But those who knew her best were better able to estimate her at her real value. And whenever the honor of the Institute required it, as for instance when some official ceremony demanded a certain formality, she willingly accommodated herself to the requirements of etiquette, and very soon showed that she had breeding, no less than capacity for affairs.

Some one found fault with Mother Caron, on one occasion, in presence of Madame Masson, the *Seigneuresse*

of Terrebonne, because that excellent religious had driven a considerable distance in a rough cart, seated on a pile of bags. "It was," as the objector declared "a great want of self respect."

"Not at all" interposed Madame Masson, "Mother Caron is always grand and dignified, even when sitting on a pile of bags."

And the good lady knew whereof she spoke, being noted in the highest social circles for her own refinement and distinction of manner. A circumstance which in no wise prevented her from almost worshipping Mother Caron and never more so than when Mother Caron, by her carelessness of dress or bearing, at the table or elsewhere, sought to palm herself off upon those with whom she came in contact, as a woman of no breeding.

A priest, who was very well acquainted with Mother Caron, arrived one morning at the Convent of St. Elizabeth to say Mass. The Superior, who chanced to be very busy in the kitchen, had to keep him waiting a few minutes. When she at last, appeared, he said to her in a jesting way: "You deserve to kiss the floor." Immediately the Superior got down and did actually kiss the floor. Never in his life had the priest felt more confounded and angry with himself. He went to the chapel, deeply edified and much moved, after an humble apology for his unfortunate jest.

Father Norbert Lavallée, who was pastor at St. Vincent de Paul during Mother Caron's term of office

as Superior there, esteemed her very highly, and was always willing to open his purse strings in her regard. But it was remarked by the Sisters that that worthy ecclesiastic never hesitated to humble her, even in public. He himself, as every one knew, was of a quick and ardent temperament, but his way of acting towards Mother Caron, whom he nevertheless appreciated to the full, his brusque manner, for instance, of reproving her for any oversight, finally led the Sisters to the conclusion that there was a tacit understanding between pastor and Superior, which could be turned to the advantage, not to say the edification, of every one present. Mother Caron submitted to this trial with a heavenly joy. No doubt, it must have cost a great deal to the natural woman, but the saintly religious was fully aware that amid trials such as this virtue has its birth.

Therefore she was disposed to distrust that easy and ephemeral success, which is hailed by so many others as a triumph. The praises and honors which her own extraordinary merit, more even than the dignity of her office, drew upon her, were a veritable torment to that humble soul. She complained of them bitterly, and always made it a request that compliments or encomiums upon herself, which she declared to be so ill deserved, should be suppressed.

Once after the consecration of a Church, she had superintended the preparation of a ceremonious dinner with her usual skill and success. The Bishop of the place, a prelate who was, in general, very sparing of

compliments, pronounced a eulogy upon her in presence of his priests, comparing her to St. Vincent de Paul. Utterly confused, Mother Caron hastened to attribute the success of everything to those who had assisted her.

And moreover, the Sisters were always certain to find her on the morrow of such days, hidden away in some remote corner of the chapel, where she believed herself to be unnoticed by all save God alone. When she had for the first time relinquished the reins of government of the Providence to assume the direction of the mission of St. Vincent de Paul, her humility, in all respects was so remarkable that on hearing the mere account of it one of the clergy of the Cathedral Mr. Plamondon, was moved to tears. In setting out for any place, even if it were at a considerable distance, she always went on foot, and when asked why she did not drive, she invariably replied that she preferred walking or that it was good for her health. If, however, because of the distance, or in order to save time, she was obliged to take a carriage, she always chose by preference the poorest and worst appointed, often contriving to slip a double fare into the cabman's hand. For thus did her charity coincide with her desire of making a poor appearance. In this connection, a pretty little incident is told by one of the Sisters who knew her very well. It was when she was Assistant and consequently after her departure from St. Vincent de Paul. One of the benefactors of the Community, Mr. Charles Lacroix, offered to drive her out to *Les Écores*, probably on the



occasion of a Bazaar. To her dismay and altogether to her surprise, he arrived with a carriage and pair of horses. (\*)

"I never was so much ashamed in my life," set confided next day to the Sisters at St. Vincent. "If hid my face everytime I saw any one coming. I was so much afraid of giving disedification."

Another time she arrived quite late at night at one of the missions at a considerable distance from Montreal. Next morning at prayers, every one was astonished to see her in the chapel. "But how did you get here?" she was asked at breakfast. The answer was very simple. She had reached there at night after the Sisters had retired. Having been admitted by one of the old men of the house, in order to disturb no one she had slipped upstairs to the garret, and slept upon a bundle of wool. She did not disdain to rummage for the poor in the attics and cupboards of the rich, whenever she got permission to do so, for old furniture, linen or clothing, some of which was going to loss, or wearing out simply for want of use. Nothing rejoiced her more.

Superior for the greater part of her life and having almost always commanded, as those who are in the habit of commanding well know, it often becomes necessary to reprove weakness or levity; and it is also a fact, that those who have once been reprov'd very

---

(\*) At that time, in Canada two horses used only far carriages.

frequently require to be reprov'd again. Mother Caron had a way of her own when oblig'd to give such reprimands, or, she did the thing herself, and in a proper manner. It is related that she had recommended the Sister in charge of the Refectory, to take care of the pieces of bread left upon the table after meals. After the lapse of a few days, she saw that her recommendation had been disregarded. She instructed a young Sister to gather up all such fragments, and to put them in her drawer. The novice obeyed and the Superior, without uttering a word of reproach to any one, silently ate the crusts. Needless to say, that such a way of acting made a much deeper impression upon all concerned than the longest discourse.

She never spoke of herself, except to depreciate her own merits, or to declare her incapacity to perform such or such an act, or at least, to perform it well. Part of her hour of adoration happening to fall one day during the hour of the community Mass, some one remarked that it had been, in that way, considerably abridged.

"Oh," she exclaimed with a sigh, "the good God didn't lose much, I pray so badly...."

Another time, a young sister, aware of her culinary skill, asked her advice in the preparation of some rare and unusual dishes. Mother Caron gave the required information, but added immediately: "Remember though, my little Sister, that I am ignorant of much more than I know, in such matters."

One year just as Christmas was approaching, she was obliged to set out for the making of several consecutive collections, and some one said to her: "It is such a pity you have to go on the very eve of the festivals. You should really try to arrange matters so as to get back on New Year's eve. "There is no necessity for me to be here," she answered, "you can receive visits perfectly well without me. I would not refuse to stay here if I were commanded to do so. But I confess that I should very much regret if I had to give up the part that has been assigned me. For what can be more beautiful than to go begging with Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and like them to be rejected and despised. During my travels, I can draw a parallel between the duty I am performing and the Saviour of Bethlehem and I hope that my Christmas will be profitably spent."

This little anecdote most certainly recalls that saying of the Apostles, who, as the Scriptures declare, "went rejoicing, because they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the Name of Jesus." (\*) *Quoniam digni habiti sunt, pro nomine Jesus, contumeliam pati.*

To beg, oh, how she loved to beg. It appeared to her a sacred duty, which should be so much the dearer to a Sister of Charity that it was repugnant to the delicacy of a well brought up young girl. She strove very hard to overcome her natural repugnance in this

---

(\*) Acts V, 41.

respect ; and when she noticed any want of generosity in her younger Sisters with regard to that duty, it gave her real pain. She recommended that every Sister in the Missions should be trained to that part of the work, and when she herself went collecting in the city she usually took with her some young Sister, that she might initiate her into that difficult service and accustom her to performing it.

Whilst Superior at St. Vincent de Paul, it may be remembered that she followed in the footsteps of Mgr. Bourget in a collecting tour through those villages where his pastoral visits led, and in several of them she was very ill received. Even in some presbyteries she met with a cold reception, and with her companion was left standing for sometime in the hall. A young Sister, who was with her, felt aggrieved at such a humiliation, but the Superior said to her : "Let us thank God, my little Sister, for if we were not glad to be treated in such a manner we should deserve nothing better."

She herself related that once, when she was collecting in a parish where she was well known, and where consequently every one gave generously, the devil inspired her with a thought of vanity. But she soon routed the malignant spirit by saying : "Let me alone. Isn't my task hard enough ! Dont try to make me lose the merit of it. If you were in my place, you would'nt like it very much if some one came tormenting you, and trying to do you a bad turn."

That manner of speaking, by which, if we may be pardoned the expression, she seemed to make appeal to the charity of the Evil One, was characteristic of her admirable simplicity. Such delightful incidents occur only in the lives of Saints....

Not only did she herself love and practice humility, but she highly esteemed it in others, and desired that it should be conspicuous in her Sisters and in her Community. It chanced that one time, when she had made a journey to New York, as is related in the Annals of Vancouver, she and her companions were brought, by the stupidity or perhaps the knavery of a cabman, to a hotel of more than doubtful reputation. Some good Catholic friends came to take them away from there as soon as they heard of their arrival. But meantime, in the squalor and disorder of the place, the Superior had found a subject for an excellent lesson in humility, and said to her companions: "Should not we, who are the servants of the poor rejoice to be treated as they are!" A certain parish priest once applied to her to obtain Sisters for the foundation of a mission in his parish. "Reverend Father," inquired the Superior, "did you not try somewhere else first?" Somewhat disconcerted, the priest had to admit that he had in fact knocked at another door, but that he hoped she would not on that account refuse his request. "On the contrary," answered Mother Caron, "the work will go all the better for that." And, in fact, she instantly took measures for the establishment of that

mission, which met with great success. In the same order of ideas, the annals relating to the departure of the Sisters from Sorel are most edifying. In 1858, as previously noted, Mgr. Bourget invited the Sisters of the Congregation to go to Sorel, after they had left St. Hyacinthe, where they made room for the Sisters of the Presentation. Now the mission of the Providence at Sorel was an exceedingly prosperous one, and the people were deeply grieved at the departure of the Sisters. Mother Caron, who was at that time Superior of the Providence, felt it her duty to comply as eagerly with the wishes of His Lordship, as if there had been question of an advantageous foundation. And when several prominent people of the place were anxious to give the Sisters a farewell demonstration, they were dissuaded by the good Mother, who had got wind of the affair and who said: "Such a demonstration would not be suitable at all for poor little Sisters like us."

Finally, reproach, even though it were undeserved, and when in her case was it otherwise, neither surprised nor grieved her. She at once made up her mind that it was well deserved. One day, a gentleman who fancied that he had some cause of complaint against the Sisters, came and made a scene in the parlor. Mother Caron, whose equanimity was not the least disturbed, thanked him for his charity and begged him to have no hesitation whatever in acquainting her with his cause of complaint; and adding in all simplicity: "Oh, if

you knew us better, sir, you would have a great deal more to say against us."

Naturally, the visitor was entirely disarmed and left in confusion, loudly proclaiming that Mother Caron was a saint. Mgr. Pinsonneault, former Bishop of London, who was living in retirement at the Bishop's palace, complained on some occasion of what he considered a serious omission, in his regard, on the part of the Sisters of Providence. They had failed to inform him of the illness of a certain lady who was a relative of his, and he wrote to Mother Caron in a somewhat sharp and caustic style. The saintly Mother immediately responded, offering her apologies in such fashion as not only appeased the prelate, but gave him forever after a very high opinion of the Superior.

And here the former Ordinary of London found himself in the best of company, for Bishop Bourget and Mgr. Joseph Larocque, who had succeeded Mgr. Prince in the See of St. Hyacinthe, held her in the very highest esteem. "Her whole exterior," said the latter, "was so expressive of humility that it inspired every one who approached her with respect and confidence." It was unquestionably her humility, the desire to be hidden and forgotten, a virtue which of all others is the most astonishing to human nature and the most prolific in the fruits of salvation; it was her humility which gained for her that wonderful ascendancy over all those with whom she came in contact. It might

be said that she practiced a kind of magic, and that her personal sympathy emanated from some mysterious source.

She seemed to have a powerful attraction for minds and hearts alike, and yet the tributes of love and respect with which she was met at every turn were precisely amongst the severest trials of her life. It is farther related in this connection that a certain young priest, who was distinguished both for learning and talent, was very anxious to shine and to display his brilliant gifts, taking also an exaggerated care of his person. But once he had been brought into contact with Mother Caron, he surprised all who knew him by a complete change in his way of acting and became in the end remarkable for his humility. However, if all the anecdotes told of Mother Caron were to be repeated here, there would be no end. How many novices were taught the value of humility by Mother Caron's life-long practice of that virtue, even more than by her advice or admonitions. When the present author, in taking notes for this biography, visited one of the houses of Providence, an old Sister who had known Mother Caron intimately described one of those never to be forgotten scenes in the novitiate.

"One of our companions," she said, "who was still quite young and remarkable for her beauty no less than her piety, had just died. We were all gathered about her funeral bier, weeping and grieving for her, when suddenly Mother Caron appeared."



"You see, my daughters," she said, "how miserable we are. Of what value are those other goods of this earthly life, that they should be so highly esteemed. Soon it will be our turn." No need to seek farther for the secret of Mother Caron's love of holy humility. She measured life by the measuring rod of eternity.

---

#### CHAPTER XIV

##### MOTHER CARON AND THE PRACTICE OF RELIGIOUS VIRTUES

—*Her Confidence in God*—

---

WHEN the Angel of the Most High, descending at Nazareth, asked the modest and shrinking Virgin to accept a cooperation in that work by excellence of the Incarnation of the Word, the first expression that crossed the lips of Mary was one of humility, *Ecce ancilla Domini*, — "Behold the handmaid of the Lord,"—and the second was one of confidence in God, —*Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*—"Be it done unto me according to thy word." Such should be the programme of every life devoted to good works. The soul which has given itself to God, to His apostolate, to

His action in the world, should be above all things humble and self-distrustful, it should also be generous, with confidence in God. For all true strength comes from Him. "I can do all things" said St. Paul,—who had nevertheless, on more than one occasion spoken of his own weakness and misery,— I can do all things in Him who strengthens me,—*Omnia possum in eo, qui me confortat.*

Mother Caron fully understood these profound and eternal truths. She was humble and retiring, as has been seen; she loved humility for herself and for her community, because beyond life she could see eternity; and that was the secret of her untiring and exceedingly fruitful activity. But the supreme and fundamental reason of all those holy dispositions was confidence in God. She knew that He was powerful no less than good, and though, under all circumstances, she proclaimed herself his humble and very humble servant, she was content to accept even honors and offices when she believed that such was His will, with a confident and complete abandonment. "I am His servant," she said within herself, "let it be done according to His will, and all must be for the best."

Exercises of devotion were her great delight and she gave herself up to them with the greatest fervor. "Let us perform all our exercises of piety in the best manner possible," she said to her Sisters, "for that time alone belongs to us. All the rest we owe to our neighbor, the poor, the sick, the infirm or the afflicted. Let us

then be scrupulous in employing our time." In anxiety, in fear or in grief, she prostrated herself before the Tabernacle and prayed. On the days of Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament or of the Holy Relics, she spent all the time that she could spare from her numberless occupations at the foot of the altar. And it was no slight subject of edification to the novices and younger sisters, for example, on going into the chapel, to find their revered Superior hidden away behind a pillar or in some remote corner, absorbed in God. Her lips, moreover, were constantly seen to murmur prayers, and this habit of prayer showed itself externally by the modest gravity of her mien and the recollection of her bearing.

At the period of one of the annual retreats, during her term as Superior at the Convent of St. Vincent, she was detained by her duties as sick nurse, at the beside of Father Gagné, the aged pastor of Mascouche, and to whom was owing the foundation of the Convent there. The Superior General of that time instructed her to make her retreat in the sick-room of her patient. She responded according to her wont: "As you wish, Reverend Mother." But later she wrote: "I was in the school of suffering; and what a splendid retreat that was for me, in the presence of that holy old man, so patient and so resigned in the midst of cruel sufferings. I said my prayers with great devotion before the altar erected in his room."

She prayed, in fact, with great devotion everywhere as is attested by the numberless anecdotes told of her. For instance, there is nothing more difficult than to keep oneself free from distractions while travelling or staying at a hotel. One of the early annalists of the mission of Vancouver relates that when passing through New York with Mother Caron, she and her companions were obliged to wait some days to catch a certain boat, and put up at a hotel: "There," wrote she, "quite retired in our common sleeping apartment, we gathered about our dear Mother Caron. We listened with love and reverence to every word of hers. On a particular evening, which not one of those present will ever forget, our saintly Superior, inspired by her own fervent piety, was anxious to give us a final proof of affection. She made us write the names of the Five Wounds of Our Lord on the same number of little tickets, for which we drew lots. She declared that before parting from us she wanted to place each one of us in a safe refuge against the dangers of the future."

That sincere faith and deep piety naturally inspired Mother Caron with the most absolute confidence in divine Providence. She placed there all her hope and reliance. Most assuredly she was no fatalist, nor tinctured even in the slightest degree with superstition. She knew that God wants us, in all things, to help ourselves, and to labor, but she was likewise well aware that both help and grace come from on high, and that both are necessary in every circumstance. One of her favorite maxims was: "Providence will

never fail us, provided only that we are doing our duty.—For the poorer we are, the more God will help us,—and the more we give the more we receive.”—There is nothing in all this that approaches the sullen resignation of superstitious fatalism, but rather a heart cry from a traveller upon the way of life, who feels that the road is insecure and accidents very possible; and who, never failing to recommend himself to God, nevertheless continues to depend upon himself. “Never complain;” she said one day to the Sisters with whom she was sharing the hardships of a new foundation, “what you do not have to day shall be given you tomorrow; for Divine Providence will never abandon you.” That was her whole plan of action. Therefore, she was ever ready to offer homage to the holy Providence of God, to whom, as she felt assured, she and her Community were indebted for so many favors. In a circular which she addressed to all the houses of the Institute, in 1876, some years before relinquishing the office of Superior, she wrote these deeply significant lines. “You will see, my dear Sisters, from this circular, that, according to that assurance which has been unflinchingly given us, we have continued to rest under the touching and truly maternal care of Divine Providence, and this fact we rejoice to acknowledge every day. The happy development of our houses may be accepted as a proof that God is with us. For what could we have done without that constant and powerful assistance in the innumerable difficulties that confront us, night and day. Therefore, we should be, as it were, weighed

down by the abundance of graces we have received and animated by sentiments of the liveliest gratitude." That was why her confidence in God was so often rewarded in a visible manner, and so as to be apparent to every one. She obtained help that was almost miraculous at times when everything seemed hopeless, and on more than one occasion she obtained from God the cure of sick persons who had had recourse to God through her intercession. The following incidents, in this connection, have been preserved by the tradition of the Order. We shall simply relate them here, without wishing in any way to anticipate the judgment of competent authority, as to their more or less extraordinary or even supernatural value.

Our Lord has promised that even a glass of water given in His Name shall not go unrewarded. The lives of the saints abound in such trifling occurrences, which are very ordinary in appearance, but through the intricate web of earthly existence, it is not difficult to follow the singularly beneficent action of Divine Providence. Thus in reading the life of St. Vincent de Paul, one is constantly being reminded of that forcible declaration of Holy Writ, "God has given His Angels charge over you to keep you in all your ways." *Angels suis Deus mandavit de te, ut custodiant te in omnibus viis tuis.* We shall have occasion to show in a special chapter how, during the whole course of her life, Mother Caron was heart and soul, first and above all things, a *Sister of Charity*. Now, it frequently

happened that she found herself at the end of her resources, and it was then that Providence invariably came to her aid. Thus, one day, she gave away her blanket to a poor woman, and on the next she received from a wealthy merchant a present of fifty blankets. On another occasion, a miserably clad woman begged Mother Caron for a skirt, at the very time when she had given away the very last garment of that description of which she could dispose. To the woman she said: "Come back here to-morrow!" while she racked her brains for some expedient to which she could have recourse, when the morrow came. Quite opportunely a generous dealer in such wares sent her a roll of flannel, and the poor woman was the first to be supplied. One morning, when she had just deprived herself of her last coin, she met Sister Mary of the Immaculate Conception, and in a voice full of emotion, said: "I have just given away my last cent, and here a benefactor has sent me ten dollars." Another time, in order to oblige Bishop Bourget, she had undertaken the care of some priests who were infirm and altogether without resources, and at a time when her finances were at a very low ebb. But, to her joyful surprise, an unknown benefactor sent her a hundred dollars. There may have been nothing miraculous in all this, but, at least, we may be permitted to find therein providential coincidences.

Her unshaken confidence in the maternal goodness of Providence had the effect of preserving Mother Caron,

even in the most trying circumstances, in inalterable security and peace of mind, such as is often seen in the true servants of God. For it was not without reason that the Angels of the Lord sang upon the plains of Bethlehem the canticle of peace. In fact, it appears certain that even upon earth God gives to men of good will the peace of heaven. One day, Mother Caron was driving through an open field during a violent storm of lightning and wind. Perceiving that the young Sister who was with her seemed extremely frightened, Mother Caron said: "Don't be afraid little one; let us throw ourselves into the hands of Providence. We must be always ready to do the will of God. And after all what does it matter whether we die in a field from a stroke of lightning, or at home in our bed?"

The Sister treasurer had need of certain papers upon which depended the obtaining of a considerable sum of money. This was in connection with a legacy left to the Community by Father Gagné, pastor of Mascouche, of whom mention has been previously made. A considerable time had elapsed since his death, and no one knew in what notary's office the documents had been executed or deposited. Mother Caron, who held the memory of the saintly priest in veneration, and who had also nursed him through a long illness, did not hesitate to ask that he, in turn, might lend assistance. "Well," she said, to the dead pastor, "are you going to let us lose that money which you wanted to give us? It is not for ourselves, but for our poor. So



you must find those papers." At once, assisted perhaps by some vague remembrance, she felt impelled to seek for a notary of the name of Lepage, though she did not even know if such a person existed. So closely was she persued by this idea, however, that she went to another notary, named Labadie, and inquired if he knew anything about one of his profession called Lepage. "Oh ! yes," said Mr. Labadie, "there used to be one of that name at Terrebonne, but he is dead long ago." "Well, go and look in his office," advised Mother Caron, "and I am sure you will find there the papers that we want ?" And so the event proved.

The Superior also effected cures, but since she had a considerable knowledge of medecine, and was, moreover, a skilful nurse, she could do so without exciting admiration. She treated her patients with *simples*, it is true, but also with prayers. It is tolerably certain that no complete record has been kept of the numberless cases, even hopeless ones, wherein piety and gratitude loudly declared that the cures were attributable to her. But it was well known that the many people who venerated her, had also a boundless confidence in the beneficent effect of her prayers and admonitions. A great many people who were ill had recourse to her. Mgr. Bourget often sent the sick to her, and she also sent them to His Lordship. So that when they found themselves cured, they were never quite certain whether it was owing to the prayers of Mother Caron, or to the blessing of the Bishop. To both, no doubt, but in the first place to God.

A priest who was well acquainted with Mother Caron relates the following incident. The mother of a family was threatened with general paralysis. Already there was a numbness in the limbs, the nerves refused to perform their office and an occasional dizziness gave token of a fatal issue. During one of these attacks, Mother Caron unexpectedly arrived. The children of the house immediately gathered about her, begging her to "make mamma well". And there were nine of these little suppliants. Mother Caron, touched to the quick, promised that these attacks would not come on again. They ceased in point of fact, and the mother lived to bring up her children in the love of God.

That incident occurred in 1873, when she was Superior General, but she had long before acquired the habit, in moments of emergency, of commanding God,—if we may dare to use such an expression—so full were her prayers of that faith which moves mountains and which is altogether irresistible. Many pretty anecdotes are told of her life at St. Elizabeth which will bear repetition here, and which have been purposely reserved for this chapter. For example, it was her pious custom when working in the garden with the old women and the orphans, to speak to them of God, or to recite the Rosary, after which she never failed to add three invocations to St. Joseph, so that all of her charges had great confidence in the Foster Father of Jesus. One day, an old woman who found it very hard to stir up the earth with her spade, said to

the Superior : "Little Aunt, tell St. Joseph to soften the earth." And, in fact, it almost immediately seemed to the digger that her spade began to work better and it would have been hard, indeed, to convince her that Mother Caron had not spoken the word that brought the power of the good Saint into action. Shortly after the foundation of the Convent of St. Elizabeth — of which we are still speaking,—one of the pupil boarders became a cause of great anxiety to the Sisters, because of attacks to which she was subject of almost frantic terror and uncontrollable agitation. Her parents, who were weak minded and superstitious, believed that a *spell* had been cast upon her. They had, therefore placed her at the Convent, though without explaining her state of health, in the hope that she might be cured by contact with the Sisters. Mother Caron succeeded in conjuring the evil spell. She consoled and encouraged the parents and persuaded the Sisters to keep her, by the assurance that these attacks would disappear ; which was actually the case at the conclusion of a novena. On another occasion grave fears were entertained for a Bazaar which had been organized at St. Elizabeth, and the matter was very urgently recommended to St. Joseph. One evening, an old woman chanced to be in the chapel when Mother Caron, who had stayed up late that evening, suddenly came in. She supposed herself to be alone and uttered the following petition quite loud : "Good St. Joseph, I know that I am very wicked, so you need not hear me, but listen to the prayers of your old women and orphans, and let us have a splen-

did Bazaar." The old woman was moved to tears, and as for the Bazaar, considering the locality it was a great success. Of course, there was nothing very extraordinary in these requests of Mother Caron for material assistance, except it be in their very great simplicity, and there are numberless other instances which may be cited wherein she had recourse to the saints in heaven; but, after all, that demand of Martha of Bethany to Jesus, was simple and in no wise extraordinary: "If thou had'st been here, O Master, my brother had not died." And we know that Jesus raised up that brother, Lazarus, from the dead.

She also obtained, on many occasions, graces of conversion that were truly remarkable. Father Lebel, pastor of St. Thomas, assured one of his clerical brethren that the prayers of Mother Caron had touched the hearts of several unfortunate parishioners of his, who had been hardened in sin. The pastor of another mission where Mother Caron had spent some time, bore witness to her virtues and to that gentle and charitable manner of speech which had brought back so many Christians to the practice of virtue. The very spectacle of her confidence in God and in His Providence inspired others with confidence. "No one has faith for himself alone," is a saying in a recent book, which has already become celebrated. (\*) Confidence is extremely

---

(\*) *Le blé qui lève.* (The grain that grows.)

RENÉ BAZIN.

contagious, and so Mother Caron naturally led to God all those who in one way or another came under her influence.

It is even related that she predicted future events. We may hesitate to find in these happenings anything more than pious conjectures born of her faith in God. But since they were for the most part realized, they are certainly worth recording in such a volume as the present. Two Sisters of the Order, during their respective novitiates, were attacked by a disease which physicians pronounced to be incurable. They were on the point of being sent back into the world, when they chanced to express their fears to Mother Caron. Instantly she responded: "Don't be afraid, my little Sisters, you will be cured and you will be religious." And religious they became, having no hesitation whatever in attributing their cure to the prayers of the holy Superior. Indeed, according to the testimony of many of her Sisters, her judgments upon the issue of numerous important events were certainly in the nature of prophecies. Attracted by the beautiful examples of charity which she noticed were being practiced in a Convent of Providence, recently founded in her parish, and particularly struck by the peace and happiness that reigned there, a young country girl momentarily believed herself *to be called*, and wished to leave the world and consecrate herself to God. But her father had been a long time ill and the family affairs were so much embarrassed that from a financial point of view

this constituted a real obstacle. She opened her heart to Mother Caron, who kindly and gently but very decidedly dispelled her illusions: "Stay in the world, my daughter," she said, "be always good and pious and God will bless you." The young girl followed the advice of the Mother Superior. She soon afterwards married a respectable man who made her very happy. She became the mother of nine children, and had the happiness of seeing four of her daughters become Sisters of Providence.

A very special mark of her faith in God and confidence in Divine Providence was Mother Caron's respect for the priesthood. The priest is the man of God. In receiving Holy Orders, he does not throw off that fallible nature with which, in common with all the children of Adam, he was born. But precisely on that account, and because on the other hand he is the messenger of Jesus Christ, it behoves a sincerely pious soul, and by excellence, a religious soul, to speak of him always with dignity and reserve. The history of all the great Orders give examples of the solicitude, blended with religious gravity and dignity which was shown by such holy women as Scholastica, Clare, Teresa, or Jane Francis of Chantal for those ministers of Jesus Christ, known as Benedict, Francis of Assissi, John of the Cross and Francis of Sales. Needless, therefore to note the filial veneration constantly displayed by Mother Caron for Mgr. Bourget, or his successor, Mgr. Fabre. Indeed, the notes taken from this biogra-

phy bear ample testimony to the fact that she showed respect and reverence for every priest with whom she came in contact. She often touched upon this subject in her advice to her Sisters. Also, when opportunity offered, she rendered any service in her power to the members of the clergy, and those amongst them who were poor or sick were objects of her special solicitude. Mgr. Larocque, second Bishop of St. Hyacinthe, paid homage, more than once, to the munificence of Mother Caron in his regard, and we have read letters from her to the Reverend Superior of St. Sulpice, to the Archbishop of Oregon, and to the Vicar General of the latter prelate, which leave no doubt of her sentiments of religious respect and profound veneration for the anointed of the Lord. Each time that occasion offered she renewed to them all, in her own name, and in that of her Community, and in accents of unmistakable sincerity, the assurance of her entire and constant devotion.

Respect for the priesthood, confidence in Providence or, better still, as it may be expressed in a single word, her faith in God, based altogether upon humility and self distrust, were the fundamental virtues of the truly Christian and religious life of our heroine. Upon these two pillars, faith and humility, she had begun to build from her earliest years, and continued in the sequel, to construct that work of her life which, as has been seen, was so long identical with that of the Providence.

---

## CHAPTER XV

MOTHER CARON AND THE PRACTICE OF RELIGIOUS VIRTUES

*—Her Religious Spirit—*

THE religious spirit in its true sense is nothing more than the full flower of the Christian spirit. From the very fact of their vocation, those who give themselves to God under the serge of the monk or the veil of the nun, should be, above all others, lovers of regularity and obedience, of simplicity and industry, of poverty and mortification. For that is what must be understood by the full flower of the Christian spirit. The preceding chapters have shown how great were Mother Caron's love and practice of humility and confidence in God, and how these two fundamental virtues formed the basis of her whole plan of life at the Providence. Some special chapters may be devoted, later on, to the consideration of her charity towards every one, but especially her Sisters in religion, which formed the definite end and the framework of all her labors. In the present chapter some other virtues shall be considered, which are, perhaps, less remarkable and less likely to attract outside attention, and which may be distinguished from, rather than separated from humility, confidence in God, and the exercise of charity, but which have nevertheless a dis-



tinctive character of their own, and which were also practiced in a very high degree by the heroine of this biography. Such were her regularity and obedience, her simplicity and love of work, and finally her spirit of poverty and her attraction towards mortification. And already in the chapter upon humility, this narrative has had occasion to mention the opinions of men and women who knew her best as to her practice of that virtue. She made known and loved, in every possible way, the Rules and Constitutions of the Institute. "Let us love and respect our holy Rules," she often wrote or repeated, "and let us also bear in mind that concerning charity, it takes precedence over all the other virtues, and should be practiced above all."

Assuredly, Mother Caron was very far from being an autocratic Superior. But gentle as she was, her daughters bear testimony to what is thus expressed by one of their number: "Our sainted Mother Caron, by her sweetness and gentleness of soul, was always inclined to give pleasure to her Sisters, condescending as far as possible to their wishes. But when her duty, or the observance of our holy Rules required, she knew how to employ severity. In such cases she was inflexible, and her words, like pointed arrows, pierced the soul of her who had strayed from the narrow path.

When the voice of authority made itself heard, whether it was that of the Bishop, the Council, or the Superior at such times as Mother Caron was not herself governing, she had no thought but to obey. Yet obedi-

ence is often very difficult to human nature. It is easy enough to believe that such or such a one is submissive because it costs her no effort to obey. Though humiliated, set aside, forgotten or despised, such a person remains gay, serene, contented, even joyful. But can any one justly estimate what she may have to suffer at certain times ; nor do those especially who are called to the redoubtable honor of commanding, under whatsoever circumstances it may be, enjoy the immunity from such trials that is imagined by the vulgar. It has been long since discovered that those who would command well must first learn to obey. The head, the Superior, she who leads, who directs, requires that spirit which is the very soul of a society or a Community, must be more fully acquainted than any one else with its Rules and Constitutions, and must be unwilling to accept the slightest dispensation therefrom ; or better still, must never allow herself to accept a dispensation. Such was Mother Carou as Superior and Superior General. In so far as was possible, she made herself a model to every one of fidelity and punctuality.

And in truth, she acted thus quite simply and naturally, for never did a heart less proud, in the bad sense of the word, beat in any human breast. On a certain day, in 1876, when the end of her career as Superior was approaching, she said to her dear novices : "My little Sisters, you have come here to begin your apprenticeship to religious life. Well, listen to what I am going to tell you. Be simple and I can promise you perseverance. Simplicity is the favorite virtue of

the Divine Spouse who has called you ; of our patron, St. Vincent de Paul and our founder, Bishop Bourget''. These three names were often upon Mother Caron's lips, especially when she wanted to preach the beauty of Simplicity. "I would advise you, my dear children," she said upon another occasion, "to ask nothing and to refuse nothing. When you have need of anything, make that need known to your Superior, and then remain tranquil. You have done your duty. Have confidence and all will go well." In a conference with her religious one day, she recommended that in order to obtain the blessing of God they should attach themselves to the following practices: 1st. "To live in *simplicity*, *humility* and *charity*, according to the advice of St. Vincent de Paul. 2nd. In everything to forget self and to see God alone. 3rd. To remain peaceful in the midst of trials and contempt, that God may be glorified and His poor assisted." All her exhortations, however, and her whole plan of action, may be reduced to that single word, simplicity.

She herself practiced what she taught. Nothing could be more simple than her own deportment, manners and her dealings with others. There is no doubt that to that beautiful simplicity she owed much of her success in doing good and it was often turned to the profit of her work. During the progress of a collecting tour, she came, one day, to the house of a well to do farmer, and being shown in the farm-

yard a flock of fine turkeys, she ventured to ask for one for the dinner of her poor. The master of the house turned a deaf ear to the request, but Mother Caron nevertheless accepted his invitation to enter the house, where she was received with great politeness and given a generous alms. Just as she was taking her departure, one of the fowl which she coveted suddenly flew upwards and alighted on the seat of the carriage. "You see," she said jestingly to its owner, "Providence wants to give it to me." The worthy man could not help laughing, and Mother Caron carried off the fowl. Another time, she sent a young Sister to a shoe merchant, Mr. Fogarty, corner of St. Catherine and St. Lawrence Streets, Montreal, to buy two pairs of shoes, giving her only twenty-five cents. Being in a hurry and to avoid delay she had hastily muffled the young Sister up in her own cloak and bonnet, with the result that the poor messenger set out with a tightening of the heart, though the same could not be said for her head in the very capacious bonnet. Mr. Fogarty, out of regard for Mother Caron, accepted the twenty-five cents for his shoes, but he sent word to the good Superior that she should be more careful in future how she dressed her Sisters. But when, indeed, did Mother Caron ever concern herself with dress! One day, she, herself, was in the kitchen preparing dinner for a Bishop, who was suddenly announced. The prelate with his entire suite had arrived sooner than he was expected. Mother Caron quickly took off her apron and went forward quite simply to receive His Lordship,

which she did, despite her costume, with so much ease and dignity that there was but one opinion as to her gracious and smiling demeanor. It is related that once when she had gone to Three Rivers to help her Sisters there, probably on the occasion of a Bazaar, she called upon her cousin, Father Charles Olivier Caron, who was at that time Vicar General, and whom she had known intimately from her early childhood. This was in 1867, when she was Assistant General. Before taking her leave, she asked if he would hear her confession. "No, no," answered the Vicar General, "that would be embarrassing for both of us." "Eh! what," exclaimed Mother Caron, "why, it is no longer you, but Our Lord who is present there! So come, cousin, let us reanimate our faith, and be kind enough to hear my confession."

She frequently declared that "Provided God was glorified and the poor assisted the rest mattered little to her." Elaborate manners and studied methods never appealed to her. All that seemed to her too worldly, since the religious should aim at simplicity. This same quality was remarkable in her correspondence, the style of which was ready and easy, and always extremely simple. Sister Mary Bonsecours, a former superior of the Deaf and Dumb Institute, went one day to the house of the Hon. P. J. O. Chauveau, on business, which occupied so much time that she consented to remain to dinner. During that meal, Mr. Chauveau, who was himself a distinguished man of letters, read

aloud to his family a letter which he had received from Mother Caron. Couched, as it was, in the simplest language, it excited his admiration and he declared that he intended to keep it as a precious memento.

After what has been written here of her active and fruitful life, it seems scarcely necessary to insist further, or to show with any kind of detail, Mother Caron's faithful devotion to the holy law of labor. Since the fall of Adam it is true that labor has become weariness and a drudgery to mankind in general. But it has joys and consolations which bring sweet repose in their train. These sweet and holy joys were very familiar to Mother Caron. She loved work, and no labor, even the most arduous, was repugnant to her. This has been fully shown in her journeys and voyages, in her organization of good works, or of bazaars, within the Community and outside; since the far off days of St. Elizabeth and St. Vincent de Paul, she had been incessantly occupied with whatever could glorify God, assist the poor, and tend towards the progress of the Community. She was an incomparable worker. She never spared herself, and was, for the rest, blessed with tolerably robust health. The labor of the fields or the farm-yard, house-work or culinary tasks, the assistance of the poor, the sick or the afflicted, she embraced all, devoted herself to all, gave herself up to all, with incredible ardor. Other people were always astonished that she found time to do so many things, and to do them well.

She was neat also, but without over fastidiousness; she loved holy poverty, but without exaggeration and without scruple. She was satisfied with anything. She willingly chose, and wore by preference, worn or mended clothes and the oldest she could find, provided always that they were decent and in no wise contrary to modesty or decorum. Once, as she was paying a New Year's visit to the Gray Nuns, she dropped one of her gloves. It was picked up by a religious, who secretly showed it to her companions, bidding them remark that it was of coarse wool and mended in many places, though Mother Caron was then Superior General. In the beginning of the mission of St. Vincent de Paul its poverty was extreme. There were not even enough chairs, and the Sisters had to content themselves with blocks of wood cut to the required height, and also with beds of straw. "Oh," said Mother Caron, "we are still richer than Our Lord, who had not even a stone whereon to lay his head." She would have scrupled very much when in the kitchen to be in the least degree wasteful as regarded the preparation of food or the burning of wood; and was, in fact, economical in everything, even to the employment of her time, being careful never to lose an instant. It is related by one of her companions on the mission, that while awaiting the time for prayers, which took place half an hour after rising, Mother Caron, whose toilet was quickly made, found time to make some buckwheat cakes, not only to economize time, but as she said, "so as not to waste the heat of the fire." During the free time of

retreats she was to be found in her cell, recollected indeed, in God, but her hands busy with some work for the poor. A last anecdote, particularly bringing into relief her love for holy poverty, no less than her humility, is thus related: A lady of high position had promised for some reason or other to give a meal to a poor person upon a certain day. The day wore on towards evening and no poor person had appeared. The lady could not think of any expedient by which to fulfil her promise, when happening to see Mother Caron passing on her return from some charitable errand, quickly sent out her servant inviting her old friend to enter, and consulted her regarding her dilemma. "It is getting late," responded Mother Caron, "and so that I shall not have to trouble any one in the house, give me my supper; *let me be your poor person.*"

But that love of order, that taste for simplicity, that devotion to work and that reverence for the sweet virtue which St. Francis of Assisi called his "Sister Poverty", all would have been incomplete in the estimation of Mother Caron, had she not first sought in everything and everywhere to practice mortification. Mortification is, as it were, the expression of self immolation and self sacrifices, or it is at least their exterior sign. There is the mortification of the senses, and there is also the mortification of the will. Mother Caron was thoroughly acquainted with both, and practised them in an admirable manner. By so doing she brought to perfection in her life that which has been



called her religious spirit. So that the true state of her soul would be but imperfectly understood were not some pages devoted to the illustration, by various anecdotes, of the degree in which that important virtue was practiced by this eminent religious.

Mother Caron laid down as a principle that in the matter of mortification the Sister of Providence should, in the first place, accept and bear patiently the privations and pains, the contradictions and vexations, the discomforts that are inherent to their state of life. She believed that the most meritorious of penances was that imposed upon a Sister of Providence by her life. And in that she was right, for though very praiseworthy and deserving of applause may be the zeal that seeks other mortifications, it is very certain that the best of all is the faithful performance of one's duty. One day, Mother Caron said to her Sisters: "In religion, it is very necessary to be mortified. Not that I want to prescribe long fasts for you, nor hair shirts, nor disciplines. You must begin by other things. You should, at first, mortify your sight, your hearing, your tongue, your taste... Never complain of the food; let your taste be the same as that of the cook. If the food be too salt, or too sweet, tasteless, well or ill prepared, do not show any displeasure, but accept it as it is." That was her own way of acting. At table she took the first dish that came, though always unostentatiously. She never added any seasoning, but contrived this so discreetly that no one was the wiser. Under pretence of being in a hurry, she frequently

contented herself with soaked crusts of bread. She cheerfully satisfied her hunger with the scraps left from the old people's table. She was never sufficiently ill to allow any one to take care of her. She went as seldom as possible to the infirmary, and even when obliged to take medicine herself, she was seen to busy herself, nursing the sick. It was also remarked that when she went to sugaring parties in the country she never ate any of the candy. She brought back her share to the old men and women. And needless to say that it is a very great penance indeed for a Canadian, not to eat (\*) *la tîre*.

She treated herself with the same severity in regard to clothing and sleeping. An old pallet, a thin blanket, a hard pillow, sometimes even hard wood sufficed for her. She even obtained a dispensation so as to be able to depart in these particulars from ordinary usage. Discreetly, and under a variety of pretexts, she followed this saintlike attraction. More than once it was discovered that she had slept all night with her head upon a block of wood. So as to be able to watch over the domestics, she chose at one of the missions as her sleeping-place an underground apartment, a species of cellar, adjoining the kitchen. It was quite accidentally discovered that she practiced there the most terrible austerities. In another of the houses, she slept all summer in the attic, on a pile of the wool that had been collected, giving as her reason that she

---

(\*) *La tîre*, maple candy. Trans. note.

slept better there. A young Sister, who was some what *naïve*, feeling very tired one day, thought she would take advantage of the splendid opportunity that offered, of trying the much vaunted couch of the Superior. But she got up again very quickly. For not only was the pile of wool very uneven, but certain guests had taken up their lodgings therein that were decidedly uncomfortable for sleepers, since they bit very hard. Once when Mother Caron was staying with strange people, she was put into a sumptuous apartment, but it was discovered after she was gone that she had never slept in the bed at all, but had spent the night upon the floor. She never by any chance made use of a rocking chair, and it was said that she wore under her clothing an instrument of torture in the shape of a tin cross, punctured with holes, the raw edges whereof prieked her flesh. When visiting a great city, such as New York, she refused to see any of the sights, saying that they did not come in her way. In fine she was most ingenious in concealing her penances, and if any one wanted to torment her, it was only necessary to let her see that her subterfuges were understood, and she wept. . . . .

There is no better way of concluding this chapter upon the religious life than by a fresh extract from the annals. This consists of a little sermon, which she preached to her dear novices, Oct., 1874, and wherein, unconsciously and without ever suspecting it, she drew an exact picture of her own life. To realize why she

was humble, with lively confidence in God, charitable orderly, obedient, simple and laborious, poor in spirit and mortified, it is only necessary to reflect upon the discourse here given, which deserves to be quoted in full and without comment: " My little Sisters, You have  
" parted from your relations and friends, and that has  
" been a great sacrifice. Accomplish it, then, with gener-  
" osity and confidence in God ; for where much has been  
" given, much will be rendered back again. Our Lord  
" will reward you munificently for what you have suffer-  
" ed and sacrificed for his love. What thanksgivings do  
" you not owe to God, for having called you to the  
" religious life. For it is a great grace and out of His  
" pure mercy, since He owes you nothing. Remember  
" that before being admitted to the novitiate, you  
" knelt down and said: *Mother, we ask the favor of*  
" *being admitted amongst the number of the Servants of*  
" *the Poor. To which the Superior answered: My*  
" *daughters, if you wish to be good Servants of the Poor,*  
" *deny yourselves, take up your Cross and follow Jesus*  
" *Christ.* Did you fully understand, my little Sisters,  
" the meaning of those words: *deny yourselves?* What  
" is renunciation? It is simply not doing as you please.  
" To deny oneself is to humble oneself, to immolate  
" oneself, not only during the novitiate, but all through  
" one's life. Renunciation of self is the religious life. On  
" the day when you took the habit, you were also  
" told to take up your cross. And that means that  
" you must thenceforth bear patiently the contradic-  
" tions that may arise, the sufferings and humiliations

“ that God may send. To embrace all adversities is to  
“ take up your daily cross, and by consequence to  
“ follow Jesus.”

This little discourse, so solid and so rich in those things which should constitute the true programme of a religious life, has not only been taken, word by word, from the lips of Mother Caron herself, but as has been sufficiently shown here, her whole life was an application of those principles. She was imbued, in an eminent degree, with the religious spirit, she carried her daily Cross, she followed Jesus.

---

## CHAPTER XVI

## MOTHER CARON AND THE PRACTICE OF RELIGIOUS VIRTUES

—*Her Charity to the Poor and the Unfortunate*—

---

THE Sisters of Providence are above all things the Servants of the Poor; a fact which was perfectly understood by Mother Caron from the first moment of her religious life. There are, no doubt, many ways of practicing holy charity, and that chosen by the Sisters of Providence is not the least fruitful. Mother Caron's heart was naturally compassionate, as is evident in studying her early years, or when as a devoted teacher she gave herself up to the delicate task of training children, whilst finding means to help the poor and needy on all sides of her. The religious life, therefore, had merely to regulate the generous impulses of her heart, to expand and to perfect them. A Sister of Charity in the fullest meaning of the word, she spent herself unweariedly, and gave exteriorly, without ever losing her interior detachment from creatures, a work which is nevertheless extremely difficult to human nature.

Her solicitude extended to every misery, her words of consolation and encouragement reached all sufferings, and very often she wept with her dear afflicted ones. "The love of the poor," declared one of the old Sisters,

"appeared to be her predominant passion, the most tender charity, her distinguishing characteristic."—"Mother Caron," wrote another, "brought calm and peace to afflicted hearts. How many moral wounds she staunched and healed!"—"Her love for the poor," wrote another of her contemporaries, "her gentleness and compassion, lent an inexpressible charm to her virtue. She was everywhere to be found surrounded by the unfortunate. They seemed to constitute her chief delight. She was often seen to shed abundant tears over the sorrows of those with whom she conversed." . . . . For, in truth, she was deeply moved by the sufferings of the poor. An eminent religious, a former Provincial of his Order, who afterwards became Assistant General, in France, Father Antoine, of the Oblates, rendered this testimony to Mother Caron in a letter which he wrote after her death: "I have often heard of the all embracing charity of Mother Caron, and I remember to have myself seen her eyes fill with tears in presence of some misery which she was powerless,—much as she might have wished it—to relieve."

But if her heart was compassionate, she found in her lively faith a far higher motive, and one which made her still more so. To do everything possible for the poor, as she always declared and loudly proclaimed, whenever occasion offered, was, in her opinion, the best means of bringing down upon herself and her Community the blessings of heaven. "All that God gives us," she said, "is for the benefit of the poor. If

we give generously of all that is at our disposal, neither we nor our poor shall ever want for anything. "She was quite willing to place her reliance, and to rest the prosperity of a house upon the number of poor it sheltered. Once, when a mission was groaning under the weight of a heavy and peculiarly painful trial, Mother Caron said to the Sisters there: "Have no fear, you are helping the poor, and that is in itself a benediction. God will protect your work!" And such, in fact, was the case. Having learned, on the contrary, that in another of the missions some persons were sent away because there seemed no means of providing for them, the good Mother was much distressed and cried: "God will not bless them." According to her, neither room nor resources were ever wanting. "There is always some way," she used to say, "of lodging Our Saviour." And that was an unanswerable argument. "The poor," she was fond of repeating, "should always take precedence of ourselves. It is thanks to them that we have been consecrated to God. God has granted us the grace of vocation in order that we may love, respect and serve them."

So that her invariable rule was "never to refuse any one and always to give everything." The great financiers would probably have considered that an original way of balancing a ledger, but Mother Caron was counting on Providence. "When there was question of practising charity," said the Warden of the St. Vincent de Paul Penitentiary, who knew her intimately, "Mother Caron, could never say No. Never a rebuff,



never a refusal. Nothing seemed impossible to the impulses of her generous ardor, nor would she admit that anything was too hard or onerous."

In the early days of the Mission of St. Vincent de Paul, the beds had to be piled up one above the other, so as to be able to move about in various apartments and at night they were set up in the class-rooms, or in the passages. Once, it was represented to her that there was absolutely no means of setting up another bed. She instantly gave up her own, and despite the entreaties of the Sisters, slept upon a pile of rags in the attic. It sometimes happened, on some such occasion, that she was found in the morning covered with snow. Provided that the poor were well off, or, at least, less badly off, she was quite content, that was enough for her. She deprived herself of everything possible for the sake of her dear poor. Her Sisters were sometimes obliged to make use of pious stratagems to prevent her from giving away her own clothes, or her bed covering. Thus, they allowed her on occasions only the barest necessaries, and still she found some way of giving, and what was more, she was ingenious in concealing her charitable liberality. One day, she was going out with one of the young Sisters; the latter was somewhat startled to perceive that the good Mother, as she supposed, was wearing white stockings. On looking closer, she saw that the Superior's feet were bare, except for a pair of old slippers. Another time, she went with the Superior of a mission to visit a

poor char-woman, and discovered that she was very badly shod, she exchanged shoes with her and persuaded the superior to add a pair of stockings, while she, herself was quite content with the old foot gear she had received from the woman. In 1874, when she was at the Mission of Walla Walla, in Washington Territory, her habit of desiring to help every one led to an amusing adventure. One evening, at the hour when all the Sisters were going to prayer, Mother Caron saw two Indians waiting silently near the door. Such a proceeding on their part was nothing new to those who were familiar with the country. The poor savages were in the habit of coming, like the little ones in the stores of our childhood, to "see what was going on, and for no particular reason." Mother Caron thought they were in need of something and following the impulse of her kindly heart, she lingered behind the others and hastened to the kitchen where by good luck, she found no one. She searched the cupboards, finding two loaves of bread and a pot of butter: opening the oven, she took out some potatoes that were baking there, and brought all to the astonished Indians, making them a sign to be off as quick as possible. A servant, who had chanced to witness the occurrence, was able to explain the mystery to the greatly surprised cook, whose supper had vanished from the fire. During the meal, when excuses were offered for the absence of the potatoes, Mother Caron earnestly assured them, that all was for the best. It was a great humiliation for her to ask

alms, and yet she gave herself up to that work, which cost her a painful effort, with the utmost ardor, simply because it was for the poor. If people seemed at last unwilling to give, for it must be owned that she sometimes became a little importunate in her demands, she was driven to ask for a loan. But no one was deceived, knowing very well what that meant. Some one remarked jestingly that giving seemed to be a passion with her. "Yes", she answered, "it is a passion, and one with which I hope to die."

She had a particular affection for those amongst the poor who were the most miserable, those who were afflicted, (\*) or the guilty. She took care of the

---

(\*) In order not to make this paragraph too long a note may be added concerning the tender and maternal affection which Mother Caron always bore to those who are, beyond all others, afflicted, namely the Deaf Mutes. The work for those unfortunates cost the Providence many anxious hours. From its very inception, in 1852, during the years that followed but especially during her term of office as Superior General, Mother Caron spared neither zeal nor devotion to that cause. Her heart, always so intensely compassionate, felt the deepest sympathy for the moral, intellectual and physical privations of these poor afflicted ones. It became necessary upon one occasion to dismiss from the Institute an orphaned Deaf Mute, who was the despair of her mistresses, and whose example, as it was feared, might prove detrimental to her companions. Mother Caron, who was, of course, consulted, only agreed to this measure with the greatest reluctance. She followed out into the world that sheep who had been cast out from the fold, and interested

one, and excused the other. Her sympathy with the juvenile delinquents of the Reform School at St. Vincent de Paul may be remembered. But there are a multitude of other instances of her indulgent kindness which have not been related. One day, an unknown man presented himself to Mother Caron, begging for an alms which might enable him to go to the hospital. He was certainly very miserable in appearance, and seemed to be genuinely ill. The Superior was disposed to grant his request, when a Sister chanced to come along, who had full knowledge of the individual.—“Why, Mother,” she cried, “you mustn’t help that drunkard. If you give him money, he will surely spend it in drink.” “Hush, my little daughter,” the Mother hastened to reply, “you mustn’t speak ill of the poor. He is unfortunate and I can’t send him away without help. Whatever use he makes of it, God will only regard our charity.” And forthwith she ordered a carriage,

---

herself in its welfare. The child found herself most unhappy in her new surroundings, and the kind Superior soon had the joy of bringing her back to the Institute, changed very much for the better, and anxious to do her best. She became, in fact, a model, and the right arm of her teachers. This example is chosen from amongst numerous others. It may be added that one of the last acts of Mother Caron, as Superior General, was to place at the disposal of the Deaf and Dumb Institute a hall in the Providence Asylum, which was in a more central position than the Institute itself, to be used for the reunions of former Deaf and Dumb pupils who were scattered throughout the city. That privilege has never been withdrawn.

*Author's Note.*

and had him conveyed to the Hôtel-Dieu. Whilst she was Superior at St. Vincent de Paul, she was sent for one day to the parlor, and found there a poor woman, whose misconduct was only too publicly known, but who begged a shelter for the night. Now there was neither a bed nor a place to put one, but Mother Caron, unknown to any one, arranged to give her her own bed, and slept herself upon the floor. One night, at the Providence Asylum in Montreal, she was awakened by loud cries and a great deal of noise. She arose and dressing herself went to the door to see what was the matter. It was a troop of boys who were chasing an unfortunate wanderer of the night, who, to judge by her appearance was of the lowest character. Mother Caron, armed with her Cross, quickly imposed silence on the young tormentors and taking the unfortunate wretch under her protection, brought her in to spend the night under the roof of the Providence. Another time she brought in and quartered in her own room a poor girl just out of the maternity hospital, who had nowhere to go.

Persons of that description seemed doubly unfortunate to Mother Caron, and assuredly she was right. Therefore, while relieving their physical necessities she strove as far as possible to come to the assistance of their moral miseries. And particularly when it was against herself or the Community that they had offended she not only forgave them herself, but moved heaven and earth to obtain their pardon from others. The

fact that she was the one offended naturally made her advocacy very powerful, so that she nearly always won in such cases. Thus, a cabman, who was a bad driver or unable to control his horse, one day caused a Sister to be thrown out. The Sister, none the worse for her accident, came out of it quite safe and sound. But the driver was arrested by a policeman, who threatened to make him, at least, pay a heavy fine. It was however, found upon inquiry that the man, who was from the country, was perfectly honest and respectable and as sorry as any one for what had occurred. It was good to see how warmly and zealously Mother Caron pleaded his cause. "She was quite sure," she said, "that it was 'nt, the poor man's fault, that he would 'nt hurt a fly. It was the sort of accident that might happen to any one. What would the judge, or the policeman, it didn't matter which, do if such a thing had happened to his own brother?" In short she gave them no peace until the offender was released, after which she set to work to console him, because through no fault of his own he had met with an accident which might have had such serious consequences. A former servant, one of those half witted persons who are sometimes employed by communities on the score of economy, but who from many points of view are undesirable, contrived in the absence of his successor to effect a stealthy entrance into the stable, where he stole the Sisters' horse. He brought the animal to Montreal, disguised it by cutting off its ears, and having made it into a beast of burden,

employed it in his latest occupation. Proceedings were, however, instituted, which resulted in the finding of the man and the stolen horse. Brought before the judge, the man was sentenced to a term of imprisonment, which was something for which he had not bargained. Mother Caron, however, entered into the campaign. The thought of any one being sent to prison for an offence committed against her Community was not at all to her taste. Her kind heart protested against the sentence. She hastened to the judge, arguing and pleading so forcibly that she obtained pardon for the thief. That was, perhaps, pushing compassion a little too far. But from the moment that the judge's consent was obtained justice was satisfied, and charity had its way.

When she could not help the poor in any other way, she adopted them, which is assuredly a very simple manner of assisting those in need, but not within the reach of everyone. The good religious had, however, a very free hand for her adoptions, as for her other works of charity. The Rules of the Institute did not put any limits to the liberality of the Superior. And she had, moreover, been careful to obtain from those in authority the fullest latitude, as she has expressly declared somewhere. This chapter, then, no less than the others, will show how she gave herself up with a joyful heart to the practice of this virtue, which she so much loved. One time when on a mission, she was called to the bedside of a poor dying widow, the mother of a family. She

hastened thither to console and comfort her, helping her to die a good death, and when she was gone, adopted the five children. The youngest was only a month old, and Mother Caron carried her home in her apron, while the others followed weeping. And she took the best of care of those dear children, "her treasures," as she called them, until they were at an age to care for themselves. Once as she was passing through the parish of St. Martin, she was struck by the miserable appearance of a dreary looking hut which she felt sure must be an abode of suffering. She entered there, and in fact, in a damp sort of cavern of which the dwelling consisted, she found three little girls who had been abandoned, in the direst poverty. Mother Caron questioned them and discovered that they had neither relatives nor friends. That settled the matter. She took all three home with her to the Convent, where they were brought up in the practices of piety. One of them became a religious in a Convent in Ottawa, and the other two were comfortably settled in the world. Still another time, her attention was called to a sorely afflicted family in the village of St. Rose. Of the five children composing it, three were Deaf Mutes, besides being idiotic, and the other two, who were considerably older, were no more fortunate than their juniors. They were totally ignorant of everything concerning religion. Filled with compassion, Mother Caron made it a request that these afflicted ones should be placed in her charge, and herself undertook the by no means easy task of instructing them. She succeeded. They were admitted to Communion by Father



Lavallée, —for that was at St. Vincent de Paul— and later were confirmed by Bishop Bourget. On this latter occasion Mother Caron expressed the wish that the two boys should take respectively the names of Bishop and pastor. So as Ignace and Norbert they became good catholics. A parish priest, at whose Convent Mother Caron was Superior, related after her death, that he once met a woman going in the Convent, who was not a beggar, but a grumbler, who might very well have done without charity. "Never come here again, to beg," he said to her, "don't you know very well that the Sisters are poor. They have eighteen orphans to feed and clothe, besides six poor old women, who can't contribute anything." — I afterwards learned, that Mother Caron was much distressed at my having spoken so to the poor woman. — "Another time," relates the same parish priest, "the Superior went begging in one of the adjacent parishes, and brought home with her a poor idiot who did not know a single prayer and had never been brought to church. By dint of patience and kindness, she caused the light of faith to shine in those poor eyes, to the extent that he was judged capable of making his confession and Communion. From the same priest comes the story of a certain Genevieve, a poor ignorant woman, who had been living in all kinds of disorders, for which she was held to be scarcely responsible. The pastor, at last, insisted that she should go every Thursday to the Convent to be instructed by the Sisters. A short time later he saw her in the sacristy one day preparing for Confession. — "But do you know how to make your

Confession?" inquired the priest.—"Yes," answered the woman, "*aunt Caron* showed me how."—"So you still go to the Convent on Thursday?" the pastor farther inquired.—"But *aunt Caron* wouldn't let me go away from there at all," was the reply, "because she said the young people would be sure to make me angry."—"But how can the Sisters feed you?"—"Aunt *Caron* told me to ask St. Joseph for food, and he gives it to me." Simple as is this little dialogue, it gives some insight into the manner in which Mother *Caron* managed to feed so many poor people, refusing none and giving to every applicant. It requires, however, but little reflection to understand how many secret sacrifices, what anxieties and what vigils were represented by all this?

She had her own peculiar way of collecting. Even in Montreal, from the time that she was Treasurer and more especially after she became Superior, she was very frequently obliged, to go out begging herself, or to send her Sisters. For that is after all the great resource of the poor. A Sister of Providence often sets out with a sinking heart, but she goes nevertheless, since it is demanded by the spirit of her vocation. Mother *Caron*, then, made her rounds and sent her daughters upon theirs, and always with the approval of Mgr. Bourget, the Sisters went through the streets of the city, asking for alms when the needs of the Asylum demanded. But Mother *Caron* also supplied them with a list of the homes of the poor, at which the collectors were to stop, bestowing a portion of the alms received. That

was an original, but very Christian way of begging. At such a spectacle, how the angels of charity must rejoice in heaven above! Mother Caron as Superior General always wished to share the hardships and labors of foundation, and usually made the collection herself in that parish. Every one was, however, astonished at the methods of that singular mendicant. She invariably distributed to the poor whom she met a portion of the alms received; and to those who expressed surprise, she murmured: "God will repay us." The following is related by a venerable ecclesiastic in Montreal. Mother Caron was setting out on her visits to the poor and sick, and asked the Treasurer to give her some money. "Mother," was the reply, "I have only a little small change left, and this very afternoon we have to pay out a large sum. "Give me what you have," the Superior said, and she went off cheerfully to dispose of the last cent. But at that very instant a wealthy benefactor appeared with a considerable sum to replenish the empty coffers. "I knew very well," said Mother Caron on her return, "that nothing is ever lost when it is given to God." And forthwith she went to the chapel to give thanks to Him who renders a hundredfold what is given to the poor.

This mode of action, so Christian and so supernatural, was well calculated to touch every heart. The unction of her words, moreover, put a final touch to that which was so happily begun. Her very appearance, so humble and yet so dignified, as the writer has been

assured, often caused her request to be granted almost before it was made. Her very presence inclined all hearts towards spontaneous offers of assistance. She very well understood besides how best to choose her time, as the following typical example will serve to show. Political passions are very active in Canada, and a meeting at which the rival candidates and opposing orators are to be heard is always a great event, and especially in the country districts. Mother Caron had no politics, but she knew how to turn them to the advantage of the poor. Just as a candidate was about to speak upon the hustings, she was seen to approach, holding out a wooden bowl and begging him as a prelude to his discourse to perform an act of charity, which could not fail to bring him good fortune. Needless to say that such a request could not go unheeded. Influential citizens who were present took pleasure in holding out the hand, or passing the cup through the crowd for Mother Caron, and very often with the most satisfactory results. Mother Caron knew how to employ both delicacy and tact, not only in asking but also in giving, which is very often extremely difficult.

There are sufferings which have to be relieved with the greatest discretion, and it can never be too much insisted upon that the hand which gives should act accordingly. Alms are sometimes given in such fashion as to seem almost an insult. Mother Caron always knew just how to proceed. When, for instance, in the country, travelling pedlars, who are really beggars in dis-

guise came to the door, she did her best to oblige them. It quite distressed her to be unable to buy any of their wares, in which case, she introduced them to the neighbors, hoping that they might make amends for her own small purchases or no purchases at all. When paying entertainments were given during the Bazaars—and heaven only knew at how many of these latter she had assisted, here, there, and everywhere—the kind thought occurred to her of standing near the door and slipping tickets of admission into the hands of those who could not pay. And this attention was especially appreciated by the children, who blessed her for her benevolent intervention. When Mother Caron was absent, such concessions, it may be well understood, were not made, and the children went round saying: "It is easy to see that Mother Caron is away." That single childish expression, all these little anecdotes, give strong testimony, like to the honor of Mother Caron and to the delicacy of her acts. But here is something better still: In an Indian Mission, that of the Cœur d'Alène, now De Smet, through which Mother Caron passed on one of her journeys she remarked that the poor missionary Fathers were in almost complete destitution. On her return to Montreal, she hastened to buy and send out to them blankets, and materials for cassocks. Nor was that the only time she acted in the same manner to missionaries whom she knew to be in want. A former ward of Mother Caron's, who afterwards became a priest, tells this pretty story. "As a student I spent my vacations at the Convent

with Mother Caron. Being Irish, and only a short time in this country, I had no opportunity of travelling during the holidays, nor of speaking English. So, Mother Caron asked me one day:—“Would you like to go to Burlington, to our Sisters there, so that you may travel a little and be able to speak your own language?”—“Certainly”, I answered, “that would be a splendid trip, but Mother Caron I have’nt got a cent.”—“But I have got a few cents,” she said smiling, “and they are for orphans.”—“When I became a parish priest”, continued the narrator, “Mother Caron came to see me, and at her departure I was only too happy to purchase for her orphans, at her suggestion, a pail of berries that were offered for sale at my presbytery.” As may be seen Mother Caron never changed. It was always for her orphans, girls or boys, or for the poor.

A great deal has been said here about the poor, but she loved the rich too: the rich who is often poor in many respects, and most worthy of compassion. By the very nature of her apostolate, she had been long in a position to know the terrible afflictions that often lie hidden under the gilded tapestry of the most sumptuous mansion. Often, indeed, as she went about on her rounds or in her collecting tours, she gave by her advice, her admonitions, her moral consolation, which were always marked by delicacy, refinement and good breeding, far more than she received in material help. And when any one was stricken by reverses of fortune, at the melancholy hour, when

whilom friends disappear, Mother Caron remained faithful. For to her, the fallen, impoverished rich were indeed deserving of sympathy and kindness and her gentle hand staunched those wounds of the heart that often bled so long and profusely.

Another remark which may be added here, and which deserves to be affixed in letters of gold to all Asylums and Refuges, is this: that Mother Caron never took out of their class, *déclasser*, those whom she assisted, or those whom she rescued. Nothing is more pernicious than that unintelligent charity which, especially in the case of children, gives a false direction to a life. It is no ordinary compliment to say that Mother Caron through her knowledge of the proprieties, always lent a double value to her charities, because they were skilfully and intelligently performed.

Mgr. Joseph Larocque of St. Hyacinthe, who was thoroughly acquainted both with Mother Caron herself and the work of the Providence Community, made to her Sisters the following remark, with which this chapter may be fittingly concluded: "You will never have a Superior more charitable than Mother Caron, nor one who will render more eminent services to the public."

---

## CHAPTER XVII

## MOTHER CARON AND THE PRACTICE OF RELIGIOUS VIRTUES

*— Her Charity Towards Her Sisters and Cooperators —*

To the author it appears that the chapter just written on the charity of Mother Caron toward the poor and the unfortunate would be incomplete without another which should serve as its natural and necessary complement. That the life of this woman of good works was entirely consecrated to God's poor, has, we think, been fully demonstrated in the simple story of this life, and in the various anecdotes which show what was her constant preoccupation. Now, in that apostolate, Mother Caron necessarily had cooperators without and co-workers within. How did she bear herself toward her Sisters in religion and also toward the friends and benefactors of the Community? The answer to these questions requires the writing of another chapter, since it was to such persons that Mother Caron showed herself especially charitable.

Nor is this as common as might be at first sight supposed. Far, indeed, from us, is the thought of depreciating, even in the slightest degree, the zeal of which this country is a witness, in her many deserving com-



munities. The author neither would nor could show partiality to any one of them in particular. But wherever there are human hearts, there, too, as the experience of the ages has made manifest, there is corresponding suffering. In communities as elsewhere, there is quivering, palpitating human nature. Even those who have given themselves up so generously to good works may at times become the prey of impulses of pride, or, at least, of susceptibility that is more or less dangerous. How does it happen that people can be on the one hand so gentle and compassionate and on the other so hard and cruel. Who can sound the depths of the human heart and know how necessary it is to be always on guard, if one would be at all times and in all things generous. Oh, it is comparatively easy to give oneself to God, and to immolate oneself on the morning of the clothing or profession, before an altar gaily decorated with flowers, with the odor of incense in the air and while one is still under the spell of eloquent appeals from voices all on fire for God and His works. But in the sober realities of life, in the prose of every day monotony, when worn out with fatigue, aggrieved by apparent injustice, or when one is misunderstood or ignored, ah! then, it becomes difficult. And it may be boldly asserted that it is, perhaps, more difficult for members of a Community to fraternize amongst themselves, in a truly Christian manner, than to devote themselves to exterior works.

Now, from this particular point of view, Mother

Caron's whole life was an example. From the very depths of her nature, long since transformed by grace, she gave, she pardoned, she consoled. It has been already remarked that she was full of sensibility. Her heart beat readily, but always with kindness, towards others. In speaking to her Sisters it was a benevolence and a sweet unction that softened considerably the sacrifices which duty compelled her to impose upon them. Those who suffered most from those wounds of the heart, which are the most painful, found in Mother Caron a generous, compassionate and delicately considerate soul. How eagerly she granted them whatever permissions were possible, and which might console them a little. With the same delicacy, she anticipated the requests of those who were too timid to ask. When she was obliged to admonish or to reprove, it was always evident that she did so from a sense of duty alone, and she was often more ill at ease than those who received the correction. She became a little excited at times, but every one knew that it was neither through passion nor bitterness. She pitied the Sisters who had to work hardest and when it was possible shared in their toil. As it was instanced by one of the old Sisters, Mother Caron helped her in the making of tapers and candles, when that task was particularly heavy, though she was then Superior General. That, in fact, seemed to her the greater reason why she should help, assist or console. One day, the Sisters were looking for a little cape for her use, and could not find it anywhere, until she explained: "I gave it"

she said to a poor Sister who was too timid to ask for one, and noticing their looks of admiration she added : "You would have done the same in my place." A charming little incident is expressive of the same delicate consideration. Some one in Mother Caron's presence offered a picture to one of the Sisters whose birthday it was, and nothing to a young Sister who stood by. On which the Superior, taking a picture from her book, presented it to the latter, saying : "They are not giving you anything, my little Sister, so here."

The Sisters who were far off upon the missions were the objects of her very special affection. She knew how much it costs human nature to make the sacrifice of family, friends and country. So that her missionary Sisters in those distant regions were often consoled and strengthened by her kind letters. When it came to her knowledge, that the religious in such or such a mission, or in some particular Convent had to endure privations because of poverty, or on account of some calamity, as for instance a fire, she did everything in her power to help her children there. It is recorded that she supplied the missionaries of Oregon for several years with clothing ; and it has been seen how eagerly she flew to the assistance of her dear Convent of St. Elizabeth after the fire of 1876. And so it always was for missions in distress. She hastened to encourage the directress and to employ her own credit in procuring for the sorely tried mission the most affectionate help.

The novices had a large share in her deepest affections. Those dear children she considered to be the hope of the Institute and of the future. She was fully alive to the necessity of treating them with gentleness and tenderness, but also with firmness, when there was question of the Rule or of the practice of religious virtues. She shed tears when any one had to be dismissed; and only decided upon that extreme measure when every means of overcoming obstacles had been exhausted. The question was, in fact, previously studied over and over again in all its bearings. She often spoke to the novices, and always with the greatest kindness. It is quite probable that amongst those who read these pages there are many who can render heartfelt testimony to the truth of these assertions. How many Sisters of Providence are still living at the present time who knew Mother Caron, and heard her speak during her novitiate. They, more than others, must acknowledge indebtedness to the magnanimous heart of the venerable and lamented Superior. It is certain, as already stated, that Mother Caron contributed no little and especially where the novices were concerned, to keep alive in the Institute the *spirit* of foundation days, that is to say, the *spirit* of Mgr. Bourget and Madame Gamelin, in other words, the *spirit of God*.

For she strove always, and for general edification, to make the *spirit of God* predominate above all things and with regard to every one. She was fully persuaded that without Him nothing can be sustained, nor rendered

permanent. Now the spirit of God, as she with admirable simplicity explained, was charity above all and to every one, and especially fraternal charity amongst the members of the same Community. Some extracts from her discourses or her circulars will serve to give a better idea of her sentiments in this regard.

In a *conference*, during the Retreat of 1874, Mother Caron spoke thus: "My Sisters, here we are at the last exercise of the Retreat. I hope that each one of us has done her best to profit by these days of grace. It consoles me very much to observe that on the missions, as in the Mother House, such efforts are being made to *observe charity*. Let us apply ourselves more and more to the practice of that beautiful virtue. If any one makes an offensive remark to you, do not answer. If any one is getting the better of you in an argument, be silent. When peace is restored be sure that you are in perfect agreement with each other. Be also very discreet, both in word and act. Do not let the emotions by which you are agitated appear upon the surface. Show the greatest sweetness to others, and know how to soften a refusal with kind words. We cannot always accede to the wishes of those with whom we live, but they should always be *treated with charity*: let that kindly and respectful charity be ever exercised towards the poor who are our lords and masters. In all our difficulties let us have recourse to St. Vincent de Paul. He is our father, and he will know how to save us from all embarrassment." On

another occasion, which was also during a Retreat, that of March, 1876, Mother Caron developed the same idea. "We must", she said, to those who were making the Retreat, "*take great care of the poor.* That we may fulfil that obligation in all its perfection, let us remind ourselves how on the day of profession we promised to serve the infirm and the afflicted of every description. So, once again, my Sisters, *take care of the poor.* If we are unable to satisfy all their demands, we can at least speak a few kind words to them. I pray a great deal for you all, and I recommend myself to your prayers."

Such were her exhortations as regarded charity to the poor, but here are now her ideas on that very important subject of fraternal charity. These are especially to be found in a New Year's letter, and their practical common sense must be admired by every one: "Let us avoid, my Sisters, that sensitiveness which causes us to take fire at the slightest contradiction, and which interferes with the discharge of our daily duties. Let us mutually practice such kindness and gentleness as must make all observers cry out: *See how these Sisters love one another!* Such are the practices which I recommend to you, my beloved Sisters, and which I impose upon myself, as bouquets and New Year's gifts." And another greeting, which has been taken from her address to the assembled Community on January 1st, 1876, reads thus: "My particular wish for us all, my Sisters, is a *family spirit*, that family spirit which is ready to find excuses for each other. We all

have our faults and those that have the most should be the objects of our special preference. We should have confidence in our Sisters and never misjudge their intentions.''

Therefore, it is not surprising, but on the contrary very natural, to find that in all her relations with her Sisters and her daughters, she took continual care to develop that *family spirit* amongst them. In a circular of January, 1874, she writes again: "In return for your good wishes, accept mine. Let us have a sincere esteem for the poor and for our works. As our venerated Mother Gamelin used to say. 'Let us profit by that which God has placed in our hands, wherewith to obtain a blessed Eternity. Time is short . . .'" In sending a poor woman to a certain Superior, she wrote as follows: "Your charity in favor of those who have no where to go is well known, and that is why Our Lord sends you His members. Therefore I recommend this poor old woman to you, and she will bring God's blessing with her." To the Sisters of Steilacoom, who sent her their good wishes on her patronal Feast of St. Emily, she answered: "I accept your good wishes with the liveliest gratitude. I return all the honor to Him by whom I have been placed in this position which I so unworthily occupy." She assured a Sister in Oregon of "having full liberty to write her whenever she chose," declaring, "that she would always be glad to help her." She compassionated her sufferings in terms so delicate, that we wish it were possible to

reproduce the letter here in full. But, at least, a paragraph or two may be quoted: "However, my dear Sister, you must not be discouraged by the sight of these imperfections, but humble yourself and endeavor to draw nearer to God. For it is assuredly at the time of a Retreat that the soul, more fully enlightened, sees in what condition she is with regard to her neighbor no less than in relation to herself. And then, my dear daughter, although we may not seem to be advancing, so long as we have good will and are conscious that we are making efforts, we need not be discouraged, but hope for everything from the divine grace. ...."

Writing to another upon the subject of her works she wrote: "Your mission, my dear daughters, is beautiful. Those poor children of the woods, forgotten by all the world, will be your crown in heaven. Continue your noble work. God will never allow himself to be outdone in generosity. You must sow the good seed in the hearts of your children of the wilderness. What you say of your Indian pupils gives me pleasure. God will assuredly bless your efforts." But it would be necessary, in fact, to cite whole letters, in all of which are found the same note of sympathy and encouragement which must have cheered the heart of many a modest little Sister to whom her Mother General wrote thus.

It was because she loved her devoted co-laborers in the cause of charity. She loved them in God and for God, and therefore she loved them with all her heart. Her correspondence, which is but a faint echo



of her life, bears the unequivocal stamp of that love in every page. Nothing could be more touching than those letters of hers in which she refers to the death of her dear Sisters and daughters. She contented herself with a simple narrative of the facts concerning their last moments, to which she added short and pointed reflections, tending to edification. And so it is that reading them sixty years afterwards, on paper that has grown yellow, it almost seems as if the beatings of her loving heart could still be felt. On the death of her friend of former years, Madeleine Durand, in religion Sister Vincent, who had been in the infirmary for more than a year, she wrote: "Our dear Sister Vincent, who had been in the infirmary since March, 1873, passed to a better life this morning at ten minutes to eleven. She was sixty-four years of age, of which thirty-one had been spent in religion. We need not be surprised that she had so long and painful an illness, since she had offered herself as a victim for the Community. In presence of her mortal remains, let us remember that such, one day, is to be our destiny... She sincerely loved the Community, and has given proof of that love on many occasions. In return for the affection which she bore us, let us pray and ask the prayers of our poor for her soul.... I hereby give permission to all the houses that can afford to do so to have a low Mass said for her soul. She has well deserved this privilege, since she was the only one of the Foundresses who was at work amongst the poor seven years before the

foundation of the novitiate. Again, on November 1st, 1874, Mother Caron wrote: "Death has come once more to take one of our number, our dear Sister Mary Bonsecours, (née Gadbois). This beloved Sister, whom as you know, came back ill from her journey to the Rocky Mountains, has been long a sufferer from cancer of the throat. In the beginning of last month her sight became paralyzed. She showed herself entirely submissive to the will of God in that trial, as well as in the acceptance of death. She carried her devotion to the work of Deaf Mutes to the point of offering up the sacrifice of her life for the conversion of some amongst them. She had no fear of death. She was convinced that God was merciful in allowing her to suffer. She longed for heaven. Having worked a great deal for the poor, she counted very much upon the mercy of God. She has left us a beautiful example. Let us, too, sacrifice ourselves entirely for our works, so that we may deserve, like her, to die without fear."

Thus did Mother Caron, in death as in life, love her dear fellow laborers. On the 30th May was celebrated, as usual, at the Providence, on St. Emily's day, the patronal feast of Mother Caron. It was her last Feast as Superior General. To the good wishes addressed to her she responded by an address, which it is incumbent upon us, to transmit to posterity: "I thank you very much for all the good wishes you have offered me. On my part, I have, but one wish to make for you, my Sisters and for the novices, and that is, that you

seek in all things to be very simple, very humble, very charitable; that you never allow yourselves to be hurt by trifles, not to show any sensitiveness with regard to insignificant things. I am well aware that sensibility does not entirely depend upon ourselves; and that we cannot always control it as we would wish. But believe me, my Sisters, if you have simplicity and charity, no matter what happens you will always be happy. This is no doubt the last wish I shall make for you. If you put it in practice all will go well with you during your whole lives." At the same time, she promised to let them have something which she had long refused, because she thought it was contrary to simplicity. She gave them her photograph, as, indeed, Mgr. Bourget had previously urged her to do. "You do not need my poor photograph to remind you of me," she said, "but when you see me thus represented, you will remember my miseries and will pray for me." It was rather her goodness that was remembered, and always will be, at the Providence, and the time has already come when the Sisters are tempted to pray to her, instead of for her.

During her wonderfully active career, Mother Caron outside of the Community, had many cooperators, both men and women, in her various charitable works; beginning with the benefactors of the Institute. It would be impossible, therefore, to conclude this chapter without saying at least a few words concerning her gratitude and remembrance, that is to say, her charity, towards them all.

For instance, she never forgot what the Providence owed to Mgr. Bourget, as well as to the priests of St. Sulpice. She felt that in all circumstances they were entitled to her willing service and entire devotion. Furthermore, she prayed and obtained prayers, which is after all the best kind of charity, for all who had done any good to the Community. Especially after the death of any of its benefactors, numerous were the suffrages offered to God for the repose of their souls. She never forgot a benefit, and even in the temporal order and by the things of this world, she never lost an opportunity, in so far as circumstances permitted, of making some acknowledgement. She regarded this as a sacred duty.

At one of the Missions of the Providence in Washington Territory, at the time of the foundation of a Hospital, a Protestant family had shown great kindness to the Sisters. The people were at that time very wealthy and their benefactions to the Community had been both numerous and munificent. Overtaken in the end by reverses of fortune, they were finally reduced to actual want and privation. Mother Caron immediately directed that the mission should charge it self with the education of the younger members of the family. Many of the children of families who were thus reduced, in Montreal and elsewhere, owed their education to her, on account of past benefits. A certain lady, who was obliged, by reason of poverty, to withdraw a donation, which she had been in the habit

of giving, received from the Superior a nicely worded letter, thanking her for all she had done in the past and promising her the blessing of heaven. The author has also read letters which she wrote to a certain Madame Joliette, who had lodged two of the Sisters in her house; to the Superior of the New York Sisters of Charity for hospitality likewise offered to two religious, who were passing through the great city in connection with the work for Deaf Mutes; to a worthy citizen of Santiago de Chili, who had made advantageous arrangements for the Sisters, in the name of the municipal authorities, and to a number of other persons. All such correspondence, marked by that beautiful simplicity with which we are already familiar, and with that true delicacy, which can be read between the lines. In the collections which she made through the city or elsewhere, she had a way of thanking people that was most encouraging, and which seemed to say: "It is not that I deserve anything, but you are so kind that you are always giving." And in consequence, they were always willing to give again. Many instances are recorded of Mother Caron's delicate and refined manner of acknowledging a favor. Thus, for example, to one of their kind and charitable friends, Mrs. Ostell, she caused her own chair to be sent, because it had been admired by that lady, and she remarked at the same time: "How could I refuse anything, to her who has been so good to us?" To a poor child who had obligingly told her the time, when

it was necessary for her to know it upon a journey, she gave a quarter of a dollar. These are, to be sure, very small and trifling details, but they are not without significance.

The following is decidedly better. It may be remembered that the first Chaplain of the Sisters of Providence was Canon Prince, afterwards first Bishop of St. Hyacinthe. To him Mother Caron wrote at New Years : " You will permit me, my Lord and good Father, to offer you the sentiments of gratitude and respect with which we are penetrated, since you have been, after God and our Founder, our first support in the religious life. We beg of Divine Providence ; with the confidence therein which is the result of your teaching during the days of our spiritual infancy, to grant you all the assistance of which your young diocese has need. We shall beg of the Infant Jesus to pour down upon your Lordship His most abundant benedictions."

It almost seems to the author that these things only lose by being written down. In the cold print of a book, must always be wanting, in part, at least, the graciousness of tone that often gives even to the humblest actions their highest value. For there can be no possibility of bringing to life again Mother Caron's sweet smile and kindly glance. The charity of Christ possessed her entirely ; and during her whole life she was animated by a sincere and constant gratitude to all who had shown interest or sympathy in her work and consequently, in particular, those who were its

benefactors. To her dear daughters, especially to her Sisters in religion and her devoted fellow-laborers, she was genuinely and in all things kind and charitable ; which is still another way, and not the least fruitful, of working for the poor, and consequently for God. *He who gives to the poor lends to God.*

---

## CHAPTER XVIII

LAST YEARS OF MOTHER CARON

1878—1888

---

HUMAN life, and especially its active part, is short. Mother Caron had been a religious of Providence for thirty-five years, and although she was only seventy-one years of age, she was feeble and worn out. The Community had to think of allowing her to rest, so that in July, 1878, as we have already said, Mother Amable succeeded her in the office of Superior General. But she had ten years more to live for the consolation and the edification of the whole Community. Henceforth, the web of her existence was wrought in more neutral colors, but it nevertheless included many and beautiful examples of practical utility for all those who had the good fortune to be brought in contact with her. There are sunsets which

are radiant, and twilights that are full of promise. The night may come, only to be full of beauty and activity. And so it seems to be with certain chosen souls, who in communities are predestined by God to the apostolate of example, following that of action.

There was a deeply touching scene, one morning during the Retreat of 1878, when all the Sisters were assembled in the large refectory for breakfast, and the good Mother, aged and bending under the weight of years, humbly knelt to ask pardon for all the faults she had committed, and for the bad example given. Faults, had she ever committed any? and did she even know what it meant to give bad example? And yet all present were absolutely convinced that Mother Caron acted thus in all simplicity and sincerity. In such admirable fashion did she inaugurate that life of silence and retirement henceforth to be hers.

It was by no means her intention, however, to give herself up thenceforth to complete inaction, and it was to anticipate her desires in this respect that the new Superior confided to her the direction of the Residence Sault-au-Récollet. The St. Janvier Home, of which the Sisters of Providence had charge, belonged in fact, to the Bishopric, and it was there, as everybody knows, that Mgr. Bourget, late Bishop of Montreal and Archbishop of Martianopolis, had taken up his abode. Many aged and infirm priests, attracted, no doubt, by the reverence inspired in every one by that holy old man, had come to seek an asylum near



him. It may be, then, imagined, with what holy joy the soul of Mother Caron was filled, as during those next few months she filled in relation to that beloved prelate and his brethren, the double role of Martha and Mary to Jesus at Bethany. Moreover, the calm and peaceful situation of the Residence, on the banks of the pretty River *des Écores*, and almost directly opposite St. Vincent de Paul where she had spent so many years, was admirably adapted to holy and consoling reflections. It is, besides, natural to suppose that the presence there of Mgr. Bourget gave to the late Superior something of the joy and consolation felt by Martha and Mary at Bethany in the presence of the Divine Master.

God willed, however, that such happiness was not long to be hers. Even that congenial task was too much for her shattered frame. It required a more complete rest than which the direction of that household permitted. In September, 1879, she was sent to Belceil, which is certainly one of the most delightful spots in the world. The house of the Providence, there, is situated on the banks of the incomparable river Richelieu, and as regards location is one of the most beautiful retreats that could be imagined. That fine property had come to the Sisters by inheritance, as the dowry of the five Sisters Gadbois, all of whom had entered the Community. The house which was employed as a place of rest for Sisters who were ill or over tired, and for old people that were in need of

fresh air, had long been directed by one or other of the Gadbois Sisters. In 1879, it was the eldest, Sister Ignace, who was Superior. She had no more submissive subject than Mother Caron. "At the time of the changes for 1879," relates the annals of the house, "we were surprised and at the same time rejoiced to learn that Mother Caron was coming to reside at Belœil. That good Mother, whom every one loved and revered, tried to make herself useful in every possible way. She was often seen at work in the garden, in the kitchen, washing dishes; in any corner, in fact, where there was work to be done." She simply could not remain idle. It was her great happiness, as tradition declares to busy herself in the court yard with some poor insane people to whom she spoke of God, and with whom she prayed. Not far from the Convent lived a poor sick woman. And as Sister Ignace had thought proper to offer Mother Caron such exemptions and permissions as coming and going as she pleased, which were always employed for the benefit of her charities, the latter had very soon found out the poor woman and begun to visit her assiduously, and from time to time obtained permission of the Superior to bring her some assistance. It chanced one Saturday evening, that a beggar asked for hospitality. Sister Ignace, hesitating, was on the point of refusing, when Mother Caron, pleading the cause of the unfortunate, appealed to the memory of Sister Gadbois' father, Mr. Victor Gadbois, one of the most charitable of men. "Ah, Sister!" she cried, "if your

father, were here!" That allusion to the hospitable customs of her forebears, weighed down the scales on the side of charity, and the beggar remained under cover. If such an act savored of imprudence, there was no reason to regret it, and all the Sisters were edified to see Mother Caron, on the following morning, which was Sunday, going in search of the poor old man and bringing him in to hear Mass beside her in the chapel. At such moments, it made one better just to look at Mother Caron. She was radiant in every sense of the word.

She was soon obliged, however, to leave Belœil. A serious illness by which she was seized, in January, 1880, brought about that parting, which all the household dreaded. She was brought back to the Mother-House in Montreal, where she came to the very gates of death, and received the last Sacraments. But so many prayers were offered up for her that it seemed as if Heaven were moved and to the general joy she became after a few weeks convalescent. "During an illness which was at first believed to be her last," wrote Father Antoine of the Oblates, in a contemporary memoir, "the good Mother had sent for me to help her to prepare for death. I went to visit her very frequently during those few weeks, in her little cell in the infirmary; and was greatly edified each time by her spirit of faith and submission to the will of God. It was one day during that illness of 1880, that Mother Caron, under the form of a farewell discourse, gave to

some young Sisters, whom she had known as children, counsels which they have remembered ever since, and which are here given, by which it will be seen that she was practical even to the end. "I advise you, my dear Sisters," she said, "never to ask for anything and never to refuse anything. That practice is the most lasting, for the things which we impose upon ourselves from our own choice are done one day and omitted the next. But, once you have taken to heart the advice here given, nothing *can* be omitted without a decided protest from conscience. Another thing that I earnestly recommend to you is to be always of the same taste as the cook. It was Father Martin, the Jesuit, who long ago, gave me that as a plank of salvation. Apply yourselves also to charity, take the weakness of others into consideration. Be ready to suffer all things, but not to make any one else suffer." She warned them in conclusion not to put off their preparation till the hour of death, lest they arrive at the term with empty hands. "If *you* have empty hands, Mother," cried one of the Sisters, "what will become of us?"—"Oh, poor child", responded the sick woman, "each one has her own budget, but self-denial is so hard to acquire."

The many prayers for her recovery seemed, as has been said, to bring Mother Caron back from the brink of the grave. But on her return to Belœil, in the month of July of that year, she seemed very much broken. The beauties of Nature and the warm sunshine, so brilliant at Belœil in that Summer season, seemed at first to hasten

her convalescence. There, as everywhere, her presence was very dear and precious to every one. But in the Autumn, her frequent indispositions gave such cause for alarm that it was deemed prudent to bring the venerable Mother somewhat nearer to the Mother House in Montreal. It was decided to send her to the house of St. Isidore at Longue-Pointe. So the former Superior, submissive, as was her wont, departed from Belœil, leaving the Gadbois household to congratulate itself on having possessed, for two separate periods, the beloved Mother Caron. It seemed as if she brought with her everywhere something of the foundation *spirit*. Visible traces of that spirit seemed to linger after her passage, or, if the expression be preferred, she left after her a beneficent odor of sweetness,—*in odorem suavitatis!*

In this poor life, so full of contrasts, the sorrow of one very often makes the joy of another. Whilst at Belœil they had to resign themselves to the grief of seeing the saintly Mother depart, at St. Isidore they were rejoicing to see her arrive. According to the local chronicles, she reached St. Isidore on the 25th November. She had herself felt deep regret at being obliged to leave the peaceful retreat of Belœil, but she was careful as far as possible to avoid every outward manifestation of such a feeling to the Assistant, Sister Mary Godfrey, who announced to her the highly opportune decision of the Superior. "The arrival of Mother Caron in our midst," wrote the annalist of St. Isidore, "is regarded

by us as a very precious privilege and a special favor on the part of Divine Providence. Henceforth, it will be our sweetest occupation to surround that dear Mother with love and respect and with the most tender care."

During the succeeding years, the house of St. Isidore was honored by having within its walls two of the Foundresses, Mother Caron and Sister Zotique, ( Agathe Séné, ) both of whom had been companions from the very first of the holy Mother Gamelin. At her own request, Sister Zotique had obtained from the Superior General, Mother Amable, the favor of being permitted to share the retirement of her old friend. Her presence, as was justly believed, might be of service to the former Superior General and help to cheer her. Mother Amable hastened to accede to that pious desire of a holy and venerable friendship. It is no easy task to outlive oneself. In the depths, even of those natures that approach most nearly to perfection, there is always a remnant of pride which rebels. Even when strength is nearly gone, and the head is bent, as if the better to regard the grave, it is hard to admit one's own, decadence. To grow old, to find oneself worn out enfeebled, is a severe trial to generous hearts. But it is life. It is the story of one wave urged onwards by another, until inevitably it is broken upon the rocky shore. Then, it is only the thought of another life, where nothing shall be broken, that can console and uplift. Mother Caron and her venerable friend, Sister Zotique, were amongst those who look beyond the horizon of

this earthly existence and who grow old without murmuring. Their life at St. Isidore was a source of edification to every one.

Both of them were naturally the recipients of every care and attention, but such was especially the case with Mother Caron, since it was impossible to forget that she had been so long the revered and beloved Mother of the whole community. The annals for May, 1883, of the St. John of God Hospital give details, of which only a summary can here be given. : "Today, (that was the 29th May, eve of the Feast of St. Emily) Sister Superior, (Thérèse de Jésus) accompanied by two other Sisters, went to St. Isidore with greetings to Mother Caron. She brought her a basket of fruit and candy, some little trinkets and some pretty pictures. That enabled her to give pleasure to others, which is always her greatest happiness." And the next day, May 30th, the annalist farther relates, "there was beautiful singing at Mass, and the altar was prettily decorated. There was grand recreation in the refectory, and the whole day long, it was a festival *of the heart*." To which she adds : "The happiness of possessing those two old Mothers is no little consolation to us. They preach to us, continually, not only by their wise counsels and maternal advice, but by their modesty and gayety.....The very sight of those two venerable figures sustains the fervor of the youngest amongst us, and is a consolation in trials or in weariness..... May God long preserve them for our greater good."

It is the consolation of submissive souls to find in their very submission a peace which keeps them always serene. Mother Caron was content at St. Isidore, as she had been at Belœil and at the Sault. She loved that hallowed solitude, where, despite her age and infirmities, she could still and always make herself useful. She knitted for the poor lunatics, she weeded the garden, she peeled vegetables, she helped in the kitchen, she visited the sick and, with all due deference to the learned faculty, she nursed them also. At least, she made broth for them, and prepared medicines, to which none of the doctors objected. One time, a doctor in the neighborhood fell seriously ill, and Mother Caron, being authorized to do so, visited him regularly. She brought him broth and soup and jelly which she had made herself. When he was cured, the doctor, paid the highest tribute to the nourishment which had been brought him by his nurse, and everywhere recommended the same treatment to his patients. He often declared that they had brought him back to life, which was of course a great gratification to Mother Caron. So she loved St. Isidore and whenever she was absent from there, she was eager to return. And moreover, since St. Isidore was in point of time one of the first missions of the Providence, it had a special claim upon her foundress heart. Being asked one day when she showed a certain impatience to go back to St. Isidore, why that house had so strong an attraction for her, she answered : "I am content at St. Isidore, because it is the cradle of the missions, and also because I can be of



some use there. It seems to me that I can still do a little good there, whilst here I am no good at all."

Since she had ceased to be Superior, Mother Caron, with the necessary permission, had kept up some of her epistolary relations so that from Montreal, from the Sault, from Belceil and from St. Isidore, letters were regularly despatched, which must have redounded to the strength and consolation of many a Sister soul. The author must be denied the pleasure of reproducing them here *in extenso*, for fear of unduly prolonging this chapter, but such extracts as can be given paint in vivid colors the generosity of the writers soul and the nobility of her sentiments.

Here for example is how she writes to Mother Amable, the Superior general who had replaced her, and who was then, June 4th, 1880, travelling in the West. "More than all others, my mind and my heart are with you in your pilgrimage. And should it not be so, my good Mother for you are going to consolidate and to complete what I had barely begun. You are going to repair my faults, and to give to those dear Sisters, so far away and isolated, that wise direction which your fine mind, your sound judgment and your devoted heart will so surely prompt. Far from me, indeed, is the thought of addressing you in those laudatory terms, of which you would be the first to disapprove, but permit me, at least, to express the hopes which I entertain as to the results of your mission, and my confidence that it will be of the greatest con-

solation to our dear Sisters. How often in spirit, do I climb mountains and descend mountains with you. I join with our dear Sisters missionaries when they go out to meet you. I rejoice with them when you arrive, but when you are going away again, alas, my good Mother !!!" And there exclamation points expressed what her pen refused to say. But if we may be permitted to underline them, what noble sentiments of humility, confidence in God and respect for authority, are contained in those brief paragraphs.

Another time, in 1881, she wrote to another Sister, (Sister Michel Ange) who had sent her New Year's wishes, always expressing herself with that simplicity and kindness of heart which she showed towards every one: "For you who have so much need of physical health to be able to visit Our Lord in the person of His poor, I am going to pray that you may be able to accomplish your tasks with the necessary strength and virtue. I shall go with you sometimes in spirit to visit your dear sick, and learn from them how to die well."

Lastly, to one of her relatives who was also a religious and therefore doubly dear to her heart, she wrote, in 1882, the admirable letter which follows; it is too beautiful and too complete, for a single word to be omitted. The writer wishes from the bottom of his heart that all novices and other young girls who may chance to read this book, may both read and understand it: "In the calm of my retreat," she wrote to

her cousin, (Sister Emily of the Sacred Heart) "I feel that I must bless and thank God for the graces without number which He has lavished upon me, despite the little courage or devotedness that I have put into His service. But my dear child, apart from that debt of gratitude, I feel that I owe a great deal more still, in return for what He has done for those who by a double title are dear to me. Having followed with much interest that path beset with thorns by which you have journeyed to your holy vocation, I became perfectly convinced that God was with you, and that we could therefore return thanks for it in the outpouring of our hearts. Yes, my dear child, God has chosen you. I will say more, He has taken you by the hand to draw you near to Himself. He has enlightened your mind, so that you were able to understand and to appreciate the sweetness that is to be found in His service, and the rewards that He has promised. He has asked for your heart, that He may dwell therein. What goodness, what magnanimity on the part of that loving and tender Spouse! But as God will only crown those who have fought for Him, do not fear the struggle which you will have to maintain all the days of your life. That sweet Saviour will make those combats proportionate to your strength. Your humility, your courage, and your devotedness will be the measure of His assistance. I will permit myself, my good and devoted Sister in Our Lord, to call your attention to these four dispositions, all of which will greatly tend to your advancement in virtue. My long experience has, on

more than one occasion, convinced me that without prudence, courage, humility and self sacrifice, nothing can be accomplished. I wish I could give you an example, but, alas, I have only imperfections to offer for your imitation. May the ever merciful God make my faults of service to your greater advancement, by warning you to avoid them carefully. So that when the idea occurs to me of making reparation for my own life, that has been so imperfect, I tell myself that an excellent way to bless God and return Him thanks for all He has done for me, would be by contributing towards a union with Him in the closest bonds of some privileged soul like yourself. As we are about beginning a New Year, at a season when all are seeking to show their devotion to those they hold dear, I feel that it is a favorable time to make known to you, as I have just done, all the wishes and desires of my heart for you. In the eyes of the world, these would be poor New Year's gifts, but I trust that they may be useful and that the Divine Saviour will lend them that charm which He imparts to all that is done for love of Him."

It was but natural that in answer to these beautiful letters, breathing the true religious spirit, and full of edification, Mother Caron should have received many which she found most consoling. Amongst numberless others, which might well be reproduced here, we have chosen one from Mgr. Joseph Larocque, former Bishop of St. Hyacinthe, and who with the late Mgr. Raymond was the Founder of the Monastery of the Precious Blood

there. He wrote to his "dear Mother" on the 7th December, 1881, an epistle wherein it may be seen how these holy souls prepare for death. Nothing more exquisite can be imagined than this interchange of beautiful thoughts, which are at once so human and so Christian.

" My dear Mother Caron,—Your letter of December reached me last night. It seems to me that your handwriting is still very firm. Your health then, must be in a tolerably good state, despite the manifold occupations of your long career. The year 1882, you tell me, will see the completion of your seventy-fourth year, and I, too, shall finish my seventy-fourth year at the end of the coming August. But I don't know if we are going by the same train. As for me, my dear Mother, it seems I have got a ticket for a very fast train. The years pass before the mind and the memory like the pages of a ledger. And quickly as they go, I count them, nevertheless. Death has been so busy around me that he has left me alone and isolated, a mark for his darts, I am the oldest of the ecclesiastical body in the diocese of St. Hyacinthe. The Sisters of the Precious Blood want to keep me till my eightieth year, but I don't know what Death will say about that! Let us pray for each other, that we may depart by the train of the holy will of God, our debts paid and our railway tickets in good shape."

However, the years rolled by and certain symptoms of passing indisposition announced the approach of

paralysis in Mother Caron. In June, 1883, she had a quite a serious attack and was removed to Montreal. It may be said that from that time onwards her life was a series of relapses, after temporary recoveries. God imposed upon her, who had so loved activity, the supreme trial of being long an invalid before her death. She received invitations from all directions to the Houses of Providence in Montreal and its vicinity, and with the consent of the Superior, she loved to accept such invitations. Thus in 1885, she was to be found at the Deaf and Dumb Institute. Those poor afflicted ones, as already mentioned, had a very large share in her affections, and of this they were keenly sensible for they all loved Mother Caron. The annals of June, 1885, speak of her presence there, which they declare to be "an honor and a favor from heaven."—"It is", they say, "a constant joy and consolation for our hapless pupils, who love and venerate Mother Caron because of her virtues, her kindness to them, and the great tenderness she has shown in their regard."

In truth, Mother Caron, aged and broken as she was, practiced more and more perfectly, if that were possible, and to the great edification of the Sisters, the pupils, and the infirm, those virtues which have been here indicated: humility, confidence in God, regularity, simplicity, obedience, mortification, and above all charity. Her respect for those in authority never wavered. She carried her fidelity and her punctiliousness in asking permissions to the verge of scruple.

When on account of distance or ill health she could no longer ask for them in person, she did so through others. The young Sisters who were appointed to render her such good offices as her condition rendered necessary, were in her eyes, Superiors. She obeyed them in everything. She rose punctually at the hour indicated by the Rule, which was five o'clock, but she took care not to waken others who were sleeping in the infirmary. When she was no longer able to do anything else, the greater portion of her body being benumbed by disease, her hands alone remaining active, she knitted, and always for her dear poor.

On the 12th June, 1886, she was able to assist at the feast of the Superior General, Mother Amable, to the great joy of every one.

On the 21st April, 1887, she returned to Longue-Pointe, to take care of her aged friend, Sister Zotique, who had fallen dangerously ill, and she watched beside her several nights. Nothing in Mother Caron's appearance, as the doctor testified, gave any sign as to whether or not Mother Caron had had a good night. Sister Zotique recovered her health and did not die until 1893,—at eighty-five years of age, but she probably owed her recovery to the charity and the prayers of her friend.

In 1887, the Hospice St. Joseph, situated at a few paces from the Mother House, and one of its first branches, after having served as a retreat for aged priests and subsequently a boarding house for

ladies, later an Asylum for Deaf-Mutes, and still later, again, a boarding place for ladies, became, at last, a refuge for old men, who were helpless and abandoned. What a windfall for Mother Caron ! At the Refuge, which was supported altogether by alms, Mother Caron had the pleasure of offering the first alms in clothing and in the sequel, as long as she was able to walk or even to drag herself along, she visited the *old men* in the Refuge.

It is also related that one of her last pleasures, in January, 1888, was to regale the old women of the Mother House with plates of excellent and tempting *la tire* which were specially prepared for her. And on the same occasion she presented her dear old women with scapulars and medals and it was arranged that she should herself distribute the candy and little gifts. O when had she ever desired anything else than that which had constituted the happiness of her life, to give and to console !

That was in the year 1888, in which occurred her eightieth birthday, and which also saw her death. But it is scarcely necessary to say that she was ready and full of hope. All her life long she had given to the poor, the friends of Jesus, why then should she not, in spite of miseries and weaknesses, confide in the mercy of Him who said : *Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.* If any one had asked her if she were afraid to die and go to God, she would assuredly have answered, as did the mother of a cer-



tain parish priest addressing the Archbishop (\*) of Montreal. "Oh, no, Your Grace, I am not afraid of death. I am waiting for it."

---

## CHAPTER XIX

### DEATH OF MOTHER CARON

August 13th 1888

---

"PRECIOUS in the eyes of the Lord is the death of His saints." So spoke the Psalmist many centuries ago; and certainly all who have the happiness of possessing the faith will agree that the Psalmist was right. So far as we are permitted to see from the depths of this earthly exile, where nothing is seen save through a glass darkly, it is for the accidental glory of the Lord God, that those souls whom He, in the first place, created to His own image and likeness, whom He later redeemed at the price of the Blood of His Divine Son, and whom He has destined to possess Him eternally in the endless vision of beatitude, should reach the term of this life well prepared, and as St. Paul expresses, "having accomplished in their flesh what is wanting to the Passion of Christ." But the death of the just is also precious in the sight of men.

---

(\*) The mother of Father Ladurantaye of St. Jerome, to Archbishop Bruchesi, Feb. 12th, 1908.

For it is needful that man should be taught by example as well as by precept, by life no less than by doctrine. To the members of an Order or Community, in particular, nothing is of greater value than the example of faith and resignation given in the presence of death by their superiors and their masters. Naturally they expect to be edified by those who preached to them all their lives. And that is doubtless why the sons and disciples of a St. Francis or a St. Dominic are shown to us as deeply moved and attentive beside the bed of death.

Mother Caron had lived so well that she was naturally prepared to give to the Community which she had so much loved a salutary example of resignation in her sufferings and death. She had too long preached humility, not to be humble in that dread hour; she had too long shown confidence in God for that confidence to fail her in that supreme moment; she had been too long mortified not to be generous even in her very agony. Having been thus generous and confident so she remained through the long period of suffering, which weighed upon her during the last months of her life. Her life had been such, in fact, as to point to such a death, but Divine Providence ordained that her agony should be prolonged for weeks and even months, so that the lesson of her death should be, both for her Community and for history, the magnificent crown of her forty-five years of religious life.

At the beginning of 1888, it could easily be seen

that Mother Caron, then in her eightieth year, was nearing the end. Her health, which had been uncertain for four or five years previous, grew gradually worse. She suffered, about the end of January, from a sore throat, which in spite of the great care taken of her, endangered her life. The Doctor even judged it prudent for her to receive Extreme Unction. She rallied, but it was only to endure a long martyrdom. The paralysis, which had attacked the head, secretly, slowly, but surely, accomplished the work of destruction. Medical science could do no more than give her a temporary respite from her most acute sufferings. At the same time, the soul had to struggle and to suffer, side by side with the body. In the same measure that He purified that holy soul, God responded to her ardent aspirations after pain and humiliation, and Mother Caron drank the chalice to the dregs. It would have been in no way surprising, if Nature, which is usually weak in some direction, and has to struggle more desperately when consumed by fever or hastening to decay, should have shown weakness, and, if like Jesus in the Garden, the venerable Mother should have asked that the chalice should be taken away. Nothing, however is recorded on this subject, and not the slightest hint given, that could authorize us to make such an assertion. So that it was only through the generosity of her *fiat*, that we are led to think of the *transeat*. This means in good English,

that all the witnesses of Mother Caron's sufferings dwell upon her heroic resignation, which leads us instinctively to think of those interior struggles which such a victory presupposes, in every human soul. For it must not be forgotten, that deep in every Christian who sanctifies himself is also the man: for grace transforms, elevates, but does not destroy nature.

As when in presence of the impressive ruins of some ancient monument we stand in deep emotion, the soul oppressed by the memories thus evoked, so in presence of the old, those for whom life is just beginning feel inclined to bow their heads reverently, to ask questions and above all to listen. Still more is this the case when the flame of life is on the point of being extinguished, and but little time remains wherein to hear their voice. The Community of Providence had known Mother Caron for forty-five years, it was sadly evident that she was going to die, and therefore the new generations of religious, who were becoming ever more and more numerous, gathered eagerly and with a reverence that was almost worship, around "that dear and venerable relic of the cradle of the Institute." Each one felt that she was storing up for herself a consoling remembrance as she gazed upon the beloved features of that saintly and venerated Mother, listened to her words and took her counsels to heart. They thus surrounded her, and it is safe to say that every one of those who approached that bed of death went away deeply moved, edified and rendered

more fervent. For both in word and act, the aged Mother continued to be the finished model of a religious, humble, mortified and charitable.

Amongst the rest, came the young Sisters of the novitiate, drawing near to offer her some attention, and delighted, if they received in return a look or a gesture. How they treasured every word that fell from her lips, and how zealously they resolved to preserve such words within their heart ! And if religious modesty did not forbid us to bring before the public in the pages of this book, the numerous survivors who knew Mother Caron in her last days, nearly a generation ago, little doubt that other and equally beautiful pages might be written containing sacred and touching repetitions of what is here set down.

Most admirable in Mother Caron was her spirit of prayer, as is testified by all who knew her ; a union with God that was constant and sustained. Her tongue was so much affected by the paralysis, that she had difficulty in articulating, but her lips still murmured fragments of prayers. And amidst her greatest sufferings nothing gave her so much relief, nor more speedily calmed her most painful agitation, than to kneel beside her bed and pray aloud. She seemed to prefer the Our Father, Hail Mary, and the Acts of Charity or Contrition.

And weeks were added to weeks, and months to months, without any notable change taking place. The

disease, as has been said, was doing its work slowly but surely, and the greatest trial of all, moral sufferings of various sorts agonized the soul of the saintly mother, whilst her body was being undermined by physical pain. On June 11th, Sister of the Immaculate Conception (Marguerite Thibodeau) one of her companions of the foundation, came to see her. Mother Caron told her that she was suffering very much, and asked her, as a friend, if she thought she had to linger much longer. The Sister assured her that she thought not. " Oh, I am content to suffer before I die, " the holy patient said, " Providence is very good to give me such an opportunity of gaining merits for heaven. But pray, dear Sister, and ask prayers for me, that I may profit by my sufferings, and die a good death ! "

And still weeks were added to weeks. In the beginning of July, a complication set in, which hastened the progress of the paralysis, and made a speedy and fatal ending appear imminent. Mother Caron again received Extreme Unction. But the hour had not yet come ; it seemed as if she had not yet suffered enough. God willed that she should drink the chalice to the dregs. On the morning of July 13th, as the dear patient appeared unusually calm, the Sister infirmarian asked if she would like to receive Holy Communion. " Oh, Yes, " she answered, " I would be so glad to receive Our Lord. " She communicated with the greatest joy, and after having made a prolonged thanksgiving, she fell into a peaceful sleep, which lasted a

great portion of the day. From that moment, her moral sufferings and her terror ceased entirely. That last Communion, her Viaticum for eternity, for she was never afterwards able to receive the Sacred Host, brought her peace of soul. Only her physical sufferings continued the work of dissolution. By the action of the pain, her nerves became contracted, and the poor sufferer was in such a state of agitation, that it was only with the greatest difficulty she could be relieved. While in this miserable state she was transported on the 23rd of July from the Providence Asylum to the new Mother House, on Fullum St.

It may be explained here that during the very time that the former Superior lay dying, the community, on account of the great progress it had made, a progress in which Mother Caron had had a considerable part, was busied with the construction of buildings, much more important than those of the Asylum near St. James' Church, which even though enlarged, had become insufficient for the needs of the Community. The Mother House was therefore removed to Fullum St., opposite the Church of St. Vincent de Paul. The *old can* can never leave the place where they have lived without a pang of the heart. The Asylum, the dear Asylum with its memories and traditions appealed so strongly to the soul. An ancient poet has truly said that even inanimate objects are "worthy of tears" *sunt lacrymæ rerum*. Old houses, particularly Mother Houses, are in that category, for they have an eloquence

that moves to tears. All the old Sisters whom the Superior called to Fullum, Street, the new retreat prepared for their old age, knew how to make that little sacrifice cheerfully, and with the spirit of submission to God's will, to which their life had accustomed them. But it is certain, as appears from the Annals, that the arrival of the venerated Mother at the new Infirmary, on July 23rd, 1888, contributed no little towards the sanctification and consecration, as it were, of the new abode. The Sister Infirmarians felt that they were blessed by heaven, in thus beginning, at the bedside of the beloved and supremely charitable dean of their community, the ministry of mercy which they were henceforth to exercise in that sanctuary of suffering.

And the writer of these pages, which are intended, first of all, for the Sisters of Providence, cannot help feeling a thrill of emotion in thinking of all those by whom they shall probably be read, in that Infirmary where the heroine of this biography terminated her glorious career of labor and suffering. The thought is inspiring. For he may confidently hope, in fact, that the recital of the sufferings so heroically borne by Mother Caron, and of her edifying death, will long continue to console the Spouses of Christ, who through the dispensations of His Providence shall come thither, they too, to suffer and to die. And it may be that in their generosity, after having prayed for their Community, for their elders, for all those who are dear to



them, they may give a thought to the humble historian of her who shall remain as a model and exemplar to every one.

On the 3rd August, at a quarter past one in the morning, it seemed as if Mother Caron's last moment had come. The Chaplain of the Mother House, Father A. Faubert, was called in all haste. He gave her holy absolution and recited the prayers for the dying. But that day was not the one appointed by God as the term of her miseries. She regained sufficient strength to suffer for some days longer, and with greater intensity than ever. On the 7th of August a new crisis excited renewed alarm. It was fully expected that she would not last the day, and again the helps of our holy religion were abundantly procured for her. She rallied however, once more. The next day, August 8th, the Superior General caused a Mass to be said by the preacher of the Retreat, Father Caron, S. J., a relative of the patient, that God might be pleased to have pity on His servant, and grant her some relief. But that dear and holy soul was to drain that bitter cup, and it was only a few hours before her death, on the evening of the 13th, that she grew calm.

Her agony lasted for several hours. The professed Sisters asked and obtained permission to watch beside the dying religious and assist her by their prayers. Sister of the Immaculate Conception, the beloved confidante of Mother Caron's inmost thoughts, believing that at that supreme moment it would be sweet to her

soul that they should thank God for having granted her the favor of suffering, suggested the recital of the *Te Deum*, in which all the assistants joined. Could a more beautiful spectacle be imagined. Upon that bed of agony lay the aged friend of Jesus Christ and His beloved Spouse, passing through the last ordeal and about to breathe her last sigh, whilst those around her, the Sisters she had known and loved and who had been the witness of her excruciating sufferings, singing in deep sincerity, that superb hymn which has been variously ascribed to St. Ambrose and St. Augustine. "We praise Thee, O God, we acknowledge Thee to be Our Lord—Thou, O Christ, art the King of Glory—Having overcome the sting of death, Thou didst open the Kingdom of Heaven.— We therefore pray Thee O Saviour, to help Thy servants, whom Thou hast redeemed with thy Precious Blood.— In Thee O Lord, have I hoped ; let me not be confounded forever." Does not such a spectacle as that magnificently illustrate the grandeur of our Catholic faith?

Mother Caron expired at the very moment when the voices of the suppliants, quivering with emotion, uttered that cry of hope with which concludes the final verse of the *Te Deum*, "In thee, O Lord, have I hoped, let me not be confounded forever!" It was then twenty minutes past eleven, on the night of the 13th of August, 1888.

The mortal remains of the lamented dead were exposed awaiting the time of burial, in the vast Com-

munity Hall of the new Mother House. It was the first time that a catafalque had been erected there. That was, to say the least, a singular coincidence, which had been permitted in the designs of Providence, that a Foundress of the Institute and one of its most exemplary members should thus inaugurate, in that centre of action of the Community, that silent but ever fruitful preaching which from the bosom of Death itself is addressed by the generations who have gone to those who are to come. And that the coincidence might be more marked and rendered more significant, it occurred precisely at that date, in the middle of August, when the Exercises of the annual Retreat were in progress at the Mother House. The Sisters making the Retreat had come thither in great numbers, from their various missions, giving themselves up during the six days that had elapsed to the exercises of prayer and meditation, begging of God to show them the way, that they might the more clearly understand their duties ; and there, all at once, they were confronted with those silent remains, with the coffin and with the catafalque. Was this the answer to all their pious self-examination, or, better still, the model, the exemplar which God offered them? The secrets of God are impenetrable, but the providential manifestations of His mercy are often most consoling.

On the morning of the beautiful Feast of the Assumption, August 15th, took place that year in presence of the beloved remains of Mother Caron, and, at the

conclusion of the ceremony of religious profession, the always affecting scene of the fraternal kiss which, according to custom, is given to the newly professed. According to the confident hope, so lovingly expressed, it was from the height of heaven whither Jesus had already called her, that Mother Caron looked down with her wonted sweetness and benignancy, on the various details of that scene which was being enacted beside her funeral bier.—“Embrace each other, my Sisters,” she seemed to say, “embrace each other in the Lord,—*in osculo sancto*. But remember that you have given yourselves for life to Jesus in the Institute of Providence. Therefore remember that you must be humble, hopeful, gentle, chaste, laborious, simple, charitable and mortified. You cannot follow Jesus, as He himself has said, except on the condition of carrying the Cross.”

And if Mother Caron did not literally speak such words from her coffin, at least, she had spoken them by her whole life.

The obsequies of the former and ever beloved Superior General took place on August 17th, in presence of such a concourse of priests, religious and lay people as the Chapel of the Providence had never before seen. The Mass was celebrated by Father Charles Olivier Caron, Vicar General of Three Rivers, assisted by Father Charles Caron, S. J., and Father Joseph Caron, his brother, acting respectively as deacon and sub-deacon. The officiating clergymen were all cousins of the deceased. Present in the sanctuary were twenty-

three priests, while in the body of the Church were 400 religious, seventy deaf mutes, forty orphans, and a large number of old women from the Asylum ; besides numerous relatives, friends and admirers of the lamented Mother Caron. The presence of so many members of the clergy was a homage to her indisputable worth, and that of so many religious from the various communities of Montreal, Ottawa and St. Hyacinthe, bore witness to the universal esteem in which she was held ; while that of the old people, the orphans and deaf mutes was highly significant.

After the Mass of Requiem, when the funeral procession was formed, it surprised no one to see that the modest hearse which bore to their last home the mortal remains of her, who had been the admirable servant of God, Mother Caron, was given such an escort of honor as caused her funeral to assume the proportions of a triumph. No less than one hundred and forty carriages followed the hearse. And thus, to that admirable religious, who had chosen to live hidden and obscure, such obsequies were given as are usually accorded only to the great ones of the earth. And that was, indeed, but just ; for though it be true, that God alone could worthily crown such a career, still that world which she had loved for God's sake, which she had benefited and which she had edified, had every right, and in fact the sacred duty, to remember her with sorrow and to bow down in reverence beside her grave.

And now she sleeps, awaiting the great day of the final resurrection, resting at last, after all her labors and her sufferings ; she sleeps her last sleep in the Cemetery of the Providence at Longue-Pointe, in the shadow of the great central Cross, which arises on the terrace of honor, reserved as the burial place of the Foundresses of the Institute.

May she rest in peace ! Happy are they, who, having like her, lived for God, know how to die in His love.

---

## CHAPTER XX

### TESTIMONIES OF ESTEEM AND VENERATION

---

THE great consolation of the Christian in presence of death is to feel that he shall not entirely die. He knows, in fact, that his soul is immortal and that if he has been faithful it will return to God, its Creator, in the everlasting glory of the eternal beatitude. The rest matters little. One thing alone is necessary.

But in the merciful designs of His Providence, God also desires that the memory of those chosen souls should remain in benediction amongst men ; the saints live forever in the remembrance of the nations. It is

for this reason that the Church has devised, or more properly speaking sanctioned, the beatification or canonization of her most illustrious sons and daughters. God forbid that we should even in the slightest degree anticipate the wise and prudent judgment of the Church, our Mother. She is the sole judge of the opportuneness of the initiative, or the utility of those proceedings, that human life, however perfect, may otherwise appear to authorize.

In the last chapter of this book, it is merely our desire to recall some of those numerous testimonies of esteem which were rendered to the subject of this biography, during her life or after her death. Since it was necessary to fix some limit, the author has confined himself by preference in the first place, to those which come from episcopal or priestly pens, to those rendered by the Sister Communities of Montreal, and finally those from several communities of other dioceses, which seemed the most likely to excite general interest.

In the course of the preceding pages reference has frequently been made to the singular esteem in which Mother Caron was held by the holy Bishop Bourget, and it may be safely added, by his successor, Mgr. Fabre, who regarded her with the greatest veneration. To her own sincere and supernatural respect for the priests of Jesus Christ, the latter had always responded by the deepest respect and esteem for her. As has been seen, twenty-three priests were present at her obsequies, and her death afforded an opportunity to

many Bishops and priests to testify their respect for Mother Caron, and their appreciation of the noble work with which her life had been filled.

The great Archbishop of the West, Mgr. Taché, wrote from St. Boniface: "Personally, I have had many opportunities of seeing and admiring that excellent religious. I have every confidence that in leaving this earth, where she gave so eminent an example of virtue, she took her flight to heaven, to receive the crown which her inexhaustible charity had won for her. The noble Institute, for the foundation and stability of which she did so much, is far too dear to me that I should forget to pray for that generous Foundress."—"I formerly knew the venerable Mother Caron very well," wrote Bishop Gravel of Nicolet, "her heart was much larger than the resources of the Institute, which was still struggling with the trials of its infancy. I dare not offer my condolences, for I am convinced that she is in heaven, whence she will continue to protect the work which was so dear to her."—"I sympathize from my heart," wrote Mgr. Junger of Nesqually, "for the great loss which has befallen the Community of Providence in the death of Mother Caron. There is no doubt, that she has gone to receive in heaven the magnificent reward of her charity and fidelity to the duties of religious life. May we, one day, enjoy in heaven the happiness which is now hers. Certainly she is an example to us all, and the lesson which that example teaches us is: Be attentive to all



your duties and exact in their fulfilment ; Be faithful in working for your perfection and sanctification." -- "During the six years," (1846 to 1852) "that I spent in the Bishop's palace in Montreal," wrote Bishop Moreau of St. Hyacinthe,— somewhat later in 1891,— "I had some opportunity of knowing Mother Caron and her work. I have constantly admired her wonderful charity to the poor, and her unlimited confidence in Divine Providence ; two virtues which always go together and which can work wonders."— "Not only myself but all those who had dealings with Mother Caron," wrote Mgr. de Goesbriand of Burlington, "were forced to admire her respect for the clergy, her great zeal for her neighbor and particularly the poor. She was certainly one of the most lovable and beloved persons whom I ever knew, precisely because she forgot self in serving and obliging others."— Another Bishop wrote : " Mother Caron, Oh, she was a true religious, you have lost much in losing her."

In addition to these testimonies from Their Lordships the Bishops, here are some remarkable tributes from members of the clergy. A prominent parish priest of Montreal wrote in 1891 : " I regret very much that I did not keep many of Mother Caron's letters. They contained the most beautiful thoughts on humility and self sacrifice."— A priest from the Seminary of St. Hyacinthe wrote : " Each time that I was admitted to the presence of that venerated Mother, I admired more her great charity, her entire devotion to her work,

and her ardent love of God. Her whole conversation may be resumed in these few words: "Let us love our neighbor for God, and let us love God in our neighbor." Her ardent charity towards her neighbor naturally rendered her prayers most powerful with God. Therefore it can be judged what those prayers must have obtained."—Some years after Mother Caron's death, a venerable priest of the Sherbrooke diocese wrote as follows: "My position when a young man brought me into frequent relation with Mother Caron, and I have always remembered her goodness and charity. I always found her admirable. No mother could have shown greater tenderness and solicitude for certain orphans of my acquaintance, of whom she had constituted herself the protectress. The fact of being poor and an orphan were sufficient claims upon her charity. Who can tell the number of those to whom she was a veritable Providence. She had no thought, no consideration, except for others. She was as simple and innocent as a child, and this childish simplicity was blended with all the virtues of a Sister of Charity." A religious of eminent virtue, noted for his knowledge of the things of the spiritual life, and who, moreover, had had the direction of her soul for sometime, said of Mother Caron: "In all things and everywhere, she was a model of regularity, of piety, of charity, of sweet simplicity; and I must say that she always edified me. Most striking in her was her spirit of faith and submission to the will of God, which was the

principle of her piety, as it was also the source of her obedience. In the need which she felt of direction, a word of advice or the expression of an opinion on the part of Him who represented Our Lord, she regarded as a command proceeding from the mouth of God Himself. Therefore she seemed to have no judgment of her own, no personal will. Those dispositions which were necessarily manifested in important circumstances she showed above all in the minutest details of her spiritual life, and thus it was that, in my opinion, Mother Caron was truly a model of obedience." The following was recently related by a religious of her own Community, who had preserved for Mother Caron's memory a devotion that bordered on worship.

"In the latter days of Mother Caron's administration as Superior General, the Canons of the Cathedral of Montreal came, just upon an ordinary occasion, to pay a visit to the Providence. When they were going, Mother Caron accompanied them to the door, in token of respect and to do them honor. As they went—one of them remarked—though not of course in Mother Caron's hearing—that she was considerably broken down, by age and fatigue."—"Yes," responded Canon Dufresne, whose remark was overheard by a young Sister, "but broken down as she is, she still has the *dignity of a queen* and the *simplicity of a shepherdess*." Two charming expressions, truly, and should any one consider them exaggerated it is only necessary to supplement them by an attentive consideration of that

portrait drawn of her almost on the day following her death, by a very distinguished religious, whose name will lend it the greater value, the Very Rev. F. Lajoie, at present Superior General of the Clerks of St. Viateur. "Every time," wrote he to the Sisters of Providence, "that I had occasion to meet that holy and venerable religious, (Mother Caron) I was always edified by her words, her devotion to the poor and unfortunate of every sort, her boundless confidence in Divine Providence, her gracious manner, wherein courtesy was united with religious simplicity. Humility always seemed to be her favorite virtue. I had often heard her spoken of, by her devoted daughters, and so had occasion to observe how fully she had succeeded in gaining their esteem and confidence. Her words and examples had always seemed to have the most beneficial effect upon her Sisters, and greatly influenced them. I am persuaded that that great zeal for works of charity, and that devotion to the poor, the afflicted, the sick and the orphans which have always distinguished the Sisters of Providence, were, in great measure due to the example of self-sacrifice so constantly shown by Mother Caron to her Sisters. For, did she not always claim as her share whatever in charitable work might be lowest, most difficult, or most painful? A word from her mouth, which often took the form of a pleasant jest, sufficed to lend wings to the youngest and to stimulate the ever increasing zeal of the oldest. Mother Caron's piety was remarkable. It was

a pleasure to watch that excellent friend of God at prayer. She appeared to address Him with the most filial abandonment and with the simplicity of a child. It was then apparent to every one that she loved God with her whole heart and soul. It was undoubtedly from that love of God and abandonment to His Divine Providence, that she drew her charity and devotion to the afflicted. She was also remarkable for her spirit of poverty, and those who have lived in her society must have many edifying stories to tell in that connection. I have always considered Mother Caron a saint. I have no doubt whatever that she is already enjoying in heaven the reward of her great charity. During her long life of self-immolation, she was ever a beautiful example to her companions and the dear daughters whom she so much loved. She will be a powerful protectress for her Community and its works, which have become so numerous. United in heaven with the devoted founders of the Providence, the Bourget, the Prince, the Truteau, as also with your saintly and revered Mother Gamelin, and with so many generous fellow reapers in the harvest of charity, she will pray with them for the children whom she has left on earth, and for the prosperity of the work dear to her maternal heart, the *Community of Providence*. Be consoled therefore, my beloved daughters, for her departure from here below. Continue to venerate her, to preserve long and sacredly the memory of her virtues; and strive to walk always in her footsteps. Then, God will

bless you and all your works. As in the past, difficulties will not be wanting; but success will crown your generous efforts your zeal and devotion to the afflicted, the disinherited of earth."

Such tributes can be in no way surprising to such readers as have taken the trouble to follow this narrative so far. It was only just, that in the venerated Mother Caron should be applauded the admirable Daughter of Charity and Servant of the Poor; just, also, that in her and with her, beside her open grave, homage should be rendered to the work with which for forty-five years she had been identified, and which is no other than that of Providence. For this last reason, it must be both consoling and encouraging no less than edifying, as may well be believed, for the daughters of Providence to read the expression of sympathy and the tributes of respect paid to Mother Caron on the occasion of her death, by the sister communities of Montreal.

One of the most remarkable in every respect, of the religious with whom Mother Caron was brought into contact, was assuredly the much honored and revered Mother Seraphine, first Prioress of the Carmelites in Canada, whose most edifying biography has just been published. (\*) When the Carmelites arrived

---

(\*) *Vie de Mère Séraphine, première prieure du Carmel en Canada.*— "Life of Mother Seraphine, First Prioress of Carmel in Canada," which was to appear at about the same time as this biography. (Author's note).

in Montreal, May 8th, 1875, it was precisely Mother Caron, who, with two nuns of the Hôtel-Dieu, was sent by Bishop Bourget to meet them, and who bade them welcome at the railway Station. The two venerable Mothers later maintained their relations with each other, which inspired mutual confidence and esteem. "Mother Caron," declared Mother Seraphine, "is truly the perfect type of the Sister of Charity. Her soul is indeed a kindred soul to that of St. Vincent de Paul. She continually reminds one of that incomparable friend of the poor and the unfortunate."—"Oh," cried she, upon another occasion, just after having had an interview with Mother Caron, "is not the Mother General of the Providence, the true daughter of Bishop Bourget!" And she went on to explain that what charmed her in the saintly Superior was "that beautiful simplicity, that candor, which lent to her clear countenance an air of innocence, that strikes all who approach her." And with what evangelical simplicity," she added, "so much tact, such perception and an almost supernatural sagacity in judging of persons and things, at once seizing and embracing every side of the most complex questions, and discovering with unerring eye the best means of dealing with them."

"Her love for the poor", wrote another Carmelite shortly after her death, "almost amounted to worship; and it seemed to be the culminating point from which shone forth all other virtues. When any one spoke of the poor, Mother Caron's face lightened up, her eyes

shone, and it could be plainly seen that there was the passion of her heart. Her work remains to prove it, and as an illustration of the superior intelligence and eminent virtue of a woman who is undoubtedly one of the glories of Canada.'

The testimony of the Carmelites, so austere and so wise in the things of the spirit, was followed by that of the pious daughters of the Venerable Marguerite Bourgeoys and those of the Venerable Mother d'Youville. "Some of our older religious," wrote a Superior of the Congregation de Notre-Dame, "who are now themselves dead, had intimate and particular relations with Mother Caron. They were familiar with all the facts relating to the precious qualities of that saintly Mother, and their esteem and veneration for her have remained indelibly impressed upon us. Even those of our Sisters who have met her only in passing, can testify to her remarkable affability, her modesty, her deep humility and her charity towards the poor and the orphan. How much good she has done not only in our city, but elsewhere, during half a century of labor and devotion to the relief of all who are unfortunate! For that long life, so well spent in His service, God has without doubt reserved for her a crown of glory, which she is now enjoying." The Superior of the Gray Nuns of Montreal wrote on her part: "The memory which has been left to us of the perfect charity and disinterestedness of Mother Caron, is still living amongst all who knew her." But the



daughters of Mother d'Youville, of the house of Ottawa, founded by the saintly Mother Bruyère, a cousin and former pupil of Mother Caron, February 20th, 1845, were more closely in touch with our heroine. As early as 1852, we read in the annals of the Gray Nuns of Ottawa, that there was "union of prayers and good works between the two Superiors and the two Communities," and in the following year Mother Caron made a visit to Bytown,—the former name of Ottawa— which, as the annals declare, was the occasion of great pleasure and edification. "Sister Caron is a true mother to us," they wrote, "she is so kind, so obliging, so charitable, that we have recourse to her with the greatest confidence." On the death of Mother Bruyère, in June, 1876, Mother Caron paid a visit to her deeply afflicted daughters, and consoled them as far as possible. She was long remembered there. "Mother Caron has always been highly venerated amongst us," wrote the Superior of the Sussex Street House, "because of her close union with our dear and much lamented Mother Bruyère, who so often spoke of her and with such high praise."

Mention has been previously made, as it may be remembered, in the chapters concerning Mother Caron's visits to the West, of the particularly affectionate relations existing between the Sisters of Providence and the various communities that sprang from the apostolic mind and magnanimous heart of Bishop Bourget; such as, for instance, the Daughters of St.

Anne, and the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. In 1891, the Superior at Lachine wrote to the Providence: "The older Sisters and the officers of our Community have always held good Mother Caron in great esteem.— The religious virtues, so conspicuous in her, are recalled with the highest praise; her charity, so compassionate to all miseries: her cordial and maternal hospitality, her wise and prudent direction, her rare talent for administration, her tact in giving good advice. In a word, it seems as if no eulogy could be denied to her sweet and holy memory." The Sisters of the Holy Names also preserved the happiest remembrance of the saintly Superior of the Providence, with whom under a variety of circumstances they had been brought into contact. "I am anxious to have a share in your very natural sorrow," Mother Mary Stanislaus, the former Superior of the Hochelaga house, wrote from Longueuil to Mother Mary Godfrey, Superior General of Providence, on the day following the death of Mother Caron. "It is a great loss for your Community, of which she was one of the most distinguished members. She has had a glorious career; nor can it be doubted that she is now enjoying her reward. From that point of view, the beloved dead is happier than we, who still weep amidst the sorrow and sadness of this poor life. I do not mean, however, that we should not mourn for her, nor shed tears beside her grave for a loss that must be deeply felt. But I realize that she is not to be pitied, and that we

can all find motives for consolation in our sorrow, by the remembrance of her holy life and the certainty of the happiness by which she is already crowned." Nor was Mother John the Baptist, actual Superior at Hochelaga, less explicit: "It is with the most lively sorrow that I have heard," she wrote, "of the death of your beloved Mother Caron,—of that venerated Foundress, who has always been the soul of your great work. It is true that her long and beautiful career, so richly dowered, has long since won for her an unquestionable right to the heavenly inheritance, but it is sad to see those whom we love, our advisers and our models, falling around us, so that poor human Nature is tempted, at first, to think only of our own sorrow. Even now, I seem to see Mother Caron as the happy guest at the marriage feast of the Lamb, as the faithful Spouse, resting on the breast of Jesus, whom she so devotedly loved and so constantly served in the person of His poor, as a protectress in heaven for your dear Institute."

The other Communities of Montreal also expressed upon her death similar sentiments and warmest sympathy. "It is true," wrote Mother Sarens, Superior of the Sacred Heart, Sault-au-Récollet, "that you no longer enjoy her presence; but the influence of her spirit and example will be no less efficacious than it has been in the past, now that you can count a protectress the more in heaven."—"We can readily understand," wrote the Sisters of the Precious Blood, who were

then at Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, near Montreal, "the deep grief which that painful trial has brought to the hearts of your Community. We beg you to accept our sincere condolence, with the assurance of our ardent supplications to the Blood of Our beloved Saviour that that beautiful soul may be refreshed and inundated eternally with its living streams."—"Accept our most sincere sympathy," wrote the Mother Provincial of the Good Shepherd nuns, Mother St. Alphonsus Linguori, "and believe that we shall make it a duty to pray for the venerated deceased. Though we feel assured that she is already in possession of that beautiful crown, won by her long career of devotedness and her saintly life. No matter, she shall have our prayers, as she has our regrets."—"Accept our most sincere sympathy," wrote the Superior of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, Saint-Laurent, near Montreal, Mother Mary of St. Basil, "for the loss with which you have just met. You have one more protectress in heaven. Her intercession will be most helpful to you. We feel tempted to pray to her for ourselves. At eighty years of age life must necessarily be a burden and death very sweet. There is much reason to believe that the passage from time to eternity of that soul laden with merits was the truest happiness for her, though it caused so deep a wound to your hearts..."

Assuredly the wound was deep, and it was not without reason that the various communities rivalled each other, by their delicate attentions in striving

to console the Sisters of Providence. Not only did such expressions of sympathy reach them from the different religious houses of the vast Archdiocese of Montreal, but also came from elsewhere. We give here a list thereof, and shall conclude this chapter with some extracts therefrom. Never was a more precious garland of tender and dignified remembrance, laid upon a grave.

From Sister St. Helen, Assistant of the Sisters of Charity of Quebec : " It is with the most cordial sympathy that we share the heartfelt grief that is at this moment afflicting your Community. Whilst hoping that the lamented Mother Caron is already in the enjoyment of the rewards merited by her forty-six years of religious life, entirely consecrated to charity, we cannot fail to offer our humble suffrages in favor of her holy soul. May that new protectress from the heights of heaven send down the choicest blessings on all those who were dear to her...."

From Sister St. Zephyrin, Superioress of the Hospital of the Sacred Heart, Quebec : " I hasten to express to all your religious family the assurance of the fraternal and affectionate sympathy with which we share in your sorrow. As you have declared, Mother Caron was a relic, which you loved to preserve. She was also a soul enriched with merits, whom the Divine Spouse was longing to call to Himself. No doubt the disappearance of the older members from a Community makes a void which is not easily filled. But the

memory of her edifying virtues, and the consideration of what they have won for her in heaven, should be our consolation."

From Sister Mary of the Cross, Assistant of the Sisters of Sillery, Quebec: "God, in crowning the merits of His faithful servant, has given to your noble Institute another protectress in heaven. The charity and devotedness which she practiced here below towards the unfortunate must certainly give her a great intercessory power over the Heart of Jesus. No doubt she will make use of that power for the benefit of her zealous co-laborers, whom she has left after her to continue the holy and beautiful work, in the founding of which she lent so material an assistance."

From Sister St. Louis, Superior of the Asylum of the Good Shepherd, Quebec: "We have learned with sorrow of the loss which you have just sustained in the person of your good and venerated Mother Caron, one of the foundresses of your house. Knowing the works, to which she so largely contributed, we can better appreciate the good she has accomplished. After a long and saint-like career, she has gone to heaven, laden with merits, as with years..."

From Sister Archambault, Superior of the Hotel Dieu of St. Hyacinthe: "Death has come to claim a new victim from your midst, and this time it is a Foundress, who has bequeathed to your beautiful Community the example of a true Sister of Providence."

From Sister Marie du Bon Pasteur, Superior of the Presentation Sisters of St. Hyacinthe : "Mother Caron was dear to you by many titles. It is sad to see the disappearance of these precious lives to which are attached the earliest memories of your Institute, those venerated elders of the Community whose lives were one long act of charity and self sacrifice. Can we complain that God has plucked the ripened fruit, called the faithful servant to her reward ! In these sad circumstances, we are more deeply conscious than ever of the bond that unites our religious families...."

From Sister Aimée de Ste-Marie, Secretary of the Sisters of the Precious Blood, St. Hyacinthe : " Many are the supplications that have gone up to heaven for your intention since we heard the sad news. Our dear Mother Caouette loved your excellent and saintly Mother Caron. Therefore she is doubly and most sincerely a sharer in your sorrow. As a mark of respect to her memory we will give her a share in the suffrages which are daily offered for our departed Sisters, asking the Blood of Jesus to regenerate her fully, should she still be in debt ...."

From the Sisters of the Assumption of Nicolet : " We will send up to the throne of mercy, in union with you and under the eye of God, our most fervent prayers for the repose of the soul of your good Mother Caron. Heaven is the reward of her virtues, and the sacrifices she has made for good. The glory of your cherished Mother will be then very great and her in-

fluence very powerful in favor of your holy Community....."

From Sister Mary Edward, Superior of the House of Providence in Kingston: "I have just returned from the Missions and find awaiting me your letter announcing the death of our much esteemed and venerated Mother Caron. Although my condolence may appear a trifle behind-time, it is nevertheless most heartfelt, and I beg of you to accept my sincere sympathy and that of our little Community. Truly, dear reverend Mother, it grieves me when I recall the many zealous laborers of whom death has robbed your Community during the last year; and few have left a more noble record than our saintly Mother. We can feel that her good works are crowned in that world of peace which she has gained by her fidelity in the duties confided to her care, and where, we trust, she has ere this joined the other holy members of your Community. It is consoling to know that your dear Sisters are increasing in heaven...."

Naturally, besides these letters so full of delicate sympathy, we have read many others which we are compelled to omit. To the Mother House came many from the daughter houses. We are unable to reproduce them here, with but a single exception and all must agree that this particular epistle deserves to come forth from the family archives for the edification of the future phalanxes of religious. It is dated the 21st



August, 1888, and addressed by the Sisters of Providence of Vancouver, (Province of the Sacred Heart,) to the Superior General of the Montreal Sisters. "Reverend Mother and very dear Sisters,—Once more a victim, and such a victim this time!.. It seems as if Our Lord wished to snatch from us all that is dearest. Ah, how the heart bleeds from such wounds as this! And what an effort is required, in such painful circumstances, to bow beneath the hand that strikes. And yet, resting upon the Heart of Jesus, the wounded and stricken soul finds strength to pronounce the *fiat* of resignation. May the Divine Spouse of our souls take the place of those legitimate affections which He withdraws from us. Although our venerated Mother Caron was no longer able to fill any other office than that of prayer and suffering, still it was a consolation for us to know that she existed, that she was praying and immolating herself for us. Dear Mother Foundress, what did she leave undone, for us, severally and individually! What charity, what devotion, what forgetfulness of self. Her humility led her to become the servant of everybody. Is it impossible to imagine virtue more solid or more lovable?... Oh, what a cross her death is to our Institute! But how sweet it must have been to our sainted Mother to exchange this valley of tears for her true Country, where she must have received a paternal welcome from our Father St. Vincent de Paul and the other good friends whom we can already count there above....."

Surely, there could not have been found a better expression with which to conclude this "Life of Mother Caron." It has been a particular pleasure to us to borrow it from the Sisters of Providence themselves. It is well said; after such a life Mother Caron must, indeed, have met with a warm welcome up in heaven from St. Vincent de Paul and the other friends of charity. And so we believe, from the very depths of our soul. So that is why this life must remain at once an example and an inspiration to every one. May we imitate that example; may we turn that strength to good account; so, that on the day of solemn retribution we too, may hear the consoling words: "Come ye blessed of My Father, for I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat, I was naked, and ye clothed me, I was afflicted and you consoled me.... Come, for yours is the Kingdom of heaven."

THE END

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

PREFACE.....7

### CHAPTER I

1808—1826

BIRTH AND YOUTH OF MOTHER CARON. . . . . 13

Canadian families;—birth at Rivière-du-Loup;—the Caron family;—early years of Mother Caron;—Miss Burroughs' school;—the trials of poverty;—the youthful Emmelie becomes a worker in straw;—Mlle Angele, her cousin.

### CHAPTER II

1826—1843

MOTHER CARON'S LIFE IN THE WORLD. . . . . 19

She does not at first think of becoming a religious, but is gradually being prepared;—becomes a school-mistress for her cousin, Father Thomas Caron, pastor at Saint-Esprit;—the mission of *second mothers*;—Emmelie's success in teaching;—her Catechism lessons and singing classes;—she loves to give;—she deserves and gains general confidence;—her kindness of heart to *her* children, their gratitude;—at St. Vincent de Paul and St. Martin;—prayer and self-sacrifice.

## CHAPTER III

1843

MOTHER CARON TAKES THE HABIT. . . . . 26

The beginnings of the Providence ; — Madame Gamelin ; — Mgr. Bourget, his appeal ; — Emmelie Caron hears that appeal ; — probation before the final decision, at thirty-five years of age ; — March 25th, 1843 ; — Mgr. Bourget's far-sightedness ; — they leave the *yellow house* ; — the Asylum ; — the spirit of the *yellow house* and of the Institute.

## CHAPTER IV

1843 — 1844

MOTHER CARON'S NOVITIATE. . . . . 34

The spirit of Christianity ; — the example of Jesus ; — the acceptance of the chalice ; — the trials of a novitiate which is in its inception ; — collecting from house to house ; — Canon Prince and Mgr. Bourget ; — Sister Caron's virtue and influence ; — her labors, her spirit of faith, her obedience.

## CHAPTER V

1844

MOTHER CARON'S PROFESSION. . . . . 40

A summarized account of the ceremony ; — an exquisite picture ; — the ladies of honor ; — canonical erection ; — first profession ; — Mgr. Bourget's *pastoral* ; — importance of the episcopal pronouncement, on that

occasion ;— the 29th day of March, 1844, for Sister Caron and how she found herself prepared therefore ; —God was henceforth the portion of her inheritance.

## CHAPTER VI

1844—1849

SISTER CARON AS TREASURER. . . . . 46

The day after profession ;— reading of the Rules ; — the Sister Treasurer ; — what she should be ; — how Sister Caron carried out that programme ; — her relations with those whom she governed ; — her good and beautiful qualities appreciated on the outside ; — her generosity ; — her prudence ; — her success.

## CHAPTER VII

1849—1851

SISTER CARON SUPERIOR AT ST. ELIZABETH . . . . . 52

The foundations in the missions ; — at St. Elizabeth ; — the good people of that locality fear expense ; — Sister Caron wins them over ; — the *yellow house* of St. Elizabeth ; — the Superior's kindly dealings ; — a visit to St. Elizabeth in 1908 ; — Sister Caron's works ; — an unfortunate lunatic, a poor idiot, a beggar, sick and old such were the "lords and masters" of the Sisters ; — works of charity and the training of children ; — Sister Caron gives the example ; — how much she was loved and revered ; — house to house visitation ; — an original demonstration ; — Sister Caron succeeds Mother Gamelin who is just dead, Oct. 7th, 1851.

## CHAPTER VIII

1851—1858

MOTHER CARON, SUPERIOR AT THE MOTHER HOUSE. . . .62

A heavy charge ; — anecdote of Pius X ; — general sympathy ; — her light no longer under the bushel ; — her beautiful qualities ; — the fire of 1852 ; — the Providence, standing in the midst of ruins ; — Mgr. Bourget sorely tried ; — various incidents of the conflagration ; — letter of Mgr. Bourget ; — the Hospice of St. Jerome Emilianus ; — the Providence, house of God ; — the Sisters and the cholera of 1854 ; — administration of Mother Caron ; — new foundations ; — that of Chili ; — that of Vancouver ; — that of the Deaf Mutes ; — Mother Caron's zeal ; — Mother Caron no longer Superior ; — her last advice ; — her counsels to the novices ; — she is sent to St. Vincent de Paul.

## CHAPTER IX

1858—1866

MOTHER CARON, SUPERIOR AT ST. VINCENT DE PAUL. . . .78

St. Vincent, its appearance ; — St. Vincent, fifty years ago ; — Father Mercier's donation, 1845 ; — *note* upon Ile Jesus and the Auclair family ; — the ladies of the Sacred Heart ; — how the Sisters of Providence came to St. Vincent ; — Mother Caron is named first Superior ; — her arrival ; — the difficulties of the beginning ; — the pastor, Father Lavallée, and Father Thomas Caron ; — influential friends ; — the first poor ; — Mother Caron's labors ; — prayer for benefactors ; — Ladies of Charity

a sewing room ;— the Bazaar of 1860 ;— collecting at Rivière-du-Loup ;— the collection, upon the occasion of Bishop Bourget's pastoral visits ;— the Convent is sold to the government ;— moving and getting settled in new quarters ;— Mother Caron and the juvenile delinquents ;— the fire of 1864 ;— her works ;— the story of *Céleste* ;— a school of Domestic Economy ;— Mother Caron's self sacrifice ;— what was accomplished at St. Vincent de Paul under Mother Caron's management ;— the Convent of St. Vincent de Paul in 1908.

## CHAPTER X

1866 — 1872

MOTHER CARON, ASSISTANT GENERAL . . . . . 93

A significant expression ;— departure from Saint-Vincent-de-Paul ;— regrets ;— foundation of the generalship ;— responsibility of the governing Sisters ;— functions of the Assistant General ;— visits to the patrons of the poor ;— she mends broken glasses ;— she converts the sick ;— Mr. Olivier Berthelet and Mrs. Nowlan ;— advice to those on mission ;— the work for Bazaars ;— a brief stay at the mission of Laprairie ;— the 25th July, 1872 ;— Mother Caron is made Superior General.

## CHAPTER XI

1872 — 1878

MOTHER CARON, SUPERIOR GENERAL :

a) *At the Distant Missions*. . . . . 102

Those composing the household of the Providence

in 1872;— Mother Caron accepts the task;— she is received with joy;— Bishop Bourget's words;— importance of such encouragement;— the difficulties of the distant missions;— how they may be obviated: by the novitiate in common and the visits of General Superior;— departure for her visits to the West;— difficulties of her journey;— various incidents;— at the Missions of St. Ignace, in the Rocky Mountains;— improvement in the financial situation;— foundation of the Hospital in Missoula;— Mother Caron spends the Winter in the West, she breaks her arm;— she writes to Montreal;— Golden Jubilee of Mgr. Bourget;— at the mission of Vancouver, April, 1873;— her holy joy at the success of the work;— historical details;— she decides upon a new building;— the *Retreat*, the school of devotedness (anecdote of Paul Bert);— visit to the missions of that region;— a record to be kept of the passage of the Mother Visitor;— correspondence relating to the Feast of St. Emily, May 30th, 1873;— visit to the Sisters of St. Anne;— reflections on the subject of the Communities founded by Bishop Bourget;— she returns with the Superior of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary;— her unexpected arrival in Montreal;— pious and filial rejoicings, on the next day, October 15th.

## CHAPTER XII

1872 — 1878

MOTHER CARON, SUPERIOR GENERAL:

- b) *Government of the Institute in its Centre of Action...* 123  
The brain that thinks and the heart that vivifies;



—the action of Mother Caron ; — the work of the insane ; — the work of the Cathedral ; — visit to the horses in the vicinity of Montreal and in Vermont ; — Mgr. Bourget resigns his See ; — Mother Caron's homage to the venerated prelate ; — her delicacy towards Mgr. Fabre ; — twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of Mother Gamelin ; — burning of the Convent of St. Elizabeth ; — Mother Caron in a law suit ; — Mgr. Conroy and the death of Pius IX ; — the fiftieth anniversary of the 4th March, 1828 ; — the thirty-fifth of the taking of the habit by the Foundresses ; — New Year's Day, 1878 ; — the last circular letter ; — the 23rd July, 1878, a new Superior General is elected.

## CHAPTER XIII

## MOTHER CARON AND THE PRACTICE OF RELIGIOUS VIRTUES :

a) *Her Humility*. . . . . 144

The lesser history side by side with the great ; — a traveller on the summit of a mountain ; — what humility is, especially for those in office ; — horror of vanity ; — admiration of Madam Masson, Seigneuresse de Terrebonne for the Superior ; — Mother Caron kisses the ground ; — she is humiliated by Father Lavallée ; — she is distrustful of her own success ; — a handsome carriage ; — her arrival in a Convent ; — she gleans, in attics ; — how she commands ; — how she speaks of herself ; — to ask for alms ; — her humility towards her Sisters ; — opening of one house and closing of another ; — how she received reproaches ; — opinion of Mgr. Larocque ; — his influence ; — his lessons to the novices ; — she measures life by the measuring-rod of eternity.

## CHAPTER XIV

## MOTHER CARON AND THE PRACTICE OF RELIGIOUS VIRTUES

b) *Her Confidence in God*. . . . . 159

*Be it done unto me according to thy word*;—her exercises of piety;—a retreat, beside a bed of sickness;—the thought of God, while on a journey;—confidence in Providence, some instances thereof;—a circular, 1876;—how her confidence is rewarded;—several examples;—her peace and security;—extraordinary happenings;—cures;—power of her intercession united with that of Bishop Bourget;—the mother of a family;—several occurrences at St. Elizabeth;—graces of conversion;—prophecies;—her respect for priests;—the work of her life was built upon humility and confidence in God.

## CHAPTER XV

## MOTHER CARON AND THE PRACTICE OF RELIGIOUS VIRTUES

c) *Her Religious Spirit*. . . . . 174

What is understood in this chapter by the religious spirit;—her regularity and her obedience;—her respect for the Constitutions;—the testimony of her Sisters;—the cost of obedience;—its importance, in those who govern;—her simplicity;—discourse to the novices: the Divine Spouse, St. Vincent de Paul and Mgr. Bourget;—advice to religious;—her practice of beautiful simplicity;—several instances;—her manner of writing;—it elicits the admiration of Mr. Chauveau; her love of work;—some examples;—her love of poverty: instances given;—her practice of mortification;—doing her duty;—at table, to be of the same

taste as the cook ;—*scraps* from the old people's table ;— at the *sugaring* parties ;— as to clothing and sleeping ;— what happened to a young Sister who took her bed ;— Mother Caron's pious subterfuges ;— her address to novices (1874) : *take up your Cross!* Mother Caron carried her Cross.

## CHAPTER XVI

MOTHER CARON AND THE PRACTICE OF RELIGIOUS VIRTUES :

d) *Her Charity towards the Poor and the Unfortunate*....188

What was her love for the poor ;— how faith is the basis of charity ;— her idea of the importance of charity to the poor ;— she never refused any one ;— she deprived herself ;— instances given ;— her charity towards the most miserable, and those who are guilty ;— various instances ;— a note concerning the Deaf and Dumb Institute ;— she became the advocate of those who had committed offences against the Community ;— her adoptions : instances given ;— her manner of making collections ;— her well known charity increases her influence a hundredfold ;— with political men ;— her delicacy in the art of giving without humiliating the recipient ;— her charity towards the rich ;— she never put out of their *own class* those whom she assisted ;— testimony of Mgr. Joseph Larocque.

## CHAPTER XVII

MOTHER CARON AND THE PRACTICE OF RELIGIOUS VIRTUES :

e) *Her Charity towards her Cooperators in good works*...206

Another chapter on charity ;— what Mother Caron

was in relation to her Sisters and to the benefactors of the Community ;—the trials of the common life ;—Mother Caron's kind-heartedness towards her Sisters ;—various instances ;—Sisters in the distant missions ;—the novices ;—Mother Caron's words (Retreat of August, 1874) ;—a letter to the Sisters ;—the family spirit ;—extracts from her correspondence ;—on the occasion of the death of Sister Vincent and of Sister Mary Bonsecours ;—address on St. Emily's day (1878) ;—she gives her photograph to the Sisters ;—her gratitude to the benefactors of the Providence ;—an anecdote from the West ;—several young people supported by her ;—letters of thanks to Madame Joliette and to a Superior ;—instances of her delicacy ;—towards Mgr. Prince ;—to mention such details is to detract from them ;—who gives to the poor lends to God.

## CHAPTER XVIII

1878 — 1888

## LAST YEARS OF MOTHER CARON. . . . . 221

Her Retreat ;—touching scene ;—at the St. Janvier Home, Mgr. Bourget ;—at Belœil ;—interesting details ;—at the Mother House ;—her serious illness ;—testimony of Father Antoine of the Oblates ;—a discourse to the young Sisters ;—return to Belœil ;—the *spirit* of the foundation ;—at St. Isidore at Longue Pointe ;—Mother Caron and Sister Zotique ;—touching attentions to the aged Sisters ;—Mother Caron's occupations at St. Isidore ;—she cured the physician ;—her correspondence ;—letter to Mother Amable ;—letter to Sister Michel Ange ;—letter to her cousin, Sister Emily of the Sacred Heart ;—beau-

tiful letter of Mgr. Larocque to Mother Caron ;— paralytic stroke ;— she visits at different houses ;— at the Deaf and Dumb Institute ;— her respect for Superiors ;— her love for the Rule ;— being unable to do anything else, she *knits* ;— she goes to take care of Sister Zotique ;— at the St. Joseph's *Refuge* ;— her last pleasures ;— her last hopes ;— she awaits death.

## CHAPTER XIX

AUGUST 13th 1888

## DEATH OF MOTHER CARON. . . . . 239

The death of the just is precious in the sight of God and also in that of men ;— those who have given edification during life should edify in their death ;— first crisis ;— the lesson given by the dying ;— Sisters vie with each other in tending the dear patient ;— her spirit of prayer ;— dialogue with Sister of the Immaculate Conception ;— a complication ;— Extreme Unction ;— last Viaticum ;— it brings peace ;— from the Asylum to Fullum Street ;— inauguration of the Infirmary ;— example to those who will suffer and die there ;— the 3rd of August, another alarm ;— 7th August, a new crisis ;— the 8th August, Father Caron says Mass for her ;— the evening of the 13th ;— her agony ;— the *Te Deum* ;— she expires ;— the remains are exposed ;— coincidences ;— the newly professed in presence of the dead ;— the funeral ;— in the cemetery at Longue Pointe.

## CHAPTER XX

## TESTIMONIES OF ESTEEM AND VENERATION. . . . . 252

The Christian knows that he will not entirely die, but will go to God;—the Saints still live here below;—tributes to Mother Caron:—from Mgr. Bourget, Mgr. Fabre, the clergy, Mgr. Taché, Mgr. Gravel, the Bishop of Nesqually, Bishop Moreau, Bishop de Goesbriand...;—a parish priest of Montreal, a priest from St. Hyacinthe, a priest from Sherbrooke, a former director, one of the Canons of Montreal, from Father Lajoie;—the Carmelites, the Sisters of the Congregation, the Gray Nuns of Ottawa, the Sisters of St. Anne, the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, the Sisters of the Precious Blood, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, the Sisters of the Holy Cross;—from other dioceses: (from Quebec), the Sisters of Charity, the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, the Sisters of Sillery, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, (from St. Hyacinthe), the Sisters of the Hotel Dieu, the Sisters of the Presentation, the Sisters of the Precious Blood, (from Nicolet), the Sisters of the Assumption, (from Kingston), the Sisters of Providence, and finally, from one of the daughter houses, that of Vancouver, Wash: "she will be welcomed, there above by St. Vincent de Paul and the other good friends of Charity."

