



The *Great* Canadian
Catholic Hospital History Project

Documenting the legacy and contribution of the
Congregations of Religious Women in Canada,
their mission in health care, and the founding and operation of Catholic hospitals.



Projet de la *Grande* Histoire
des hôpitaux catholiques au Canada

Retracer l'héritage et la contribution des
congrégations de religieuses au Canada,
leur mission en matière de soins de santé ainsi que la fondation et l'exploitation des hôpitaux catholiques.

Love Spans the Centuries

Volume 1: 1642-1821

by

Albina Fauteux, SGM

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Albina Fauteux S.G.M.

LOVE SPANS THE CENTURIES

Volume I

1642 - 1821



MERIDIAN PRESS

**LOVE SPANS
THE CENTURIES**

CATHOLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF CANADA
ASSOCIATION CATHOLIQUE CANADIENNE DE LA SANTE



Marguerite d'Youville
1701 - 1771
Tableau by Flore Barrette, S.G.M.

Albina Fauteux S.G.M.

**LOVE SPANS
THE CENTURIES**

Volume I

1642-1821

Origin and development of the Institute of
The Sisters of Charity of Montreal "Grey Nuns"

translated by Antoinette Bezaire, S.G.M.
preface by Marguerite Letourneau, S.G.M., Superior General

CATHOLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF CANADA
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L'HÔPITAL GÉNÉRAL DES SOEURS DE LA CHARITÉ
SOEURS GRISES, Montréal, 1915*

PREFACE

The translation and publication of this volume, a first in a series of four, is the realization of a long-cherished dream. The original text in French, was written in 1915 by Sister Albina Fauteux, S.G.M. Although the author was not identified, archival information testifies to this. Another Grey Nun now gives us access to an English version. I am most grateful to Sister Antoinette Bézaire, S.G.M. for generously undertaking this time-consuming translation task. Her talent, her expertise and her patience provide a greater number of Grey Nuns, lay associates, collaborators and friends, first-hand information on the origin, the development and the enduring focus of the Institute of the Sisters of Charity of Montreal, "Grey Nuns".

This volume begins the story of love at work throughout the centuries. It relates in moving terms the unfolding of a living tradition of servanthood and compassion. Like a well-guarded treasure, it contains the vivid memory of a great woman who dearly loved Christ Jesus and the poor. Each page introduces us to the life and founding spirit of Marguerite d'Youville. The essential elements of her charism, her courage, her mission, her convictions are uncovered. Also disclosed therein are the many challenges encountered by the founding group. Throughout the reading of this

book, one senses the apostolic pulse of Marguerite d'Youville. Yet more, it is possible to fathom the motivating force which marked the beginnings of our Institute totally dedicated to the ministry of charity among the poor.

Marguerite d'Youville's great vision is particularly well documented in this first volume. Open to the creative movement of the Spirit and gifted with a rich charism, she focused on the needy. Motivated by the universal charity of Christ Jesus and a genuine love for the poor, together with three other dedicated women, she embodied a life of service. Initially, Marguerite introduced the poor in her home, then she restored l'Hôpital Général which the Charon Brothers left in shambles. Her mission as she understood it was to manifest to all persons that tremendous charity which has its source in God the Father. In this perspective, she sought to foster values of tenderness, justice and reverence for life throughout its continuum.

This book portrays more specifically the life and powerful vision of Marguerite d'Youville; it reveals how an unbroken line of valiant women first met the challenges of presence to the world and presence to God in a unique social context. Volumes II, III and IV develop further the Youvillian universal love which spanned 250 years.

May every Grey Nun choose to read the book so as to discover anew the legacy of charity left to our Institute. May all those who take time to peruse its pages be moved to embody the challenges of a preferential option for and commitment to the poor.

Marguerite Letourneau p.g.m.

Marguerite Letourneau, S.G.M.
Superior General

1987

PRELIMINARY CHAPTER

Early years of Ville-Marie — Foundation of Hôtel-Dieu and
Congregation of Notre-Dame — Arrival of first Sulpicians.
1642 – 1688

Ville-Marie had only a half century of existence and its population was scarce in number when a group of pious lay people were thinking of founding the General Hospital. Barely more than a thousand persons lived in low, solid houses with thick walls and sloping roofs, scattered along the shore of the St. Lawrence and along St-Paul and Notre-Dame Streets. The plans of the beginning of the city in 1690, reveal two points of interest; Bon Secours chapel and the south end of McGill Street. It did not extend beyond what is known today as rue St-Jacques. For the most part, its houses were arrayed on the hillside which leaned gently towards the river. Those which were erected on the crest of the hills along the shore overlooked the St. Lawrence with, to the north, a deep valley where flowed a stream which has since disappeared under Craig Street. Beyond this valley, the land rose gradually to the very summit of Mont-Royal. At the foot of the mountain, on the present site of the Major Seminary, Father Vachon de Belmont, Sulpician, built around 1685 a fort for the defence of the colony. Between Ville-Marie and the fort were woodlands and newly cleared areas which colonists were preparing for cultivation.

Ville-Marie was only a village; but, similar to a young plant bursting with sap, it foretold what flowers and what fruit it would

one day bear. The Christian spirit which had prompted its foundation had not grown faint. It fermented within, and one could foresee that having been manifested by the flourishing of family and personal virtues, it would give birth to a religious institution. A place where persons seeking perfection and dedication of self would come together in solidarity to gain strength to perform deeds they could not accomplish alone.

Born of the apostolic aspiration of two saintly persons, Father Olier and Mr. de la Dauversière, the Notre-Dame Society of Montreal had adopted their pious plans and worked energetically to realize them. In the mind of these men of God, a new church was soon to flourish in the colony of Montreal, in which purity and charity would be admired. Bringing together within its walls the armies of field and altar, Ville-Marie would be at once a bulwark against barbarism and a beacon from which the light of the Gospel and civilization would emit its powerful rays over the sea of darkness in which so many Indian tribes were being lost.

This project was fraught with difficulties; it required generous persons, with absolute dedication and spirit filled courage. God, who had inspired Father Olier, brought them forth. Paul de Chomedey, Sieur de Maisonneuve, was the instrument which Providence provided for the projected foundation. On May 18, 1642 he landed on the Island of Montreal with forty men, planted a cross in this land still a wilderness and founded the town. For twenty-two years he protected its fragile beginnings with prudence, pushing his efforts and his courage to the point of heroism. When an unmerited disgrace brought about his abrupt withdrawal from the work to which he had dedicated his life, he was nevertheless awarded the crown of glory and he departed with the fond hope that he was leaving Canada a sound beginning.

Three religious communities were assisting the colonists who were busy clearing the land or pushing back the Iroquois aggressors.

The Jesuit Fathers were the first to serve Montreal, and they did so as missionaries. As yet, they had no permanent residence. It

is well known that the first mass in Montreal was celebrated by a Jesuit priest, Father Vimont.

At the time when Mr. de Maisonneuve left Montreal forever, Hôtel-Dieu, the Congregation of Notre-Dame, and the Sulpician Seminary were the only establishments in Ville-Marie. The Hôtel-Dieu cared for the sick and the many wounded in ceaseless warring; the Notre-Dame Congregation was dedicated then, as it is today, to the teaching of youth; finally, the Sulpician Seminary provided spiritual help.

The origin of Hôtel-Dieu intermingled with that of the colony. Jeanne Mance who was its founder, numbered among the early settlers. She was on the ship which brought Maisonneuve to the Island of Montreal. It was she who decked the altar on which the first mass was celebrated on May 18, 1642.

Born about 1606 near Langres in France, Jeanne belonged, as did Maisonneuve, to a prominent family of Champagne. Favored from early childhood with heavenly blessings, she perceived an early call to commit her life to the service of God and neighbor. Having heard of Canada, of the devotedness of Madame de la Peltrie and of the Duchess of Aiguillon towards this colony, a saintly ambition was enkindled in her soul. She resolved to go to Canada. Her life's goal was set. In Paris, she was introduced to the wealthy Madame de Bullion who promised to help her financially and encouraged her to found, for Ville-Marie, a hospital similar to the one in Quebec.

By God's design, at La Rochelle where she was to embark, she met Monsieur de la Dauversière who brought her into his project. De Maisonneuve was about to set sail; Jeanne Mance joined his troops happy to share trials and perils.

In 1643, repeated and more violent attacks of the Iroquois had given rise to many wounded. Jeanne Mance saw in this adversity a providential opportunity to put into action the plan entrusted to her by Madame de Bullion. Assisted by this noteworthy benefactor and supported by de Maisonneuve, she had built in an open

area in the very centre of Ville-Marie a modest building which was called Hôtel-Dieu.

The place had to be staffed with a religious family who would dedicate its energies to relieving the sick. Mr. de la Dauversière was to provide it. In La Flèche, he had founded an institute of hospitallers expressly destined for the Island of Montreal. Towards 1658, Miss Mance, having lost the use of her right hand in an accident, went to France to seek healing. The favor was granted February 2, 1659 by touching the heart of Father Olier who had died a saintly death two years earlier. This trip proved useful to her undertaking. She went to La Flèche in order to solicit hospitallers for Hôtel-Dieu in Ville-Marie. Mr. de la Dauversière needed little prodding and towards the end of the year, Jeanne Mance returned to Montreal in the company of Sisters Moreau de Brésole, Catherine Macé, and Marie Maillet. In settling these valiant recruits in her humble hospital which through fifteen years had witnessed her works and wakeful watchings, the heroic woman earnestly thanked God and could now say with confidence: "This work shall never perish".

A short distance from Hôtel-Dieu, facing its enclosure, was an old stone hovel which had served as a stable and the upper part of which had been converted into a dove-cot. It is in the destitution and darkness of this hut, touching image of the stable of Bethlehem, that had been born two years earlier, in 1657, the Congregation of Notre-Dame.

Champagne had the honor of giving Ville-Marie the woman of worth who became mother and foundress of this group of Sisters and Christian educators.

Marie-Marguerite Bourgeoys was born at Troyes, April 17, 1620. Energetic and pious even as a child, she gathered her friends together to speak of God and to incite them to do good. Her zeal, her communicative devotion made manifest by a vivid intelligence and a sound judgment, grew with the years and earned her an irresistible influence upon the youth of her time. Impressed by such beautiful qualities, a saintly priest of Troyes wished to

entrust her though she was only 22, with the direction of a community he wished to establish for educating young women. The endeavor failed. God had other plans for this privileged person. France was not to be the setting for her mission.

As early as 1653, at the request of Monsieur de Maisonneuve, gifted with supernatural insights, she had resolved to devote herself to Ville-Marie. Affirmed in her plan by an apparition of the Virgin Mary, she left without delay. On November 16, 1653, she arrived in Montreal fully determined to give herself without reserve to God's biddings.

Four years went by before she could open a school. The day finally arrived when on April 30, 1657, she welcomed to the poor stable near Hôtel-Dieu, her first students and began the humble and noble ministry of teaching which in the future was to be a successful enterprise. Two years later, the modest stable opened its doors to four helpers, whom Mother Bourgeoys had recruited in France: Sisters Crolo, Raisin, Châtel and Hioux. Thus began in the Church, the Congregation of Notre-Dame whose 110 houses in 1915 provided education for some 28,000 young girls.

In the same year, 1657, the Sulpicians settled in Montreal. Father Olier, their founder, had desired to come to Canada himself and to devote his life to Indian missions. It was his followers who were to realize the dream of the founder.

As early as 1650, the colony of Montreal had suffered from the lack of priests. The Jesuits who until then had ministered to the spiritual needs of the colonists, could no longer continue this service without detriment to their Indian missions. They therefore asked to be relieved of the service they had been providing to Ville-Marie. It was then that Father Olier urged by de Maisonneuve thought of sending to New France a few members of the priestly association he was founding. After having prayed much and awaited the repeated requests of Montreal's Governor, Father Olier believed in 1657 that the time had come to send gospel laborers into this part of the Lord's vineyard. For this mission, he designated Father Gabriel de Queylus, Father Dominique Galinier, Father

Gabriel Souart and Father François d'Allet. This was to be, so to speak, the last will of the saintly founder. On April 2, he left this land of exile... even before his disciples had set sail for Canada.

The arrival of the new missionaries was greeted with great enthusiasm. Miss Mance offered them shelter at Hôtel-Dieu until their seminary was erected. The salutary influence of these apostles was a source of prosperity and blessing for the colony. Our Institute was to find in them its first support and direction.

Thanks to these religious families, Ville-Marie was abundantly provided with spiritual help: the Word of God was preached, teaching was extensive, care of the sick was assured. What more could the colonist wish? There was, however, a category of people who were without assistance or protection: the infirm and invalids of all ages, including both sexes which privation and the misfortune of war had reduced to premature aging or to untold misery. Inexhaustible in its charity, religion was to bring forth benefactors and open a shelter for the needy.

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

Mr. Charon and his first associates.
1688 – 1692

Around 1671, Father de Queylus had already “conceived the idea of founding a hospice in Ville-Marie where ailing Indians could be treated gratuitously and where the aged who wished to, could retire”.⁽¹⁾ He even planned to make towards it a “first payment of 10,000 pounds”. But another foundation occurred at this time which claimed the dedication of the Sulpicians . . . the establishment of a school for the education of the Indians. Preference was given to the latter and the fund was applied to this establishment which was opened at Gentilly, a small fort situated on the shore of the St.Lawrence between Lachine and Pointe Claire.

A few years later, around 1688, a pious layman, Jean-François Charon, was filled with compassion for the poor, the infirm, and the orphans whose numbers had increased due to the war. He resolved to dedicate his energy and wealth to the service of these unfortunate persons.

Born in Quebec, on September 9, 1654⁽²⁾ he was the son of

(1) Histoire de la colonie française au Canada, Faillon T. 111, pages 279–281.

(2) Dictionnaire généalogique de Tanguay, Vol. 1.

Claude Charon de la Barre, a rich merchant from Blois, and had at an early age, gained knowledge of business. At a date difficult to establish precisely, he settled in Montreal, where in a short time, he acquired a fair fortune. As a young man, François had shown a tender love for the poor and an ardent zeal for works of charity.⁽³⁾ His growing interest for these works, along with his reputation for integrity, soon won him the esteem and confidence of his fellow-citizens. He therefore had no difficulty in winning the interest of wealthy and influential people in the colony towards the project he had in mind.

No sooner was the project made known at the seminary than everyone moved hastily towards its execution. As early as 1688 Father Dollier de Casson, then superior, had promised to give Mr. Charon approximately "9 acres of land along Pointe-à-Callières near the mill of the château"⁽⁴⁾ on condition that the proposed hospital would be built in five years. "If it were not built, or if in the future, the hospital project were to fail, these 9 acres of land would return to the 'Seigneurs' of the Island of Montreal, without any claim being made for buildings or improvements." Afterwards, Father de Casson added three more acres. These donations were legal only after being ratified by the superior general of the Sulpicians who at the time, was Father Tronson. This ratification was received only on March 16, 1692 and the transfer was drawn up on October 23 of the same year.⁽⁵⁾

This transfer was soon followed by another for the same purpose. They were made "without any charge other than to pray

(3) Archives du Séminaire Saint-Sulpice de Montréal.

(4) Separated from the other part of the town by the Saint-Pierre River, this point of land which juts out into the river, is called Pointe-à-Callières after Hector de Callières who was Governor of Montreal 1681-1699. The Château in question is the wooden fort built by Mr. de Maisonneuve shortly after his arrival. This château or fort remained standing until 1682 or 1683 when it was demolished in order to build Mr. Callières' house on the site (Memoirs of Father Dollier de Casson and Sister Morin).

(5) The transfer mentions 10 acres, 9 rods instead of the 9 acres or about, as mentioned in previous documents.

to God for the sanctification of the priests of the seminary".⁽⁶⁾ In 1689, Mr. Charon was able to dispose of 80 acres of land for the low sum of "twelve denarii a year."

The magnanimity of the seminary was exemplary. It sparked in the hearts of the citizens a rivalry of generosity. The poor brought their mite, the wealthy their gold. Some even conceived the desire to give of themselves and became associates of the founder by dedicating their talents and good will. Among these were Pierre Le Ber and J. Fredin. They are mentioned because they were the first to join François Charon and their example opened the way to others. Their association with this new work seems to date back to 1688. In this year, legal documents, sales, contracts, and other papers, carry the three signatures. Excepting these rare documents, no other trace of J. Fredin is to be found in our archives. It is believed he remained connected with the hospital until 1701. At that time, letters of Father Lechassier⁽⁷⁾ reveal that Mr. Fredin had gone to France on hospital business, but that "he did not plan to join Mr. Charon".

The name of Pierre Le Ber on the contrary, awakens the memory of one of the most virtuous French families God ever gave to Ville-Marie. His father, Jacques Le Ber, was born in Pistre, in the diocese of Rouen. The desire to dedicate himself to the founding of Ville-Marie gave him the courage at a very youthful age, to leave his family and his country in order to settle in that town. His unselfishness was visibly blessed. His undertakings prospered. In the person of Jeanne Lemoyne, sister of Charles Lemoyne, he met a spouse worthy of himself by her virtues and her lofty sentiments.⁽⁸⁾ Five children were born to the couple: four boys and one girl. . . . Jeanne, the pious recluse who later was an example of virtue in the colony.

(6) Following a tradition, it is to fulfill this obligation that daily we recited the Salve Regina after the Miserere following the noon meal.

(7) Letter dated March 10 and 21, 1701.

(8) Vie de Mlle Le Ber, p. 2.

It was even the example of his heroic sister which led Pierre Le Ber to embrace a virtuous life and to dedicate himself along with François Charon to the abandoned poor of Ville-Marie. "He proved to be the most zealous and the most constant of Mr. Charon's associates, say the chronicles of the Hôtel-Dieu of Québec. He spent for the establishment of the hospital, the greater part of his considerable wealth". Without committing himself by any religious vow as did thereafter new associates of Mr. Charon, Pierre Le Ber lived a very edifying life in this house. "He remained there as a boarder spending the greater part of his time at works of art, particularly painting. Though he never became famous, he nevertheless is noted for being the first Canadian who liberalized the arts. His preference for religious topics allowed him to exhibit his paintings in many churches. Finally, the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame owe him the portrait of Saint Mother Bourgeoys. Undoubtedly, more capable artists perfected his work but without him, the authentic traits of this heroic woman would be unknown to us".⁽⁹⁾

The memory of Pierre Le Ber remains linked to a monument dear to Canadians. This virtuous citizen had a great devotion to Sainte Anne. Father Dollier having granted him an acre of land in that part of the town still known today as Quartier Sainte Anne, he erected there at his own expense, a sanctuary to the great miracle worker with the intention of making it a place of pilgrimage. The first mass was celebrated there November 17, 1698. In order to ensure the existence of this chapel, he left a legacy to the priests of the seminary so that they would see to its upkeep. The chapel stood until after the conquest, but since it was out of town, it had to be demolished to put an end to profanations by vandals who repeatedly broke doors and windows. When circumstances became more favorable, at the same location, the seminary built the present church destined to perpetuate the devotion to Jesus' grand-mother according to the wish of its early founder.

⁽⁹⁾ Vie de Mlle Le Ber, p. 330.

Pierre Le Ber died on October 2, 1707 with a reputation for holiness, in the thirty-ninth year of his age. He was buried in the crypt of the Brother Hospitallers, but in accordance with his will, his heart was kept in the chapel of the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame where his sister Jeanne Le Ber was living as a recluse.

In his will Le Ber had left to the hospital an annual income of 500 pounds, for the upkeep of three poor persons: a young man in honor of the Child Jesus, two elderly men to honor St Joseph and St Joachim.

We note also that charity and piety were a tradition in the Le Ber family. The following episode is touching evidence of this. Jean Le Ber Duchesne, brother of the above, was a soldier. Mortally wounded in battle at Prairie de la Madeleine where he was in command under the orders of Valrène, against Major Schuyler, he was carried to his father's house. In his dying moments, he wished to give to God in the person of his poor, the supreme proof of his love. This is evident in the document drawn up at his father's request on August 14, 1691, the day following his burial. Responding to his son's desire, Mr. Jacques Le Ber bequeathed in his son's name, "to the destitute of Montreal in the care of Mr. Charon, all the tillable land of Pointe St-Charles — about 35 acres — belonging to Jean, together with the buildings which comprise a house, a granary, a stable and their contents as well as livestock, tools, and equipment and the revenue therefrom".⁽¹⁰⁾

While in Montreal all contributed to this pious enterprise; in Quebec, the bishop and other administrators of the country also favored it. Bishop Saint-Vallier held the only episcopal see then

⁽¹⁰⁾ Donations by Mr. Le Ber to the poor of 35 acres of land at Pointe St-Charles, on August 14, 1691. This donation was accepted by Father Guyotte, a priest from the Sulpician seminary and pastor of the parish. It was stipulated in the contract that if the plan for the hospital did not materialize, the revenue from the farm would be utilized in perpetuity for the relief of the poor of Ville-Marie.

existing in New France. Monseigneur de Laval, the great and holy apostle who was the first bishop of Canada, was still living.⁽¹¹⁾ Having resigned in 1684 he was replaced by Bishop de Saint-Vallier. Seeking solitude and sacrifice, exhausted and ill, he considered himself unfit to govern his church, he nevertheless wished to continue serving it in prayer, penance and austerity before God. As to Bishop de Saint-Vallier, thanks to his influence with the court, Letters patent had been obtained from Louis XIV in 1692 to establish a hospital in Quebec. These letters authorized the opening of similar houses at any place in the colony where they were judged necessary. Taking advantage of this implicit approval, Mr. Charon and his associates immediately began to build the hospital.

The same year, 1692, the Jesuits and the Recollets settled in Montreal. The Jesuits built their first house on the north end of rue Notre-Dame between where are today St-Gabriel and Gosford facing Jacques-Cartier Square. The Recollets settled on the south end of rue Notre-Dame, between Saint-Pierre and Mc Gill facing rue Dollard.

(11) Monseigneur de Laval died May 6, 1708.

CHAPTER II

The General Hospital — Installation of the future
Hospitallers — First attempts at community living —
Approval by Bishop de Saint Vallier —
Letters patent of Louis XIV — Acquisitions.
1692 - 1696

The General Hospital was erected on Pointe-à-Callières where fifty years earlier, our forefathers had built an altar and where the first homes in Ville-Marie had appeared. It occupied the area bordered today by du Port, Commune and Normant Streets, and d'Youville Square.⁽¹⁾

This three-storey building in rough stone was 90 ft. long and 30 ft. wide. At the west end were two wings each 30 ft. square. One faced the mountain, the other the St. Lawrence river hardly a hundred steps away. In front, and beyond the Saint-Pierre River which touched the edge of the property, one could see through the trees, the dwellings of the young city. Without any doubt, as he built his hospital, Mr. Charon already had in mind the community of hospitallers which he would eventually found. The layout indicated that the house was destined for religious.

⁽¹⁾ With the exception of the church which was demolished in 1872 to allow the extension of rue Saint-Pierre the other parts of the building, destroyed by fire in 1765 and immediately rebuilt, still stand and are used for storage.

On the first floor were the kitchen, pantries, and the dining room for the brothers. The upper floors housed their prayer room and about twenty cells. On each floor, large well-lighted and well-ventilated rooms were for the poor. A door was intended to connect the second floor to the chapel which would be built later. It would give easy access either for religious functions or for private visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

Actively pursued, the construction work was completed in less than two years and the hospital could be occupied by mid 1694. This at least, is what may be concluded from records of admittance. The first name which appears is dated June 1, 1694. It is that of Pierre Chevalier, a forty-year old mentally handicapped person who lived there until the age of approximately 82 and died September 15, 1736.

A few months later, on October 2, a pastoral letter from Bishop de Saint-Vallier confirmed and encouraged this new work. We reproduce here, the passage in which appears clearly the plan of Mr. Charon and his associates.

“After having duly considered all things, and knowing that one of the greatest things we can do for the Church is to establish a hospital or house of charity in Ville-Marie where the poor can be cared for, and considering also, how Our Lord blessed the beginnings of this work, wishing to encourage their zeal and to contribute with all our might to their pious plan, we have approved and do approve the foundation of François Charon and of his present and future associates, permitting them to live together as brothers hospitallers — to elect a superior and other officials of said house according to canonical regulations, observing the rule which they have deemed suitable for themselves, and which will be approved by me and my successors. To make them aware that Our Lord’s blessing will be upon them and upon the poor they will receive, we permit them to have Mass in the most appropriate place in their house where they may keep the Blessed Sacrament in a tabernacle until they can build a separate chapel; and we permit them to receive the priests which they may obtain from France to serve their house and their poor even though they

do not belong to the community of the Sulpician priests established in Ville-Marie and Lords of the Island of Montreal who have approved this establishment and have contributed the land by free donation, providing the brothers are qualified to carry out their obligations; and to facilitate the observance of the rule by the brothers and their poor, we permit the building of a small bell-tower from which all may be summoned to common exercises. . . .”

Thanks to the credit of Bishop de Saint-Vallier, thanks to the help of the Count de Frontenac and of the Intendant Bochart de Champigny, the hospitallers at this time, saw their foundation approved by the court. The Letters patent of Louis XIV are dated April 15, 1694. Registered at Quebec, October 14, these letters were received a few days later.

This legal assurance given to Brother Charon of the future of his society, authorized him in these very days of October to purchase from Louis Compte-Dupré a 500 acre farm north of the Saint-Pierre River. Since the owner also wished to contribute to this charitable enterprise, he conceded the land for the modest sum of 900 pounds.

Nothing can better reveal the unselfishness and the integrity of the founder’s intention than the few lines heading the record book which contained the deeds of the various properties acquired for the hospital. Dated December 1, 1694, they read as follows:

“Since in all enterprises undertaken purely for the glory of God, we must account to Him for every act, it is reasonable that this book should list the property holdings of the hospitallers beginning with a humble prayer to the divine majesty that these may never be used for any other purpose than for the relief of the poor and to inspire the brothers to consider themselves as unworthy servants of Jesus Christ who must limit themselves to simple necessities of this life so as to be in a better position to serve the poor”.

The following year, Mr. Charon was busy building the proposed church. This church, however, would be completed only

nine years later (1695–1704) but there was no delay in celebrating the Sacred Mysteries in it.

By today's standards, this temple would appear very modest, built as it was, of rough stone like the rest of the building from which it hardly stood out. According to Charlevoix, it deserved admiration. "The house is beautiful" says he, "and the chapel is very pretty".⁽²⁾

Light and air penetrated through four arched windows set two by two in the lateral walls. At the entrance was a large door, also arched, above which were three regular windows and a small circular one. The roof had sharp inclines. A small bell-tower with a steel bell weighing barely two pounds topped the building and gave it the appearance of a sacred place. Judging by its weight, its toll must have been weak and timid but it sufficed, they say, to call to prayer the occupants of the house and even people of the neighborhood. It would appear that the new church was given the name of Holy Cross since from its early beginning, the feasts of the Finding and the Exaltation of the Holy Cross were celebrated there and the brothers soon adopted these two feasts as the main ones of the Institute.

The church was yet unfinished when Mr. Charon had a windmill built in the hospital compound, as well as a brewery. Soon these many costly enterprises astounded the persons who were most dedicated to the hospital. But the founder saw in these both a resource and a saving for the future of his establishment so he actively pursued the construction work. By 1705, the windmill was completed and the Council of Quebec authorized the brothers to grind grain for the king's troops along with the crop produced on farms belonging to the hospital.

Having seen with what zeal Mr. Charon assured the material prosperity of his house and opened for the sake of Jesus Christ an abode of love, let us consider how he organized his society

⁽²⁾ Histoire de la Nouvelle France — Charlevoix, T. III p. 168.

from within. It is however fitting to first distinguish between two distinct works within the establishment: the relief and education of the poor, "work which Our Lord has blessed"; the other, an association of pious and zealous persons, determined, in order to provide this service, to put everything in common: goods, talents, skill, and workmanship.

This ministry of charity for the poor required three conditions to get off to a good start: a locale, a budding activity, and approval. The building of the hospital was completed in the spring of 1694; during the course of the summer the poor were admitted; in the fall, the letter of the bishop of Quebec and the Letters patent of the king of France were received. Thus, the work originated, and thanks to God, in spite of misfortune, it would survive.

The other work, the association of persons charged with the administration of the hospital called for similar conditions: a locale, that is the same hospital; authorization to initiate the ministry of caring which had already been granted by Bishop de Saint-Vallier and approval which was to come later.

CHAPTER III

First attempts at religious life — Bishop de Saint-Vallier entrusts the direction of the hospitallers to Father de la Colombière — Travels of Mr. Charon to France to recruit novices — The vows — Principal devotions of the hospitallers.
1696 – 1707

A religious community was soon to be born. It had been awaited and hoped for; a dream which had been kept in mind in planning the layout of the hospital. A brief summary of this community is necessary to fully grasp its unfolding history.

In 1696, Mr. Charon had succeeded in grouping around him five novices or rather five candidates, for as yet there was no true religious community, consequently, no novitiate. These new associates were Nicolas Datte, Jean Jeantot, Alexandre Turpin, Mathurin-Benoist Durant and François Hadancourt.⁽¹⁾ The founder and his associates lived a pious life dedicated to the poor but they had as yet, no definite rule. All did not appear to have a predilection for this work of hospitality which had earlier attracted them and which was the main purpose of the foundation. After having given a few years to the care of the poor, some were drawn in diverse directions: to continue the work begun or to aban-

(1) Registre de vêtue et de profession.

don it in favor of schools.⁽²⁾ Others on the contrary, felt that by pursuing both ministries they would better answer the needs of the colony.

Bishop de Saint-Vallier who with great solicitude watched over the society, understood the danger of this uncertainty and this division or rather this lack of organization, and wished to remedy the situation without delay. Towards the end of 1698, he entrusted Father de la Colombière his vicar general⁽³⁾ with the responsibility of visiting the parishes of Montreal and surrounding areas and gave him likewise, the direction of the hospitallers. On January 19, 1699, he wrote to him: "If Mr. Charron could obtain a copy of the rule of the Sisters of the Congregation, I would willingly permit him to take from it that which could be suitable". In the same letter, he authorized Brother Charon to bury in a special graveyard, brothers, employees and the poor who would die at the hospital.

Embracing with zeal the interests of the young community, the new superior did not spare any effort to make of it a truly religious family. He paid the brothers long and frequent visits. As he had already spent with them the winter of 1698, he also spent that of 1699.⁽⁴⁾

In keeping with the intent of Bishop de Saint-Vallier, he subjected them to the rule of St. Augustine⁽⁵⁾ and laid out for them special constitutions.

In order that these rules might be more firmly established in the house and that the members might be exposed to a deepen-

(2) Letter of Father Lechassier to Mr. D De Casson 1699.

(3) Father Joseph Seré de la Colombière had come to Montreal as early as 1682 as a member of the society of Saint-Sulpice. In 1691, he was recalled to France by his superior general, Father Tronson, for reasons which Faillon explains in his story of Mother Bourgeoys. Having left the society in 1692, he returned to Canada soon afterwards and was taken into the service of Bishop de Saint-Vallier, becoming his vicar general.

(4) L'Hôpital Général de Québec, p. 127.

(5) Registre de vêtue et de profession, p. 9.

ing of interior life, Brother Charon ardently desired the help of a priest who could remain constantly with them. Until then, the Sulpicians had provided ministry to the hospital. Acknowledging their services, Brother Charon had apparently expressed his satisfaction to Father Tronson, their superior general, since, on March 26, 1699, the latter wrote: "I will always be happy that our priests render to you and your poor all the help they can and it is with joy that I learn from you that they do so in time of need. You can count on it that they will continue to do so unless they become unable to cope. . ."

The direction of the hospitallers became increasingly difficult when the priest assigned to this task was made to dwell at the hospital. Reduced as they were in numbers, the priests could hardly keep up with serving the parishes, mission posts, and the two other religious communities already established in Montreal. Had they been more numerous, however, another difficulty existed which left them little hope of "bringing forth much fruit among them"⁽⁶⁾ and which obliged them to be very cautious and discreet in their relationships. A few quotes taken from Father Tronson's letter to Father Dollier de Casson will enlighten us: "It is up to you to see what you can do to help the hospital. We have been told that these gentlemen from the hospital have come together under the direction of the seminary in Quebec. If this is true, may there not be ill-consequences if we become involved. However, since it is charitable to help them out, you may judge whether we can do so without living there". Later, Father Tronson in a letter to Father de Valens says: "As to the hospitallers, we have been told that they are under the seminary in Quebec, so I believe that they are not as open as they could be towards our priests if the latter are to direct them. . . However, in charity, we must help them but with all the caution that Christian prudence dictates".

Father Leschassier constantly urged his priests to be helpful to the brothers and to assist both them and the poor. He himself tried

(6) Letter of Father Tronson, March 30, 1699.

to do this by giving Mr. Charon all the help he could when the latter was recruiting in France, in 1700. On his return, the founder had the consolation of bringing back three recruits and a secular priest "to help him form his community".⁽⁷⁾ The priest was Father M.P. Boy, formerly a teacher in Montreal and who, since his ordination, was curate in Franche-Comté. On his return to the hospital, Mr. Charon set himself anew under the yoke of discipline and gave himself to the practice of perfection to which he hoped to dedicate himself permanently one day.

The following year, Father de la Colombière returned among the hospitaliers. After living with them a few months and being satisfied with the fidelity with which the candidates practised the rule to which they had committed themselves during the past two years, he gave them a religious habit. It was a black cassock with a mantle of the same color and with white wrist and neck bands.⁽⁸⁾ A cross of black wool visibly worn completed the costume and distinguished the professed members from the novices.

On May 17, 1702 Father de Belmont, superior at the seminary received the final vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and hospitality made by the founder and his five associates in the presence of Father de la Colombière, Father Vouillot and Father Boy. Thus, while the association was taking on a pattern of greater regularity, the work for the poor was also taking shape. Whatever trials it would have to face, whatever shiftings would occur, after centuries it will however witness to the infinite kindness of Divine Providence towards generations of infirm, orphans, and indigent persons.

Two years later, on August 6, 1704, the six professed pronounced vows of stability. The act of commitment reads as follows:

"We, Joseph de la Colombière, priest counsellor, priest of the sovereign council of Quebec, grand archdeacon and one of the

⁽⁷⁾ Registre de Vêture.

⁽⁸⁾ Constitutions des frères hospitaliers, pages 83, 84.

grand vicars of the diocese, having examined the dispositions of brothers François Charon, Nicolas Datte, Jean Jeantot, Alexandre-Romain Turpin, Mathurin-Benoist Durant and François Hadancourt and found them firm in their resolution to continue living, and even to die in the service of the poor in this institution called the house of the brothers of the Cross of St. Joseph, we have admitted them to the vow of stability with all the more reason that the five first-named have been working in this house for over eight years. They pronounced their vow of stability in the chapel of this house, into our hands before receiving the Holy Eucharist at Holy Mass in the presence of the under-signed witnesses the 27th of July, seventeen hundred and four at the General Hospital of Ville-Marie". The signatures follow.

Ten days after they had thus confirmed their commitment, Father de la Colombière presided over their first elections. Brother Charon was elected superior, Brother Datte, Assistant and Master of Novices, Brothers Jeantot and Durant, Councillors. The latter was also appointed bursar.

In the year 1705 – 1706 the novitiate, now duly established, opened its doors to three new candidates: Pierre Bréland, Pierre Crépeau and Nicolas Becquet.

Besides the professed and the novices, there were men connected with the hospital as employees who gave dedicated service to the poor. A few boarders were there also, having come to live a peaceful and retired life. Without being bound by vows of religion, they could "busy themselves with small chores around the house",⁽⁹⁾ follow the same rules as the brothers and share their good works and their prayers. As to the poor, the archives of the navy specify that at this time, about one hundred had been taken in.

Through the number of poor who had been helped, Brother Charon could see his efforts being rewarded. He rejoiced and drew

⁽⁹⁾ Constitutions des Frères, page 164.

from this fact new energy to maintain order and discipline. According to the Constitutions, the spirit that animated the new society was "the spirit of the Holy Family and particularly of its head, St Joseph under whose guidance the brothers were to work constantly at their sanctification and that of the poor, imitating the humility, the gentleness, and the charity of this glorious patriarch. They were to take as their model, the interior dispositions with which the father of the Saviour and spouse of the Holy Virgin acquitted his duties".⁽¹⁰⁾ Having chosen this saint as the patron of the institute, Brother Charon wished his feast to be celebrated each year by the solemn singing of first vespers, a high mass and vespers of the feast. In his honor, he established a confraternity which a good number of citizens joined.

At this time, devotion to the Sacred Heart was surely alive in the hospital. A copy of an inventory drawn up in 1719 mentions a chapel erected under this title, furnishings and altar cloths for this chapel. This demonstrates that the Heart of Jesus was already honored by a special cult at this house . . . but we cannot firmly establish when. It is possible that Father J. de la Colombière introduced this devotion as early as 1699 when he became the director of the hospitallers. He was the brother of Venerable Claude de la Colombière who had directed Blessed Marguerite-Marie and one of the promoters of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. How could one not presume that the love of this adorable Heart passed from the saintly Jesuit to the director of the hospitallers and that the latter in turn tried to hand it down to those he was directing? Residing in Quebec, could Father Joseph de la Colombière ignore the great movement which since 1700 was taking place in this town to spread this devotion? However it may be, in dictating his will in 1723, the superior of the hospitallers requested emphatically that if he died in Ville-Marie, his heart be placed in the chapel of the Sacred-Heart at the hospital.

The main devotion of the brothers, that which was most dear to them and which they would promote with the greatest zeal,

⁽¹⁰⁾ Constitutions, page 34.

seems to have been the devotion to the Holy Cross. In perusing their constitutions, one may see that on one hand, they obliged themselves to "adoration of the Cross every Friday", and on the other, "to sing with the greatest possible solemnity the first vespers, high mass and the vespers of the day" on the two feasts of the Holy Cross: the Finding and the Triumph of the Holy Cross. These feasts, along with that of St Joseph, were to be regarded as the patronal feasts of the institute.

Who had inspired this choice? Where did the idea come from? Perhaps from the name of St. John of the Cross which Bishop de Saint-Vallier bore. It is possible also, that the founder's attitude towards the suffering members of Jesus Christ made him resolve to put them, as well as the institute destined to assist them, under the patronage of the Holy Cross. Whatever may be the origin of this devotion, it has been maintained until today when we still place our works under its protection. They bear its seal.⁽¹¹⁾ For Mr. Charon who had chosen it, it was truly a symbol of the trials and tribulations he would have to face. "I myself will show him all the trials and tribulations he must suffer for my sake" said the Lord, speaking of the Apostle.⁽¹²⁾

The Master would also have him drink of His chalice. Called to found a work useful to the Church and to society, he would set the foundation without ever seeing it develop. While the work appeared to be taking shape and becoming firmly established, the trial was not far away. But, to preserve for the Church and for the poor the establishment which he thought willed by God, and which had cost him so dearly, we will witness him withstanding bravely until death, the miscalculations, contradictions, desertions, and grief, that would ceaselessly hound him.

⁽¹¹⁾ The cross surrounded with thorns, along with the motto: "In Hoc Signo Vinctes" has become our seal and the Cryptogram P† our distinctive mark. The letter P, which stands for "Poor" indicates that all that is at our disposal is the property of the poor, while the cross symbolizes our main devotion.

⁽¹²⁾ Acts 9:16.

CHAPTER IV

Last works of Brother Charon — His trials — His death.
1707 - 1719

The purpose which Mr. Charon and his associates had in mind in opening a refuge for the poor, the elderly, the infirm and the orphaned, was not only to assist them in their temporal needs. They considered it a duty more essential still, to instruct them, to form them and/or lead them to ways of Christian life. In dedicating themselves positively to hospitality, they had resolved that while making this their primary concern, they could employ a few brothers at teaching in the surrounding country schools when they had candidates capable of doing so.

As early as 1699,⁽¹⁾ Mr. Charon had attempted to join his community with a teaching community founded in Paris. His attempts failed. However he did not abandon his project, and however few were his fellow laborers in 1707, he continued to pursue it. In comparison, the education given to young girls by the Sisters of the Congregation far outmeasured the sad result of ignorance among young boys, especially in the surrounding country-side. He did not wish to postpone any longer the preparation of school teachers. Furthermore, he was not alone of this opinion. Several priests from the seminary, especially those who were pastors,

(1) Letters of Father Tronson dated March 26, 1699 and April 22, 1700,

agreed that the idea was an answer to a positive and urgent need. They did not hesitate to embrace sacrifices in order to help correct the situation.

Messrs. Raudot, father and son,⁽²⁾ intendants of Louis XIV in New France, entered into the views of Mr. Charon and requested for him from Pontchartrain, minister of the navy, a grant of two thousand pounds. But, by the unfathomable mystery of God's ways, Mr. Charon who had thus far experienced success in all his undertakings, now seemed to meet one obstacle after another. This time, the most serious difficulty came from the court. What had happened to cause this reversal? Why had attitudes thus far favorable to the hospital changed so suddenly? We do not know. But the minister's reply was to deal a deadly blow to this work. Having learned that the hospitallers were making religious vows, Pontchartrain indicated on the spot, that far from helping Brother Charon, he expressly forbade him to form a new community. He even ordered him to abandon the religious habit and to refrain from receiving novices. The General Hospital of Quebec and the Ursulines of Three Rivers were already too heavy a burden for the king who protected such establishments.

To avert the storm, the founder resolved to go to France in order to plead his own cause. He entrusted to Brother Datte the direction of the hospital during his absence and left Canada in 1708. In Versailles, he brought out before the court, the integrity of his plan, the usefulness of the enterprise, the need for the resources on which he counted. His efforts were futile; Pontchartrain remained inflexible. Alarmed but not despairing, Brother Charon decided to prolong his stay in France in order to better shield off the blows that were threatening to ruin his community.⁽³⁾

This stay appeared somewhat useful to his plan concerning boys' schools. Determined to open these schools, in spite of all the op-

(2) Messrs. Raudot were named to succeed M. de Beauharnois in the stewardship of New France in 1705.

(3) Letter of Father Leschassier to Father Bouffandeau.

position, he examined the model and the functioning of these in the main educational institutions established in the large cities of France.

To sustain him in this long ordeal, God put on his path Bishop Saint-Vallier then in France. The concerns of his diocese had brought him there in 1700. After four years of negotiations, he was finally returning to his flock when the ship he was on was captured at sea by the British; the passengers were made prisoners and brought to England where the venerable Bishop remained until 1709.⁽⁴⁾

Once freed, he was eager to return to his diocese, but he had to go back to France where he was forced to wait four long years until the king finally allowed him to. The founder, during this time, could discuss matters concerning his plans. He shared with him his hopes and his plans. The Bishop liked his idea of training school masters. Brother Charon even bought stocks in Paris for the upkeep of his school teachers.⁽⁵⁾

Not content with promising financial assistance, the Bishop also obtained for him alms from Pierre Piteau de la Pallière, doctor of theology and vicar general of Cardinal Latrémouille. These generousities prompted the founder, on February 12, 1710 to surrender by legal act, all claims to the personal monies he had disbursed for the construction of the hospital.

Following a stay of five years in France, without obtaining anything from the minister, Mr. Charon returned to Canada. The prolonged absence of their leader could not but be detrimental to the young community. Instead of finding rest and consolation on his return, the founder noticed deplorable gaps. Of the eight brothers he had left at his departure, only four remained; the four others had left the order.

(4) Hôpital Général de Québec and letters from Father Leschassier.

(5) Vol. 3, pièce 37.

Furthermore, prohibiting the brothers from wearing the religious habit and making vows seems to have contributed greatly to diminishing their prestige before the people of God and deterring new candidates. Thus, without any new recruits, the work of the hospital was no longer possible and still less feasible was education in rural schools.

In these painful circumstances, Mr. Charon did not lose courage. He would not rest until he had found a way of escaping ruin. The idea occurred to him to merge his community with that of the Sulpicians or to that of the Brothers of the Christian Schools recently founded in France. To negotiate these matters, he again went to France in 1717.

The Sulpicians rejected the merger; the care of the elderly and the formation of teachers was deemed incompatible with the goals of a clerical institute.

The Brothers of Christian Schools initially acquiesced to Mr. Charon's request.⁽⁶⁾ Arrangements had even been concluded, "the cost of sailing had been paid" when the founder, Saint Jean-Baptiste de la Salle, moved by prophetic inspiration, urged his followers to desist. They learned later from Brother Charon, that it had been proposed that the brothers be dispersed with country pastors. This dissemination, contrary to the fundamental rules of the institute, would have been detrimental to the preservation of the religious spirit.

More successful with the court, where Mr. de Pontchartrain's retirement had left Mr. Raudot in sole charge of Canadian affairs, Mr. Charon obtained 3,000 pounds of yearly income for the maintenance of teachers and the authorization for them to wear their religious habit. Encouraged by these favors, he began recruiting novices again. The cities of Bordeaux and Angers supplied him about ten judging by the records. However, the founder, "a pious man with intense charity, but a little eccentric", accord-

⁽⁶⁾ Letter of Brother Barthelemy to Brother Drolin, February 18, 1718.

ing to Pastor Ferland, was not satisfied. The work of education of young boys appeared to him incomplete without the teaching of various arts and crafts.⁽⁷⁾

On the other hand, the duty of guarding the poor of the hospital against moral dangers of idleness, made it urgent in his view, to establish shops for the crafts,⁽⁸⁾ and so he wished to provide these immediately. For this purpose, he hired two manufacturers, Darles and Soute, to train the brothers for this kind of work.

But God, who plants and pulls up, builds and tears down, seems to have let his servant engage in these new enterprises only to allow him to add the merit of sacrifice to that of good will. At the beginning of July 1719, "riding high" with his recruits, he returned full of hope to his community, when he was stricken at sea by a violent illness that could not be controlled. A sincere Christian and a fervent religious, he prepared for death and dictated his will in favor of the poor of his hospital, and having placed his trust in the Lord and begged the help of Mary, of St Francis, his patron saint, he died facing La Rochelle.⁽⁹⁾

The day following his death, his followers in mourning, witnessed his body being slipped into the sea. God who rewards with the same generosity the just who dies leaving his task unfinished, and the one who has completed his, must have received his zealous servant with love.

(7) At that time the school of arts and crafts of Saint-Joachim, Quebec, rendered valuable service to the settlers in New France. Mr. Charon perhaps hoped to create a similar school for Montreal?

(8) Constitutions, page 32.

(9) Testament de M. Charon.

CHAPTER V

The new superior — The schools — The inconstancy of teachers — The Sisters of Hôtel-Dieu lodge at the hospital — Brother Chrétien's trip to France — his profession — Death of Father de la Colombière.
1719 - 1724

The death of the founder struck at the heart of the wavering society of the Hospitallers and foretold its approaching ruin. However, among the new associates of Mr. Charon, there was one who had received special marks of confidence. He was Louis Turc de Castelveyre, a native of Martigues a small town of Provence, seven leagues from Marseille.⁽¹⁾

Having witnessed the final moments of the founder, and having received his last will, he was chosen by the dying man to be the executor of his affairs. A sum of 200 pounds was bequeathed to him "for services rendered and for the friendship that the latter had shown him".⁽²⁾ On his arrival in Quebec, Louis Turc who had taken the name of Brother Chrétien, went to Bishop de Saint-Vallier to tell him of the death of his superior and inform him of his will. In the eyes of the bishop, the confidence Mr. Charon

(1) Extracted from the topographical, physical, civic, historical and political description of the French part of the Island of Saint-Domingue.

(2) Testament de M. Charon, Vol. I, pièce 5.

had bestowed on Brother Chrétien designated him as the new superior of the hospitallers. He confirmed him in this function and sent him back to the brothers with a letter of appointment.

The letter contains such a beautiful eulogy of Mr. Charon that we reproduce it here:

“We do not know how to express the pain we feel at the death of Mr. Charon and the compassion we have for you in your sorrow. What consoles us is that his death was as holy as his life had been; however, as God is so pure that he finds blemishes even in his angels, we exhort you to pray as we do, and have prayers said for the repose of his soul. We have done what we could to help him succeed in his plans. Now that he has died a martyr of his zeal, we do not want to abandon him and we are impelled more than ever to pursue his plans, especially now that we have seen Brother Chrétien whom he has made executor of his will and who was in charge of his affairs even while he was in full health. We could not refrain from approving his choice and we beg you to recognize Brother Chrétien as your superior and to obey him as such.

You cannot better honor the memory of your pious and charitable founder than by obeying, as he always did, the orders of your bishop. Far from straying from the beautiful examples he set before you, I hope that you will strive to imitate them, thereby showing yourselves to be worthy children of such a good father.

Given at Quebec, this nineteenth day of September, seventeen nineteen”.

Signed: Jean, Bishop of Quebec.

This was truly a critical time for the hospitallers. To the threat of abolition that overshadowed them, to the frequent absences and now the premature death of their leader, a worse trial was now added; the arrival of a new superior, unfamiliar with the customs of the country, the hospital personnel, or even the rules of the institute.

Nevertheless all acceded to the wish of their bishop and accepted Brother Chrétien as their superior. The organization of

schools was one of their main concerns. Thus they were accountable to the king who had granted 3,000 pounds to the institution for the salaries of teachers. One of these schools had been opened at Pointe-Aux-Trembles as early as 1717 thanks to the generosity of the seminary whose members were disposed to favor this work in the parishes they were serving. Furthermore, it was the will of Father Leschassier, superior general of the Sulpicians, who in 1719, wrote to his confrères in Montreal: "It is advantageous for the colony to be able to supply for the island and the countryside good teachers for young boys, hence we must contribute to the success of the good work in order that there be teachers imbued with true and solid piety".⁽³⁾

In 1721, six schools were founded. Brother André Dumoyre directed the one at the hospital, Brother Louis Pillard taught at Boucherville, Brother Simmonet de la Croix at Longueuil, Brother Jeantôt at Pointe-Aux-Trembles, Brother Nicolas Datte at Batiscan, and Brother Lagirardière at Three Rivers. Brother Hérault directed the shops at the hospital.

These teachers, recruited at random and dispersed too hastily in the countryside, lacked precisely the solid quality of which Father Leschassier spoke. Some had been in the brotherhood hardly a few months when they were sent out to the schools. Left on their own, without sufficient formation, and without a rule, they soon returned to worldly ways of comfort and independence and ended up returning to secular life. François Darles and André Soute, the two manufacturers which Mr. Charon had brought back from France in 1719, did not remain more faithful to the trust he had placed in them. As early as 1721, both were expelled from the hospital.⁽⁴⁾

Laxity and irregularity reigned in the hospital where the poor, now few in number, merely existed. The dilapidation of the whole

(3) *Vie de la Mère Bourgeoys*, Vol. 2, page 269.

(4) Vol. 1, page 6.

building was a result of the absence of discipline. An incident testifies to this.

It was on June 19, 1721, while preparations were on the way for the Feast of the Blessed Sacrament, that fire broke out at Hôtel-Dieu and brought ruin to two thirds of the town. In their distress, the Sister hospitallers and their patients found kindly refuge with the Sisters of the Congregation; but the lack of space did not allow them to remain there.

Upon learning of the disaster, Mr. de Vaudreuil, Governor General, rushed to the scene. The distress of the population in general and that of the Sisters of Hôtel-Dieu in particular moved him deeply. He begged Bishop de Saint-Vallier and Mr. Bégon, the intendant to confer with him on how to accommodate the Sisters and their sick. It was decided that the brothers would occupy one part of the General Hospital and the Sisters the other.

What it cost the Sisters in terms of work and fatigue to settle there, we shall never know; but it is certain they found the house in such a state that the cost of repairing it came to 3000 pounds.

In spite of the worries occasioned for both communities by this set-up, both had to put up with the inconvenience for three and a half years. In vain did the bishop urge the sisters to get on with the building of the hospital; laborers were scarce and resources scarcer still as a result of the destitution in which the fire had left the greater part of the population. These calamities gave rise to new forms of dedication. As in the early days, the priests from the seminary became the support of the indigent and the consolation of the afflicted. Great care and attention were lavished on the Sisters and their sick by Father Vachon de Belmont and Father Louis Normant, confessor of the Hôtel-Dieu hospitallers. Finally, on November 11, 1724 the reconstructed Hôtel-Dieu could receive the guests.

During these difficult years, the women Hospitallers experienced the death of five of their sisters. They were buried in the General

Hospital crypt and their ashes mingle with those of the Grey Nuns who later rested there.

Several incidents had occurred within the community of brothers during this four-year interval. Dissatisfied with the conduct of the teachers, and feeling that religious vocations were on the decrease in Canada, Brother Chrétien went to France towards the end of 1721 in search of recruits. Following the example of his predecessor, he had requested that Father Leschassier, superior general of the Sulpicians, should receive in his house young men destined to the General Hospital of Ville-Marie so as to put their vocation to the test prior to sailing to Canada. But he was not any more successful than Mr. Charon had been. Yet, in 1722, Brother Chrétien had the satisfaction of returning to Montreal with ten new teachers. On October 2 of that year, he pronounced his vows along with André Dumoyre, Eustache Pillard, Louis Hérault and Gervais Hodiesne. To the four vows already mentioned the men added that of instructing the youth. The profession celebration was presided by Father de la Colombière, their superior and was to mark his last function with the hospitallers. On July 18 of the following year, death took from them their best counsellor.

Father Joseph Serré de la Colombière died at the Hôtel-Dieu of Quebec, July 18, 1723 at the age of 72. Grand archdeacon and grand vicar of the diocese, clerk counsellor to the superior council of New France, and in turn, superior of Hôtel-Dieu and of the General Hospital of Quebec, these functions had not prevented him from taking an active interest in the community of the brothers. Their capitular acts testify to his fidelity in fulfilling the mission he had been assigned. The will of this holy priest depicts in a touching manner, the modesty of his life as well as the fervor of his piety, and his attachment unto death to the work of Brother Charon. One can judge by this extract:

“If I die in Quebec, I beg my confrères at the cathedral to bury my body according to the rules of the chapter and in the place destined for this, out of love for the most holy Virgin, in consideration for whom they tolerated me in their company;

and I hope that for the same reason, they will pray for me after my death. If I die in Ville-Marie, I beg Father de Belmont to have my body buried in the parish graveyard and my heart placed in the chapel of the Sacred Heart where I beg the dear Brother Hospitallers to ask pardon of God for my lack of love for Him. I give to the Brothers of Ville-Marie the amounts I lent them, what remains of my money, my clothes, my books and my chapel”.

CHAPTER VI

Another trip to France by Brother Chrétien — Approval of the rules of the hospitallers — Profession and election of Brothers presided by Father Boucher and Father Chèze — Brother Chrétien's retreat.
1724 – 1729

The death of Father de la Colombière must have saddened the hospitallers all the more as it coincided with the absence of Brother Chrétien who had left for France a few months earlier. What reasons motivated his absence at a time when his presence seemed so necessary? A question difficult to answer, but the most likely reasons are his plan to establish a novitiate at La Rochelle, and to improve the finances of his community.

Whatever the case may be, at this time, debts contracted by the brothers in France as well as in Canada, must have weighed heavily on the community. According to the memoirs of the times, as early as 1723, a sum of 1200 pounds sent by them to Brother Chrétien through Father Robert, bursar at the seminary in Paris, was seized by creditors before it ever reached its destination.⁽¹⁾

Of the 3,000 pounds granted for the school teachers by the king,

⁽¹⁾ Vol. 1, pièce 27.

they utilized only 862 pounds that year. The rest had been applied to the payment of more urgent debts.

These repeated blows violently shook the unsteady community and harbored a painful perplexity among the members. But while the storm raged outside, Bishop de Saint-Vallier who expected a great deal from the brothers, redoubled his efforts to brace up their courage and to strengthen their motivation. On October 8, 1723, he solemnly approved the rules by which they had been living since 1699.

“The eagerness you have shown from the beginning of having rules, has made me decide to put these into your hands so that you may come to know them, to love them, and to practise them before they become obligatory; but now, having noted that you have already recognized them as suitable for your institute by the care you have taken to meditate on them and to pray over them, it is with pleasure that we give them to you to follow under the authorization of our signature”.

By this sanction the prelate hoped, as he stated in his letter, to induce the brothers to practise with greater fidelity and love this rule which they had themselves so earnestly requested.⁽²⁾ Shortly afterwards he conferred on Father Boucher, Pastor of the Ile d’Orléans and Father Chèze, a Sulpician priest, the power necessary to work together at helping the Brothers to observe these rules. Vested with this authority, on October 24, 1724, Father Boucher assisted by Father Chèze, gave the holy habit to a postulant, received the vows of three novices, and the vows of stability of seven of the professed; then he proceeded with a new election. Brother André Dumoyre was elected assistant. Two councillors were placed in charge to answer for the superior who persisted in remaining in France.

This prolonged absence of Brother Chrétien however, worried the brothers and those who were interested in their community.

(2) *Constitutions des Frères hospitaliers*, p. 192.

Their alarm alas, was only too well founded. Far from bettering the finances of the community, the superior, as a result of loans and bad transactions, had only plunged it into deeper difficulty. In 1725, he owed creditors in France alone, 29,938 pounds.⁽³⁾

Lacking money and fearing his creditors, Brother Chrétien fled to Santo Domingo under the pretext of establishing there a fishing industry for the benefit of his community. Surprised and indignant over such a strange decision, the court ordered the governor of the island to have the fugitive arrested. To avoid being pursued, Brother Chrétien sought refuge in the Spanish part of the island. In September 1728, he appeared in Quebec and sought shelter with the Recollets.

The incident became known in Montreal and Brother Gervais Hodiesne, the bursar, notified him that he must, without delay, give up his procuration to the hospitallers. At this time, Brother Chrétien left Canada and since then, our records have lost track of him.⁽⁴⁾

A memoir presented to our superiors in 1758 by Commander Jacques Viger stated that in 1735 Brother Chrétien had paid all his debts and was now penniless. In this painful situation, Castelveyre (his real name) now on his own, resolved to return to Santo Domingo where he settled in a small town on the island, called Cap.⁽⁵⁾

There, he managed to acquire a house which he soon filled with destitute children, elderly people, crippled persons, and incurables. He also took in many persons arriving from Europe who without support and without shelter were in great distress.

In order to avoid administrative processes for which he felt incompetent, Castelveyre shed this responsibility on the town coun-

(3) Volume I, pièce 27.

(4) Ibid.

(5) Cap Haiti it would appear.

cil. As for him, not aspiring to any other honor than to be the servant of all, he again took the religious habit of the hospitallers and fulfilled the obligations of their rule until May 25, 1755 when death took him from the unfortunate and from all the citizens of the Cap.⁽⁶⁾

A pious and dedicated man but apparently too hasty in his zeal, Brother Chrétien shows how a good person who lacks certain practical qualities can jeopardize the future of an institution. His retreat and the debts accumulated under his administration determined the ruin of the hospitallers. The ruin was slow, it is true, as it took eighteen years to complete it. But these eighteen years were a series of long, painful alternative of new efforts and new failures.

In 1730 the hospitallers owned 4,562 acres of land in the parish of Chambly, in addition to the land they already owned on the island of Montreal. They had hoped that this property would be

(6) This memoir is extracted from a topographical, physical, historical civic description of Santo Domingo — M.L.E. Moreau de St Mery, Philadelphia 1797, Vol. I.

(7) This mill built by Mr. Charon in 1705, became the cause of long quarrels between the hospitallers and the Sulpicians. We shall not give here the details of these quarrels. We shall say only that the hospitallers, authorized to grind the king's wheat along with their own, violated the rights of the lords by receiving their serfs at the hospital mill. The lords then claimed their rights and received ineffective promises from the hospitallers to respect these rights.

The day finally came when the brothers recognized the injustice and resolved to amend their conduct. An act passed in 1730, demonstrates that to end differences and to forestall any that might arise in the future concerning "the said mill", and the brothers wishing to remain under the spiritual direction of the Sulpicians, and having duly considered the matter, surrendered the mill to the lords of the island of Montreal reserving however, the right to grind their own grain there. They also retained the services of one of the Sulpicians to say Mass at the hospital every day of the year, to hear the confessions of the brothers and their charges, and to administer the other sacraments etc. This accord was not kept any more than the previous promises. In 1740, the brothers had recourse to the King's council to regain possession of their mill. This request was granted, but new infringements were brought to the attention of the Quebec council and the brothers on July 17, 1741 received orders from the court forbidding them to grind any grain at their mill, but that which would be used in their own house. Any further infringement and they would be fined.

a source of income for the hospital. Instead of being of help, it was for the most part left idle, and ruinous lawsuits were brought against the brothers because of it. It was therefore a burden instead of an aid.

Furthermore, the brewery, the flour mill⁽⁷⁾ and various industries set up at the hospital, along with the stores opened in 1725, hardly reaped any profit. The mercantile establishment and the shops only resulted in a surplus of work and worry which diverted the brothers from their primary commitment and ended in extinguishing in the hearts of the majority if not of all, the love and spirit of their vocation.

From 1724 to 1730 only one religious profession is recorded: it was the last. In 1731 a decision of Bishop Dosquet who two years earlier had acceded to the see of Quebec, aggravated the situation. Judging the brothers incapable of operating their house, of forming and maintaining its members, he forbade them to admit any new aspirants and even dispensed from their vows those who wished to return to secular life.⁽⁸⁾

This was clearly a death sentence passed against the society. Nevertheless, the few brothers who remained faithful could not resign themselves to leaving the place and to seeing their works perish. In agreement with Brother Jeantôt, their new superior, they sent Brother Hodiesne to France to arrange a merger with another religious group. The Brothers of Christian Schools would have consented to a union; Brother Timothy, superior general of the order, even sent to Montreal Brother Denis and Brother Pacifique (1737) to examine the situation at close hand; the question of debts remained the great obstacle. To level this difficulty, help was requested from the court; but the king and the minister, remembering all the favors previously granted — all for naught, did not wish to make any further concession.

Finally, after more than five years of fruitless negotiations, having learned that creditors were just waiting for the moment of union

⁽⁸⁾ Vol 3, pièce 15.

to claim reimbursement, the Brothers of Christian Schools rejected the project altogether.

Another century was to elapse before the sons of Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle would come to exercise their teaching ministry in Montreal.

CHAPTER VII

Thirteen years of Canadian Episcopate — Proceedings of the Governor and the Intendant with Bishop de Pontbriand in favor of the hospitallers — Bishop Pontbriand gives notice to the hospitallers of their imminent demise — The Sulpician Seminary and the Recollets — Brothers André Dumoyre and Alexandre Turpin.
1729 - 1744

The apostolic ministry of the first two bishops of Canada, Bishop Laval and Bishop de Saint-Vallier had lasted sixty-nine years. In the thirteen years that followed, the pastoral crosier passed through the hands of four successive prelates. After the death of Bishop de Saint-Vallier in 1727, Bishop Duplessis de Mornay, his coadjutor, had on September 15, 1728, taken possession of his episcopal see by proxy but he never came to Canada. In 1729, he sent to Quebec Bishop Pierre Herman Dosquet whom he chose as his coadjutor. The country was not unknown to the designee. Three years spent in Montreal as a Sulpician had allowed him to study the mores and customs of the Canadian people. Health reasons had obliged him to return to France.

Recognized as Bishop of Quebec in 1734, Bishop Dosquet resigned in 1739 and was replaced by Bishop François-Louis Pourroy de Lauberivière. The new bishop was only twenty-nine. The holiness of his life equalled the nobility of his birth. Alas! a premature death abducted him from his church before he could

even tackle the work to which he wished to dedicate himself. Pestilence having raged on the boat aboard which he was traveling, he became so worn out caring for the sick that he contracted the illness himself and died on August 20, 1740, thirteen days after landing in Quebec. The population venerated his memory as that of a saint.

Bishop Henri-Marie Dubreuil de Pontbriand was then called to replace him. Consecrated in Paris on April 9, 1741, he arrived in Quebec in August of the same year.

Hardly had his promotion become known in France that Father Harem Delorme, a friend of the hospitallers, went to urge him to consent to the proposed fusion of the hospitallers with the Brothers of the Christian Schools.⁽¹⁾ The prelate replied that he preferred to see things for himself on arriving in Canada; then report to the Court.⁽²⁾

Fear that the bishop would give in to requests contrary to the wishes of the hospitallers prompted Mr. Beauharnois and Mr. Hocquart to write to the minister: "We are awaiting the new bishop to confer with him on the means of supporting the brothers. It would be well, however to forewarn him before he leaves France, not to give in to the wishes of those who want to do away with them". These last words were aimed at Father Normant, superior at the Seminary, unjustly accused of having turned away candidates who wished to join the hospitallers so that the new society of Christian women which he was forming might take their place. The Governor and the Intendant apparently ignored the fact that Bishop Dosquet had forbidden the brothers to admit any new candidates.

Whatever the case may be, on June 20, 1742, Bishop de Pontbriand at his official visitation at the General Hospital, declared to the hospitallers his intention of replacing them by a society of

(1) Letter of Father Delorme, Vol. 3 Pièce 9.

(2) Letter of Father Lamarche, Vol. 3 Pièce 18.

pious women, who for more than five years, had been practising works of charity in Ville-Marie. Shortly afterwards however, the prelate appeared to discard this plan and wondered if it would not be better to entrust this work to the Sisters of Hôtel-Dieu or to the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame.

Informed of these plans, the minister wrote in 1743 to the Governor and the Intendant to examine with the Bishop, which of the two communities would be more appropriate for this project and to find a better way of making use of this establishment. But as the administrators were not on good terms with Father Normant, and as Father Tronson had reserved certain rights when the property was donated so that it could not be alienated without his consent, nothing was concluded.

However, Bishop Pontbriand remained convinced that the community of hospitallers could not subsist for long. "It is probable", he wrote them on October 4, 1744, "that there is no way that you can continue your present apostolate. But we shall try to preserve the principal work which is the care of the poor. We shall do what we must to provide an honest living for all and I trust that the Sulpicians in particular will not abandon you. I shall provide suitable places for all".

The attitude of the Sulpicians in helping the hospitallers was generally recognized. Yet they played a subdued role in laying the foundations of this community. They favored it at first, but considering the unsteady grounds upon which they were building and no longer being in charge of its direction, they kept their distance. The hospitallers however, benefitted for many years by their ministerial services. Father Chèze, among others was their director for four years.

The Recollets also had a large role to play in the service of the hospital. In their archives the following names appear most frequently: Brothers Emmanuel Crespel, Augustin Quintal, Potentien Houdin. On November 20, 1727, a record of the vesturing ceremony of Pierre Martel carries the signature of Brother Hyacinthe,

Recollet, "performing the duties of chaplaincy for the brother hospitallers under the authority of the bishop".

Before the ultimate conclusion of this story, Brothers André Dumoyre and Alexandre Turpin died at Hôtel-Dieu within a month. Little is known of these two. The first was a native of Anjou and was probably one of the recruits Brother Charon had brought back when he returned from Europe in 1719. The other was born in Quebec and numbered among the first associates of the founder. Both enjoyed the trust of their community as is shown by the fact that Brother André had always been either superior or assistant and Brother Alexandre, Master of Novices and bursar. Another qualification, however, does them even greater honor: watchful sentinels, in spite of the tempest which heaped up such great ruins around them and caused the courage of most of their companions to give way, they remained staunch in their position of duty.

With more support and better direction, these brothers might have served a useful and fruitful career producing lasting fruits. Their whole conduct proves that they lacked a leader who could encourage interior life which is the soul and sustenance of religious communities.

Distracted by financial worries, occupied with thoughtless enterprises, the person who should have led them by following the example of the provider of Nazareth, became instead, the instrument of their ruin. It was the financial situation of the hospitallers that prevented the Brothers of the Christian Schools from rescuing part of their works. The hospitallers would, as well, lose the other part for not having known how to avoid "tumult and haste in business". Drawn along by a zeal inspired more by human activity than by a faith vision instead of awaiting the time marked by Providence, they seemed to take the lead. As a result, a multitude of enterprises rapidly dispersed their energies and eventually led them to become exhausted.

CHAPTER VIII

Resignation tendered by the hospitallers
— Madam d'Youville accepts the direction of the hospital.
1744 – 1747

The citizens of Ville-Marie witnessed with sadness the end of the society of hospitallers. They could not accept the complete annihilation of a work for which they had so much interest, to which they had donated alms so generously, and on which they had founded such great hopes. Sharing their regrets and their fears, the minister wrote from Paris to the Bishop of Quebec on March 31, 1747. "Considering the situation in which the hospital finds itself, it is becoming urgent to make some arrangement in order to forestall complete ruin. When Mr. de Lajonquière arrives in the colony, you must work with him and Mr. Hocquart so that according to your report and recommendations, I may obtain the king's approval".

Mr. de Lajonquière had just been named Governor of Canada but he was made prisoner at sea by the British. As the number of brothers had been reduced to two, both unable because of their age to work, the solution to the problem could not be deferred any longer. Furthermore, since 1744, the brothers themselves were asking to abandon the administration of the hospital.⁽¹⁾ Such is

(1) Letter of Monseigneur de Pontbriand to the minister, October 3, 1744.

what Bishop de Pontbriand put forth to the minister in the following letter dated October 10, 1746: "These brothers with the exception of the eldest, write to me repeatedly that they can no longer survive, that they are unable to care for the poor, that the place is falling into ruin, because of the lack of needed repairs. It is absolutely necessary that their business be attended to. I would have done so already by putting in charge Madam d'Youville and the five persons she has brought together in Montreal and who are doing useful work, but. . . I am at a loss as to which way to go. We cannot please everybody".

The decision was finally taken and the resignation of the brothers was accepted on August 27, 1747 by Mr. de Beauharnois, the Governor, Bishop de Pontbriand, and Mr. Hocquart, the Intendant. Madam d'Youville was at the same time made provisional administrator. If some individuals had any apprehension about this choice, Father Normant was not one of them, for he had long recognized Madam d'Youville as the person chosen by God to continue the work of the hospital. It was in a life of poverty, hard work, and humiliation that the pious widow had been prepared for this mission; time had come to reveal to the world what treasures of wisdom and zeal enriched her being.

Before closing this part of our history, let us sum up briefly what the work of the Charon brothers had been and what remained of it. Undertaken with genuine and noble intentions, pursued with zeal by the founder, never perhaps had any institution known as many elements of prosperity. Credit and favors had been lavished on it from all directions; and as a modern speaker⁽²⁾ said, speaking of the hospitallers: "the rain that fell upon their roof was of gold".

When met with contradictions, clouds soon dispelled to allow the sun to shine again. However, where there is question of in-

(2) Rev. Fr. Plessis, F.P. in a sermon preached at Notre-Dame at the close of the triduum which was the occasion of the introduction of our Venerable Mother's cause for Beatification, May 22, 1891.

ternal organization, of the maintenance of discipline, of a solid and durable formation or the work of God in general, the good will of some, and the influence of others, are equally powerless. Even during his lifetime, the founder had evidence of this reality. Mr. Charon who had a presentiment of his imminent death, named a friend to replace him to continue the works which he had begun. A few years later, the religious spirit had all but vanished in his house and a new state of confusion caused its downfall.

When the resignation of the brothers was accepted, their number had been reduced to two: Brother Jean Jeantôt and Brother Joseph Delorme. The first in his eighties, was now senile. Living at the hospital for over fifty years, he had witnessed its days of glory as well as its decline. He was to die there August 12, 1748 after the establishment had passed into other hands. Now, only Brother Joseph remained. He had not yet reached old age, but feeling isolated and like a stranger amid all the transformation Madam d'Youville was bringing about at the hospital, he returned to France where he retired at Saint-Cyprien in Agenois at the home of a nephew. A life pension paid to him by the hospital, allowed him to live without undue worries. He died March 19, 1772.⁽³⁾

Among the works undertaken by Brother Charon, the care of the poor was the first and it outlasted all the others but on a much reduced scale since at the time the brothers resigned, the hospital housed only four invalids. The activities of shops and of schools begun about 1717 did not stand the test of time.

Had material prosperity been able to supplement the decadent works, there would have been hope, but alas, no matter where one looked, all that could be seen was ruins. In the inventory begun September 4, 1747, one sees only walls to be rebuilt or repaired, floors and stairs to be replaced. When the new administration took possession of the house, twelve hundred panes of glass had to be replaced in the twenty-six windows. The farms

⁽³⁾ Letter from Mr. Maury, April 7, 1773.

of Montreal and Chambly afforded little returns and required extensive renovations.

Finally a sum of thirty-nine thousand pounds owed in Europe as well as in Canada was threatening the hospital with complete annihilation. Fortunately, God was watching over its existence. But to manifest his action, he waited until all human hope had vanished. He wished once more to provide the occasion to repeat for the glory of his name: "If the Lord does not build the house, in vain do its builders labor".

(Ps. 127:1)

PART TWO

CHAPTER 1

Birth of Marie-Marguerite Dufrost de Lajemmerais, her family, her early years, her marriage — Father Dulescoat's prediction — As a widow, Madam d'Youville engages in pious and charitable works — Father Normant prepares her for her future mission.
1701 – 1738

Nothing is more pleasant for children than to reflect upon the early years of their mother. On these grounds, Varennes deserves our attention. This village situated between Boucherville and Verchères scatters its white houses along the shores of the St-Lawrence River. Beyond, surrounded by maple, elm and oak trees are fertile and well-cultivated fields which constitute the wealth of the inhabitants. In the center, a short distance from the shore, precisely at the place where the first parish church stood, now stands the new church. The splendor of this vast structure is emphasized by two elegant steeples and high arches. Only a short distance to the right of the church is the place where once stood the house of the Gauthier de Varennes, later that of the Dufrost de Lajemmerais. Both generations had honored it by an exemplary life. A beautiful house⁽¹⁾ occupied by Mrs. Lussier replaced the old home.

⁽¹⁾ This house and part of the land next to it were once the property of Dr. Charles-François Painchaud. In his will dated June 5, 1891, he bequeathed part of the property to the Grey Nuns "In case they would want to build a chapel there." A man of faith, Dr. Painchaud had in mind that we might wish to erect a sanctuary when the Church would declare our foundress Blessed.

Part of the old foundation⁽²⁾ however, remains buried there, remains of a monument which our affection would fondly claim from oblivion. Within these walls, Marie-Marguerite Dufrost de Lajemmerais was born on a Saturday, October 15, 1701, the same year the Brother hospitallers received their holy habit. It was she who would one day restore their work. Her father, Christophe Dufrost de Lajemmerais, from Medréac in Brittany, had been in Canada since 1687. Descended from a noble family long renowned for its bravery, he had inherited its military virtues.⁽³⁾ His fearlessness and his exploits against the Iroquois caught the attention of Denonville under whose orders he was fighting. Sub-officer in the army, Christophe du Frost de Lajemmerais was soon promoted to the rank of lieutenant, and then of captain.

Her mother, Marie-Renée de Varennes was the daughter of René Gauthier de Varennes, Governor of Three Rivers and granddaughter of Pierre Boucher de Boucherville, former Governor of the same place. The head of this family was highly respected for his noble character. Large grants of land and titles of honor were the reward he received for the services he rendered to the col-

(2) A document dated July 4, 1698 and ratified July 1, 1701 certifies that the land for the church was donated by René Gauthier de Varennes, Mother d'Youville's grandfather. In the wall he later had built to separate his property from this land, he made a private entrance for his family. To keep this in mind, Dr. Painchaud had a gate made in the new wall at the same place as the first one had been. This gate, so often used by our foundress in her childhood, still exists today. When Mother Deschamps sent Sisters to Varennes for the first time, she used to say to them: "Be very faithful to make your pilgrimage to the parish church. As you pass through the gate which our venerable Mother used to reach it, ask her to give you her sentiments and her love for the Blessed Sacrament". This recommendation was always piously observed. This gate was the occasion of many tender and strong emotions experienced by the Sisters who visited the place.

(3) In 1371, at the siege of Becherel, a Jéhan du Frost was employed. This Breton was fighting to protect his family. Le Frost was but a short distance from Becherel. Always on the alert, always ready to join other combatants, the soldiers returned to their fields after battle, only to take up arms again as soon as the need arose. The Dufrost were from the small place which bears their name. They spread out as far as another small place called la Gesmeriaie where Mother d'Youville's father was born.

ony. Fifteen children born of his union with Jeanne Crevier, brought honor and joy to his home. One of the boys, Nicolas, became a priest. One of the girls, Geneviève, became an Ursuline. In addition, this family blest by God, was to give to the Church a number of nuns, and ten priests of which two, Charles and Joseph Dufrost de Lajemmerais, were brothers of our Foundress while two others, François and Charles-Marie Madeleine d'Youville were her sons.⁽⁴⁾

At the time of Marguerite's childhood, her grandfather Boucher was living in retirement at his manor in Boucherville in order, say his memoirs, "to work more diligently at the salvation of his soul, to care for his numerous family, to aid a greater number of needy, and to be more useful to his fellow-citizens". Thanks to the example of a laborious and christian life which she received in the patriarchal milieu and from her virtuous parents, Marguerite was singled out early by her intense activity, her piety, and her gravity.

However, it was not long before trials would wound her loving heart. She was hardly seven when her father died in 1708. This premature death contributed greatly in developing the virtuous dispositions inherent to her nature. Christophe Dufrost de Lajemmerais⁽⁵⁾ left his widow and six children penniless. Marguerite was the eldest. Although young, through this misfortune, she readily understood what duties she would have to fulfill from then on. Sharing with her mother the care of her brothers and sisters, helping her with the housework, constantly searching ways of alleviating her situation of poverty, became a constant preoccupation.

"It is a pity", wrote commissioner Raudot, "to see this bereaved family, without means of subsistence unless assistance is

⁽⁴⁾ Vie de Madame d'Youville par Faillon, p. 4.

⁽⁵⁾ La Gesmerais was also written as Lajemmerais. We have kept the latter spelling.

provided". After repeated requests, Madame de Lajemmerais finally obtained in 1714 a pension of fifty crowns. This was the indemnity the king paid to widows of officers.

In the meantime, about 1712, impressed by the qualities of the young Marguerite, friends intervened, and by their influence, she was admitted to the boarding school of the Ursulines in Quebec where her mother, her grandmother and her aunts had studied. A great aunt, Geneviève Boucher, known as Mother St-Pierre was a highly respected member of the convent. Of her is written: "Loved and respected by all, she seemed to have taken on the task of reproducing in the cloister the virtues which her venerable father practised in the world".⁽⁶⁾

It is in this blessed house that Marguerite had the joy of making her first communion in the chapel where ten years earlier, the feast of the Sacred Heart had been celebrated for the first time in Canada. Everything leads us to believe that the atmosphere of recollection inside these walls had an influence on the life of this child. One wonders whether it was not in this very sanctuary where the Sacred Heart of Jesus was honored, that the devotion took root in her heart. In any event, later she was to become a fervent promoter especially in her religious family.

A simple incident reveals in what religious atmosphere this exemplary child had been placed. One of the teachers, Sister Marie-des-Anges, as if she had had a presentiment of Marguerite's destiny, gave her to read, "The Holy Ways of the Cross" by Reverend Boudon. Austere as it is, this doctrine already appealed to her earnest and sincere nature. She savored it and drew inspiration from it. The future foundress would find less difficult and less bitter the works and the privations she herself would have to face pondering on the voluntary poverty of Jesus in Bethlehem, on his labors in the shop of Nazareth, on his austerities during his public life and on his supreme gift of self on the cross.

⁽⁶⁾ Annals of the Ursulines.

Evidently, at the Ursulines, the piety of Miss Lajemmerais was growing firmer and was taking on a maturity well beyond her age. Under the title, "Une femme forte au Canada du dix-huitième siècle", the annals of the monastery reveal her to be one of the most distinguished pupils of her time: gentle, pious, sincere, intelligent, never losing a minute. The sight of her classmates who were less diligent or less attentive made her intensify her efforts and her zeal at study. "These young ladies are more fortunate than I", she said to herself, "their time is not limited; as for me, I no longer have a father and my poor mother eagerly awaits my return home".⁽⁷⁾

In this atmosphere favored by Providence, she grew in piety and love of duty. These qualities prepared her for her future life as a spouse, a mother and a religious.

At the age of twelve, Marguerite happily returned home to once again assist her mother. Her fondness for work and perfect know-how of house-keeping duties made of her a precious helper. Her brothers and sisters found her more loving and devoted than ever. An angel of peace and kindness, she inspired such confidence that she was considered a second mother. Advice or reprimand from her was well received; and so, she readily became arbitrator in their quarrels and a confidante.⁽⁸⁾

As time passed, the beautiful qualities with which nature and grace had endowed her were being perfected and she was becoming an accomplished young lady. One could have easily believed that with her sedate and reflective attitude, the gravity of the cloister would have better suited her aspirations than the frivolous ways of the world. Such was not the case. Lively, clever, pleasant in her relationships, gifted with charm, she was sensitive to the admiration she engendered. "She was attracted to and loved the things of this world", says Father Dufrost. She engaged in it and on August 12, 1722, her marriage with François-Madeleine

⁽⁷⁾ Les Ursulines de Québec, Tome I, Ch. II, p. 176.

⁽⁸⁾ Manuscript of Mr. Dufrost

You, de la Découverte, of Ville-Marie was blessed by Father Priat, a Sulpician, vicar-general of the bishop of Quebec.

Instead of the happiness the young bride had hoped to find in her new life, she met the cross under its most distressing aspects. Her marriage, troubled at first by the ravings of a mean and quarrelsome mother-in-law, was made more gloomy by the hardness and indifference of the very man to whom she had united her destiny. After squandering his fortune in shady pastimes, Mr. d'Youville, without any consideration for his wife,⁽⁹⁾ without any love for the children⁽¹⁰⁾ with whom he had been blest, submitted them to harsh trials of poverty. Finally the day came when the unfortunate spouse had to take on hard work in order to provide the necessities of life for her young family. Far from grumbling or complaining, she suffered all in silence as she lavished kindness on the husband who failed to return her love. Sometimes, only her silent tears revealed the intensity of her pain.

God was permitting these hardships only to detach his servant and to better prepare her for the accomplishment of his plans. As Madam d'Youville's hopes faded, as her illusions vanished, she experienced a mysterious force drawing her farther away from worldly goods. As grace transformed her, a notable change occurred in her conduct. Though already virtuous, she became a model of heroic patience and serene acceptance of suffering. More knowledgeable about the vanity of worldly things, she turned

(9) According to letters preserved in the archives at Ottawa and published in *Le Supplément au Lac Saint-Louis* by D. Girouard, Mr. d'Youville "established trafficking practices on Ile-Aux-Tourtes" near Vaudreuil, during the early years of his marriage. It was in this perilous business that he lost his wealth and gave the Indians reason to lay bitter charges against him.

(10) Children born of the marriage of Madam d'Youville:

- 1) May 21, 1723 – François Timothée died August 17, 1723
- 2) September 24, 1724 – François You de la Découverte – Priest;
- 3) September 3, 1725 – Marie-Madeleine-Ursule died August 25, 1726
- 4) December 16, 1726 – Louise died in infancy;
- 5) July 18, 1729 – Charles-Madeleine – Priest;
- 6) February 26, 1731 – Ignace died July 17, 1731.

towards things eternal with vigorous faith, and energetic will. Father Sattin states: "She was seen to be touched more than ever by heavenly concerns and gave up all worldly vanity as she sought in God alone her consolation". Did these painful circumstances contribute toward her childlike and firm confidence in the Eternal Father? A letter addressed many years later to Reverend de l'Isle-Dieu leads us to that conclusion. "Often, my Sisters and I implore our dear Savior and his divine Father who has been the object of my confidence for over forty years, so that he will keep you a few more years, and then reward you with eternal glory".⁽¹¹⁾ According to these words, the great confidence Madam d'Youville harbored for the Eternal Father, stems back to when she was twenty-five. There is no doubt that a growing love for God was the source of her courage and acceptance in her afflictions.

Grace-filled assistance in the person of Father Dulescoat, Sulpician, helped Madam d'Youville to overcome the manifold difficulties which befell her. Providence placed her in communication with this virtuous priest and pastor at Notre-Dame whose reputation for holiness was in high renown in Ville-Marie. In this person, tried by adversity, the wise director saw in her a chosen person, an instrument fashioned by the hand of the Divine Master to effect His plans of mercy and love. He guided and supported her in the narrow path where he thought she was called to walk from now on. Finding her one day burdened with greater perplexity than ever, he attempted to console her. Suddenly impelled as if by prophetic inspiration, he said: "Be consoled, my daughter; God destines you for a great work. You will restore a house in its decline". Do these words not remind one of the words that God himself addressed to his servant through the mouth of his prophet:

"I have preserved you that you might possess the inheritances that were destroyed".⁽¹²⁾ Admirably prepared to hear these words,

(11) Letter dated October 12, 1766.

(12) Isaiah 49:8 Douay.

Madam d'Youville at first experienced surprise but was not troubled by them. She did not even attempt to fathom their meaning but with perfect docility, she abandoned herself to the wisdom of her guide, ready for whatever God would expect of her.

The mysterious portent was soon verified. Three years later, on July 4th, 1730, François d'Youville died of pneumonia. His death occurred after only seven days of illness. Far from seeing in this premature death the relief of her domestic troubles, this noble woman experienced deep pain. "She grieved bitterly over the death of her husband", says Father Dufrost, "and long did she mourn his loss".

However, this new trial did not dampen her courage. Her soul was drawn further towards supernatural thoughts. Her main consolation was to turn to him who somewhere in Scripture is called "the Father of orphans and the Protector of widows" and who was already drawing her to himself and beckoning her to place her trust in him. Alone at twenty-nine, with two young children⁽¹³⁾ and burdened with debts, she adored the ways of Providence and committed herself to its care. With the amazing resources which the courageous display in times of tempest,⁽¹⁴⁾ she set up a small business to earn her family's livelihood.

With the help of her relatives and the good will of a few friends, and thanks especially to her ingenuity and her untiring energy, her business prospered. In a few short years, with God's help, she succeeded in paying off her husband's debts. When her two sons were of age to begin their studies, she placed them at the Seminary in Quebec and provided for their education.

While with loving firmness, she watched over her sons' progress, Madam d'Youville reserved time for God and for the poor.

(13) Of the six children born of Madam d'Youville's marriage, four died at an early age. The last, Ignace, was born February 26, 1731, seven months after the death of his father. He died on the 17th of July, 1731.

(14) Une famille bretonne au Canada.

Thus she found relief in her weariness. She encroached on her sleep in order to exercise her works of charity and to develop her spiritual life without neglecting her maternal duties. The weather, no matter how inclement, did not prevent her from attending daily morning mass. In the afternoon, whenever she could get away, she spent some time before the Blessed Sacrament. It was there before the Lord that she laid her cares and renewed her energy. Eager to grow in the love of God, she frequently received Holy Communion and renewed her strength. But of souls intimately united with him, God demands greater participation in his life of selflessness and sacrifice. It was in these moments of intimacy that the Lord communicated to his chosen one his love towards suffering humanity.

Great lessons of poverty had long ago taught her to love the poor. More than ever, they became part of her family. In spite of her own distress, she found ways of helping them and in order to do so, she even curtailed her own needs. In her soul so open to compassion, there was room for all misfortunes. The sick and prisoners were the object of her special care and she even went from door to door to solicit help for the burial of criminals. Without knowing it, she was preparing for her future mission as she visited the poor at the hospital and washed and mended their clothes. From what we know of the General Hospital, this type of help was then indeed very welcomed.

Madam d'Youville was going about, spending herself in a self-forgetful way, exercising her charity and zeal when on February 7, 1733, death prematurely claimed her spiritual guide. Father Dulescoat had just reached his forty-fourth year when he succumbed worn out by incessant ministry. He was mourned as a benefactor and as a saint.

Jean-Gabriel le Pape Dulescoat was born in the diocese of St-Malo in Brittany in 1689. A true apostle, he had earnestly requested as a favor, to devote himself to the colony of Montreal. Realizing what a precious asset his services would be, Father Leschassier, his superior, granted his request and he came to

Canada in 1717. Father Dulescoat had been pastor at Pointe-Aux-Trembles, assistant, then pastor at the parish where he died leaving the memory of an exemplary priestly life. The early exhaustion of his strength is attributed to his ardent zeal and to the austerity of his life. Since 1730 he was no longer functioning as pastor. He nevertheless continued to spend what little strength he had in ministering to others.

Madam d'Youville felt keenly the loss of this man of God who had been her counsellor and support through one of the most trying and painful times of her life. It was not long however, before a new director would guide this soul who in trial was so submissive to God's ways. From the Sulpicians came another wise and pious director. Father Normant was to be the instrument of Providence on her life and her future work.

Born in 1681 at Châteaubriand in the diocese of Nantes where his father was a physician, Louis Normant du Faradon entered the Sulpician Seminary January 4, 1706. Only ten months of fidelity and exemplary life in this institution won him the privilege of membership. After performing various important functions there for fifteen years, he requested and obtained the favor of coming to Canada. He arrived in Montreal in 1722. A man of quality, possessing knowledge, wisdom, and moderation, Father Normant soon won the affection of his fellow-priests and the confidence of the citizens. Superior at the seminary since 1732 and involved in parochial ministry for over ten years, he was not altogether a stranger to Madam d'Youville. He had witnessed her distressful situation at the death of her husband. He had seen her successful efforts as a mother to provide for her family. He admired the order she maintained in her home, the kind but firm authority with which she watched over her sons. In her visits to the poor and the sick where he at times met her, he had appreciated her resourcefulness, her generous and charitable attitude. Now that he was her spiritual director, he would help to deepen her piety and her Christian spirit. A pious association existed in Montreal since 1663. It was the Confraternity of the Holy Family founded by Barbe d'Ailleboust⁽¹⁵⁾ and Father Chaumonot, a Jesuit, with the aim of "forming Chris-

tian families on the model of Jesus, Mary and Joseph." Madam d'Youville had been a member since 1727. Under Father Norment, she became one of its most active and devoted participants. Soon her fervor, her piety, and her exemplary life won her the respect and confidence of the associates. The responsibility of forming the postulants, of being assistant and director successively befell her.⁽¹⁶⁾

But the zeal of this fervent Christian constantly needed a new object. Eager to promote love for the Eucharist and out of concern for humankind, she registered in the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament and of a Happy Death on March 16, 1733. This association had been recently established in Ville Marie's parish church.⁽¹⁷⁾

Two years previously, she had enlisted in the confraternity of the Sacred Heart, established in the chapel of the Ursulines of Quebec. She was assigned October 23 as her special day of prayer to the Sacred Heart.

However, the interest of another apostolate urgently became

⁽¹⁵⁾ Barbe de Boulogne, widow of Louis d'Ailleboust, third Governor-General. *Histoire de la colonie française.*

⁽¹⁶⁾ *Registre de la Confrérie de la Sainte Famille.*

⁽¹⁷⁾ The principal object of this association is to assure its members the benefit of a happy death. On joining however, the associates do not commit themselves only to pray for the dead, but to make it a special practice to honor Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. Thus the devotion to the blessed Sacrament and zeal for suffering souls are the foundation of the association.

To this effect, each associate must recite daily, the prayers recommended and spend each week a half-hour in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament and a whole hour once a year on a special day.

In addition, on days honoring the Eucharist, the associates make an hour of adoration and when possible accompany the Blessed Sacrament when it is being taken to the sick. (Extract from the register of the Confraternity of a Happy Death.) After she had formed her own community, Madam d'Youville continued to belong to the association and she had her associates join. Each newly professed was required to enlist after her profession. To conform to the statutes of the association, a sister was designated to make, in the name of the community, a half-hour of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament.

the concern of Father Normant. The precarious financial situation of the hospital, the confusion among the brothers, the dilapidation of the entire house, were causes of grave worries for the future of the establishment. As superior of the seminary, and vicar general of Ville-Marie, this holy priest felt bound to prevent the ruin of a work which his predecessors had protected and so generously endowed. The words expressed by Father Dulescoat that "Madam d'Youville was indeed the person destined by God to restore this house" appeared to be a divine inspiration. He believed in it and immediately prepared the pious widow for the accomplishment of this plan. To this effect, he suggested that she welcome in her own home a few poor people whom she could care for, feed and where need be, bring closer to God. Madam d'Youville liked the idea so consistent with the inclination she felt was becoming stronger and clearer daily. However, she did not feel capable of carrying out this new task alone. The education of her sons, the eldest of whom had just been placed at the Quebec Seminary, necessitated unceasing toil. She immediately recognized the need for the co-operation of others.

The year was 1737. Madam d'Youville nurtured a close friendship with a pious person of exemplary conduct; "a friendship all the closer because of the charity that was their bond."⁽¹⁸⁾ She was Marie-Louise Thaumur de la Source, daughter of a Montreal surgeon. One day as the two friends had engaged in a mutually stimulating and more prolonged conversation, Madam d'Youville, without divulging the plan she had in mind, proposed that to discover God's plan for them, they should make a novena at the tomb of the beloved Father Dulescoat. His reputation of holiness led many persons to invoke him as a saint. Many told of favors received through his intercession. Miss Thaumur willingly consented to Madam d'Youville's proposal and both women spent these nine days in meditation and pious recollection. Thus, like all the true friends of God, Madam d'Youville could not conceive

⁽¹⁸⁾ M. Dufrost.

that such an important decision could be made without being brought to maturity in silence and prayer before God.

At the end of their retreat, the two friends went to visit Father Normant. Inspired from above, the saintly director spoke to them of the peace and joy experienced by those who leave all to follow Jesus. He showed them the benefits of works of mercy and the glory they give to God. Without however, hiding from them all the sacrifices, pain and suffering involved in the care of the poor, he strengthened their faith and stimulated their love by showing them Jesus disguised in the poor. The authority of his words coupled with the grace of their retreat produced a strong impact on Madam d'Youville. Overcoming all objections, she resolved at once to dedicate the rest of her life to this work. Less familiar with this kind of self-giving, her friend, Louise Thaumur, remained undecided. But soon, she too resolved to give up everything she loved to embrace a life of sacrifice along with Madam d'Youville.

In the meantime, the latter continued to care for the poor and the sick whom she visited. On November 21, 1737, feast of the Presentation of Mary, she welcomed into her own home a poor blind woman by the name of Françoise Osseau, wife of Pierre Le Boeuf. Was the arrival of this poor woman on the feast of the Presentation an indication that God was accepting her sacrifice? In any case, this initial gesture was to mark the humble beginning of their charitable projects.

Charity is contagious. Won by the example of Madam d'Youville, two virtuous persons a few days later, offered to come and share her work. They were Catherine Demers and Catherine Cusson. Their generosity soon put an end to the hesitation of Louise Thaumur de La Source. All four came together on December 31, 1737. Together, they definitely consecrated themselves to serve Jesus Christ in the person of the poor. It is not known whether this dedication was made privately or whether Father Normant was present. In their humility, these women were silent on such details. It is certain, however, that their plans did not extend beyond a secular association. Their commitment, on December

31, 1737 has always been considered as the day of their consecration. This date is specifically registered in the first records of the community and in the renewal of their original commitment which they signed in 1770 at a general retreat. In similar words Father Sattin expressed the same conviction: "The esteem they held for poverty, chastity, and obedience was such that, before God, their sole witness, they had, of their own free choice, made the formal commitment to observe them faithfully".⁽¹⁹⁾ And again: "As soon as Madam d'Youville and her associates came together in 1737, they dedicated themselves to the service of the poor, in such a way that they lived in the practice of the evangelical counsels".

Firmly convinced that God wanted her for this work, Madam d'Youville resolved to overcome every obstacle. These would be numerous on her path. The first and the greatest of all would come from the love she had for her sons. To abandon them while still so young and in such need of her, in order to devote herself entirely to the poor, would be to fail in her primary duty. With the clear and practical mind which guided her faith, Madam d'Youville found a way to reconcile her duties as a mother and as a servant of the poor.

Her eldest son was placed in the seminary in Quebec. The youngest, barely eight, remained with her until he became old enough to join his brother. When this time came, she accompanied him to Quebec and continued to provide for both, "God only knows at what sacrifice and with what grief"⁽²⁰⁾ until they attained the priesthood. However, her secret sacrifices were repaid when, by divine choice, both her sons committed themselves to God's service as priests. This sign of God's favor on her sons so dear to her, was in itself a reward for the sacrifices and works of his servant. We believe it is also an eloquent homage to her as a Christian mother.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Manuscript of Father Sattin, pp. 44 and 55

⁽²⁰⁾ Manuscript of Father Dufrost.

CHAPTER II

The coming together of Madam d'Youville's first companions — The trial — Fervor and regularity of the society — Illness of Madam d'Youville.
1738 - 1741

Entirely dedicated to her mission of charity since the fall of 1738, Madam d'Youville rented a house that was larger and more appropriate for her plan of bringing her companions and poor together under the same roof. This house considered as the birthplace of their society, belonged to Mrs. Le Verrier. It was situated on Notre Dame Street, facing the church of the Recollets between Saint-Pierre and Sainte-Hélène Streets.

Our mothers took possession of it on October 30. "Very quietly, they transferred their few belongings and the whole content of their treasury which did not exceed 1000 francs by the currency of that period⁽¹⁾."

It was in this evangelical poverty that the foundresses set the basis for the institute. On the other hand, their hearts were filled with limitless confidence in Divine Providence and consequently their courage and abnegation could stand any test.

Their first concern, as they crossed the threshold of their dwelling, was to kneel before a small statue of the Virgin Mary given

(1) M. Dufrost.

to them by a priest. There, in a fervent prayer and with deep emotion, they begged the Queen of virgins to be their protectress and their mother. Then in a voice which betrayed her faith and love, Madam d'Youville in the name of all, made an act of consecration and renewed the resolution they had taken, of spending their entire lives in the service of Jesus-Christ, living and suffering in the person of the poor. Catherine Demers was strong enough to allow her voice to mingle with that of the foundress as she read the dedication. Meanwhile, their two companions, more deeply affected, shed abundant tears. This acquiescence of the heart was followed by a generosity never belied in the future.

Shortly afterward, Father Normant came to encourage and strengthen them. To gladden their hearts and make them savour the sweetness hidden in sacrifice, he spoke to them of the blessings and promises of eternal life which were attached to the work they had undertaken. Convinced that no lasting good is founded or consolidated without the cross and the strongest contradictions, he warned them not to attempt to build on any other foundation. He exhorted them to prepare themselves by faith in God and his Divine Providence, to face all kinds of hardships.

This precaution was not superfluous: trials did come from many directions. Already the population had shown displeasure at the coming together of these humble women and the fear they had of seeing them one day replace the brother hospitallers. When the purpose of their coming together became known to the public, their indignation could not be contained. "The morning after Madam d'Youville and her companions had entered the Le Verrier house", writes M. Dufrost, "on their way to the parish church for the feast of All Saints, they became the target of shouts and jeers from the mob. Folks went as far as to hurl stones at them, accompanied by insults." All too happy at having been judged worthy of suffering disgrace for Jesus Christ, Madam d'Youville and her companions answered these insults only by humble and courageous protestations of their patience and their virtue. But instead of appeasing their adversaries, this peaceful resistance appeared to keep alive and even to increase their resentment. For

a long time to come, they had to undergo the same assaults, without anyone taking their defence.

These trials, however, were only the beginning of the tribulations which under different forms were to beset the little society. To the abusive language was added odious slander. They were accused of selling fire-water to the Indians, thus violating ecclesiastical law, and of intoxicating themselves. From thence comes the name "Grey Nuns" which was given them in derision, and which they insisted on perpetuating by the color they later chose for their garb. A symbol of humility, discretion, a life of poverty, of work, of seclusion, the grey color was indeed the one most suited to these women who applied themselves to reproduce in this temple of charity, the abasement, the self-sacrifice and the humble works of Nazareth. Nevertheless, nothing could prevent the slander hurled against them from spreading through the whole colony. Worse things still were said which travelled even as far as the Marquis de Beauharnois, Governor-General. These accusations were so believed in the town that a Recollet priest thought himself obliged to refuse Holy Communion to Madam d'Youville and to her companions, as to public sinners.

It was most likely during this popular uprising that the inhabitants of Montreal addressed to the minister of the navy, the petition aimed at keeping the hospitallers in charge of administering the hospital and of overthrowing the new society of daughters of charity. Luckily, God was watching over our frail cradle. Though signed by the Governor and other notable men of the town, this petition aimed at destroying the work of our mothers did not obtain the desired success.

The storm which rumbled outside, did not stop Madam d'Youville and her companions from continuing quietly the double purpose they had set for themselves: to sanctify themselves and to serve the poor by devoting themselves to the relief of their miseries. One of their first concerns after their installation had been to erect to Mary, mother and queen of hearts, a small oratory where

they would pour forth their soul in prayer and nourish it in meditation.

Then, as today, spiritual exercises interrupted and sanctified the day's work. The order in which these exercises were to follow one another in occupations had been determined by a set of rules laid out by Father Normant, a few months after their commitment.⁽²⁾

Up at five in the morning, they meditated for a half hour and then, in whatever weather, they went to the parish church for mass. Three times a week, they received holy communion together. On other days, they received in turn and the one who had had the privilege of receiving in the morning was to perform during the day, before her companions, an act of humility and mortification.⁽³⁾ On returning home, their day was spent doing spiritual reading, taking care of the poor, and performing various manual tasks. The quarter of an hour which preceded dinner was set aside for particular examen.

In the evening to honor the most holy Virgin whom Father Normant had given them as their primary patron, they came together at five to recite the rosary in the little oratory dedicated to her and pray the Office of the Name and Coronation of the Blessed Virgin. On a day set aside for retreat each month, they interiorly renewed the spirit of charity necessary for the apostolate to which they had dedicated their lives. Finally, this same rule of life gave them as patron and model of self-giving towards the poor, St Charles Borromeo, who even as cardinal, was the provider of the poor and the support of plague victims.

In the first year, they welcomed four poor persons. This number soon increased to ten. "It was by their needlework, the profits

⁽²⁾ Manuscript of Father Sattin.

⁽³⁾ This practice was observed in the institute until the proclamation of the decree of December 17, 1890, concerning confessions and communion for religious congregations.

of which they put in common, that they earned their living and that of their dependents; consequently they were burdened with continual labor and had to curtail much of their sleep." But what wakefulness and what fatigue would they not have taken on in order to feed and to clothe these privileged friends of Jesus Christ! They were happy, however, under the conduct of the one who directed with so much kindness and firmness this modest and laborious home. Sweet, sedate, thoughtful, of few words, willingly accepting advice from others and deferring easily to their views, Madam d'Youville suggested rather than imposed inflicted tasks to be done, care to be given. Consequently, her companions felt at ease with her and trusted her completely. They considered her, not as an equal, but as their common mother which they loved and respected. They did not designate her otherwise than by this title of filial affection.⁽⁴⁾

Madam d'Youville had impressed upon her little society this trait of regularity and fervor which we have just seen when she was condemned to almost complete inaction. As early as 1738, she had begun to feel pain in a knee. Without concern for her rest, without sparing herself, she continued to perform her duties diligently and to go in the early morning each day to the parish church for mass. During the winter, she suffered so much from the intense cold and difficulties in crossing the bad roads that her pain worsened considerably despite treatment. Three surgeons in turn treated her. Numerous incisions performed by the first two had resulted in inflicting a large and deep wound. After vainly exhausting his skill, a third one, Dr. Feltz, renowned for his knowledge and rule of thumb method, proposed the application of live frogs. One can understand the disgust and the repulsion of Madam d'Youville towards such a treatment. Nevertheless, accustomed to overcoming all that was repugnant, she consented to this repeatedly, thus giving her companions the opportunity to admire her patience and constant abnegation.

⁽⁴⁾ Manuscript of Father Sattin.

In vain did everyone await from medical help the desired result. The ailment persisted. With no earthly hope to be expected, they resolved to pray the saints to heal their patient. At the insistence of the sisters, and seconded by their sacrifices and their desire, Madam d'Youville made a novena at the grave of Father Dulescoat. Having experienced no change, she consented to go to Quebec to pray at the grave of Bishop de Lauberivière whose reputation of holiness had been justified by several extraordinary favors⁽⁵⁾.

However keen was the confidence of Madam d'Youville and of her daughters in the intercession of the man of God, the healing was not obtained. After having developed in his servant the zeal and constant activity required for works of charity, the divine Master wanted to initiate her to a higher virtue: abandonment to the will of God, when this will immobilizes one's nature, crucifies it, destroys it gradually, in order to better assure the triumph of grace in a soul and to render it more suited to his plans. To establish Madam d'Youville in this complete abandonment which he wished as a basis for the budding institute, God had determined to leave the foundress crippled for a few years, before curing her himself one day.

Quelling all the agitation which still tore her soul, Madam d'Youville submitted entirely to God's plan and without complaining, she bore her state of ill health with all the vexations it entailed. Thus, she had to be carried either to parish functions,

(5) This one, among others, appears worthy of reporting. "During the crossing", we read in the biographies of the Quebec bishops, "a woman had in a moment of trouble, let her child fall into the ocean. The child disappeared into the depths. In her desolation, the disconsolate mother cast herself at the feet of the young and pious bishop of Quebec, whom she had already witnessed performing wonders of charity. She had faith in the intercession of Him who sacrificed himself so totally for others.

The holy bishop immediately began to pray and God rewarded the faith of both. The child reappeared, carried on the waves, and the happy witnesses of this marvel noticed that he kept his eyes focussed on those of the prelate who himself, looked now at the child and then towards heaven. Finally, the sailors having lowered a boat into the ocean, took the child from the waves and returned him full of life and health to his mother now consoled."

business matters or duties of charity when emergencies obliged her to go out. In spite of these difficulties, she did not for one minute lose interest in her work. From her invalid's chair, she directed her household and with wisdom and tact assured its progress. With a smile, she encouraged her companions, with a word she animated their fervor, watchful meanwhile that their activity was moderate, for her own zeal was ordered and discreet.

On July 2, 1739, she opened her house to a seventeen-year-old orphan, Thérèse Lemoine Despins who wished to become a boarder. This young person belonged to an honorable, upper middle class family from Boucherville. Her parents had bequeathed to her a rich patrimony and what is better still, they had given her first-rate Christian up-bringing and education. Nevertheless, Madam d'Youville had not the faintest idea that this frail adolescent whom Providence was sending her, would inherit her spirit and be the one who could carry on her work.

As for young Thérèse, who had come to this house seeking shelter and protection without any thought of leaving the world, how could she have had any idea of the mission which God had in mind for her? We shall see later, how God accomplished his purpose.

CHAPTER III

Death of Catherine Cusson — Illness of Father Normant —
Arrival of new recruits — Madam d'Youville's healing.
1741 - 1745

Madam d'Youville's society was evidently a work willed by God, for from its origin through each new phase of its existence, it carried visibly the divine sign of trials. Hardly two years had gone by since the pious women had come together in the Le Verrier house when the angel of death visited this abode of peace and charity. Catherine Cusson was its first victim.

An illness of eleven months, borne with resignation, had purified and embellished her soul; she was worthy of being offered to God as the first fruit of the society. She yearned to see his adorable face and to be forever united to him, when the thought of his eternal justice suddenly changed this pious desire into painful terror.⁽¹⁾ This anguish, so sudden and so severe, was, however only a trial by God, a last attack made on the generosity of his servant to increase her merits and draw her to more complete abandonment. Father Fafard, who assisted her, had no difficulty in making her appreciate God's merciful conduct towards her; he soon dispelled her fears and restored in her "the childlike confidence she had always manifested towards our heavenly Father". It was

(1) Father Sattin.

in these pious sentiments that she expired on February 20, 1741, at the age of thirty-two.

Born of a middle-class family of workers who knew how to be self-sufficient, Catherine Cusson, in the world, had lived by needlework. In joining our mothers, she did not change her occupation, but relieved of all personal interest, she engaged with increasing ardor in this same work in the interests of the poor of Jesus-Christ. "She had always distinguished herself", say our memoirs, "by her charity towards the poor and by her fidelity to the rule."

This separation was painful. It was a collaborator, better still, it was a sister virtuous and loved, who was disappearing; and this departure reduced to three the number of our mothers. This was, however, not the last trial. We have seen a little of the role of Father Normant with them. Interpreting the will of God on their future, he had shown them the goal they were to strive for and had, so to say, marked out the way before them. Founding the strongest hopes on the work undertaken for the good of the faith and of the poor, he dispelled with care all that could impede its development. In conferences all permeated with evangelical charity and faith in God, he offered them the means of overcoming the increasing opposition of their enemies and gave them a secret strength to overcome the weaknesses of their own hearts. Humanly speaking, he was an indispensable support.

However, by one of these unforeseen blows with which God sometimes tests our faith, he allowed a serious illness to threaten his life. Great was their concern and desolation. They had seen Madam d'Youville confined to an invalid's chair and now feared that death would snatch their guide and perhaps bring about their dispersion and ruin their work. Full of apprehension, our mothers resolved to storm heaven for this precious life. When their prayers and sacrifices remained unanswered, Madam d'Youville made two promises in her name and that of her companions. She would burn a candle in the parish church each year on the feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin, feast particularly dear to the

Sulpicians. In addition, she would order from France, a painting representing the Eternal Father. This time, God was touched: health returned to the revered patient and soon the pious ex-voto testified to the gratitude of the young society. Today, that painting continues to do so from above the altar of the community room, at the Mother House, where the Eternal Father presides over our recreations and religious exercises.

The first promise was not less religiously fulfilled. Each year, on the eve of the Presentation, the community sends to Notre Dame Church, a candle to be burned before the statue of the Virgin Mary as a homage of unflinching gratitude.

The tears and sacrifices of this time of anxiety and grief were not without benefit for the society. New vocations had sprung up with this profitable dew, giving our mothers hope and consolation. On July 23 of that same year, 1741, Catherine de Rainville came to replace Catherine Cusson. Of noble extraction, she no longer saw fortune adding its prestige to the coat-of-arms of her forefathers; however, honor and religion remained at the centre of an intensely Christian life. Consequently, Catherine de Rainville brought to her new family, with the maturity of her thirty years, solid virtues and excellent qualities of heart and soul. "Of unusual ability in deliberations", say our memoirs, "she combined sound judgment and great prudence with gentle firmness."

Thérèse Laserre-Laforme, daughter of a surgeon of the same locality, joined the community the following October 22. "Energetic and dedicated, she also, was to be of precious assistance to Madam d'Youville and her companions." Lured by example, a third candidate, Catherine Ménard followed closely these generous recruits. But, soon, realizing that she did not have the strength to cope with the required abnegation and dedication, she withdrew.

In the same summer of 1741 two other young ladies came to Mother d'Youville with perhaps no other motive than to seek protection for their youth and a refuge against adversity. The first, Marie-Joseph Bourjoly, hardly sixteen, was born in Boucherville.

The second, Antoinette Arelle, was from Longueuil and had just turned twenty. Both were received as gratuitous boarders during which time their aptitudes and attractions could be tested.

The arrival of new candidates intensified the zeal and fervor of the first members and appeared to them as a visible sign of God's approval of their society. Nevertheless, this assurance could not be perfect without their mother's return to health. This favor, for which they had prayed for so long was at last to be granted. In 1744, after six years of suffering and patient resignation, Madam d'Youville was "suddenly healed without human intervention". Satisfied with the submission of his servant, the Lord who expected from her new sacrifices and great works, returned her health and strength.

CHAPTER IV

New trials — First fire — Original Commitment —
Installation and displacements — A few recruits.
1745 – 1747

The thanksgiving of Madam d'Youville's daughters for the unexpected cure of their mother was still rising heavenward, when a serious accident again tried their charity and faith. During the night of January 31, 1745, while the household was sleeping peacefully, a fire broke out suddenly. The conflagration spread so rapidly that the Sisters and their poor had barely time to slip on a few clothes; and in less than two hours, the house and its contents were reduced to a pile of ashes. A poor demented person who returned unnoticed into the house to get her shoes, perished in the flames to the great regret of Madam d'Youville who had earlier restrained her. Without any stockings and wearing only old shoes, this charitable mother had been the first to assist her poor. Having assembled them, she confided them to the care of her companions. She remained at the site as long as there was any danger in order to prevent the flames from spreading to neighboring houses.

"It was pitiful", Father Dufrost later said, "to see these fragile women surrounded by their poor, half dressed, and even barefooted in the snow, crying and trembling with cold." The most distressed, and infirm begged their guardians not to abandon them. They tried to console them by speaking of heaven and assuring

them that they could count on them. In the meantime, far from sympathizing with the unfortunate victims, crowds which came to the site of the fire, appeared rather to rejoice saying: "Do you see that purple flame? — The firewater destined for the Indians is burning." Hurling in such circumstances, those words must have pierced the hearts of our mothers. Mockery and insult were being added to complete ruin.

But, crosses and suffering only enlighten and detach to a greater extent souls which belong to God. Such was the lesson our mothers learned from this calamity. Evidently, God wanted to be their only consolation, their only support; this material ruin was from him, a pressing appeal to greater abandonment into his hands. They responded by greater poverty, by a more complete detachment from worldly goods. Until now, each had kept the ownership of her money and her furniture; only the product of their labor had been put in common. They resolved to remove this last remaining obstacle between their heart and God. "We had too much comfort", Madam d'Youville told them; "perhaps too great an attachment to worldly things. Hereafter, we shall live more in common, in greater poverty." It is thus that trials and afflictions united these pious women of humility, self-sacrifice, and abandonment to Divine Providence. Precious fruits of zeal and sanctification were to result, as well as the ultimate shaping of their new life.

Without any further delay, the second day after the fire, February 2, feast of the Purification of Mary and of the Presentation of Jesus in the temple, our mothers, as if to give witness to the gift of themselves entirely to the Eternal Father in union with Mary offering her son, put in common all their income as well as all their belongings. This act of disappropriation known hereafter as the "original commitment" has served, so to say, as the foundation of our society. Drawn up with care by Father Normant, it was signed that very day by the foundress and her two companions, and thereafter by those whom Divine Providence associates in their work. A copy of this act was inserted in the first constitution manual published in 1781 by Father Montgolfier. Since then, every professed, on the day of her consecration, must add her

signature to those of these venerable pioneers. This is how the act is drawn up:

“We, the undersigned, for the greater glory of God, the salvation of our souls, and the relief of the poor, wishing sincerely to leave the world and to renounce everything that we possess in order to consecrate ourselves to the service of the destitute, united by the bonds of charity (without any intention on our part of forming a new community), in order to live and die together, so that this union may be firm and lasting, unanimously we have agreed and of our own free will, we have promised the following:

- 1- Henceforth, to live together for the rest of our days in perfect union and charity under the direction of those who will be given to us; in the practice and faithful observance of the rule which will be prescribed for us; in complete submission and obedience to the one among us who will be charged with the government of the house; and in entire poverty and renunciation, putting in common from now on everything that we possess and everything that we shall possess in the future, without keeping for ourselves the ownership of it nor the right to dispose of it⁽¹⁾, making by this act a pure, simple and irrevocable gift to the poor, which no one among us nor among our relatives may claim after our death for any reason whatsoever, except landed property, however, if there be any of it, which we can dispose of freely.
- 2- Unreservedly to consecrate our time, our days, our work, indeed our lives, to labor, the product thereof to be put in common to provide subsistence for the poor and for ourselves.
- 3- To receive, feed, and shelter as many poor as we can take care of by ourselves or by the alms of the faithful.

⁽¹⁾ At the time our Constitutions were approved in 1880, this point was slightly modified: the giving up all rights of ownership according to Roman courts, rather more appropriate for an order with solemn vows.

- 4- All persons who will be received in the association will bring with them everything that they have: linen, clothes, furniture, and money, all to be put in common, nothing excepted or retained; renouncing every right of ownership or withdrawal by a voluntary and irrevocable gift which they make to Jesus Christ. And if they have any income or annuities, they will be included and put into the common fund. All landed property will be excepted, as said above, which they can dispose of at death.
- 5- If any one of those who will have been received into the society is obliged to leave it for good reasons, she will not claim anything that she may have brought to it, having freely surrendered it and made gift of it to the poor; but she will be satisfied with what others may have the charity to give her.
- 6- If, in the course of time, there are no persons capable of maintaining this good work, or if for some other reason, it is not wise to continue it, the undersigned wish and intend that all property, movable and immovable, will be put into the hands of the Superior of the seminary at Montreal, to be used according to his discretion in good works, and especially for the relief of the poor, transferring to him every right of ownership, making to him a gift of it, in their name as well as in that of the poor to whom everything belongs, declaring anew that such is their intention.

This act of union having now been read and reread, we do approve it and with the help of God's grace we oblige ourselves with all our hearts to fulfill its terms.

Made at Montreal in the presence of the undersigned, February second, seventeen hundred and forty five."

M. Marguerite Lajemmerais widow d'Youville
Catherine Demers-Dessermont.
Marie Thaumur de la Source.

No thought, no regret over the losses just sustained appear in these pages. The sentiments of entire renunciation of all that these

humble women could ever possess in the future are their only goal. An admirable response indeed to the detachment which God seemed to be requiring of them before establishing them permanently in his service! A touching application of the teaching which Jesus in the mystery of his Presentation offered to their meditations and their love!

Alongside the malicious people we heard insulting in calamity, thank God, there were others touched by pity and Christian charity. Among the latter, some sent beds, others much needed furniture. A rich merchant, Mr. Fonblanche, "came to offer them a house where they could continue their pious occupations".⁽²⁾

They accepted all with sincere gratitude, as they had had to disperse and return temporarily the poor to their families. Great was the joy of these poor people to be re-united to their benefactors. During the fifteen months they had to remain in this house, the foundresses and their protégés were grateful to the Sulpicians who were faithful and generous agents of Providence. They provided almost their entire sustenance.

However, it was not long before lack of space became a problem. The little group was as yet made up of only fourteen persons it is true, but in these quarters, it could not expand; new requests for admission urged Madam d'Youville to seek more spacious quarters. In the spring of 1746, she believed she had found these. After signing a lease for three years, she installed her aides and her poor there. But it had been said that hardship would be an inseparable companion of this work. Hardly was the little group installed than Mr. Boisberthelot de Beaucour, Governor of Montreal, decided to occupy this house himself. Under pretext "that such a house was more suitable for a governor than for poor women such as they", he ordered them to leave without delay. In vain did Madam d'Youville insist that she had a three-year lease on the place, that moving involved trouble and expense;

⁽²⁾ Father Sattin.

his only response was that if they did not leave willingly, he would have them evicted. There was no time for deliberation.

Now, the quest for another shelter had to begin and where was it to be found in such unforeseen circumstances? Providence upon which they had learned to count did not fail them. It inspired a kind person, Madam Chapt de Lacorne⁽³⁾, to offer her own house gratuitously. As noble of heart as in birth, this generous Christian deemed it an honor to yield her home to the poor and to the servants of the poor; and so as not to thwart the freedom of her guests, she moved to her country dwelling.⁽⁴⁾

It was apparently during her stay in these new quarters, and in the midst of preoccupations concerning the move that Madam d'Youville had the consolation of seeing her society increase by three new members: Agathe Véronneau, from Saint-François du Lac and the two young boarders mentioned earlier: Marie-Antoinette Arelle, and Marie-Joseph Bénard-Bourjoli.

However, Madam d'Youville's considerate nature made her reluctant to prolong indefinitely her stay in this borrowed house. So she seized with eagerness, the earliest favorable occasion to return it to the person who had so whole-heartedly allowed her protégés to inhabit it. From Mrs. Lacorne's house, they moved to a modest home near Notre-Dame church. This occasioned new fatigues, new worries, adding also new traits of resemblance to the Holy Family in their move from Bethlehem to Nazareth, and from Nazareth to Egypt in order to find suitable shelter for their precious son. But He who knew the contradiction of exile would soon put an end to the fatigues and anxieties of his servants. Satisfied with their good will, he would finally open for them a stable lodging where he would dwell himself, not only under the guise of the poor, but veiled in the Eucharist to be at once, the

(3) The head of this Canadian family was Mr. Jean-Louis de la Corne, Sieur de Chapt, and Lady Antoinette Dallemagne de la Font. He died in 1731 (Histoire des grandes familles Françaises du Canada, page 245).

(4) Father Sattin.

initiator of their work, their support in their weakness, and a partner in their labors. This favor, object of their prayers and of their desires, was to be bought at the price of great sacrifices. We shall see later that sacrifices will be their lot.

In the meantime, another consolation, or rather another spiritual help, was granted them. To sustain them in the path of abnegation and of zeal upon which they had entered, to help them more efficaciously in the work of their personal sanctification, Providence had a regular confessor assigned to them. It was Father Michel Paigné, a Sulpician priest who at the request of Father Normant, their superior, took on this ministry of peace and charity.

CHAPTER V

Madam d'Youville is given temporarily the charge of the
General Hospital — She brings in her partners and her
poor — She adopts the devotion of the hospitallers —
Erection of the Confraternity of the Sacred-Heart —
New wards — Difficulties concerning the Jericho ward.
1747 – 1750

The year is 1747. By this time, two years had gone by since the brothers, feeling incapable of continuing the work of the hospital, had asked to be relieved. Other than Madam d'Youville and her companions, no one was able or willing to replace them. But such prejudice had been entertained against these humble women; they were in such disrepute that to entrust such a work to them, appeared to the administrators to be out of the question.

However, the necessity for change was urgent. The hospital left to two brothers "incapable of looking after it, was deteriorating".⁽¹⁾ The buildings were falling into ruin and the poor, reduced to four, were languishing in misery.

A decision had to be made. Father Normant had long foreseen the extinction of the hospitallers. It was to forestall the disappearance of their work that he had formed Madam d'Youville and her companions for the service of the poor. For this purpose "he

⁽¹⁾ Father Dufrost.

had neglected nothing of what could strengthen them in the spirit of their vocation; he had especially instilled into them a trust in God capable of sustaining them in their greatest difficulties".⁽²⁾

Their patient silence under the contempt and contradiction to which they were subjected was, according to him a guarantee of their courage and a visible sign of the providential character of their mission. He did not hesitate to vouch for their constancy and their unselfishness.

Entering into the views of this man of God, Bishop de Pontbriand, C. de Beauharnois, Governor General, and G. Hocquart, the Intendant, entrusted to Madam d'Youville and her companions the provisional direction of the hospital with a promise to have this authority ratified by the Crown. The letters addressed to Quebec on this matter are dated August 27, 1747. In entrusting to the daughters of charity the administration of the hospital, these letters carried as well, the order to draw up an inventory of the property. The authorization to carry out the repairs deemed necessary by experts, and finally the obligation to render an account of all revenues.

Our mothers were not blind to the extent and difficulty of the enterprise. As if to increase these difficulties and force his servants to count all the more on His help, God permitted that this proposition be made to them at a time when the health of the foundress was at stake. The fatigue and worry brought on by the recent fire and frequent moves that followed had had a repercussion on the yet weakened health of Madam d'Youville: and God, desiring to purify his servant more and more through suffering, kept her many long months in painful inactivity.⁽³⁾ Nevertheless, in spite of the precarious state of Madam d'Youville's health and lack of resources to face a debt of 39,000 pounds, they entered more deeply into the ways of self-forgetfulness and of trust in God, and embraced the new task with earnestness. God approved what may

⁽²⁾ Notes of Father Montgolfier.

⁽³⁾ Manuscript of Father Sattin.

appear to us as daring. He soon restored Madam d'Youville to health and we shall see later that he caused the society to regain popular favor.

For the present, Louise Thaumur was in charge of preparing the move. To comply with the ordinance of the chief administrators, the inventory first had to be taken. Begun on September the fourth in presence of François Foucher, the king's attorney, and of Brothers Delorme and Jeantôt, this inventory was completed on the nineteenth of the same month. It has already been briefly mentioned; therefore we shall not elaborate. It gave a sufficient idea of the dilapidation of the hospital to show how disinterested was the help now offered and how generous was the activity that did not recoil before such a state of ruin.

After having made the most necessary repairs, the new administrators took possession of the hospital on the seventh of October of the same year. Still too weak to make the journey on foot, Madam d'Youville was brought there in a common cart. In her eyes, such a conveyance was what best became a servant of the poor, and increased her likeness to the One she wished to honor in them. Furthermore, the thought that her new dwelling would allow her to take in a greater number of destitute persons filled her with joy. On entering the hospital, she found there six persons — Brothers Jeantôt and Delorme and four poor old men; she herself brought along nine poor people and her six companions.

The goal Madam d'Youville and her companions had set themselves as they entered this house was to restore, not to destroy a work which, in spite of languor and apparent sterility, had served a useful purpose in the past. Instead of removing all that could recall the founders, they tried to preserve faithfully all that was of the spirit, practices and goals of the institution.⁽⁴⁾

(4) Certain points of the rules and customs of the hospitallers were maintained by our foundresses and appear still today in our own Constitutions and customs. Nothing is more natural than having to continue their work; our mothers would draw inspiration from the wisdom and experience of the brothers and follow their example as closely as possible.

Of Christian inspiration, this association had been dedicated to works of charity; we shall see later how Madam d'Youville was able to maintain these works and even to expand them.

However, she did not wish, for the time being, to continue the work of the schools and she asked the administrators "to be dispensed from instructing the youth".⁽⁵⁾ Later her daughters would open primary schools to meet the needs of certain localities. In the North-West, they would even take on industrial schools organized in view of training native children in various arts and crafts suitable to their respective sex. Thus the plan conceived by Brother Charon was to be realized in its entirety.

As for the principal devotions of the hospitallers, Madam d'Youville gave them primacy in those she wished to adopt for her institute. "The cult of names, the fidelity with which we keep them is the salvation of things", said Tertullien in his concise language. The feasts of the Holy Cross which had been until then, the titular feasts of the hospital chapel, were maintained and celebrated with the same pomp and solemnity. The work of the inventory and the near vacancy of the hospital at the time of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross had not, even that year, prevented celebration there of high mass and solemn vespers, according to the custom of the hospitallers.

It was not in vain that the foundress wished to preserve this devotion to the Cross and to place it at the foundation of her institute. Initiated to suffering from her youth, or rather from her childhood, she felt she would all her life have to follow closely a poor, humble, and suffering Jesus. The better to strengthen her steps and those of her Sisters in the path of this adorable leader, she understood that she must seek in frequent meditation of the Cross the anointing that fortifies, the light that guides, and grace that brings about perfection of life by shaping it gradually according to the divine model.

⁽⁵⁾ Memoirs of 1752.

The veneration of the Sacred Heart seemed to have been considered important from the very early days of the foundation. We have already seen that one of the altars in the hospital chapel was particularly dedicated to the Sacred Heart. Our humble Mother welcomed this devotion with all the more joy as she herself had learned early to honor the heart of Jesus and that it was in its divine contact that had arisen the great desire that now filled her life. We read her name inscribed in 1731 in the record of the Confraternity of the Sacred Heart established at the Ursuline Convent in Quebec city, along with the day and the Hour of adoration assigned to her.⁽⁶⁾ As early as 1749, two years only, after she entered the hospital, she obtained from Benedict XIV through Father Normant, an indult dated May 5 authorizing the establishment of the Confraternity of the Sacred Heart in the hospital chapel and enriching it with indulgences.

A record was opened at the same time for members of the Confraternity. It is headed by the names of Father Normant and Father Déat along with their days of adoration; the names of the foundresses follow; then those of pious persons of the town among which are noted a large number of priests and important persons: finally, the names of boarders and the poor of the institution.

Thus, the humble foundress inaugurated her work of dedication and love by drawing hearts to Jesus Christ, after having dedicated her own heart to him. This delicate attention illustrates well from what source her zeal was drawn. From it came this intense and exquisite love that would characterize her whole life and deserve the praise after her death: "She tenderly loved Jesus Christ and the poor."

As for the feast of St Joseph celebrated at the time of the brothers by high mass and vespers, nothing indicates that it was celebrated with the same solemnity under the Sisters. However, they did

(6) Marguerite Dufrost de Lajemmerais' hour will be October 23, from 8-9 a.m. (Record of the Confraternity of the Heart of Jesus at the Ursuline Convent in Quebec) This explains why the name of Mother d'Youville is not inscribed in the record of the General Hospital.

render to the faithful guardian of virgins, a loving veneration of trust and respect. On Wednesdays, the most exemplary Sisters obtained the privilege of receiving holy Communion in his honor.

Shortly after the Sisters had entered the hospital, large wards were opened and furnished. Up until then, only men had found refuge and assistance there. Now, women were received, orphans, incurables, and mental patients as well. The love of Jesus permeated them, and transfigured for them, the persons in greatest need; all found with them, the care their age and infirmities required. Father Antoine Déat, a Sulpician priest, pastor in Ville-Marie, took advantage of Madam d'Youville's enterprising spirit and brought to her attention, another category of unfortunate people, who were no less worthy of attention. A vigilant and zealous pastor, he was disturbed at seeing certain disorders multiplying in his parish. To remedy this evil, he had long desired that a place of refuge and retreat be established for prostitutes. Repeated requests made to ministers of the colony for their cooperation in establishing "a work so useful for the preservation of morals and the honor of families" had remained unanswered.

He was more successful with Mr. Hoquart. With the latter's authorization, he urged Madam d'Youville to take in these misguided persons in order to bring them back to sentiments of honor and the practice of virtue. Always disposed to undertake any good work which Providence and the interest of souls seemed to require of her, the charitable mother embraced this one with the dedication and spirit of faith for which she was renowned. Twelve rooms were immediately prepared in the upper part of the house to accommodate them. These rooms were called Jericho, a name given to a house which had once been open by the seminary for the same purpose and which Count Frontenac had suppressed.

It was not always an easy task to keep these women confined; and very often, one had to contend with their accomplices. One day among others, a soldier unduly vexed, came to the door of the hospital, ready to fire at Madam d'Youville if she dared to refuse to return to him, the object of his passion. The foundress was

notified and urged to avoid the imminent peril. Finding strength in God, Madam d'Youville did not hesitate to face the stranger. And in her usual calmness, with a peaceful look and controlled voice, she ordered him to leave. Subdued by the authority of this word and the modest dignity of its tone, the soldier departed silent and crestfallen.

Unable to obtain anything from Madam d'Youville's firmness, the dissolute took their protests elsewhere. In the meantime, G. Hocquart who had returned to France, had been replaced as Intendant by François Bigot. It was soon noticed that the new administrator did not share all the views of his predecessor. With the complaints made to him against Madam d'Youville concerning the women confined at the hospital, he became persuaded that the foundress' zeal was exaggerated. The practice she had adopted of cutting their hair served him as a pretext to disapprove of her conduct. He threatened a law-suit against her if she continued the practice. "To remedy such abuse", he added, "I order you expressly not to receive into this Jericho, any girl or woman except by my authority which I shall send in writing when I judge appropriate to confine one. I trust you will not repeat the mistake you have made; otherwise, I shall apply an effective remedy". (7)

Such unkindly attitudes along with such formal restrictions were not likely to assure a long life to this work which the sisters had undertaken with such zeal. Other difficulties which later arose, forced them eventually to discontinue and they gave it up with regret. (8)

(7) Letter of August 17, 1750.

(8) Our memoirs mention this work for the last time in 1755 on the occasion of Bishop Pontbriand's pastoral visit. In a circular letter, the prelate allowed admission of these persons only "on order of the civil authorities and in as much as the primary object of the institute would not suffer".

The following year, on the entreaty of intendant Bigot, the hospital opened a ward for wounded soldiers. There is no doubt that this added responsibility, coupled with the lack of space, obliged the Sisters to discontinue taking in prostitutes.

These difficulties were, however, only the prelude to much more serious troubles. Under the administration of the new Intendant, the very work of the poor would be compromised. But we shall soon see how Providence saved it with the help of powerful and dedicated benefactors.

CHAPTER VI

The Administrators revoke the powers granted to Madam d'Youville — By an ordinance of Oct. 15, 1750, the hospital is suppressed — Petition of the citizens — Strife between Madam d'Youville, the Bishop, and the Intendant — Father Cousturier defends the cause of the hospital — The ordinance of 1750 is annulled — Letters patent of Louis XV positively affirm Madam d'Youville in the administration of the hospital.
1749 - 1753

Less than three years had sufficed to reveal the administrative qualities of Madam d'Youville. Thanks to the spirit of orderliness, of work, and of thrift which characterized her and which she had passed on to her companions, the hospital had undergone a great transformation. The buildings and premises had taken on new life; thirty poor found there a livelihood, good care, and the advantage of a well-ordered Christian existence. Modest indeed were the resources with which to assure the subsistence of the poor and to face the obligations resulting from the acceptance of the establishment. But in the midst of this poverty, everyone knew how to await and how to expect assistance from above, and God blessed their trust. The sacrifices and hard work of the sisters provided for the essentials; the alms of a few friends from time to time covered the most urgent debts. Collections were even organized for this purpose. Father Navetier, a Sulpician priest, took

it upon himself to collect in the town and suburbs. Father Hourdé, also a Sulpician, did likewise in the parishes of Laprairie, Longueuil, Varennes, and Verchères. The product of these collections proved this time that public opinion, so hostile in the past, now favored the work once thwarted.

Thus reassured about the present and counting even more on the future, they carried on trustingly when, as we just said, difficulties far more serious than the preceding ones set the young society on the very brink of ruin.

At this time, extreme privation was felt in the whole country. The Marquis de Beauharnois complained: "Indigence is dominant in Canada", he wrote; "I do not know ten families capable of paying the dowry of a religious". Exhausted by ruinous wars, the royal Government was uneasy about new communities establishing themselves in the colony. It feared that lacking resources, they would become a burden, and consideration was being given to understand in a letter addressed to the Administrators of Quebec, concerning the provisional commission of the Montreal Hospital: "Whatever may be the success of this arrangement with Madam d'Youville", he wrote, "I must forewarn you that his Majesty is not inclined to consent to the forming of a new community of women in the colony. They have increased too quickly already". Inspired by this attitude of the Crown, the Minister suggested to the Administrators, the union of the General Hospital of Quebec with Hôtel-Dieu of that town and to unite in the same way the Montreal establishments. Such a suggestion could not be agreed to by the Administrators, jealous of preserving in Quebec the two distinct establishments; but it had the effect of awakening another project in their minds.

While the Quebec hospital appeared unstable, that of Montreal offered hardly a better chance of survival. According to the resolution of the court, Madam d'Youville could not form a new community. The dispersion of her society after her death would infallibly condemn the hospital to ruin once again.

Rather than allow both establishments to exist in such precarious conditions, would it not be better to assure the existence of only one? By transferring to the Quebec hospital, the property of the Montreal hospital, it was thought that the latter could be done away with. To compensate, the poor of Montreal would be received at Quebec. In the eyes of the Administrators, this arrangement appeared to be the most practical and wisest, so they adopted it. Recently arrived in the country, Mr de Lajonquière yielded to their decision.

But they had settled on a suggestion of the court, not on its formal authorization; especially, they had not counted on the protests of persons dedicated to the establishment. As soon as Father Normant became aware of the danger that threatened this work, he sought practical means for protecting it. A petition drawn up in the name of Madam d'Youville and her companions was sent without delay to the chief Administrators.

The petitioners recalled the promise made to them by the Administrators that they would be confirmed by the court in the administration of the hospital, promise on which they had based their determination to invest all their labors and their attention on the restoration of the establishment in ruins. They gave assurance of their zeal in pursuing this work born of the devotedness of the faithful, upheld by their alms, and recognized as an indispensable necessity for the poor of Montreal. These were quite unwilling to end their days in Quebec and besides, were not in a state of sustaining the fatigue of the trip and unable to cover the expense. Neither the question of the debt left by the hospitallers which they had bound themselves to liquidate, nor the question of expenses incurred for repairs to the hospital would ever authorize them to harass the Crown for any extraordinary help. Counting on the vigilant care of Providence, "which until then had seemed to bless their efforts and their sacrifices", they requested only to be favored with the protection of the chief Administrators and the approval of his Majesty.

Bishop de Pontbriand appeared touched by the direction of this request. He wrote to Madam d'Youville: "If God calls you to govern this house, I am persuaded that His plan will succeed. I shall address a reminder to the Minister showing him that no better way can be found of consolidating this house than to leave it in your hands".⁽¹⁾ Did Bishop de Pontbriand later change his mind or did his reminder have no effect on the Minister? We have no way of knowing. In any case, as early as the autumn of 1750, the planned suppression actively pursued by Bigot was concluded with the Bishop, the Governor and the Intendant.

By the ordinance they drew up jointly to this effect, October 15, the provisional agreement made with Madam d'Youville ceased to exist; the property and real estate of the Montreal hospital would be transferred to Quebec. The Quebec sisters were authorized to sell to their advantage, buildings and property of the Montreal Hospital that could not be moved to Quebec, and to "take in, feed, and support the crippled, the elderly, and the orphans of Montreal in proportion to the income they would receive". Because the inclement season was not suitable for the transfer of the poor to Quebec, a special clause authorized Madam d'Youville to remain with them at the hospital, until the following July.

This decision hastily taken, without preliminary agreement, and without the formal authorization of the court, brought consternation among the most disinterested. When Father de l'Île Dieu, Vicar General of the colonies in Paris, was informed of this, he wrote to the Bishops: "People are hasty in Canada. They hang a man and try him later". To top it all, the ordinance was published in Montreal on November 23, after the last ships had set sail for France, so that everyone would be faced with an accomplished fact by the time protests reached the court.

Madam d'Youville heard this ordinance published in the street to the sound of drums as she was returning from the market place

(1) Letter of September 8, 1748.

where she had been shopping for food for her household. She had no sooner entered the house than a bailiff came to inform her that she would have to "remit to the King's attorney the property titles to the hospital and to give an account of the revenue from this property; that she was forbidden to carry out any work, any repairs to the property of said hospital under pain of suffering the loss of expenses incurred". One can imagine the surprise and the pain of the Foundress on receiving this double summons and the manner in which it was given.

A glance at Jesus despised and jeered at by the mobs established in her soul the peace and serenity which she maintained in the most difficult situations. As she recalled the Bishop's words, she thought: "If God calls us to govern this house, his plan will succeed; the impediments and opposition of men should not trouble us".

The citizens did not conduct themselves in the same way. Entirely won over now to Madam d'Youville whose worth and initiative they recognized, they burst out into criticism against the Bishop and the Intendant.

Father Normant, less affected by the measures of administration than by the excesses they had engendered, could not but convey his grief to Bishop de Pontbriand.

"The ordinance has caused great commotion here, not only by the sound of drums that accompanied the proclamation, but still more by the mutterings, the slander and calumny to which it gave rise. Everybody was so affected that without any restraint, and overlooking all rules of charity, they broke out into resentment against your Highness and against Mr. Bigot whom they suspect to be its authors, excusing the Governor General, and holding him in no way responsible for this measure of which he does not approve. I have been and am still grieved to see such blameworthy excesses, such offences against God, and to see the trust and respect they owe your Highness, altered and diminished. In my opinion, it is not the right way of defending a good cause".

Here, Father Normant specified some of the complaints which the people were spreading unscrupulously against the Administrators by adding: "This merging is considered unjust because it strips the poor of this locality, of an acquired and legitimate right over property that is being disposed of in favor of strangers; and because it is in direct opposition to the intention of the Founders who in establishing this hospital, had in mind only the poor of this locality.

"It is believed that this merging is absolutely void in form, since the interested parties were neither informed nor heard; the merging was concluded without previous information nor any official report to prove its necessity or usefulness.

"On the contrary, it appears that the affair was willfully kept secret until the ships had sailed for France; it was proclaimed only when it was impossible to have recourse to the Crown; this is contrary to the rules.

"Besides, it is surprising to see how Mr. Bigot, who is the pursuing party, kept to himself the knowledge of this whole affair; the quality of judge and party being incompatible and contrary to the law. This gives rise to much disapproval. A few, however, claim that no one can refuse the time or the means of referring the matter to his Majesty; and until the court be informed, the merging will not take effect".

Along with the most influential citizens of Montreal, an appeal was made to the Minister of the Navy, in order to have the ordinance of the administration revoked. The Baron of Longueuil, the Governor of Montreal, the King's lieutenant, the Major and other officers and magistrates signed it. It was an energetic protest against the suppression of the Montreal Hospital, a work founded expressly in view of the needs of this Government, legally authorized and established for life by Letters patent of Louis XIV.⁽²⁾

(2) Vieux documents Vo. 2, pièce 28.

A copy of this document was sent to the Administrators before being sent to the Minister. Madam d'Youville had the courage to take it herself to Quebec with Father Normant's letter. Cooly received by the Bishop and by the Intendant, she was more graciously received by the Governor who promised to mediate with the court.⁽³⁾

However, in case of threatening eviction, Madam d'Youville thought it expedient to present her accounts to the Intendant. It was the beginning of 1751. Since the little colony had entered the hospital, the Sisters' labors and the alms of the faithful had sufficed to feed and support the poor, but they had not been able to pay off the expense incurred in repairs made to the hospital, nor to return the farms to production. In these works, Madam d'Youville had limited herself to what was indispensable; however, to cover these costs, she had had to borrow 10,000 pounds. It was fair then, for her to claim this amount in order to pay off the debt. Such was not the opinion of the Intendant. Not only did he refuse Madam d'Youville her rights, but he blamed her for increasing the number of the poor at the hospital and for having received fifteen or sixteen women without having been formally authorized to do so. According to him, the expense made necessary by this increase remained the responsibility of Madam d'Youville, along with the obligation to "have the hospital's farms cultivated and seeded before turning them over to the Sisters in Quebec".

These objections and unreasonable claims were too contrary to justice and to the instructions that Madam d'Youville had previously received, for her to feel obliged to comply with them. With the humble and firm conviction that alone a sense of duty can give, she wrote:

"The letter by which you honored me in writing caused all the greater surprise that it appears to me entirely contrary both to the ordinance which established me as provisional Director of this

(3) Notes from Father Sattin.

hospital and to what you, yourself told me when I exposed to you the sad state of this house; the property being in ruins, required urgent and extensive repairs. Kindly recall, Sir, that you always required me to keep everything in good shape and to proceed with needed repairs. The Bishop and the Governor General gave me the same instructions. It is then with your consent and that of these gentlemen that I worked for the welfare of the poor. It is true that I did not receive your orders in writing; but your word is just as good; I trusted it as it was my duty to do so, because of the respect I owe you and because I know you to be honest. I acted accordingly. I believe I was right and that you cannot before God nor before men, refuse to allow me the said expenses and the refund of the amounts I spent. I borrowed the money and I must reimburse it."

"Furthermore, Sir, I forwarded to you my accounts after the first year of my administration. At that time, the expenses exceeded the income by more than 3,000 pounds; you did not appear to disapprove of this nor show any discontent. If I had exceeded my powers or acted against your will and against the welfare of the poor, it would have been normal to bring the fault to my attention and to disallow any further repairs. But on the contrary, you encouraged me to continue because in effect, you recognized the necessity. It is therefore not on my own accord, that I acted, it is with your knowledge and with your approval. It is even at your request, as in establishing me as Director of the hospital, you ordered me to keep a record of expenses and receipts, so as to be able to render an account; and by the same act, you authorized me to proceed with the more urgent repairs, according to the report drawn up before the King's attorney, by experts designated for this purpose. The experts reported on the necessary and urgent repairs that were completed; those that I made are included and were judged necessary by the experts. I made them with authorization and in conformity with your orders. You cannot then, in conscience, refuse to reimburse me as I did not exceed my powers, and made only a small part of the necessary and urgent repairs mentioned in the official report that you had

drawn up. If I had not made these repairs and allowed the house and buildings to crumble, if I had abandoned the farms, you would have blamed me. I did for the best, without any personal interest, but acted only for the welfare of the poor. If I have not the consolation of having pleased you, it is that ability was at fault, not good will."

"You appear to blame me for having received a greater number of poor people than were there when I entered the hospital. It is true that there were only four, of whom only one was on half-pay. They had great difficulty living on this, and since I have come, the number has grown to over thirty and they have been adequately provided for, not from the revenues from the farms but by Providence and by our labor; I was never told that the number we were to receive was to be limited, and I don't believe there is any document that indicates this. Even if this were so, Sir, I would still not deserve reproof, because on the one hand, I was authorized to set up the women's ward and to accommodate and feed those I had already cared for; and on the other hand, when you granted the poor the honor and the charity of your visit, you appeared happy and approved this good work. Also, you yourself on reviewing my accounts, recognized and stated so, that this excess of expenditure over income has not been incurred for food and upkeep of the poor. This excess was then only for repairs and upkeep of property which was thus improved. It then appears just that expenses incurred contributed toward the improvement of the estate. You are too honest not to yield to such sound reasoning."

"You state, Sir, that I must sow the farms before turning them over to the Sisters of Quebec. I can assure you that when I took over, I did not find the land sown; nor even a strip of ploughing done; it is I who had the land ploughed and seeded: and, Sir, I feel that I am bound only to leave things as I found them. I expect that you will be kind enough to accept my accounts and sign them. They are presented with all the honesty of which I am capable"...

The wisdom of this reasoning would have persuaded an impartial and unbiased man; but the effect on the Intendant was to

accelerate the intended project. Furthermore, his response, besides indicating his formal determination to continue in the same direction, contained, in addition, a refusal to settle the accounts of the Foundress as well as the suspicion to the effect that she had resorted to false pretexts in the giving of alms.

Did the Intendant succeed in sharing his suspicions with others in administrative authority? One may believe so by Bishop de Pontbriand's reply to the Foundress who had asked for his advice and help in this delicate conjuncture. "I think", he wrote, "that they are convinced that you did not really borrow and that these expenses were made from alms received. If you presented these loans as Director, perhaps you would have less difficulty. I say perhaps, because I am not involved in this affair, but I have been obliged by various circumstances, to consent to the merging that was decreed."

Instead of the support of which she stood in such great need, it was added grief that came to Madam d'Youville. Crushed by the mistrust that seemed to gain momentum, with her loyalty attacked, she became alarmed. If only her own personal interests had been in question, she could have accepted to be unrecognized and would have awaited from God alone her vindication. But she saw the future, the very honor of a work undertaken in the interest of the poor and the faith, seriously compromised: she felt urgently bound to defend it. Pressed by the Bishop himself to explain her case, she wrote:

"Your Grace, I am sincere, honest, and incapable of any subterfuge to disguise the truth or make it ambiguous. I really borrowed this sum of money for the benefit and restoration of the hospital farms. I owe it and I have no other means of repaying than the refund which I expect from your grace and from these gentlemen. What I tell your Grace is the exact truth, and I would not tell the slightest untruth for all the money in the world.

I sought nothing but the restoration of this hospital and its goods and in incurring these expenses, I never intended to create a sort of necessity, as some think and say, that I should remain to care

for it myself, because of the impossibility of reimbursing me. Such, Your Grace, is not in my nature. I can assure you that such a thought never occurred to me; but what drew me into this situation in spite of myself and against my intentions, was the multitude of necessary repairs which one after another required prompt attention, and in conscience, I felt bound to see to them, fearing that being responsible for this work, I would answer before God if I allowed everything to go to ruin.

This is the only reason for all the expenses which I found necessary and which truly were necessary. Neither my companions, nor the number of our poor were responsible for these debts; Mr. Bigot admits that the revenue from alms and our work sufficed for their livelihood. I beg your Grace to attempt to have these loans reimbursed."

If the sincerity and directness of her language did not immediately restore to Madam d'Youville the entire confidence of Bishop de Pontbriand, they succeeded at least, in dispelling the suspicion that had arisen against her. It must have been a relief for the accused Foundress to receive the assurance of this from the Bishop himself.

"I believe what you have written to me; as a result, you may take all necessary legal means to recover what is owing to you. The King will probably settle all these difficulties; you will be in a position to assert your rights, to stand by your agreement, I wish you success".⁽⁴⁾

Such was not the Intendant's wish. Obstinate in his purpose, he proceeded hastily to carry it out, but was soon to regret it. On his order, the titles to the farms at Pointe-Saint-Charles and at Chambly had been turned over to the King's attorney. A man named Boivin was ordered to take possession of these farms in the name of the Sisters in Quebec, in the early days of April.⁽⁵⁾ Part of the furniture of the hospital had already been transferred to Quebec:

(4) Letter — April 26, 1751.

(5) Letter of February 5, 1751.

a pulpit from the chapel, remarkable among many, for the beauty of its sculpture.

Decidedly, the Intendant had counted on the sanction of the court, and he expected confirmation by the return of the first ships.⁽⁶⁾ But, though he watched eagerly for a dispatch, the mail remained silent on this subject. This silence made him suspect that some strange intervention had impeded his scheme. In fact, Father Cousturier, the Superior General of the Sulpicians, and in this capacity, Lord of the Island of Montreal, had been informed of Bigot's intentions. The suppression of the hospital appeared to be an attack on his rights; he wished to claim them. According to the condition expressly laid down by Father Tronson in donating the land for the hospital, the land and the buildings were to return to the seminary unless it were sold outright. Incapable of supporting themselves at the time of this resignation, the brothers were still less in a position to afford the necessary sum; the estate then legally became the property of the seminary.

On the other hand, Father Cousturier did not ignore that the main obstacle to the development and the prosperity of the works of the hospitallers had been the question of debts. But he was aware of the proposals made by Madam d'Youville to pay off these debts. He was himself trustee of sums that could pay some of the creditors. A legacy of 6,000 pounds left by Father Bouffandeau, a Sulpician priest, could cover a part; other charitable persons planned to contribute their alms when the pious widow was stabilized in her position as Administrator of the hospital.

Finally, based on experience of the recent past, and on the testimonies of reliable persons, Madam d'Youville was decidedly the best qualified person to restore the declining institute. "Of distinguished merit and having an uncommon mind, according to Father Montgolfier, she could direct a business with prudence

⁽⁶⁾ Letter of June 19, 1751.

and govern a community with edification".⁽⁷⁾ Father de l'Île-Dieu with whom the Foundress had communicated these last few years, added to this testimony: "She is a person who is enterprising, who is cognizant of her object and who pursues it".

Struck with the firmness of these considerations, Father Cousturier used his influence with the court to make them known. His intervention had the desired result. A letter from Paris dated July 2, 1751 suspended the sale of the hospital property. The Minister stated that his intention had never been to abolish the hospital but to change its status to that of a home for the aged administered by the Sisters of Quebec. Before settling on the suppression, the matter should have been studied to see if the establishment could not carry on with the offers of Madam d'Youville and her companions. "Whatever may be the result of your examination", he added, "please postpone the execution of your ordinance for the sale of the establishment until further orders from His Majesty. I must have you note that your ordinance does not suffice for this sort of transaction which requires the express authority of the King." ⁽⁸⁾

This dispatch gave the Intendant the presentiment that his plans were going to fail. He hastily re-established things as they had been: the property titles were returned to Madam d'Youville and the furniture moved to the Quebec hospital was returned to the hospital in Montreal. The restitution took place in time. On May 12, 1752, by an order-in-council, the King annulled the ordinance of October 15, 1750 and the Administrators were ordered "to settle with Madam d'Youville, the conditions under which she was to continue to manage the hospital." This was carried out by the agreement of September 20 of the same year. Being a prudent woman, Madam d'Youville this time requested that the new con-

(7) Father Montgolfier, a Sulpician of rare merit, of whom mention will frequently be made in the future, arrived in Montreal in the fall of 1751.

(8) Archives de la marine, dépêches de 1751. Lettre du Ministre à M.M: de la Jonquière et Bigot, 2 juillet.

ditions be protected by Letters patent from the King. She obtained this, thanks to steps taken by Father Normant, her counsellor and zealous defender during this painful struggle with the court.

More closely responsible for the negotiations in Paris, Father de l'Isle Dieu wrote to Madam d'Youville: "I hope, Madam, that we shall conclude this business to your advantage and to the advantage of this poor building which will owe you its restoration. I beg you to believe that I will neglect nothing for the success of this matter which I have at heart as much as you".⁽⁹⁾

On June 3, 1753, this success was assured: The Letters patent were signed in Versailles and registered in Quebec on October 1st of the same year.

According to the content of these letters, Madam d'Youville and her companions remained in charge of the hospital with all the titles and privileges granted on April 14, 1697 to the hospitallers. They could increase their number to twelve, distributing the tasks among themselves, under the guidance of the Bishop who would admit into the society only persons approved by himself. They were to ask the Bishop for a rule of life. They would care for twelve indigent persons; they themselves would be looked after in sickness as in health by the hospital. Such was the substance of the royal decree which conferred on the Institute of the Grey Nuns, both its legal and civic existence with all the rights which they entail.

These details have made us speak of events out of sequence. Now, we shall return to the year 1751. But before continuing, we daughters of Madam d'Youville, feel the need to pause and render homage to the zeal and dedication of the holy priests who, along the way, showed such great concern and love for our works. We are touched as we consider with what solicitude the Sulpicians of Father Olier watched over the birth of our community;

⁽⁹⁾ Letter of May 20, 1753.

with what zeal they shepherded and supported its painful beginnings. Since then, what help, enlightenment and graces have come to us through their successors! What strength and what encouragement do we not draw each day from their firm counselling which is at once discreet and fatherly!

In our feeling of inability “to acknowledge forever the kindness of these benefactors and of these guides; it is a consolation for us to be able as did our Foundress, to pray to Jesus Christ, the source of imperishable treasures, to be the only reward worthy of offering them in return for such dedication and service”.⁽¹⁰⁾

⁽¹⁰⁾ Letter of Madam d’Youville.

CHAPTER VII

Opening of the novitiate — The first mistress of novices —
Pastoral visit of Bishop de Pontbriand —
Vesturing of our first Mothers.
1751 – 1755

In the period just covered, the year 1751 was the most stormy. Momentarily divested of their privileges, our mothers felt their work to be on the point of annihilation. But while outside the storm raged, the budding institution was being consolidated from the inside by the opening of a novitiate.

In any other circumstance, this event would have been an ordinary sign of vitality and durability; but the difficulties in spite of which it came to birth reveal how deep in Madam d'Youville, was the supernatural conviction that she would nevertheless be maintained in the administration of the hospital. In imitation of the saints, she had all the more hope for the future of her society, because there was little to expect from a human point of view. Hence, she was able to maintain peace and order in her little family, while the storm raged outside.

Father Sattin depicts in a touching way, this family during its trying times. It would be profitable and a joy for us to reflect here, on a few of its original and simple traits. He writes: "This company of select persons, which we could not call a community

because it was neither exteriorly nor legally approved, was however a model of all we can see in the most regular and firmest communities. Their clothing was not remarkable nor uniform; it was that of lay people except that it was simple and modest both in cut and quality of goods as were other articles they used. The only thing distinctive about these ladies, was the black belt around their waist; no superfluous ornaments about their head-dress. They so disliked vanity that they kept their hair short.

Concerning order and religious practices, all was regulated: the hour of rising and retiring, silence, meditation, reading, and other spiritual exercises, meals, and service of the poor. Among themselves, their relationships were cordial, condescending and mutually honest. Without being strangers to the world, they carried on with persons from the outside, conversations concerning only duty or charity. As to visiting for whatever reason, all was subordinated to the will and the prudence of the one in charge, more as a mother than as a superior. They continually practiced true humility and mortification, sources of the highest virtues. Holy emulation made them eager to acquire childlike simplicity which avoids detours and personal views, as well as prying into the conduct of others. The regard they had for poverty, obedience, and chastity was such that before God, their only witness, they had of their own accord, committed themselves formally to observe them faithfully. It was by frequent retreats that they maintained such holy dispositions and that they gave rise daily to new developments of the tenderness and compassion, for the poor".⁽¹⁾

Until 1751, our first mothers had trained themselves to this life of piety, regularity, and charity under the guidance of Madam d'Youville. Aided by Father Normant, the superior, and Father Paigné, their confessor, the foundress had adequately managed everything herself, thanks to her wisdom and her alacrity. But, at this time, special vocations required an organization more in

⁽¹⁾ Manuscript of Father Sattin, p. 44

conformity with the rule. The seventeen-year old orphan who came to Madam d'Youville as a boarder on July 2, 1739, had not been forgotten. Trained to be considerate and possessing great wealth, the young lady had not at first, felt any attraction to the vocation of servant of the poor. Her tender age revolted against this type of life which appeared serious and monotonous. The works of charity and the sacrifices they entailed, inspired in her, only aversion. However, Divine Providence had led her to this pious group only to be caught like an unsuspecting dove, in the net of God's favor.

Witnessing daily the fervor of the charity of the Sisters, she reflected on the emptiness of her life compared to theirs. While all around her, they were working joyfully for the Lord, giving of themselves, reaping many blessings, she was alone, inactive, living selfishly, spending her days in idleness and without any loftiness of purpose. Gradually, she began to regret all the time lost, and to envy the lot of the servants of God. As a result of these thoughts, she tried to acquaint herself with their work. Her efforts were blessed by the Lord; it was not long before earlier reluctance gave way to genuine solace. When Madam d'Youville and her companions entered the hospital in 1747, she followed them, drawn by the secret desire of one day adopting their way of life.

Three more years of indecision went by. But vainly does one resist the Lord. His approach is both powerful and sweet, and his triumph is assured in a soul that is sincere. Thérèse Despins numbered among these. By the marvellous change that had come over her, she realized the reality of her vocation. She decided not to resist God's call any longer and revealed to Father Normant her recent aspirations as well as the interior attraction which urged her to give purpose to her life, by dedicating herself to the service of the poor. But an obstacle which to her, appeared insurmountable, stood in her way; there was no novitiate and no mistress of novices. Father Normant who knew Miss Despins' solid virtue, the rectitude of her character and her good upbringing, admiring the ways of God in her openness with him, answered without hesitation: "My daughter, I assure you that on the day

you enter, we shall have a mistress of novices." This was a mysterious promise which she was soon to understand. Trusting in his word, she therefore entered July 2, feast of the Visitation of Our Lady. Great was her surprise when she found herself to be at once the first regular novice and the first novice mistress: the same day, Madam d'Youville in agreement with Father Normant, entrusted her with this duty.

The acuteness of mind of Miss Despins, the regularity of her habits, her calm manner governed by prudence, justified this extraordinary choice. If the wisdom of superiors needs to be confirmed by precedents, it would suffice to quote Saint Theresa who brought from Avila, Sister Anne de Jésus, still a novice, to entrust to her the direction of the novitiate at Salamanca. What religious ignores the fact that Church history is full of these marvellous cases where it is evident that the Spirit of God enlightens and guides the founders of religious houses in most of their undertakings? Without this deep conviction, we would often be doomed to assess their acts as folly or imprudence.

The novitiate was opened on the day the Church celebrates the feast of the Visitation of the Virgin Mary to her cousin Elizabeth. It was an appropriate one to inaugurate this sanctuary for virgins and future apostles of charity. How fervent must have been the MAGNIFICAT which rose from every heart towards heaven that night! This feast day had undoubtedly been chosen intentionally by the foundress who was always attentive to place under the patronage of the Queen of Virgins, each new development of her society.⁽²⁾

Though astounded by such an unforeseen promotion, Thérèse

(2) Madam d'Youville was born on a Saturday; she received her first poor person on the feast of the Presentation. She signed the original commitment with her companions on the feast of the Purification. Her first concern as she assembled her companions for the first time, was to dedicate her work to the most Holy Virgin.

Despins bowed her head and humbly submitted. She did not find any companion in the novitiate, and for fifteen months, she was the only novice. Spurred on by the lofty regard she had for the responsibility she would later carry, she engaged wholeheartedly in the practice of the virtues, the ways of which she was to teach future novices.

Soon three young candidates — Marie-Joseph Gosselin, Thérèse Beaufrère and Marie-Louise Lanouiller de Boisclair,⁽³⁾ came successively to be placed under her guidance. A room on the third floor of the hospital, situated above the superior's room had served as a novitiate for the Charon brothers. It was re-opened under the same title. It is there, to this school of supernatural life, that our Blessed Marguerite would often go to teach young recruits the art of training themselves to solid virtue, that of engaging in generous sacrifice as required by a life of work, of privation, of silence, and of prayer. She would teach them to love the poor, to serve them well, so as to win them over more effectively to Jesus Christ. Having kindled in these virtuous women so eager for perfection and dedication, the fire of love that burned within her, she would have no difficulty in making them appreciate every kind of sacrifice, all the holy arts of her own generosity and zeal.

Father Sattin states that Madam d'Youville had a particular love for the novices. She considered them as her own children and always showed them much interest and affection. Seeing in them the hope and future of her work, she repeatedly spoke to them of the virtues necessary to carry out this work of mercy and renunciation.⁽⁴⁾

The Civil authorities had extended their protection over the new society; the establishment of a novitiate had assured its fruitfulness; to become solid and durable, the work now lacked only ec-

(3) Marie-Joseph Gosselin entered the novitiate in 1752, Thérèse Beaufrère in 1753 and Marie-Louise Lanouiller de Boisclair in 1754.

(4) Manuscript of Father Sattin.

clesiastical approval. This favor desired and requested by our mothers, would finally be granted them on June 15, 1755. The occasion was the pastoral visitation of Bishop de Pontbriand, the first with which he honored their society.

Let us hasten to say that all disagreement had ceased to exist between the bishop and Madam d'Youville. Hardly was the truth known, than the bishop neglected nothing to dispel the uneasiness that his former mistrust and opposition could have produced in the hearts of our dear Mother and her daughters. A letter from his grace betrayed his anxiety "You are too straightforward, Madam, to distrust the sentiments of affection and respect that I have for you. It will be a consolation for me, if our project of the General Hospital is confirmed. As soon as a firm decision is reached, we shall think seriously of settling matters".⁽⁵⁾

In the course of his visitation, he appeared to take all the more interest in the little society that had up until now, been constantly battered by storms of contradiction and trials.

Having assembled the community, he had an account rendered to him of the temporal administration of the house, of the observance of the rule, and of the details of the organization, Our Mothers' only rule consisted then of the three loose sheets written by Father Normant. One explained the nature of their original commitment as they dedicated themselves to the service of the poor; the second laid out the order of their spiritual exercises and their work of the day; the third, stated the dispositions required to live and to care for the poor. The prelate appeared satisfied with these simple rules by which the group had been confidently led since the beginning, seventeen years ago. Not only did he confirm them with his approbation, but he asked for a copy of them with the signature of the ten senior sisters, the only ones who were professed at that time.

⁽⁵⁾ Letter of January 15, 1753

At the outset, one is astonished to see that the society had so few members after so many years of existence. To understand the reason, one must recall what Montreal was like at the beginning: a relatively sparsely populated centre having already two other communities of women; this is undoubtedly why the founders were far from thinking of approving the society. One must not forget either, the obstacles and the resistance which later were in the way of its development. Besides, Providence founds on humility and wished that our Institute rest in a special way on this solid foundation. For a long time yet, it would have difficulty in recruiting, first because of the Letters patent which limited to twelve the number of Sisters, and later because of British Administration which was opposed, in secret at least, to its extension.

To fulfil another point of the Letters patent, Madam d'Youville begged Bishop de Pontbriand to draw up a new rule of life. With paternal friendliness, the bishop replied with a circular letter which our archives retain as a memorial of his first official visitation. The precious document contains such beautiful praise of our Mothers that we quote it textually: "Though we are convinced that the rules are unnecessary, as long as you will maintain these sentiments of piety and fervor with which you are penetrated, and that charity alone suffices to keep you in the line of duty, we believe however, that we must comply with your wishes even if only to give you the opportunity of practising holy obedience which is the soul of all religious communities. We promise you will have them, but in the meantime, this is what we propose: until such time as other arrangements are made, we approve that you follow closely what is contained in the three loose sheets, in Father Normant's handwriting, and which you have been practising over a long period of time. These three sheets which we have approved, we wish to have them faithfully copied in a special book which will serve to record our ordinances and rules."⁽⁶⁾ By

⁽⁶⁾ Manuscript of Father Sattin, p. 60

this same ordinance, the bishop expressed the wish that the Sisters have a special work and recreation room that secular people would not be allowed to enter; that they go habitually to the same confessor named by the bishop except for the privilege granted on Ember days. He maintained Madam d'Youville in charge as superior, persuaded that he was thus complying with the wishes of her daughters. He advises the Foundress to acquaint with the details of administration, her three senior companions and to form her council with them. He begs Father Normant to interview the sisters individually in order to select an assistant capable of replacing the superior in case of absence or illness. Concerning the admission of new candidates, he lays down the following rule: "As stated in the Letters patent, your number is set at twelve. We think that you must not admit new members except those who have been in the house, two years, and when the number (twelve) has been attained, you must not admit more than three postulants, who will not be clothed with the regular habit that you have chosen, until they have lived one year in the house, have lived your way of life and have received your consent."

The plan of the novitiate was thus established. It was now up to the experience and the wisdom of the superiors to determine the particular exercises that would contribute to the development in young recruits, of the virtues suitable to the ministry they would later exercise. The charge of assistant was soon given to Sister Thaumur Lasource⁽⁷⁾ with the assent of all, and to the great satisfaction of Madam d'Youville who appreciated her virtue more than anyone and had used her thus far as her intimate councillor.

The special habit of which Bishop Pontbriand speaks here, and which Madam d'Youville was thinking of adopting for her community, was submitted that day to his approval. The prelate was evidently satisfied. As a pledge, he wrote: . . . "We approve the costume that you propose and in which one of you appeared

(7) Though the early spelling of this name was de la Source, Sister Thaumur usually signed Lasource. It is the latter spelling that we shall use from now on.

before us: a grey robe with two or three pleats, an apron of striped cotton, a black kerchief, a ruffle of muslin and over this a sort of black band. We consent that according to the custom followed by many women, you wear a small silver crucifix. . .” In agreement with Father Normant, Madam d’Youville wished that at the ends of this cross, there be a fleur-de-lis, in recognition to Louis XV who had just incorporated the community by his Letters patent. She wished also that the heart of Jesus surrounded by a crown of thorns as a symbol of love be engraved on the upper part of the cross.

Great must have been the eagerness of our Mothers to shed the clothing of the world, in order to don this uniform which would be for them at once a witness to the close union to Jesus Christ which they had contracted over a long period of time and an impetus to take on his Spirit.⁽⁸⁾ They agreed, however, to set the ceremony for August 25, feast of St Louis, which was then of obligation and which was also the patronal feast of Father Normant. One easily understands that by this delay, they wished to add to the holy joy of their clothing, the charm of a family feast, to join an act of religion towards God, to filial recognition towards their founder and father.

At the bishop’s request, Father Normant composed the ceremonial for the circumstance; it is the very one still in use today. On the day set for this final separation from the world, as a true father, he retained the pleasant duty of presiding himself at the vesting ceremony of the ten first women he had guided in the narrow way. They were: Marie-Marguerite Lajemmerais, widow d’Youville, Marie Thaumur-Lasource, Catherine Demers, Catherine de Rainville, Thérèse La Serre-Laforme, Agathe Véronneau, Marie-Joseph Bénard-Bourjoly, Marie-Antoinette Arelle, Marie-Marguerite-Thérèse Lemoine-Despins, Marie-Joseph Gosselin.

⁽⁸⁾ Ceremonial.

For the sake of simplicity which he desired as the characteristic of the new society, and perhaps also to avoid the distractions which often arise from the pomp which sometimes accompanies such ceremonies, Father Normant wished to have it take place within the Community in presence of the novices only. Thus, far away from public view, in the silence and recollection of this cenacle, the chosen ones would better hear the message of Him who on this day, wished to be the sole object of their thoughts and affections. They would appreciate more the meaning of His divine promise: "My yoke is sweet and my burden light". Whoever carries this burden with love, will see it blossom into heavenly joys and holy works. With what trust and what joy did they not take it upon their weak shoulders? And what consolation did they not experience as they received the cross, at being able now, to carry on their bosom this cherished image, this sacred book from which one may draw and maintain the highest knowledge and wisdom: Jesus and the strength of his cross!

Did they receive at this time, the ring which today, seals our permanent consecration to God, or had they been wearing it before? We do not know. Nothing precise is mentioned in our memoirs about this. What we can point out with greater certitude, is the pains that Madam d'Youville took to have engraved on this sign of our spiritual Covenant with Jesus Christ, the names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. What a touching testimony of her tender piety towards the Holy Family, which she thereby established as guardians of their holy commitment!

On the same day, our Mothers went to the parish church functions clothed in their new holy habits. It is said that people ran to the windows to see them go by. They did so no longer with the hostile sentiments of the early days, but with respect and veneration. From then on, they were not called by any other name than Sisters of Charity or Grey Nuns, but now the name took on a different meaning from that of earlier days; from then on, the young society finally felt free to appear in public. In the evening, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament celebrated in the hospital chapel, brought a new shower of heavenly blessings to our

Mothers and complemented this unforgettable day. Unforgettable, this day had truly been for those who had bought its consolations and its hopes at the price of such great sacrifices and numerous works! Unforgettable it is also for us who enjoy the fruits of their labors and sacrifices! From a distance of some one hundred and fifty years later, the Sisters still experience the same sentiments which had touched our dear ancestors when they donned for the first time, the habit which they honored with so much glory and sanctified by so many virtues.

For nearly eighteen years, scorned and taunted, exposed to all sorts of contradictions, they had responded only by humility and staunch fidelity to duty. Free at last to follow the goal that had brought them together, strengthened by the Church's blessing and the encouragement of her pontiffs, they were undoubtedly more courageous, but also more submissive and more humble. In the light of the blessings and insights of this day, they appreciated better the importance and the extent of the good which God would bring about through them.

It was probably in this circumstance that Father Pelissier de Féligonde, a Sulpician priest of the diocese of Clermont, was assigned to replace Father Paigné as spiritual director of the Sisters. In any case, our memoirs set his nomination in the year 1755. In accord with Father Normant, their superior, Father Paigné had guided and sustained our Mothers during the most critical and most troubled period the society would ever have to face. Father de Féligonde would hereafter help them to cultivate and bring to perfection these Christian virtues which so many holy influences had brought forth in them and which now were ready to bear fruit.

This same year, 1755, the poor at the hospital received as spiritual father, another Sulpician priest of remarkable meekness and faithful dedication. He was Father Claude Poncin born in Jarcieu Village du Dauphiné, France. For fifty-six years he was to perform his humble ministry with such abnegation and zeal, that would end only with total exhaustion.

CHAPTER VIII

Settlement of the Hospitallers' Debts — Labor and Toil. 1753

As soon as Madam d'Youville was confirmed as director of the hospital, one of her first cares was to work at paying off completely the debt left by the hospitallers. It amounted to 49,000 pounds. Since a large portion of this was due in France, Father Cousturier begged Father Pierre de la Rue, Vicar-General of the colonies of New France, in Paris, to work at the settlement of this debt.

This priest, one of our most devoted benefactors, had been corresponding with Madam d'Youville for several years. By the active correspondence he maintained with her concerning the hospital, one sees with what interest he had followed the turn of events and how he had at heart, its restoration. The strife which brought this establishment to the brink of ruin also showed us, what precious help he was to Father Cousturier and how their mutual understanding and their common unselfishness guaranteed the success of these negotiations.

With the same zeal, he would in the future, attend to the question of the hospitallers' debts. After four years of research and exertion, he would settle this difficult question to everyone's satisfaction. Believing their capital lost forever, creditors were happy to accept half the payment and to cancel the rest along with the accumulated interest. There was even a surplus of a thousand

crowns unclaimed by creditors now dead or absent which would cause the good priest to say wittily: "Your intention, Madam, was surely not that I seek them out neither in this world nor in the next. It will be time enough, if others come forward to deal with them as we did with the others."

While Father de l'Île Dieu was negotiating zealously the settling of debts in France, our mothers on their part, increased their efforts and their labors to improve the situation of their house and make it capable of accommodating a greater number of indigents. Great poverty reigned at this time and Christ's prediction: "You will always have the poor among you" found its full reality then as it does today. The following lines written by our holy Foundress, reveal what adversity claimed her compassion. "We presently care for the poor of both sexes, prostitutes and we visit the sick in town and at Hôtel-Dieu, especially those with contagious illnesses. If the court approves that we remain here, and is willing to support us in the good works God inspires us to do, we shall care for abandoned babies. Furthermore, we shall receive epileptics, lepers, persons with ulcers or other disorders who are not admitted at Hôtel-Dieu.

But how could they think of taking on new works when they could hardly sustain those already existing? Each year, the hospital's actual revenue was only a hundred measures of wheat while the personnel consumed nearly two thousand measures. Charity has clever ways of outwitting our plans and making up for our human deficiencies. With her communicative faith, the Foundress affirmed: "Admirable are the resources of Providence for the relief of Christ's suffering members." While trusting God's paternal solicitude, our mothers resolved to increase their work and their effort to create new resources. When we think of the activities undertaken from then on by these feeble women, we stand in awe and admiration, and we wonder how they managed in spite of being so few in number, to accomplish such strenuous tasks on a regular basis.

One of the principal means they used was that of taking in

women boarders. The undertaking was not without a certain temerity. The poverty of the hospital, the absence of comfort, even the want that prevailed was not likely to attract persons accustomed to the conveniences and luxuries of life. Nevertheless, the guests were welcomed with kindness. Hospitality was so cordial that many women of distinction soon came to live there. The record preserved in our archives reveals to us among other names, the following boarders: Marie-Anne Robutel de la Noue, lady of Châteauguay, Madam Porlier de Vincennes, Madam de Bleury, Madam de Ligneris, Madam de Maugras and Madam Sylvain de Varennes. These were close relatives of Madam d'Youville. However close were the family ties, our dear mother never used this as a pretext to grant them any privileges that would be the least bit detrimental to the interests of the poor. On the contrary, she exacted from them, rates considered high at the time. Mrs. Maugras, her sister, made annual payments of seven hundred pounds, Madam de Bleury, her niece and Madam Porlier de Vincennes paid nine hundred pounds.

Less concerned about finding material advantages at the hospital than finding there, a place of retirement where they could prepare for eternal life, these women were enchanted with the sweet and simple piety that pervaded the house and they enjoyed the company of our mothers. Madam d'Youville among all, had the knack of rendering this abode pleasing to them. Without being lavish, our mother observed in her relationships and her demeanor perfect grace and decorum. Great kindness of heart and a rare courtesy tempered the gravity imparted to her whole personality by habits of austerity and strong virtue. The zeal for good and the intense charity that characterized her, combined so well with her good judgment, that persons whom Providence brought into relationship with her, entered easily into her views. It was in this way that she won over to the cause of the poor the hearts of her rich guests.

The acts of self-sacrifice and abnegation which were performed each day under their eyes, so enkindled their zeal that many of them begged to share in the merits of the sisters by taking part

in their work. Madam d'Youville wrote to one of them in particular: "We have here a Mrs. Robineau, widow of Mr. Robineau de Port-Neuf, over eighty-one years of age, who practises fasting and abstinence on all prescribed days and works like us for the good of the poor even though she pays her board. She is delightful in her piety and her good disposition."

Needlework was the main resource of our mothers. Whether the work was dainty or coarse, all was accepted, provided it was lawful and allowed them to improve the condition of their poor. This indifference was recognized; consequently when anyone was in difficulty about a job that was cancelled or unpleasant, they were told: "Go to the Grey Nuns, they never refuse anything." As early as 1748, they had accepted various jobs for the troops such as uniforms, tents, and banners. This work was carried on for more than twenty years even though they often suffered from embezzlement by king's warehouse-keepers, especially in the latter years when they received for their work the same payment as in the early years while the king paid his agents double that price for the same articles.

God could not but bless such disinterestedness! Despite these unfair payments, receipts rose for a few years from a thousand to fifteen hundred pounds. The faithful, it is true, added their alms to this, while the sisters added their income from other jobs. Thus, after 1750, at the request of the North-West Company, they made clothing, vestments, and various fancy objects which middle-class merchants would exchange for the furs of the Indians. When the departure of the merchants occurred too soon, then the days were not long enough to allow them to complete their work, and they toiled far into the night, spurred on by the intense activity of Madam d'Youville who was always first on the job and the most diligent worker in such cases.

It was undoubtedly in similar circumstances that unmindful of refinement, and sacrificing their most legitimate needs, our mothers sewed together pieces of linen to replace the stockings they had not the time to knit.

What clever excesses the love of the poor leads to when it is inspired and sustained by the love of God! The account books reveal that Madam d'Youville and her companions did not shrink from buying tobacco and preparing it for resale. They reaped some benefit from a brewery constructed by the Charon brothers. They maintained a ferry operating between Longueuil and Montreal.⁽¹⁾

They received animals to pasture, prepared lime for whitewash, accepted carting, etc. Thus could be applied to them, the praise once given to other heroines of charity: "For their poor, they had a thousand ways of making money; and pride did not get in the way of their clever charity."

Madam d'Youville attended to everything herself and strengthened everyone's courage by her untiring activity. Our dearest traditions show her taking special care always to choose for herself what was the hardest and the most repugnant. Surprised one day by a visit from Intendant Bigot as she was making candles, and was consequently in an untidy state, preserving her stately bearing and grace, she met him without embarrassment and said: "I was not forewarned of the Intendant's coming; he will have to take me as I am. This will not prevent him from speaking to me".

These rugged jobs did not exclude more delicate work. If our mothers, like the wise woman of the Gospel, knew how to set their hands to the coarsest jobs, they knew also, the art of seeking out linen and wool and of doing the finest needlework with skill. In 1754, they worked at making church vestments. It was the Assumption Parish which first brought to them this type of work.

Such were the various industries at which our dedicated predecessors worked along with the care of the poor. Theirs was really a house of modest but unlimited labor and dedication. These

(1) Among its old souvenirs, the Parish of Longueuil keeps a memory of this ferry boat maintained by our Blessed Foundress, the profits from which served to maintain the hospital (*Histoire de Longueuil*, p. 547).

were excelled only by their adherence to God and their filial abandonment to his Providence. Or rather, their abandonment to God gave them their clear understanding which renders capable of all good, and their supernatural strength which renders capable of bearing without weakness the most difficult labors. Is it not written that: "Where there is love, nothing is difficult; or what is difficult disappears because there is love." Thus refreshed by divine charity, the spirit of work of the Sisters would take on a new development in unceasing labor which the needs of subsequent years would require of their generosity.

CHAPTER IX

Construction of a wall of enclosure — Hostilities between the colonies — The hospital is opened to sick indigents, smallpox victims, and war prisoners.
1754 – 1758

While the inside of the hospital was being transformed by this incessant activity, the needs of the outside did not escape Madam d'Youville's vigilant eye. Up until now, the hospital property had no fence; the house and its surrounding buildings remained open to all passers-by.

The experts responsible for reporting on repairs that were necessary at the hospital in 1747 had noted this inconvenience and Madam d'Youville, who more than anyone else, knew the unpleasantness that could result, keenly desired to do something about it immediately. But so many other things then demanded the attention of the wise director, that she had to postpone this improvement. Finally, in 1754, she thought the time was right to carry it through. It was a considerable undertaking: the hospital property covered an area of almost fourteen acres and it was a question of building around it, "not a picket fence, which civic authorities would not allow at this time",⁽¹⁾ but a stone wall seven

(1) *Memoirs de l'ingénieur Franquet.*

feet high. Accustomed to facing difficulties head on, she set resolutely to work and had the good fortune of having influential friends share her concern. The Governor-General, Mr. Duquesne,⁽²⁾ who esteemed Madam d'Youville and her society, called on the generosity of the public in their favor. Bishop de Pontbriand and Father Normant eagerly responded by a contribution of 500 pounds each; other citizens imitated them; those who could not offer help from their wallet, gave help with their hands.

The sisters did not remain mere spectators of this generous movement. In order to effect this work more economically, they agreed to help the masons themselves. They were seen carrying stones in their aprons, mortar in pails and heating lime in the hospital.

About the same time, Madam d'Youville had a house built for servants in which she installed a bakery. The cost of this latter construction was relatively low thanks to charitable and conciliatory means adopted by the Foundress. A young carpenter wishing to assure good care and a peaceful end for his parents, offered to remain at the hospital to work for the poor on condition that his aged parents be looked after there for the rest of their lives. Madam d'Youville willingly agreed to support such filial devotion and she set the young man to work on the proposed construction. She also hired another carpenter laid off by other employers because he consumed too great a quantity of food.

The type of charity practised by our dear Mother took on many aspects and adapted itself to all needs. Thus she wished that among the poor at the hospital, all those who were in any way able to render service should be given work to do, be it to guard them against the evils of idleness or to give them the satisfaction of contributing to the prosperity of the establishment. One of the orderlies who was once a tailor, spent his spare time practising his former occupation for the benefit of the poor.

(2) Mr. Duquesne de Menneville was governor of New France from 1752-1755.

One of the guests who had been a cobbler did likewise. But benevolent and loyal above all, if Madam d'Youville knew how to make the best of the aptitudes and good will of her dependents, she did not forget to encourage them. Her spirit of thrift, or better, her respect for poverty did not keep her in any way from dealing liberally with those who rendered her service. The account books record the list of gifts which she was pleased to distribute to employees at the New Year, a custom which has been faithfully preserved to our day.

But while Madam d'Youville saw to the completion of this undertaking, another mission was offered to her dedication and that of her daughters, who so eagerly supported her in her zealous enterprises.

The fall of 1753 was the beginning of a painful period for the whole of Canada.⁽³⁾ What happened is known. Britain who had for many years, wrangled with France over this colony, would now grant no respite to the French Canadians until she had brought them under her control.

Constantly under arms to ward off foreign invasion or to repulse any tentative advances, the colonists did not have time to seed their land; where old men and the women could not make up for the lack of help, fields remained idle. Not only were hands lacking but also sometimes grain.

France did send some help, but this help was "intercepted by the enemy" or forestalled by officials greedy for gain at any price. Thus Canada had not only to suffer the assaults of her adversaries, but also numerous calamities: epidemics, shipwrecks, floods, early frosts, earthquakes, all seemed to visit the colony at the same time. History tells us there was "a famine that year such as the country had never known". Extreme poverty brought countless hardships.

⁽³⁾ Although the war was officially declared between the two countries only in 1756, hostilities had been going on between the colonies since 1753. (Garneau et Hôpital Général de Québec.)

But in the calamities, great mercy burst forth. These tribulations would blossom into fruits of heroism and zeal. For God who never gives his servants a love more keen than when he places them before the most distressing situations, was to give them a courage proportionate to the hardships at hand.

While at the border our best soldiers were fighting and shedding their blood to defend their homes and preserve their faith, in seminaries and rectories, in monasteries and hospitals, prayers and sacrifices were being offered for families in distress; privations and fatigues were assumed for the relief of hardships caused by the war.

Our mothers were no strangers to this generous movement. To the care of the elderly and the infirm which they had practised over nearly twenty years, they added the care of the sick. They took in rich and poor without distinction, accepting the generosity with which the rich paid for their care in order to extend that care to a greater number of needy persons. But it was for the relief of sick indigents that they especially wished to devote themselves. How admirable it was, that urged by the charity of Him who for our redemption appeared as a leper on Calvary, they took in the most wretched, those afflicted with, or covered with ulcers, were the most forsaken.

Many Negro or Pawnee slaves⁽⁴⁾ who had once belonged to wealthy families and had since fallen into misfortune, also found in their abandonment, assistance and relief at the hospital and considered themselves fortunate to be able to live out their lives there.

Not satisfied with receiving the sick in her home and caring for them, Madam d'Youville visited or had visited those in town. In times of epidemics especially, she allowed her sisters to devote themselves more willingly to this ministry of charity.

⁽⁴⁾ Missouri tribe. According to burial records of 1754-1770, about a hundred slaves were received at the hospital and buried in the cemetery of the poor.

Since 1733, smallpox had hovered continually over the colony.⁽⁵⁾ Violence with which it raged in 1755 gave them opportunity for abundant merit. The terrible plague fell more particularly on the Indians, on those of the Lac des Deux Montagnes and of the Presentation, among others. But the white population was not spared. A goodly number of persons in Montreal became victims. Madam d'Youville and her companions fearlessly faced the perils of the contagion in order to help them. They did more; they opened their own house to women victims of smallpox and joyfully lavished their care on them by day and by night.

Thus Madam d'Youville tried to give her daughters the thrust of generosity which no fatigue could repulse, which no danger could diminish. It was, moreover, her express wish that "as servants of the poor, they should be always ready to undertake all the good works which Providence offered them and for which they would be authorized by their superiors". This authorization could not but be granted in such cases. They even had the consolation of receiving the encouragement of their bishop.

"In these times of illness" wrote Bishop Pontbriand, "one must yield. I gladly approve of your receiving women afflicted with smallpox".

God himself sanctioned in his own manner this beautiful dedication. Among the Sisters, he chose as a victim, Sister Véronneau. Stricken by the illness, she did not succumb; but her case was complicated by typhoid and she was reduced to the state of an invalid for the rest of her life. She was powerless and inactive in appearance only: for what is infirmity and suffering in families where God is loved, if not the secret cooperation required by his Providence for the advancement of the works to which he associates them, and one of the surest guarantees of his blessings?

In 1775 the official declaration of war between France and England aggravated the country's situation. The hostilities, already

(5) Histoire de Montréal par Leblond.

open between the two rival powers, took on greater violence. The church was moved by the fate of the sick and wounded of both armies. In Québec, the General Hospital, in one single circumstance, received more than three hundred soldiers stricken with the plague at sea;⁽⁶⁾ the new monastery of Hôtel-Dieu received more than two hundred. In Montreal, the wards of Hôtel-Dieu were filled with the wounded. After converting their own quarters into as many infirmaries, the nuns obtained from Bishop Pontbriand the authorization to house the sick in their chapel. But space was still lacking. A call was made on the charity of Madam d'Youville and her companions. Numbering only twelve, the Sisters were already absorbed by many duties, but they did not hesitate to take on this new burden. At Intendant Bigot's suggestion, a ward of the hospital was set up and soon it overflowed with prisoners of war. For five years, our mothers found in their strength and their charity the means of extending themselves beyond measure to cope with these multiple duties. At the cost of what sacrifice? The letter of Bernier, Commissioner of war, will give us an idea.

“All is monopoly in Montreal:⁽⁷⁾ a single baker, a single butcher with exclusive privileges; a half dozen merchants and swindlers stole what came from France and the commodities intended for the country in order to use them for their own benefit. Paper money had increased and multiplied and could be converted into bills of exchange, which were payable only in three years; as a result, in cash deals, three or four hundred bills bought only one hundred worth of benefits. The price of everything rose to more than seven times the regular price”.

Such difficult circumstances created additional worries for our mothers and gave new merit to their dedication. In the year 1756

(6) Hôpital Général de Québec.

(7) Letter of 1750.

alone, the expense incurred by the care of prisoners of war rose to 18,000 francs. "The French Government, it is true, was to cover the hospital's expense."

But Bigot was less than scrupulous in carrying out the intentions of his king.⁽⁸⁾ Instead of allowing Madam d'Youville the cost of each sick soldier's ration, while she paid four francs a pound for meat, he paid her only three. And she still supplied at her own expense, bread, peas and other foods as well as the salary of hired hands. From 1757-1760 when payments were made only in paper money, the hospital had to borrow and pay interest, in order to prevent its new guests from suffering.

Had she been less energetic and less abandoned to the vigilant care of our heavenly Father, Madam d'Youville might have relaxed her zeal before these difficulties. But this generous woman was not of those who established their hopes and their works on human interests. Persuaded that "in God, nothing is lost", as she said, she pursued under his gaze, the good she had undertaken only for his glory and his love. The less she could count on human justice, the more she could count on the help of God. This help never failed her. In the delicate circumstances in which she was involved during the stormy years, God, we shall see, rewarded the unselfishness of his servant by associating her in his merciful intent with a great number of disadvantaged people.

⁽⁸⁾ Garneau Vol. 2, p. 263.

CHAPTER X

Foundations set for an addition to the hospital — Madam d'Youville protects soldiers — Her charity saves the hospital — Mysterious supply of flour.
1758 - 1760

Not only did Madam d'Youville pursue the good she had begun, but she aspired to do more. Space at the hospital had become insufficient for the needs of the times. Numerous were the sick and indigent who found refuge there, but there were still so many to take in and assist. Incapable of closing her heart to them, Madam d'Youville conceived the idea of adding a wing to the hospital. This addition was to be at the end of the building so that the chapel next to it would be in the centre of the structure.

The plan pleased Father Normant who also was preoccupied with the fate of so many disadvantaged people who greatly desired the foundress to take them in. He entrusted to Father Montgolfier the task of drawing up plans for the new building without delay. These were submitted to Bishop Pontbriand, and returned in short order to Madam d'Youville with his approval accompanied with this message: "Madam, I admire your faith in Providence; I have recognized vivid traits of it since I have the pleasure of knowing you. The plan laid out by Father Montgolfier is to my liking. My comments would be more precise if I were on site; according to me, only the number of windows needs to be increased. Never-

theless, it is up to you to decide what pleases you most. . . I wish you Madam, and your charitable companions abundant blessings.”

The new foundations were laid as early as the spring of 1758 and the work was actively pursued. But hardly had the walls been raised above ground, than they were forcefully abandoned. Rumors of war were spreading ominously throughout the country. Painful forebodings prevailed in people’s minds. Victory had responded to the heroism of our armies: at Carillon especially, Canadian and French troops had won outstanding glory but the enemy, twice as powerful in number, was gaining ground each day. Triumphant at Louisbourg in December 1758, the English were masters of the sea, of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, of the Ohio valley, and were preparing for a greater attack yet.⁽¹⁾ The moment was near, it seemed, when all of Canada would fall to the power of Great Britain.

Before the mounting surge of foreign invasion and uncertainty about the future, wisdom required that construction work be suspended pending the outcome of the crisis. Obligated to abandon the development of the plan they had drawn up, our mothers did not allow their zeal to slaken. They thought that by depriving themselves still further, by limiting their quarters, they could take in a few new guests. This is what they did with joyous abnegation and complete unselfishness. On the other hand, they increased their solicitude towards those whom Providence had already confided to their care.

Among the soldiers taken in at the hospital during the war, many did not know where to obtain subsistence after being cured. Mother d’Youville was indeed their source of Providence. She kept them and cared for them until they had found work and became self-sufficient. When they were refused work, she hired them herself either for the hospital or for the farms.

(1) Histoire du Canada par Gameau, Vol. 2 et les Ursulines du Québec.

In 1758 there were six at the hospital, one at the farm in Chambly and twenty-one at Pointe-Saint-Charles farm.

Madam d'Youville did not display less eagerness in helping those who were exposed to danger. Her compassion did not discriminate between race or creed. All those who suffered experienced the tenderness of her charity. When poor fugitives surprised and pursued from all directions were on the point of falling into the hands of their enemies, they often ran bewildered into the hospital confines. At such times our dear mother cleverly devised means of assistance and protection. In the vault of the chapel where it seemed unlikely that any search would be carried out, she gave them a place of rest and hiding. There, with a charity worthy of the early ages of the faith, she visited them, fed them and provided for their needs until the time was favorable for their escape. When this time had come, she would clothe them in the grey cloak used by the Sisters in the winter. Under this disguise, the strangers could go through the halls without being recognized.

There was one circumstance, however, in which this device almost failed. An Englishman thus disguised, was stealthily crossing a ward, when suddenly an Indian ally of the French leaped from his bed towards the fugitive, exclaiming in loud cries that he would drink his blood. Blind as a result of smallpox, this shrewd Indian, it seems, recognized his enemy by scent. Fortunately, two Sisters were in the ward at the time, busy with other patients; they were able to calm the wild man in time to prevent the assault.

One day, a young Englishman by the name of Southworth,⁽²⁾ engaged in scouting activities, had wandered from his comrades in the area of Pointe-à-Callières. As he was attempting to rejoin them, he was suddenly pursued by an Indian ally of the French. With the enemy close on his heels, Southworth preferring to give himself up to the French rather than to fall into the hands of the

⁽²⁾ Descendants of Southworth, where these details are still a family tradition, live in Williamstown, Massachusetts.

Indian, dashed towards the hospital. He scaled its wall, entered the house by a basement opening, climbed the first stairs he came to, and out of breath, entered the community room. Madam d'Youville was there at the time, busily engaged in making a tent for the French army. Accustomed to perceive the slightest expression of anguish, she quickly understood the stranger's distress. Inspired, she lifted the tent and motioned to him to crouch underneath. Southworth was hardly covered when his aggressor entered brandishing a tomahawk, and his eyes flashing in fury. With her usual calm and presence of mind, Madam d'Youville pointed to the door on the opposite side. The Indian, believing that the fugitive had escaped through it, dashed hurriedly after him. But finding no one, he left the place to pursue his search outside, thus giving the young Englishman time to escape.

Another day, in 1757, Madam d'Youville learned that an English soldier named John had been captured by Indian enemies. She was moved with compassion at the thought of the cruelties they would inflict on their victim according to their custom. Without concern for her personal safety, she hastened to the raging captors, offering two hundred francs for the ransom of their victim, thus saving him from imminent death. So did the early Christians throw their gold to greedy tyrants in order to obtain the freedom of slaves they had never known.

Our dear Mother's generosity did not go unnoticed. In gratitude towards his liberator, say our memoirs, the young Englishman gave himself to the hospital where he served as an orderly.

Shortly thereafter, on June 27, 1758 a similar incident again revealed outstanding devotedness. Father de Lavalinière, a Sulpician priest, travelling by a secluded path on the outskirts of town, noticed fastened to a post, a mother and her child whom some Indians were preparing to burn alive. Stricken with horror, he went to the tormentors and with serious bargaining he persuaded them to give up their unfortunate victims. The mother, of Irish descent, was a Mrs. O'Flaherty. Her little daughter Marie-Louise was hardly two. From this day, Father de Lavalinière became their protector

and he obtained that the child be entrusted to the care of Madam d'Youville.

Did the far-seeing foundress foresee in this innocent victim, so prematurely given over to suffering, a cause of hope for the future? In any case, deeply touched by the fate of her protégée, she had her raised with the greatest care. Even if she did not in her lifetime, have the consolation of seeing her enter the novitiate, shortly after her death, she was able from above, to observe her among those who would carry on her work.

The promptness with which Madam d'Youville came to the help of those she saw in danger or in need assured her considerable sympathy and precious help in times of trouble. An exceptionally painful circumstance gave her the opportunity to verify this.

It was the fall of 1760. A year previously, cannons roared at the walls of Quebec; and on September 13, Montcalm, its heroic defender fell mortally wounded; the town was taken and devastated by the enemy. In spite of this bitter defeat, New France, deprived of its capital, a prey to poverty which grew ever more distressful, did not lose hope. The ambition of retaining the land they had, and of reconquering that which they had lost, remained in the hearts of the settlers. Appealing to their mother country and counting on assistance which alas! would not come, they mustered their forces in Montreal and prepared for a final struggle. Their efforts were futile! While France was "attempting to rise from repeated defeats in Germany", she left our ancestors on their own, with reduced numbers to face England who was sending a strong reinforcement of well-equipped troops.

In early September, Montreal was invaded by three army units totalling more than twenty thousand English soldiers. Vaudreuil and Levis had only four hundred regular troops to oppose them. At first they thought of attacking, but in the face of inevitable defeat, wisdom dictated an honorable surrender. On September 8, 1760, this surrender was signed by the Marquis de Vaudreuil. By this act, the colony was forever lost to France, and came ultimately under British power.

The eve of this memorable day was very nearly tragic for the hospital. General Amherst who had taken position on the plains of St. Anne⁽³⁾ with his thirty-two thousand soldiers, thought there was a stronghold behind the newly-built walls that enclosed the establishment. Immediately he prepared his artillery, set his cannons on the hospital and gave orders to destroy it. The order was about to be carried out when a young soldier threw himself at the feet of his commander. "Those are not enemies who occupy that house" he said; "they are Sisters, and good Sisters". Then he told how their ingenious charity had saved his life and that of several of his comrades. Moved by this account, the general suspended the order. Without delay, he sent a detachment of five or six officers to the hospital to verify the report. The Sisters received them with dignity but not without revealing their surprise at this unexpected visit. "Ladies, we are your prisoners", they said, to reassure them. They were led through the various wards of the hospital and Madam d'Youville whose tact was equal to her friendliness, was inspired to serve them cookies and refreshments. The officers withdrew delighted with such a reception and the hospital was saved from imminent ruin.

The hospital was saved but what desolation reigned in the hearts, what fears, what dread! The following day, when the sacrifice was accomplished and the Fleur-de-lis was replaced by the British flag, grief had reached its summit. Like so many other children of France, our mothers were crushed and casting their gaze and their intimate thoughts on this France they loved and seeing it alienated forever, they painfully questioned the future. Deprived of help from the mother country, and handed over to a nation with a foreign language and religion, what would Canada become? Who would protect its faith, its traditions, its customs, its institutions? Still should one despair when the Lord promised to assist his Church and to guard its immortal destiny; when so many other painful days have yielded to these promises of immortality? Rousing their faith and lifting up their hopes, they adored the un-

(3) Today known as "quartier Ste-Anne."

fathomable purposes of Providence, and in an act of supreme and filial abandonment, they cast all their cares and worries into its bosom. Had they foreseen at the time, that this crisis would guarantee the religious freedom of the colony, their act of surrender would have been less costly to them. But, we shall see further, to what trials they had to submit for a long time yet.

For the time being, they continued generously to care for the sick and wounded whom the final campaign had led to the hospital. Heaven itself seemed to support their dedication by truly marvellous consideration. The famine that prevailed at this time throughout Canada, was more severely felt in Montreal. The great number of strangers who had taken refuge there after the fall of Quebec increased the distress. A pound of butter or a dozen eggs sold for six francs; a pound of mutton, eighty francs (\$13.40 in our currency). A quire of paper cost eighty francs and other things were in the same proportion.⁽⁴⁾

In view of saving the bread for the poor, our mothers had compelled themselves to eat only corn for breakfast and lunch. This, however, did not prevent the bread from running out altogether. But He who watches over the birds of the air did not abandon his servants. One day, as they entered the dining room to partake of their frugal meal, they were most surprised to see in a corner of the apartment, several barrels of fine flour. This first emotion of surprise was followed by deep admiration and by legitimate curiosity. Who could have been the author of this extraordinary gift? Who had delivered it there? No one could answer these questions; and despite the most minute inquiry, it was never discovered how nor by whom these provisions had come in. Manifestly, Providence had itself come to assist the Sisters in their distress, and the most fervent thanksgiving was offered.

⁽⁴⁾ Archives of the navy, 9 nov. 1759. Description of distress in Canada.

CHAPTER XI

Father Normant's illness; his final instructions; testimonial of his love towards the Blessed Sacrament; his death.

Death of Bishop de Pontbriand.

1759 – 1760

While ruins increased in the colony as a result of the war and while hearts were filled with anxiety, a trial more painful than all others affected the little community, in a special way. Worn by age, labor and infirmities, Father Normant, its venerable founder, had been ill for several months. Having worked zealously to spread the love of God, of the Church, and of the poor, the saintly priest yearned for eternal rest. God would soon gratify his desire and our mothers would lose forever, one they loved as a father and venerated as a saint.

For more than twenty years, Father Normant had directed Madame d'Youville in the ways of the purest Christianity; he had sustained her in the early beginning of her work and in the formation of her society; he had tried to instill into each of its members, the strong and sublime virtues which were to penetrate their rule and direct their lives. This loss was to plunge them into profound and intimate grief.

Five years earlier, a serious illness had led Father Normant on the brink of death. Believing his end was near, the patient had, with paternal solicitude, handed over the direction of the sisters

to Father Montgolfier. However, the hour of the surpeme sacrifice had not yet come. This was only its preparation. Contrary to what had been expected, the health of the saintly priest eventually began to improve remarkably.

While maintaining Father Montgolfier as superior of the Grey Nuns, Father Normant retained the freedom and pleasure of visiting and instructing them. On the threshold of eternity where illness had led him, virtue appeared to him more beautiful, more worthy of striving for. A closer glimpse of God had revealed more clearly His right to be better known, better loved, better served. The holy priest yearned to impart these virtues to our mothers so as to inspire in them, a keener desire to belong totally to God and to serve him more perfectly. While he should have rested, he continued his solicitude with such complete self-forgetfulness that everyone was deeply moved. Soon, Madame d'Youville even wrote to Father Cousturier, Superior general of the Sulpicians, her deep gratitude. ". . . I am delighted", he replied, "that Father Louis Normant is continuing to render you the good services he is capable of for the good work you are directing and which is so useful for the unfortunate".⁽¹⁾

Given in such touching circumstances by a voice they feared would soon be stilled, the Founder's conferences were of immeasurable worth. What impact, what conviction in each of his teachings! To our great regret, only one summary or rather a few unorganized thoughts, simple, incomplete notes remain of one of his exhortations, probably the last he addressed to the Sisters shortly before his death. Though incomplete, these notes, however, give us some insight as to how this dear father had at heart the spiritual progress of his young family, with what holy vigilance, he kept watch over the preservation and the affirmation of the religious spirit. Complete detachment, death to self and to vain cares of the world, unity of spirit, of traditions and of principles mingled with the most austere lessons of the Gospel. He repeatedly

(1) Letter of Father Cousturier to Madam d'Youville, February 17, 1750.

insisted on fidelity to established practices of the house. Willingly, he could have claimed this saying, so in keeping with the spirit of the Sulpicians: "Do small things as if they were great, because of the majesty of Jesus Christ who works in us, and who lives our life; and the great things as if they were small and easy because of his almighty power."⁽²⁾

He even goes as far as to utter his displeasure with any of the Sisters who would violate the custom of cutting their hair every two months.

If the holy founder attached such great importance to a practice so minor in appearance, what must have been his care and his zeal when there was question of observing the rules of the community or the fundamental practices of religious perfection?

However, the firm and sure authority of the master did not alter in any way the goodness and fatherly tenderness of the founder. Until the very end, he showed for this house of which he was so fond, much affection and paternal interest. When age and infirmities no longer permitted him to go on foot to his dear hospital, he had himself taken there. These visits were for the Sisters, moments of joy and gentle edification. For the elderly priest, the time spent with the Sisters seemed like that of a father among his children. Sometimes he spoke to them of their own sanctification or of that of the poor; at other times, he heard accounts of little incidents which cheered or saddened the Sisters. Always, he knew how to bring into these relaxed conversations thoughts of faith which consoled and sustained them in the exercise of charity which it must be admitted, was at times painful.

On certain days, moved by the destitution of the house which was indeed poor at that time, he made an effort to distribute at the end of each visit, little gifts, which showed his charming sensitivity. Having come with a provision of useful or pious objects such as rosaries, paper, scissors, packets of pins or needles etc.

(2) Pascal.

he distributed them to the Sisters with a delightful charm. One day, he had already exhausted his provision; only Madame d'Youville, seated next to him, had not received anything. "I have nothing left". Then, he drew from his pocket, a little silver knife which he often used and gave it to her, visibly satisfied and happy at having done so. As a true father, he had wished to show his daughters that no longer attached to anything, himself really poor, he was happy to experience with them, the privations of poverty. This knife, preserved with a religious respect since then, has been placed among our souvenirs. On August 25, feast of the founder, it is used at table by the Superior General.

A worthy son of Father Olier, Father Normant honored in a special way, the Lord of our tabernacles. As will testify the Act of Consecration which we hold from him and which he had carefully written in his own hand, his whole life had been a homage of love and reparation to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.⁽³⁾

At the point of death, he wished to give a last testimony of his piety and his zeal for the glory of the Eucharistic Jesus. Over a

(3) Act of Consecration to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

(In Father Normant's own handwriting).

Bowing at your feet, most adorable Jesus, I consecrate myself entirely to you, and I solemnly promise to render to you, every day of my life, the homage, the adoration and the respect that are due to you; and to atone as much as I can, for the wrongs and the insults you receive in the adorable sacrament of your love; for this purpose, I unite myself to the intense fervor of your holy mother; I beg this dear mother, to be my Advocate, and to present to you the sacrifice of my love and my life. Since you brought me to birth, in order that I might die, grant me the grace, O Divine Savior, to die in your arms. Do not allow me at death, to be deprived of Holy Viaticum, which you have prepared as a help and consolation to Christians in their final moments. I shall try to deserve this grace by the holy life I resolve to live. To help me in this resolution, apply to me the fruits and the merits of your Precious Blood. Apply them especially to the suffering souls in Purgatory. Relieve their pain and give them eternal rest. I offer you for their deliverance, all the prayers and good works done in the institute. Grant that having adored your presence on our altars, I may with them, possess you and love you eternally in heaven. Amen.

long period, the heart of the pious founder ached in silence at seeing the hospital chapel so ill-equipped with sacred vessels. The time had come, it seemed, to remedy the situation. A friend was entrusted with buying in Paris, a beautiful mass kit containing a chalice with its paten, two silver cruets with their tray, a monstrance of white gold, a silver censor with its incense holder, and six candle holders of the same metal for the acolytes⁽⁴⁾. Two lace albs, two cinctures of ribbon, and fifty pounds of white wax completed the gift. However, these objects could not be shipped immediately. Difficulties arose as a result of the conquest which accounted for a delay. Import taxes from now on were so high that our mothers, after many years, had the main items sold in France, in order to recover their price in Canada. Only the albs were received through Father de l'Isle Dieu. Meanwhile Father Normant's illness progressed and as the patience of the just man grew firm, his virtue received its final consecration. He had just reached the age of seventy-nine when he was called by his Master to enter into eternal rest. He had earned the right to do so by fifty-four years of laborious ministry of which thirty-six had been dedicated to the Church of Ville-Marie. A faithful adorer and a generous dispenser of the sacred mysteries, he also deserved the privilege of dying during the days dedicated to the triumph of the Eucharist. On Monday, June 18, octave of the feast of the Blessed Sacrament, Father Normant saw the realization of his life's wish: "After having adored Jesus present on our altars, he went to possess and love him eternally in heaven".⁽⁵⁾

The funeral service was held on the following day at the parish church amid a great throng of faithful people. The rich and the poor had come, eager to honor in this holy priest, a friend of the people, a noteworthy benefactor of the poor. The funeral mass was sung by Father Fafard, a Sulpician priest, and the body was placed in the crypt, beneath the sanctuary, on the Gospel side.

(4) Notes of Our Blessed Foundress.

(5) Act of Consecration in Father Normant's own handwriting.

The former superior and benefactor of the hospital was entitled to special prayers in this house which he had so loved. Our mothers did not delay in paying this tribute of gratitude and veneration to him. A solemn requiem mass was sung in their chapel a few days later. The hangings in the sanctuary and the nave expressed grief and mourning as they surrounded the coat-of-arms of the deceased. A multitude of vigil lights displayed funeral inscriptions that conveyed the regrets and the estimation of persons which the love of God had blended with his, and who owed their spiritual progress to his examples and his exhortations. It was said that never had such pomp been seen in Montreal, and a hundred years later, people in the community still spoke of it.

Even before they succeeded the Charon brothers, it was known that the feast of St Louis, Father Normant's patron, had always been a feast-day for the Sisters. That day, in response to the founder's great love for the Eucharist, they received Holy Communion, and in the evening, benediction of the Blessed Sacrament brought to a close, this intimate and filial feastday. Since then, this custom has been maintained with pious respect. Each year August 25 entitles us to general communion, benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, and a holiday beginning with first Vespers. Furthermore, so as to perpetuate in the minds and hearts of future generations, the memory of this beloved father and founder, Madame d'Youville had an oil painting made of him. Thanks to this good inspiration, Father Normant continues to live among us. His gaze continues to follow our community which he so loved and for which he labored so long.

From this same filial affection came the custom of giving the name Normant to one of the professed sisters who henceforth would be known as Sister Normant.

The following year, another bereavement was added to that already afflicting people's hearts in the Canadian homeland. When the most somber forebodings hung over the country, and when its church had a greater need than ever of being sustained, directed, and comforted, God took to Himself its chief shepherd.

During the disastrous days of September 1756, Bishop de Pontbriand had witnessed the destruction by the same fire, of both his cathedral and his episcopal residence. No longer able to live in Quebec, he soon followed the French army to Montreal, bringing in his crushed soul the seed of death. The Sulpician seminary welcomed eagerly and reverently this victim of misfortune.

Informed of these painful events, Father de l'Isle Dieu wrote to our dear Mother: "You can well imagine, Madam, my deep sorrow as well as my rightful anxiety over the state of our poor Canada. That of our respectable bishop does not make me any less uneasy and I am filled with anguish. Alas! what will become of him? Will God keep him any longer? I cannot think of him without shedding tears . . . what a loss for the poor diocese!"

For the relief of his flock, the bishop was still alive. But his health, already altered by the fatigue sustained while caring for typhoid patients at the Quebec hospital,⁽⁶⁾ had become very precarious. Nevertheless, always concerned with the welfare of his charges, the tireless prelate forgot his own sufferings to look after theirs. From the depths of his seclusion, he addressed to them some touching exhortations: "You must not, in your prayers", he wrote in his last message, "you must not forget those who sacrificed their lives for the defense of the homeland; the name of the illustrious Montcalm, those of so many respectable officers, those of soldiers and national guards must not leave your minds. You must pray for the repose of their souls. . .

Alas! he who so eagerly requested the prayers of his people for their deceased brothers, was soon to be entitled to them himself. On June 8, 1760, Bishop de Pontbriand's sufferings and labors ended. He was fifty-one years of age. "This eminent prelate died as a saint in my care," wrote Father Montgolfier, "I had the honor of closing his eyes and of receiving his final words". One of these words reveals clearly the concerns of the charitable man, and the destitution to which his dutiful self-sacrifice had led him. " Tell

⁽⁶⁾ Hôpital Général de Québec.

the poor that I leave them nothing; because I am myself, poorer than they".⁽⁷⁾ His remains were buried in the middle of the crypt of Notre-Dame Church.⁽⁸⁾

"Henri-Marie du Breuil de Pontbriand was born in 1709, at Van-nes in France into the family of the Du Breuil which had merged with that of Pontbriand about 1496".⁽⁹⁾ Had he remained in France, he could have enjoyed an abundance of earthly goods while working for the salvation of souls. But his apostolic zeal made him prefer the works and privations of missionaries. Appointed Bishop of Quebec at the age of thirty-two, he received the decree of Benedict XIV on March 6, 1741 and was consecrated in Paris, on April of the same year by Bishop Vintimille, archbishop of Paris. Shortly afterwards, he took possession of the church committed to his care and whose parishioners eagerly awaited him. For nineteen years, he gave it without reckoning his wisdom, his sacrifices and his labors.

The name of Bishop de Pontbriand brings to mind one of the most painful trials our dear foundress ever had to bear. As God wished to impart greater splendor and perfection to her virtue, he used the most delicate instrument. If all of our Mother's crosses had come from harsh, uncouth persons, she would have been easily comforted; but coming from a superior whose holiness was in perfect harmony with his dignity, the trials became otherwise cruel and painful. However, as we have seen, the truth had no sooner been revealed to him, than the bishop made every effort to consign his mistake to oblivion and to prove on all occasions, that he harbored in his heart, only sentiments of friendliness and respect for the foundress. To words, Bishop de Pontbriand made it a duty to add actions. To cite only one, let us recall that our

(7) Notices biographiques des évêques du Québec, page 256.

(8) Les Ursulines des Trois-Rivières, p. 280.

(9) The remains of Bishop de Pontbriand were later exhumed; his skull was brought by Father Tambareau, to be placed in our museum where it is still religiously preserved.

society owes to his zeal, the first approval of our rule. Our archives preserve with filial respect, the pastoral letter which was a precious commentary of it.

At the fall of Quebec, the seminary was devastated by the British. Fathers Gravé and Pessard had followed Bishop de Pontbriand to Montreal, bringing with them the students determined to continue their studies at the price of great sacrifice. There, despite many difficulties, these zealous educators continued to devote themselves to teaching until the final surrender of Canada to Britain in 1763, when they returned to Quebec. It is during this stay in Montreal that Father Gravé established friendly ties with the Grey Nuns that would last until the end of his life. For two years, he even celebrated mass regularly at the hospital, from October 27, 1759 to September 9, 1761, he signed nearly all burial documents, numerous enough at that time.

CHAPTER XII

Feelings of Madam d'Youville on the departure of her friends from Canada — The installation of an altar to the Eternal Father and of a chapel to the Blessed Sacrament — The care of foundlings — Providential help in favor of this work and donations from friends.
1760 – 1763

After the surrender of Montreal, Mr. de Vaudreuil, Governor, the Intendant Bigot, Captain de Levis and his troops and the other chief officials in the country set sail for France. All citizens who did not wish to become British subjects soon joined them. According to Garneau, twelve hundred French Canadians⁽¹⁾ left Canada after the peace treaty signed January 1, 1763.

Those who remained therefore, wept not only over their afflicted homeland, but also over the loss of relatives and friends. Letters written by our dear mother at this time, are full of these regrets. We shall cite a few passages. The emotions and the resignation expressed in these lines will give us a better understanding of our mother's sensitivity and a better appreciation of her strong virtues. "We had prided ourselves with the thought that France would not abandon us; but we were mistaken in our expectations. God

⁽¹⁾ The population of Montreal in 1760 was 8,300. In 1765, they numbered only 5,733 by census figures; this is a decrease of 2,567 since the surrender. (Histoire de Montréal par Leblond).

permitted it thus; may His holy name be blessed!" "What grieves us greatly, is that this poor country is forsaken more and more. All the good citizens are leaving. We suffer the anguish of parting as our relatives, friends, and benefactors leave never to return. Nothing is sadder. Every day, we face more sacrifices."⁽²⁾

The imminent departure for France of one of her friends elicited from her these other emotional lines: "We are losing her forever! I have not gone to see her for several days, neither she nor her family. I shall not go until I know she is gone, for I do not have the courage to bid her farewell. I shall do my best to console her father, her mother and her sisters when she has gone. I fear that this departure will cause her father and mother a great shock. I close now: my tears are blinding me."⁽³⁾

And to a former benefactor: "Please give us news of yourself and of your dear daughters. Now that France has forsaken us, our only consolation will be to receive news of our friends. . . . I shall not tell you anything of X. . . and of X. . . since they write to you. I do not know how often they kissed and bathed with their tears, the letters of your little daughters."

However, far from allowing herself to be demolished by the sadness of these sorrowful times, Madam d'Youville found courage and consoled her friends with thoughts of heaven, where they would be reunited forever. "Let us not talk anymore of departures and farewells", she wrote to one of her nieces. "Let us think now, only of working to be together so that we shall never be parted. All our sisters send their love, especially Sister Despins, who requests that I not forget her."

"All the riches of the world", she wrote later to a Christian family who had gone to France where they lived in harmony, "all the riches of the world do not equal the joy of being so intimately united. I thank God for the grace he has given you and I pray

(2) Letter to Mr. Villars, August 5, 1763.

(3) Letter to Father De Ligneris, September 16, 1762.

earnestly, that He may continue and even increase that favor to you. You must not believe however, that you will be free of trials; you must have some in order to get to heaven. But united as you are you will be strong to deal with them and you will draw great benefit from them”.

One care more than all the rest, deeply troubled this Christian soul. It was the fear that the faith would disappear because of oppressive laws with which the British government burdened catholics in England and the colonies. To Father de l’Isle Dieu she wrote, “Pray to God that He may give us the strength to carry all our crosses and to make holy use of them. We have much to bear all at once: the loss of our king, our homeland, our property, and, what is worse still, to live in the fear of losing our religious freedom.”

With the faith threatened, the country in ruins or just about, the best families gone back to France, dark indeed, was any hope for the future!

It is evident, Madam d’Youville experienced as keenly as anyone, all the bitterness of these wretched times. Nevertheless, for the foundress and her daughters, there was no question of leaving the scene of so much misery. Faithful to the mission God had entrusted to them, they would pursue it with a generosity all the greater because present circumstances rendered it more difficult. In the midst of these difficulties, they expected consolation only from above. The fervent foundress encouraged them to do so both by her words and her example. With her soul set in the realm of faith and holy abandonment, she showed them the Providence of the Eternal Father to be the inexhaustible source of charity and love. Hence the confidence which she invited them to draw from it as an element of alacrity, of strength and of indefectible courage.

She offered them a striking witness of this filial trust. In this same year 1760, while famine raged more rigorously at the hospital, she did not hesitate to allot 1,665 pounds for the building of a retable and an altar to the Eternal Father.

A monument of faith and love, this altar is still in our midst as a memorial of precious teachings and a touching souvenir. It is no longer in the chapel as it once was, but it is constantly before our eyes in the community room where it serves as an oratory. Turning our thoughts back to the dismal times in which it was built, one cannot without emotion, read the invocation engraved at its base: *Pater aeternae Deus, miserere nobis! Pater aeternus, benedicat nos!* Eternal Father have pity on us! Eternal Father, bless us! The same breath of faith that prompted them seems to inspire them still. It is our dear mother who, by these earnest supplications, continues to call upon us the blessings and mercy of our heavenly Father. It is she who invites us to trust in His Providence for the necessities of this life.

The following year, guided always by her filial devotion and by the memory of the teachings of the dear founder, Madam d'Youville had a new chapel to the Sacred Heart of Jesus built and decorated. It was as if she wished to house in this sanctuary, the life of activity, of sacrifice, and of charity, which she and her sisters were obliged more than ever to lead; as if to bury therein the cares and worries of their own hearts. It was thus that in the midst of the most painful trials and privations, the pious foundress tried to develop in her community the two devotions which would bring forth most abundant fruit of abnegation and zeal: devotion to the Eternal Father from which mercy and love spring forth; devotion to the Heart of Jesus in which true apostles of charity are tempered and perfected. She would at the same time, be assured of God's protection over the new work she had just undertaken and would prepare precious instruments for Him.

The work which at this time claimed Madam d'Youville's solicitude and which she had insisted in undertaking despite the precarious situation of her house, was none other than that of foundlings. To better appreciate the timeliness of such an undertaking made at a time when as the foundress admits, "we had difficulty supporting ourselves, lacking everything, money, work, even supplies. . . we must imagine to what danger, to what suffering these children would be exposed."

In the early beginnings of the colony, foundlings were the responsibility of government officials who collected fines imposed in court.⁽⁴⁾ As long as the Sulpician priests from the seminary retained the courts of justice in the Island of Montreal, they provided for the care of these children on the whole island. But the king, having withdrawn this privilege in 1694, took upon himself the care of abandoned infants. On his order, a midwife was made responsible for taking them in, finding paid nurses for them and supervising the manner in which they were cared for. Gradually this system gave rise to terrible abuse. Enticed by the opportunity for lucrative gain, some unfaithful nurses sold to the natives, these little innocent beings, as one would sell cheap commodities. Authorities were forced to intervene rigorously in order to put an end to this base trafficking.

Madam d'Youville whose pity was always on the alert concerning the pain of others, had known for a long time of this inhuman practice. The desire to snatch from death so many innocent victims, and the concern over their eternal destiny had largely influenced her decision to accept the direction of the hospital. A Memorandum dated prior to the Letters patent and destined to impart to the minister her views concerning the future of the society, gives proof of this. "If the court approves of our remaining here", it states, "and if it is disposed to uphold us in the good which God inspires us to do, we shall take care of foundlings. They suffer so much through lack of care. Out of twenty that are baptized, only two or three are raised. Indeed, they reach the age of eighteen without learning the rudiments of religion. I know some of them twenty-three years old who have not made their first communion". Vain hope! The king would not entrust this good work to the hospital, nor would he allow any advance toward it. This refusal greatly distressed the charitable woman, but it did not persuade her to lose interest in the fate of these children. From 1754 to 1757, she took in four. During the years 1758 and 1759 she sheltered thirteen.

⁽⁴⁾ Memoirs of Father Montgolfier.

It is a common occurrence in times of war, that populations suffer from moral corruption as well as from material loss; and so, the number of abandoned infants increased along with poverty and other disorders. On the other hand, the British government provided them no means of subsistence, their suffering was even greater after the conquest. Father Montgolfier writes, "These feeble little creatures are left in the streets and at crossroads, or are abandoned on the highways, exposed without mercy, to the assaults of the weather, or to peril from animals, in utmost danger of losing the salvation of their soul along with the life of their body."

One day, Madam d'Youville learned that two of these little waifs had been drowned in the Saint-Pierre River which ran along the enclosure wall of the hospital. Another time, walking along the streets of the town, she discovered the body of an infant only half buried. Later, while crossing the Saint-Pierre River, on a cold winter morning, she noticed on the ice, another infant with a dagger to its throat, its little hands lifted towards heaven as if begging for pity and protection.

How could a heart as full of pity and maternal tenderness as hers, resist such a powerful entreaty? Was it not for them, she thought with the spirit of faith which guided her in all her decisions, was it not for them that with a heart so full of compassion, Jesus said, "Whatsoever you do to the least of my little ones, you do unto me." This thought bolstered her courage and put an end to any hesitation. Forgetting how modest and precarious were her resources, with the assent of Father Montgolfier and her companions, she resolved to undertake the work of foundlings.

Henceforth, the hospital would be open to these victims of poverty or of crime, and selfishness or despair could no longer be a pretext for accomplishing such an odious act. There, these little beings rejected by the world, would find a cradle, loving care, and the kindness of a home. They would grow up under the gaze of the Eternal Father and with the care of His Providence. Through charity they would be fed, educated, and by a Christian

formation, she would try to make of them loyal industrious subjects dedicated to the Church and useful to society.

Such was in substance, the plan our mothers proposed to follow in adopting these babies. Father Montgolfier presented to General Gage, then Governor of the district of Montreal, a special memorandum to this effect in order to obtain his protection and his cooperation in this work. The General approved the memorandum. Touched by the dedication of the Sisters, he ordered that fines collected by the court of justice, be applied to the hospital in consideration of and in compensation for the work of these foundlings. But a change occurred almost immediately in the Government which was then purely military, and the ordinance was cancelled. The only help the hospital received was a sum of 288 francs.

A few years later, impelled by the increasing poverty of her house, Madam d'Youville again addressed her entreaty to the Government for the same purpose. Later, she addressed Sir John Carleton, Lord Dorchester, a petition in which she exposed her fear of being obliged to abandon this good work for lack of funds and the deplorable consequences which would result. So many incidents had previously demonstrated the necessity of taking these infants in to save them from criminal death.

The petition brought no results. Decidedly, God willed that this work of mercy should depend entirely on the care of Divine Providence. Our mothers committed themselves to it more than ever, and as always happens in such cases, they were not sorry. Unexpected help came to them in their darkest hours. At times, God even intervened in a visible way. One day among others, when Madam d'Youville had only one dollar left, a nurse came in the early morning to claim exactly that amount. The payment was due for the care of a child and the poor woman was in need.

The hospital's need at this time was just as great. Nevertheless, the foundress did not hesitate to remit to the nurse the payment on which she was counting. How great was her surprise when, putting her hand in her pocket, she withdrew not only the one

coin she knew was there, but several coins! Puzzled, and at the same time delighted, she recognized in this incident, "the invisible hand which sustains the world" and she offered loving praise. In the fervor of her thanksgiving, she revealed to a Sister who had witnessed her astonishment, the marvel which proved to her, God's infinite tenderness towards those who depend on Him. But immediately repressing this haste which appeared to her too human, she humbled herself before her companion and ordered her not to mention this incident to anyone.

The Sister, however, did not feel bound to obey this order and to keep from her Sisters the knowledge of the wonderful favor which Providence had just bestowed on their mother. They all saw therein another reason to admire and bless the one who "not wishing that any of his little ones perish", had in such a touching way, increased the means of providing for their subsistence.

Other help, less extraordinary but not less effective came to them from time to time from a few friends. In 1761, Mr. Ranger "a middle-class merchant of Montreal", donated 1,450 pounds and Mr. Charles Rheaume donated 2000 pounds. In the month of August 1763, Father Joseph Isambert, a Sulpician priest, pastor of Longueuil, retired at the hospital where he could receive the care required by his age and his infirmities. On December 14 of the same year, he passed away at age 70. Loyal friend and devoted benefactor of the work, as a last testimonial of his interest, he bequeathed to it 3,500 pounds and a valuable clock.⁽⁵⁾

The same year, Miss Jeanne Guy, after a stay of only a few months in this house, bequeathed to it 6,000 pounds at her death.

Convinced that God would perform new wonders rather than refuse them the means of supporting these unfortunate babies, our mothers were strengthened in their resolve not to refuse any of them. God knows at the price of what sacrifices they were faithful to it.

⁽⁵⁾ Letter of Madam d'Youville, January 2, 1764.

Seventeen babies were received at the hospital in the final months of 1760 and thirty the following year. This number only increased as time went on. At the death of Madam d'Youville, the names of 318 infants had been recorded. Of these, a considerable number had preceded her into eternity and in heaven, they were weaving for her a crown of glory.

CHAPTER XIII

Obstacle to recruitment to the society; its organization —
Travels of Father Montgolfier to Europe — Promotion of
Father Briand to the Episcopal See of Quebec — Father
Montgolfier is appointed Vicar General of the diocese and
Ecclesiastical Superior of the Grey Nuns — Death of
Sisters Dulude and Véronneau — Jean-Pierre Ménard,
Madam d'Youville's protégé.
1763 - 1766

To assure good care for the very young children, and in their developing years, to give them a solid formation for a Christian life as well as a good training for manual work, it was important that the sisters be exclusively employed at this charitable ministry. "The formation of the child requires the whole man", said a wise educator. Madam d'Youville was apparently absorbed by this care when she wrote, "The care of foundlings will employ at least three sisters: one for the newborn, another for those who are beginning to walk, and a third for those who must be taught in order that some day, they may earn their own livelihood. I even believe that only one sister in each of these wards would be insufficient". But there was a problem; one which was a serious obstacle to the development of the society. The Letters patent of 1753, as we saw, set at twelve the number of administrators. This number could not be increased without the express authorization of the King of France, who would grant such authorization only on the

advice of the administrators of the colony: the Bishop, the Governor, and the Intendant.

Vainly Madam d'Youville had tried to increase this number. The Administrators would not agree because "in the event that Madam d'Youville and her companions would be removed from the direction of the hospital within thirty years, a life pension of 250 pounds would be paid to each sister from the hospital funds."⁽¹⁾ This clause would have inflicted a burden on the hospital and could have brought about its ruin if the number of administrators had been increased at will.

However Bishop de Pontbriand soon realized that twelve sisters could not cope with the various works Madam d'Youville had undertaken. At his pastoral visit in 1755, he authorized her to receive three more postulants provided these persons would not have the rights granted to the twelve by the Letters patent and that they would be allowed to take the habit only after they had had a year of training in the novitiate.

In 1756 the number of Administrators was brought to twelve by the profession of Sisters Beaufrère and Boisclair, and with the authorization of the Bishop of Quebec, Madam d'Youville had admitted three other postulants to the novitiate. Time and experience had proved to the foundress that this number was still insufficient. In 1758, she conceived the idea of receiving as lay sisters, a few other young persons already trained for the various services and who could care for the poor with zeal and devotedness.

About this, she wrote to the Bishop "Twelve is not enough for the different tasks of the house. It is pertinent that there be persons of a subordinate rank who, though under obedience to others, may however, exercise authority over the poor or over employees of the house."⁽²⁾

(1) Letters patent of 1753.

(2) Memoirs of Blessed Marguerite d'Youville.

The holy habit worn by these young girls, the foundress thought, would inspire respect and obedience to persons under their care. Reminding them constantly of the holiness of their calling and of their commitment, would incite them to dignified and orderly behavior. "Furthermore, the welfare of the hospital was at stake", she believed. Thus clothed, these young persons would consider themselves more closely committed to the house than simple employees; they would be more inclined to take its interests to heart and to be on their guard concerning order in the various departments and the preservation of property and objects entrusted to their care.

In his reply, Bishop Pontbriand declared he saw no reason why such young people could not be received into the society, on condition that they remained as novices and postulants and not be in administration until they were admitted among the twelve. He therefore authorized the admission of four novices and six postulants. The novices were destined to replace the administrators, and the postulants would replace the novices as vacancies occurred. If this proposal were accepted, the bishop concluded, Madam d'Youville and her companions would have to submit it to him, in the form of a request. He concluded begging "Father Montgolfier to have an eye on the matter".

This proposal apparently did not exactly meet the views of the foundress. On the one hand, it was thought there could be a grave inconvenience in having a state of probation prolonged indefinitely. On the other, it was important that the administrators, restricted as they were to twelve, should be well chosen. In this case, the condition of assuring the right to novices to replace indistinctly the administrators, would create difficulties.

There could be subjects who though gifted with great generosity and capable of rendering great service to the house, might not have all the qualities required for administration. For this reason, it was necessary to establish a special category which would allow the society to put to good use the varied abilities of subjects. Admitted as lay sisters, these persons would take the same vows as

the administrators; they would enjoy the same advantages without, however, exercising the same functions or assuming the same responsibilities. Only the wooden cross instead of a silver crucifix would distinguish them from the other professed sisters. On the advice of Father Montgolfier, specially designated to examine the matter, the foundress and her council maintained this stand until such time as more favorable circumstances would allow the society to expand freely and to define its organization in a more satisfactory manner.

But, far from promoting this development, events appeared, for a certain time at least, to stand in the way. As early as 1759 Quebec fell to the British. In the eyes of the more astute, the surrender of this town seemed to ensure Britain's hold on the whole colony. What would become of religious freedom under a regime that was anti-catholic? What security would religious communities have? Would they not be deprived of the right to continue in existence? Gripped by these fears, Father Montgolfier had advised Madam d'Youville to admit to profession without delay, three new subjects: Sisters Angélique Dussaut, Geneviève Gosselin and Anne Varambourville. Subjected to the trials of the novitiate for more than two years, these young novices yearned to be united to Jesus Christ by the holy vows. On December 12, their desire was fulfilled. The gravity of circumstances, the uncertainty of a future that appeared threatening, the perturbation that prevailed, everything gave their sacrifice an exceptionally touching character. Even heaven itself must have been moved by this testimony of ardent love of God and of firm attachment to the cause of the unfortunate whose numbers and miseries increased with the harshness of the times. The consecration of the new candidates increased to fifteen the number of professed sisters.

However, Madam d'Youville must soon have been convinced that this number was still insufficient for the needs of her house. Among the early laborers, there were several whose strength had been considerably altered by age, hard work or premature infirmities. Though they did not ask to retire, they needed to be helped. But God who wished the little society to grow firm in patience

and humility did not immediately remove the obstacles that stood in the way of its expansion. The change of allegiance that occurred in 1760 further increased these obstacles. Despite the formal promise to respect the beliefs of Catholics and to maintain their institutions, the new masters, nevertheless displayed hostility towards them. Not content with refusing them access to public functions, they were not any more inclined to favor the development of religious communities. It is easy to imagine the pain and the difficulty that weighed upon the minds of the Sisters. Furthermore, since the death of Bishop de Pontbriand, the Episcopal See of Quebec was without a shepherd. This vacancy which had lasted three years, was not likely to restore confidence. However, in the summer of 1763, the Quebec chapter thought the time had come to appoint an ecclesiastical leader.

Summoned to participate in these deliberations, Father Montgolfier had promised Madam d'Youville that he would confer at this time, with the capitular members, on the expediency of admitting new recruits.

After several weeks of waiting, Madam d'Youville, having received no reply from the superior, reminded him of his previous agreement concerning their postulants who were ready to receive the holy habit. Urged by new requests for admittance, she requested in addition the authorization to accept the candidates presented to her and she added: "I expect, Father, that you will do your utmost to obtain this permission and to transmit it to us yourself, you know our need more than anybody. Furthermore, you know that among the twelve, almost half are no longer able to function. As I had received no reply, I feared that you had forgotten me."⁽³⁾

This delay was due neither to indifference nor to oversight. It was due to increasing perplexities elicited by the new government concerning religion before it was given the place of honor it had occupied until now. Father Montgolfier's reply to the foun-

⁽³⁾ Letter of September 12, 1763.

dress prescribed the greatest caution in admitting candidates. Great as was her desire at that time, and her need to increase membership in her society, greater still was Madam d'Youville's submission. She wrote, "I shall abide by your instructions concerning novices and postulants. They will await your return with great eagerness, they as well as many others". All absorbed with the grave question which at this time concerned so poignantly the fate of the Canadian Church, she added: "Your long and involuntary stay in Quebec is causing fear that the remainder of your stay may be the same. As for myself, I would be consoled if you succeeded and if you returned in perfect health."

According to these lines, the trip of the revered superior was not to end in Quebec. In fact, an important mission had just obliged Father Montgolfier to go to Europe. At the capitular meeting of September 15, 1763, held secretly so as not to set the government against the Church, he "had been unanimously selected to occupy the See of Quebec."⁽⁴⁾ Compelled to have this choice ratified by the British court, he went to London the following October with the difficult mission of defending the other interests of the church.

When these negotiations were over, Father Montgolfier left London for Paris to confer with his superior concerning the affairs of the Seminary in Montreal. A letter from Madam d'Youville was addressed to him there assuring him of the deep interest which the Grey Nuns entertained towards the success of these negotiations, and the eagerness with which they awaited his return. These negotiations did indeed deeply interest our mothers, for the directors of the Sulpicians were to make a definite decision concerning their house in Montreal. Nobody could any longer remain in Canada, without becoming a British subject and this condition applied to priests as well as to other citizens.

These men with apostolic hearts were reluctant to abandon Ville-Marie which Father Olier, their founder, had especially in mind

(4) Notices sur les évêques de Québec.

in founding his institution and to which he had wished to consecrate his own life, to suppress the establishments already founded in the interest of the Church, to deprive the faithful of the spiritual and temporal help they had been giving for more than a century. Engrossed by these concerns, they did not hesitate to make in favor of the Church and of souls, this sacrifice which was a witness to their faith and their self-forgetfulness. With common accord, the council resolved to give up to their confreres who would consent to come under British domination, the vast territories that had cost the entire fortune of many of the members of their company, and had even laid a debt on their seminary in Paris.⁽⁵⁾ Two years later, at another session held September 5, 1766, the general assembly of the Sulpician approved and confirmed this proposal as a sacrifice that could contribute to the maintenance of the Catholic Church in Canada and preserve among the Sulpicians a spirit of unselfishness that was always encouraged.

Of the forty members then at the Montreal Seminary, twenty-eight became British subjects and remained in Canada to continue the holy work they had so well begun there. As the sun shines brightest after a storm, so their charity after the crisis which had ruined so many families, appeared more splendid and more helpful than ever. In a better position to witness their devotedness and frequently assisted by their alms, Madam d'Youville wrote to Father Cousturier.

⁽⁵⁾ When one peruses the long list of priests who labored in Canada in Father Olier's Association, writes a respected priest, one is amazed to find on each page, especially 1700-1760, so many names belonging to French nobility. This is explained by the fact that these families were innocent victims of the French Revolution. The seminary drained by the enormous expenses incurred to establish and support colonists, and finding themselves in extreme poverty, had decided to send to Canada only priests financially capable of supporting themselves with their inheritance. This prospect should have dissuaded many from their generous plans. The effect was the contrary. The great poverty of the seminary, far from cooling their zeal, fanned it instead. One understands, therefore, why the ministry of these holy priests was so blessed and how these valiant missionaries succeeded in founding such good and Christian parishes; they who had given up brilliant careers in their homeland to settle in the Canadian wilderness.

“Our present situation makes us realize each day how much we owe to the charity of your priests. Our house is not the only one to feel the effects of this charity; the whole colony experiences their kindness and in their gratitude, ask that this kindness may continue”. The other communities in the town had no less reason to be pleased with the generosity of the seminary. About the same time, a Sister from Hôtel-Dieu wrote: “I would tell you confidentially that without the charitable compassion of Father Montgolfier, our worthy superior, we would have died of starvation more than three years ago, having nothing with which to buy bread and meat, being obliged furthermore, to be on constant duty in our wards, which are overflowing. Father Montgolfier, who has a noble, tender and generous heart, has great pity on our situation; he affords great help by furnishing what we need with a kindness we cannot describe. When we go without, it is because we took care to hide our poverty from him. We tell him only of our indispensable necessities and which we cannot reasonably do without short of dying. On the contrary, there are many poor families which he supports. We can truly call him the father of orphans, of widows and of all the poor in Canada.”

Let us not get ahead of events, but let us see what was the result of Father Montgolfier’s trip to London concerning his election to the Episcopal See of Quebec. It did not meet with the success expected. The court in London, having been cautioned against him, had set the condition that his consecration be approved by Governor Murray. When he returned to Quebec at the beginning of August 1764, not only was he refused the approval of the Governor, but on his order, he also had to resign his position of Vicar General. The virtuous priest who to all his qualities as a superior man, added that of having no ambition of greatness, willingly gave up the episcopate to which he had been elected.

In another meeting of the chapter, Bishop Jean-Olivier Briand, former secretary of Bishop de Pontbriand, was chosen as Bishop of Quebec. He, in turn, had to go to London to defend “the important affair of episcopal succession”. Calumny, spite and plotting almost caused the negotiations to fail. But after a year of per-

sistence and struggle, Father Briand finally obtained that the king accept his consecration. On March 16, 1766 the bishop was consecrated in Paris by Bishop Blois. "The succession of our bishops, interrupted for six years had been re-established; the widowhood of our church had come to an end, the Canadian episcopate was saved from the shipwreck of the old regime". On the following June 28, Bishop Briand was back in Quebec. That very year, the new bishop remembered our mothers: one of the first acts of his administration was to re-instate Father Montgolfier as Vicar General and to confirm him as Ecclesiastical Superior of our house.

Father Montgolfier, as soon as he had resigned, had returned to Montreal where he was eagerly awaited. He was received with great joy by all, more especially by those who had feared they would never see him again.⁽⁶⁾

But the joy was the greatest at the General Hospital where he was highly esteemed. Emulating Father Normant in prudence, in dedication, and in holiness, he continued with the same zeal, the good work his predecessor had begun. Our mothers, noting the concern he had for their community, had placed their trust, their gratitude, and their respect in him.

In the absence of Father Montgolfier, the sisters had suffered the loss of two of their companions. The first, Sister Catherine Huet-Dulude fell like a lily in full bloom, on June 23, 1763 in her twenty-third year. Her sojourn at the hospital had been so to say, only a halt between earth and heaven. She had entered the novitiate on February 1, 1762 and she was called back to God after sixteen months of sustained effort and of union with Jesus Christ. She had been born in Boucherville in 1740.

The second, Sister Agathe Véronneau, daughter of a merchant from the parish of Saint Francois du Lac, had been a member of the society since 1749. As a young professed, Sister Véronneau had been an ardent worker, zealous in the service of the poor.

⁽⁶⁾ Letter of Madam d'Youville, September 16, 1764.

She had drawn both zeal and ardor from their very source by diligence in prayer and attention to things of God.

When the hospital was opened to smallpox victims in 1755, Sister Véronneau lavished her care on them, both day and night with such diligence that she herself contracted the illness. Typhoid added to this did not claim her life but left her mentally impaired for the remainder of her life. In this pitiable state, her words and her actions, though incoherent, still betrayed the constant thoughts on her mind: to love God and to be united to Him in meditation. One day, Sister Véronneau had not appeared in the dining room where the other sisters were assembled. Concerned, Madam d'Youville immediately sent one of the sisters to look for her. The sister was indeed edified when she found Sister Véronneau in an attitude of profound adoration at the chapel entrance. "Sister, what are you doing? It is mealtime", she said — "I am making my meditation", replied Sister Véronneau, as if regretting this interruption. "And what were you meditating about? — "About the love of God", replied Sister Véronneau with artless and charming assurance, as she nevertheless followed her companion to the dining room. The love of God possessed this simple and obedient soul despite the obscurity of her mind.

In her delirium during her final days, she was heard ceaselessly repeating: "My God, I love you". With this act of love on her lips, she breathed forth her soul on April 20, 1764. She was fifty-eight years of age, and had lived eighteen years in religious life.

A few weeks after his return from Europe, Father Montgolfier, despite the many restrictions Britain had imposed on the Church, believed that Canada's position with regard to religious communities, was firm enough to allow our mothers to fill the voids which death had created in their ranks. On October 24, 1764, he received the vows of Sister Thérèse-Geneviève Coullée, and four months later, of Sister Madeleine Pampalon.

These recruits were joined by others. Though all did not persevere, their venture nevertheless indicated that the future of the Church looked brighter.

Such was Madam d'Youville's conclusion. She wrote to Mr. Héry who was then in France, "It definitely appears that the Church will be maintained in the country and that our religious communities will survive. Our bishop has allowed a young novice at Hôtel-Dieu to make profession. The eldest of the Douville girls has entered here; Miss Fouchette will enter at the beginning of September with Misses Cherrier and Lefebvre of Longueuil. Let us hope that God will bless our poor country ever more and more. Many young people are pursuing their studies, several for the priesthood."⁽⁷⁾

According to the predictions of the foundress, the Church would be maintained, but through perils and difficulties which would be overcome only with prudence, patience and firmness until at long last, the Constitutional Act of 1791 would guarantee the French-Canadians the full exercise of their rights.

The favoring of priestly vocations was yet another form of our beloved mother's charity. It was to facilitate his theological studies that she covered part of the cost of a trip to France of a young man named Pierre Ménard who aspired to the priesthood. On June 6, 1764 she had the joy of seeing him return to Canada as a newly-ordained priest. Father de l'Isle-Dieu wrote to her through the traveller, "It is the young Ménard who will carry my letter and whom we return to you as a priest. He appears to be very eager to return to his native country where, I believe, he will be well accepted. He is an excellent man but since you are taking an interest in him, tell him to be very prudent with regard to the new government. In our present situation, we must not give the least cause for concern or suspicion if we wish to preserve the freedom of religion which was granted us by Article twenty of the final treaty between the two crowns. This in a state law, a law of fidelity to the power under-which you are at present."

⁽⁷⁾ Letter of August 20, 1766 to Mr. Héry.

In 1766, Father Ménard was named pastor of Saint John in Ile d'Orléans, where he resided until 1777. Transferred to the parish of Chambly, he served there until his death on June 28, 1792. He was then fifty-four years of age. In 1808, when the remains of this beloved priest were disinterred, they were found to be in a state of perfect preservation.

CHAPTER XIV

The Manor of Châteauguay. — Chapel on Ile St. Bernard. — Bones found on the mount. — The first church. — Blessing of the bell.
1764

Feeling more at ease concerning the legal existence of her community, Madam d'Youville would concern herself henceforth with the means of assuring it the resources necessary for its temporal existence. The departure of many families who, since the conquest, had returned to France, had caused a great decrease in property value. This circumstance appeared favorable to the foundress. She decided to buy a few farms which could supply revenue for their needs. In early 1764, with her usual confidence, she wrote about her project to Father Montgolfier who was then in Europe.⁽¹⁾ "Much real estate will be sold and at very low prices, it appears. If we could convert our French money and if you were here, we would take advantage of the fact. Some property has been offered to us but I replied that we could not buy any until your return." There was a question here of the Manor of Châteauguay which Madam d'Youville had had in mind for quite some time. Before following her negotiations, let us give a brief background of this family inheritance which became the property of the hospital.

(1) Letter of January 2, 1764.

The early title of the Manor is a document dated September 29, 1673 by which Count Frontenac, "gives, concedes, and grants to Sieur Lemoyne, esquire Sieur of Longueuil, two adjacent leagues of land beginning ten acres below Rivière-du-Loup⁽²⁾ going into lake St. Louis on the south side and three leagues deep including Saint-Bernard Island which is at the mouth of the river."

The same document states that this concession is granted to Sieur Lemoyne "for the affection he always showed for the service of the King and for the diligence with which he always carried out the orders of the governors either in war against the Indians where he gained distinction on many occasions or in various negotiations and peace treaties which he drew up with them."

According to Father Faillon, the said farm was soon named Châteauguay, from the name of a son of Mr. Lemoyne. Mr. Daniel on the contrary, claims that the son of Mr. Lemoyne took the name of the granted property. The fact that gives rise to this last supposition is that Mr. de Longueuil maintained a fortress or château on Saint-Bernard Island whose farmer or business executive was named Gué or Gay, name by which it is designated in the documents of that years.

As testified in the inventory of Mr. de Longueuil's property, drawn up in 1786, this fortress or château, built of wood, housed a chapel equipped with its chalice, its silver receptacle, a brocade chasuble trimmed with golden lace, an alb, an altar frontispiece and all that is required for mass, including a silver ciborium. Estimated at two-hundred and fifty pounds.⁽³⁾ "No doubt this chapel was very small as, according to the same document, the château measured only 45' X 22'." Furthermore, according to the account given on the order of Bishop de Laval in 1683, Châteauguay numbered only "two families and six other persons."

(2) Today this river is known as the river of Châteauguay.

(3) These notes were graciously provided by Father Mainville.

The chapel, however, had a patron Saint. According to a document preserved in the archives of Pointe-Claire and dated 1715, it was dedicated to Saint Joachim, the glorious ancestor of Jesus. An earlier document found at the same place reveals that there was already a missionary in Châteauguay. He was Father Charles-René Breslay, a Sulpician priest. This document dated September 15, 1705, is the record of the baptism of Marie-Madeleine Lalu, daughter of Leonard Lalu, the cooper of Chasteau Gay, and of Francoise Couffy. Father Pierre Remy, a Sulpician priest, added the following note: "baptism performed in the absence of Father de Breslay, pastor and missionary at Château Gay".

According to these indications, we may conclude without temerity that from the beginning of the 18th century, Mass was celebrated on the Island of Saint-Bernard. Nothing seems more natural and more pleasing than to believe this. For more than two centuries Jesus Christ had descended on the island where he dwells in a modest sanctuary which he fills with heavenly graces. Through two centuries, he has sanctified by his sacramental presence this place where our sick sisters go to convalesce and where our deceased sisters sleep peacefully on the neighboring mount.

Apart from the Château which he had erected on the island and which existed still in 1765, under the name of Seignorial Manor, no other trace of his stay or of his activities was left on the island by Mr. Lemoyne de Longueuil.⁽⁴⁾ His son Charles, first baron of Longueuil, appears to have centered his activity on establishing and developing the Manor of Longueuil instead. It is there that he employed a large number of farmers to cultivate and develop his fields under his customary supervision, while the manor of Châteauguay too far away, was neglected.

However, this state of affairs could not last. In 1676, in the powers given to Mr. de Frontenac and Mr. Duchesneau to grant concessions of land or manors to the colonists, it was stipulated

(4) Mr. de Longueuil died early in 1685 and was buried in Ville-Marie.

that these concessions would revert to the crown if they were not developed. It was no doubt in view of discharging this duty that the baron of Longueuil maintained a stronghold on the Island of Saint-Bernard and that at the foot of the mount, he had erected the small windmill which is still preserved as a relic of these early times.

Judging by the size of this mill, the settlers established here were few in number or perhaps their products were small in quantity. The neighboring Iroquois of Sault-Saint-Louis it is true, would not attract the French nor render manageable the clearing of their lands.⁽⁵⁾

For this reason a fort was soon erected on these shores. In 1690 it was already there for Charlevoix says that that year, "the sieur des Marais, Captain commanding at the fort of Châteauguay above Sault Saint-Louis, having gone out into the country with his assistant and a soldier, was ambushed by three Iroquois who each chose and killed a man."

In 1696 a record of burial also states a soldier killed by the Iroquois at the fort of Chasteau Gay. The document is drawn up as follows: "This day, tenth of May, one thousand six hundred and ninety-six, was buried the body of Laurent Le Sept, soldier of the company of Mr. Leverrier, who was killed yesterday morning, at the entrance of Chasteau Gay at sunrise, near the lime kiln, by the Iroquois. They left their tomahawk near the dead body. This burial was performed in the presence of Francois le Guantier, esquire, sieur de la Vallé, Rané, lieutenant of a company of marines, commander for the king in the fort, at the church of Lachine and of Bernard Deschênes, esquire, sieur de Rochemond, officer of said detachment, who have signed with us: Rémy, curé . . . etc."

At the time when Madam d'Youville proposed to buy it, the island was still called the "Fort". In the barn and the stone stable which remained standing, open loopholes appeared in various

⁽⁵⁾ See supplement to Sault Saint-Louis, p. 73.

places. How many years did this fort exist? We do not know. What is certain is that a goodly number of persons were buried on the mount which rises to the West of the Island of Saint Bernard and resembles a camp that had been reduced in size.

In 1854, eighteen skulls and many other human bones were found on this hill while digging in a circumference of eighteen feet. Sister Reid who supplied these details and who supervised the excavations, carefully and religiously placed these bones in three separate boxes which she had buried at the foot of the cross on the north side. An entire skeleton was even found in an oak coffin which was well preserved and carefully nailed with square-headed ship nails. Were these the remains of some person of renown, an officer, a great lord, or perhaps even the chief of an Indian tribe? We may suppose so by the richness of the coffin but we have not been able to discover any precise information on this topic. In the same way, the deepest mystery shrouds the memory of the other persons buried there. It is not unlikely that they are men of war since arrows and stone weapons were also found. May light one day be shed on these forgotten tombs!

As for the baron de Longueuil, so as not to neglect his first manor and feeling incapable by himself of making the manor of Châteauguay productive, he decided to sell the latter to some member of the family. A second contract, dated August 6, 1706, established "Zacharie Robutel sieur de la Noue, lieutenant of the troops, dwelling usually at Chasteau Gay, proprietor of the land and Manor of Chasteau Gay with all the Peace Islands, all the buildings and the windmill used for making flour etc, etc." The new lord was by his marriage with Catherine Le Moynes,⁽⁶⁾ cousin of the baron de Longueuil. He had been living at the château for several years already since the record of baptism of his daughter Elisabeth-Francoise kept at the archives of Lachine states him as being on July 9, 1699 "resident of Chasteau Gay."

(6) Catherine was the daughter of Jacques Lemoyne.

However, in the hands of Mr. de la Noue, the number of residents at the manor did not increase more rapidly. In 1721, when Bishop de Saint-Vallier, in order to comply with the king's wishes as well as to satisfy his own inclinations, divided his immense diocese into eighty-two parishes, Châteauguay was considered too small to form one. It was decided that this "estate would continue as a mission, served by the missionary to the Iroquois Indians of Sault Saint-Louis."⁽⁷⁾

On June 9, 1724 Mr. de la Noue swore allegiance to the crown for his manor and the census he gives shows it to be populated by only twenty-six families qualified for the franchise. It was yet but a small nucleus on the river's edge and at the entrance to Lake Saint-Louis: but already it included names well-known today of Bro, Primot, Faubert, Cecyre, Couillard and Gendron. However few in number and without any great pecuniary resources, the residents of Châteauguay soon found the means of building a larger chapel to replace the small oratory on the Island of Saint-Bernard. It was built in 1735 on lot No. 6 according to the survey register, north east of the river. This land is today (1913) the property of Antoine Boursier.

The new chapel was still very humble, very rustic. Nevertheless, the Eucharistic Jesus was as present here as he is under the arches of great basilicas. Here, people could easily gather to hear the Word of God and participate in the Sacred Mysteries.

Though the parish did not yet have a resident priest, its records nevertheless date back to 1727.⁽⁸⁾

On February 13, 1743 the peaceful population of Châteauguay witnessed an unusual celebration. It was that of the blessing of the first bell. Reverend Clement Lefebvre, Recollet, who was acting as pastor, had requested Madam de la Noue to be godmother for this bell and to select a godfather. In the eyes of the dear elderly

⁽⁷⁾ Decision signed by de Vaudreuil, Jean Ev. de Québec.

⁽⁸⁾ The first record drawn up by Reverend Father L. Naud, Jesuit as being resident at Châteauguay, is dated January 7, 1736.

person, this honor appeared too great for her seventy-eight years. She yielded it to Mr. Leber de Senneville age 22 and to Miss Elisabeth-Charles, daughter of the baron of Longueuil who was hardly nine years old, according to the genealogical dictionary. The young lords gave their godchild the proof of their noble and generous open-handedness.⁽⁹⁾

Three years later, on June 25, 1746, Mrs. de la Noue passed away peacefully; her body was laid to rest in the parish church of Châteauguay. She left one daughter and two sons, one of whom followed his mother closely in death. The other, Joachim, did not long remain proprietor of the manor. Having taken an active part in the seven years' war⁽¹⁰⁾ which had a decisive influence on the country's destiny, he left Canada to return to France with the greater number of the nobility, yielding all his rights on Châteauguay to his sister Marie-Anne. The latter was living at the hospital as a boarder since August 5, 1748.

Feeling that she did not have sufficient aptitude for such a large administration, Miss de la Noue wisely thought of gaining Madam d'Youville's interest. The desire to be helpful and also the anticipation of later acquiring this property for the hospital prompted the foundress to farm the manor as early as 1761. That year and the following years, she kept an account of receipts and expenses incurred here, as she did at the hospital. On August 25, 1764, she accepted from Miss de la Noue, a promise that she would sell her this property, and even gave her a small down payment on it.

In the meantime, Madam d'Youville consulted Father Montgolfier and her administrative council on the means of covering the cost of this new property. At first, she relied on the monies France had owed her before the conquest, for the work done for the king's troops and for the care given to sick soldiers. But time was passing and there was no flicker of hope from France. On

⁽⁹⁾ Record of the parish of Châteauguay.

⁽¹⁰⁾ According to the Ursulines of Quebec, the seven years' war in Canada began in the fall of 1753 and ended with the surrender of Montreal in 1760. In Europe it lasted from 1756 to the Treaty of Paris in 1763.

the contrary, the amounts expected were undergoing at this time, a considerable decrease in value. According to a Royal decree, certain bills of exchange were reduced by half, others by three-quarters. "This is a considerable loss" wrote the foundress to Father de l'Isle Dieu when she learned of this. "And we lose in many ways, since we do not know if we shall ever be reimbursed." But she did not allow these disappointments to shake her faith. From perishable things she rose to things eternal and repeated her favorite precept: "I abandon everything to Providence; my confidence is in it. All will happen as God pleases."⁽¹¹⁾

Since she expected nothing from the French government, Madam d'Youville thought of giving up the feudal holding at Chambly which was complicated by certain regulations. It was a farm 6 × 60 acres "which could not support the farmer" and another of 1000 acres which, because it was not cultivated, "did not produce enough to cover the cost of grave-digging." A declared enemy of court cases and any argument over personal interests, the good foundress was happy to use this occasion to prevent them. On many occasions she had preferred to sacrifice some of the goods of the poor rather than engage in disputes so contrary to the spirit of the Gospel. Consequences were too serious for peace of soul and for edification of neighbor, she thought. An incident which happened that year, 1764, allowed her to give her daughters an example of her unselfishness in this matter. Mr. de Paris, the first agent which Father de l'Isle Dieu had taken into partnership to guard, in France, the interests of the hospital, had just died. On reviewing the accounts of the deceased, it was noted that there was a serious deficit in the affairs of the hospital. Father de l'Isle Dieu could not hide this fact from the foundress and he pledged himself to take care of it. But the generous woman would not accept his offer. Her conciliatory spirit prompted her to write:

"You appear worried concerning the outstanding accounts of Mr. de Paris, especially the bill of the West Indian Company. It is a closed affair: we discharge him of responsibility and approve

⁽¹¹⁾ Letter of March 1, 1765.

everything he has done. All our sisters join me in begging you to take from the monies you have on hand . . . the hundred and thirty-three pounds, eighteen pennies ten farthings which you furnished of your own money to make for the error you say was committed. The dear deceased did his best to help us and we would be very ungrateful if we tried to trouble his family. Please Sir, assure them on the contrary, and even if it were only for your sake, we hold him acquitted before God and before men and we pray for the repose of his soul."

Informed the following year that this message had not succeeded in dispelling the good priest's anxiety about the matter, she wrote again: "Why should you worry about an error of a few hundred pounds; when you have rendered us services which we could never repay and which we and those who will succeed us must never forget?"⁽¹²⁾

While Madam d'Youville used the slightest occasions that occurred to grow in selflessness so fitting to persons dedicated to works of charity, the Lord was preparing to submit her to still greater detachment by removing all material resources so that she would be obliged to rely more completely on his Providence. It is so true that the more God sees a person who is submitted to his will, the more claims he makes, the more desirous he is of increasing its merits and of making its virtue shine with greater splendor. The time had come when madam d'Youville would be in a position to display with greater intensity all the strength with which she had been so generously gifted.

⁽¹²⁾ Letter of August 22, 1766.

CHAPTER XV

Hospital fire — Hospitality of the Sisters of Hôtel-Dieu —
Tender concerns of Providence —
Sympathy of the citizens.
1765

The negotiations begun with Miss de Lanoue for the purchase of the seigniori at Châteauguay were almost settled when a disastrous event almost caused them to fail.

On May 18, 1765, about two thirty in the afternoon, a fire broke out in a house⁽¹⁾ situated at the corner of St. François-Xavier and Saint-Sacrament Streets about ten blocks from the hospital. Presuming that because of the distance, there was no danger to her house, Madam d'Youville immediately sent to the scene of the fire the Sisters and other able-bodied persons. While these were carrying out this charitable deed, what anguish they experienced when they discovered that their own house was threatened! In dismay, they hastened home. Already the fire driven by a strong wind, had reached rue Saint-Pierre and attacked the hospital. The roof of cedar shingles was soon ablaze. From there, the flames raced through the upper floors. Everyone was putting forth superhuman efforts to bring them under control, but all in vain; in a brief moment, they had engulfed the whole establishment. When it became

(1) The house of a Mr. Levingston, according to M. Leblond; Compton according to letters written by our foundress.

evident that it was impossible to save the house, an attempt was made to rescue the furnishings. To this purpose, clothing, bedding, furniture were entrusted to persons who offered to carry them to safety. More than fifty wagons had thus been put to the service of the victims. Vain precaution! neither the supposed rescuers, nor the objects entrusted to their care were ever seen again.

Not even the church linens were saved. Laid away at too short a distance from the scene of the fire, they too, were consumed. Crest-fallen and desolate, the sacristan bitterly lamented this loss, and attributed it to her lack of submission to her superior's recommendation. "If these things had been carried to the place designated by our Mother", she said tearfully, "they would not have burned". The lesson was a hard one and not soon forgotten.

The affliction abated, but now there was nothing left to save or to protect at the hospital. From now on, it would be a matter of bolstering everyone's courage. At the first sign of danger, Madam d'Youville had had the house evacuated. The handicapped, the aged, and the children had taken refuge at some distance from the garden. She went to them without delay. They gathered around her. One can understand the grief, the lamentations, the tears! At this sight, her compassionate heart was oppressed, but placing her trust in God, she immediately lifted her soul above this catastrophe and with a firm voice and a calm countenance, she incited everyone to be resigned and to give thanks: "The Lord had given us everything, He has taken everything away, may his holy name be blessed!"

The Sisters came in turn to surround their Mother and to mingle their prayers and their tears with hers. When the family was all there, Madam d'Youville, in a movement proper to saints, raised her hands to heaven and in her heart, adored Providence. Appealing to the faith of her charges, she said: "Children, we shall recite the Te Deum on our knees to thank God for the grace he has just granted us". All but one immediately fell to their knees. More sensitive than the others to their terrible disaster, she could not understand the appropriateness of such a prayer. With her

nature in turmoil, she retorted: "Oh, see if I'll say any Te Deums for you!" But no sooner had divine grace anointed this wounded soul, than her turmoil ceased, her bitterness was dispelled, her whole being became recollected and she bowed under the hand which had just struck. Kneeling with her sisters in the same sentiments of faith and abandonment, she continued her hymn of thanksgiving. "To adore the plans of Divine Providence and to submit to the will of the Father is what we have tried our best to do", the pious foundress was able to write in the future.

After this heroic Te Deum, Madam d'Youville arose with renewed strength to carry on God's work. As if to impart to her daughters the faith that gave her courage, she said to them with great assurance, "Take courage, my children, the house will never burn again". Was she inspired from above when she spoke these words? Or was she uttering the prayer she had addressed to God? No one knows; the fact remains that never since, has fire gutted the Mother-house.

Once the sacrifice was offered, a shelter had to be found for these one hundred and nineteen persons, for night was approaching. After consulting each other, the foundress and her companions agreed to go to Pointe-Saint-Charles. By utilizing the house and barns, they hoped to be able to lodge the Sisters, the elderly and the children. They were preparing to leave when Father Montgolfier arrived. Worried about the lot of this family in distress, he had secured for them a shelter at Hôtel-Dieu and was happy to bring them this news. A feeling of consideration for her benefactors made Madam d'Youville find it painful to accept this hospitality which would undoubtedly inconvenience those who were offering it so whole-heartedly. But, she could never find a better occasion of practising obedience.

She did not let it go by. Without revealing her preference, she acceded to the wish of Father Montgolfier.

All began their trek led by Father de Féligonde, confessor of the community. The sight of this ill-fated group wending their way in the darkness through the streets in this devastated district, was

heart-rending. It is said that many including Dr. Feltz, the hospital's physician, were moved to tears.

It was eight o'clock when they arrived at Hôtel-Dieu. Everyone received from the sisters the most cordial and prompt attention. Ready-prepared beds awaited the Sisters in the infirmary and the poor were lodged in the regal room.

After a day filled with emotion and fatigue, it would have been good to rest. But instead of the desired rest, the night brought only new fears to these victims of the recent mishap. At each moment, the explosion of barrels of gunpowder interrupted their sleep. It seemed as if death were hovering over the whole town. Already, during the fire, two persons had succumbed before their very eyes, victims of such accidents; several others had been wounded. "At least, twenty barrels of gunpowder exploded in this fire", Madam d'Youville wrote, "and we thought our last hour had come; and I consider it a protection from heaven that the whole town did not perish!"⁽²⁾

Finally, day dawned. To find renewed courage, our mothers, kneeling before the altar, opened their souls in distress. They renewed the sacrifice they had made of their lives to Jesus Christ and begged him to give them strength to bear generously the present trial.

A fervent communion sealed their offering and brought back to their souls a sweet serenity. However in this very act, the harshness of their destitution was tested. Only one of their short mantles had escaped the flames. They had to pass it from one to the other as they received Holy Communion in turn. But what wealth is equal to that which came from this communion, and what strength they received from partaking of the Bread of life. Nourished with this heavenly food, our mothers rose up ready to begin again with renewed vigor, the work that appeared annihilated. By the delightful vigilance which Providence reserves for souls it has

⁽²⁾ Letter of Madam d'Youville.

cruelly tested, they shortly had the joy of receiving the painting of the Eternal Father which Father de Féligonde, aided by one of the Sisters, had succeeded in withdrawing from the fire. The sight of this beloved picture which has escaped such a complete ruin, appeared to them in their distress as a smile and an encouragement from the Heavenly Father. More than ever, they resolved to seek only him as their support and consolation.

Another joy equally sweet lessened the bitterness of their distress. We recall the miniature statue of the Virgin Mary before which Madam d'Youville and her first companions had vowed themselves to the service of God and his poor in 1737. In sorting through the rubble, how surprised the workers were to find it shining through the smouldering remains. While its base, of copper like the statue itself, had melted in the fire, the body of the statue remained intact. Mary, the sweet consolation of the afflicted, wished to convey to her faithful servants that she also remained faithful to them in their misfortune. Grateful and touched, our mothers revered it as they bathed it with burning tears.

From that day on, the little statue acquired an infinite value for them. In the future, it would be venerated as a relic, as a pledge of Mary's protection of the work they so loved. Today, it is piously kept in the Superior General's office and it presides over chapters, over meetings, and over all important deliberations of the Institute.

One last narration will help to show concern for the sisters in their misfortunes. A few days after the fire, a keg of wine two thirds empty was found in the vault. The common quality of the wine had improved. Weeks went by and the wine kept flowing. In the last days of September, it appeared to be running out "and the stream was only the size of a straw", according to the statement of the bursar. She warned Madam d'Youville of the fact. The latter replied: "Keep drawing, Sister, keep drawing". The advice was followed and the wine continued to flow for two and a half months, that is from the end of September to mid December at which time our mothers returned to their house. It was thus that

He who helps the humble, and who "humbles them only in order to help them more", consoled them.

To these divine considerations was added the sympathy of zealous friends. Moved by the destitution of the little colony in exile, the Sulpician priests, the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame and some wealthy families helped them in varied ways. This is what Madam d'Youville wrote with emotion to Father de l'Isle Dieu: "The Sisters of Hôtel-Dieu sheltered us, our poor, and our boarders in their home. The charity of the faithful supplied us with food, especially that of the Sulpician priests from the seminary who were eager to see us re-established."

No one, however, desired to be re-established with greater intensity than did Madam d'Youville. She felt it was a burden for the Sisters of Hôtel-Dieu to shelter one hundred and nineteen persons. Of this number, only four planned to retire soon into the town. One hundred and fifteen would still remain in addition to the regular personnel of the house. This was much more than the place could reasonably hold. The Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame and Misters Deschambault and Lemoine had charitably offered various lodgings. But the revered foundress reverted to her earlier plan of taking part of her poor to Pointe Saint-Charles until the hospital was reconstructed. Then summoning all her courage and reviving her trust in God, she immediately set in motion the task of rebuilding. "We are brave enough to attempt to recover a corner of our house", she wrote. "We shall try to continue, hoping, that Divine Providence which has always sustained us, will continue to aid us". The fact is that help always came in time, to confirm her trust.

After the fire which had destroyed one hundred and eleven houses, leaving one hundred and forty families without shelter, there was naturally little to expect by way of help from the citizens. But Madam d'Youville and her companions were loved because of their devotedness. Nevertheless, with God preparing hearts, the citizens shared the little they had and the Sisters received alms totalling six thousand francs. Everyone, even the Indians of Sault

Saint-Louis and of Lac des Deux-Montagnes insisted on offering help. Undoubtedly remembering the care given their dear ones during the epidemic of 1755, these good people had sold trinkets, blankets, knives, and glass beads to donate the revenue for the rebuilding of the hospital. These small facts reveal how great was the love these generous servants of the poor had inspired.

England was not insensitive to the misfortune of those who had suffered loss. A list of subscriptions was begun in their favor and generous financial help began to pour in. Madam d'Youville had a share of these gifts. Grateful, she wrote, "We would never have recovered without the alms we received from the collections taken up in London, which relieved us". Other help contributed greatly in bolstering her courage. Always attentive in contributing to the efforts of her zeal, the seminary offered her fifteen thousand francs to cover the most urgent expenses. Madam d'Youville was so touched by this that she immediately wrote to express her satisfaction to Father Cousturier, asking him to apply the bill of exchange for 7,620 pounds which he was holding for the hospital to the payment of part of her loans.⁽³⁾ Thanks to these loans, the establishment would soon rise from its ruins.

To hasten the work of construction, Father Montgolfier allowed the carpenters to work between church services on Sundays and holy days of obligation. Thus, as early as mid September, the wards destined for the men were ready for them. They were moved there and settled on the 23rd of the same month by Madam d'Youville and the two Sisters who cared for them. A month later, on November 5th, Madam d'Youville wrote: "By contracting a debt, we have repaired a corner of our house to which our elderly poor have returned; the women, lady boarders and we, shall move in at the end of November. We shall be cramped for space, but we shall be at home. We shall not lack means of doing penance; we need this and will try to take advantage of it". The moving of the Sisters and the boarders back to the hospital could

⁽³⁾ Letter of September 19, 1765.

not take place however, until December 5th, and the elderly women had to wait patiently until Christmas.

On leaving Hôtel-Dieu where our mothers and their poor had been the objects and the witnesses of so much charity, a friendly agreement put the seal on the farewells. Six months of community life, of shared labors, and shared sufferings had bonded hearts. To perpetuate the memory of this bond, it was agreed that each would notify the other of the days when there would be a vesturing or a profession ceremony in either community so that there could be rejoicing in both houses. This agreement, sprung from cordiality and gratitude, was long observed with joy. It had to cease when these ceremonies became more frequent in both communities. However, the memory of them has remained alive in our traditions. In memory of the hospitable shelter, the sacristy still preserves a table graciously offered to our mothers by their generous benefactors at the time of separation.

CHAPTER XVI

Slowness of the restoration works — Reduction of the hospital's income — Madam d'Youville is forced to give up plans for an extension to the hospital — Divine Providence intervenes again.
1765 – 1768

As Madam d'Youville had predicted, after the little colony had returned to the partially restored hospital, the occasions for doing penance were not lacking. Various obstacles, particularly the lack of resources, considerably delayed progress of the work.

More than ever, Madam d'Youville wished she could recover from France the money due her so that she could apply them to the cost of this restoration. They would have served also to complete the extension begun in 1758.

But she always encountered the same disappointments. An agreement signed in 1766 between Government officers of France and Britain "in order to liquidate what remained of Canadian bills" had the effect of reducing the 106,624 francs due the hospital to the meagre amount of 1,132 francs, and even so, the foundress was not sure that this amount would soon be paid.

At a time when the hospital was living on loans and alms, "lacking everything, especially clothing and food", this cut and these delays caused her an immense inconvenience. She could not hide her great perplexity from Mr. Savary, her attorney who broke the

news to her. She wrote "The way France is treating our bills is causing great harm to the poor of this country: Having taken out loans on which we must pay interest, we have waited since 1757 for our payments. . . . As for the bills of exchange, the works and services we had provided at great cost; approximately one-third of the ordinance had been received as alms. . . . God be praised! We must carry our cross and he surely gives it in abundance in this wretched country!(1)

Always interested in the affairs of the hospital, Father de l'Isle-Dieu deplored these losses as real obstacles to the development of the work and did not let any occasion slip by without giving the foundress a proof of his concern. With regard to a statement of account which he had drawn up according to the latest devaluation, he wrote her: "If I can, concerning this, obtain for you a better lot, I promise I shall put my whole heart to it. . . . It remains to be seen what I shall be able to do for the other communities of the diocese who no more than yourself, are not in the category of speculators and merchants who have drained our colonies and are responsible for our losing them."(2)

And elsewhere, "You are very unfairly treated by the court, after the way you sacrificed yourself, you and your devoted community, for the service of the king and for the care of the troops. I confess that I cannot think of it without being deeply grieved; yet, I live in expectation and even the hope of receiving some small compensation."

These hopes, however, were not soon to be realized. A half-century was to go by before the hospital could recover some of this money. Meanwhile, instead of compensation, the interest of four and one half percent was reduced to two and one half. This drew from the foundress a sign of resignation. "Our good king in France will end up keeping everything. Everyday people who are in desperate need come to us; we have no more room and

(1) Letters of September 18, 1765 and August 17, 1766.

(2) Letter dated March 28, 1766.

it grieves my heart to turn them away; but I must do so.”⁽³⁾ “The fire has sunk us deeply into debt, she added; and so much money is required for a building like this. If I knew where there was that amount, and if I could take it without stealing, I would put up a building that would house nearly two hundred needy people. I have nothing. God is content with my good will.”

By dint of good will, of ingenuity and cleverness, of help, both anticipated and unforeseen, Madam d’Youville saw the restoration completed in 1767; however, she was again compelled to postpone the completion of the extension begun in 1758. The chapel, blessed on August 30, was far from fulfilling her tender love towards the God of our tabernacles. The dear mother could not refrain from expressing her regrets. “Our building has been fairly well restored”, she wrote Mr. Héry, “but we will not very soon have the space we had hoped for, for the poor and for ourselves. There is no sanctuary in the chapel, not even a hope that we will ever have one. Praise God! All will be as He wills”.

It would be up to our Mother’s successor to continue and complete this work. If it was a sacrifice for her, Divine Providence consoled her by sweet compensations. Though Madam d’Youville had to give up her plans for the extension she so desired, she nevertheless, had the satisfaction of bringing the hospital to a state where it was able to house one hundred and seventy persons, that is, fifty more than previously. When human resources appeared exhausted, God intervened.

His action appeared manifest especially in the following instances. It was in 1766. One day, entering her room where two Sisters had preceded her, Madam d’Youville remembered that she had a coin in her pocket. Because of her keen spirit of poverty, she was not comfortable about this. “I have here, a dollar which I want to get rid of”, she said, as if it were a burden. “I do not like to keep money in my pocket.” By a marvelous intervention of Providence, instead of a single coin, she drew from her pocket

⁽³⁾ Letter of 1769.

a handful of coins which she set down in the sight of her Sisters who were both shocked and delighted. Shaken herself, she put her hand spontaneously into the other pocket and the same thing happened. That only increased her bewilderment. Judging that in God's sight, her faith undoubtedly needed bolstering, she joined her hands and raising her eyes to heaven she exclaimed: "O God, I am a miserable wretch!"

The whole soul of the Foundress is in this cry. The more she received from God, the more she humbled herself. But God pursued her in her abasement and lavished his favors upon her. After these renewed pledges of divine assistance, the dear Mother could write: "Divine Providence is admirable. It has inconceivable means for relieving the suffering members of Jesus-Christ. It provides everything; in it I place my whole trust."

CHAPTER XVII

The purchase of the Manor Châteauguay — Madam d'Youville's zeal in improving the manor — Her travels to Châteauguay; she teaches catechism to poor children — First episcopal visitation at the manor.
1765 - 1768

The fire and the losses the little society had to face had caused considerable restraint in the administration of the hospital and its property. Accordingly, one is surprised to note that the same period is distinguished by multiple costly enterprises and works. God repeatedly exercises his mercy in a striking manner on those who had placed all their trust in him. Surrendering entirely to Divine Providence, the Foundress drew from the Father the strength by which she surmounted every difficulty. In the face of obstacles, she walked with a sure step, without a feeling of self-pity over the hurts experienced along the way.

To her niece who had expressed her condolence concerning the fire, she replied: "I know your kind heart too well to doubt how our accident affected you, but it is a thing of the past. You must no longer think about it." In their conciseness, these words depict well the quality of our Mother's virtue: dealing wholeheartedly with the matter at hand. The anxieties consequent to this time of trial could not make her lose sight of the plan she had had in mind of purchasing the manor of Châteauguay. She believed herself to be intimately bound by the agreement of August

25, 1764, between her and Mademoiselle de Lanoue. But was not the destitution of the little society resulting from the fire enough in the eyes of the most unreasonable to release her from this bond? Our mother did not believe so. With the supernatural sentiment which directed her in all things, she decided that "Divine Providence had so ordered events as to put her in the obligation of depending only in His fatherly care."

On June 8, only a fortnight after the catastrophe, in the name of the poor of the hospital, she signed the contract which guaranteed her the ownership of the Manor of Châteauguay "as well as that of the Island of Saint-Bernard, the islands of la Paix, aux Pains and of Sainte-Geneviève." By this contract, the hospital pledged itself to pay 15,000 pounds to Mademoiselle de Lanoue in life annuities of 760 pounds, and a down payment estimated at 4000 pounds. In order to secure the necessary funds, Madam d'Youville sold the farm at Chambly. She was authorized to conclude these transactions by Father Marchand, the Vicar General who was administering the diocese while the episcopal see was vacant, and by General Murray, the Governor.⁽¹⁾ She also resorted to her inheritance and to that of one of her companions, Sister Despains. Personally, the good mother expected that this acquisition would cause her only sacrifices and fatigue. But these considerations did not deter her from considering that in the future, the property would become a source of revenue for her community and a legacy for her poor.

The contract had not yet been concluded when already Madam d'Youville busied herself with improving the manor. The mill at the foot of the hill on the Island of Saint-Bernard appeared too exposed to violent winds and not accessible enough to the settlers who came there to grind their wheat. She decided to build another. She chose the place for it herself on the west slope of Rivière du Loup, one league away from the present manor. As early as February 1765, the clearing of the place was begun. Responsible for closer supervision of the work, Sister Thaumur-

(1) Letter of September 26, 1766.

Lasource decided that the first work done on this property, now belonging to the poor, should be dedicated by an act of religion. To this effect, she wished to fell the first tree herself after providing herself with "the strength and the hope of the Christian" by reciting several times the verse O Crux Ave.

Once in legal possession of the manor, Madam d'Youville pursued with renewed vigor, the work undertaken. The mill was to measure 70 ft. in length and 36 ft. in width. To ensure hydraulic force, she had a 280 ft. canal dug and also, in spite of the rapidity of the current, had built a dam approximately 400 ft. in length. In view of limiting the expense, she used for the construction of the new mill, the equipment of the two previous mills, that of the island and that of the hospital, and provided the meals for the laborers.

The supervision of this work along with the organizing of the manor, until then so neglected, obliged our Mother to make frequent trips to Châteauguay. In the records, we see that she went there regularly at St Martin's day on November 11 to receive the payment of rent from the land holders. The old record book covered with parchment where she entered them from 1765 to 1770 is still preserved with pious respect. In these days of primitive simplicity, travels were not effected with all our modern day comfort. A crude cart with a board across the top for a seat, was the ordinary mode of transportation. It was in this clumsy cart that tossed about and exposed to inclement weather, our beloved Mother travelled the three leagues that separated Montreal from Lachine. The rest of the way was travelled by canoe or by boat. On reaching the island, she would retire to the manor house built by M. de Longueuil halfway from the orchard. Though it was called a château, this manor house was far from resembling the castles of the great lords of the mother country. Built of layers of wood, it was remarkable by the coarseness of its construction. The barn and the stable were still more rustic. But the site is enchanting, the view of Lake St. Louis is delightful, the land is fertile and easy to cultivate.

On the east side of the island, there is a steep hill with such a regular oval form that one could believe it was man made. A large crucifix on the kiosk which today crowns the hill casts its shadow on the grounds where our dear departed sisters rest.⁽²⁾

The peace that reigns on this hill, the space and the view of the expanse of water surrounding it, conveys an impression of the Infinite and plunges the soul into sweet recollection. Beyond the immensity, one sees part of Beauharnois, Perrot Island, Pointe-Claire, Lachine, Mount Royal and Les Deux Montagnes. On the opposite side, to the east, between the great trees which provide cool shade, one sees the limpid waters of Rivière du Loup which gracefully meander towards the mighty torrent and separate the island from the mainland. Thick grasses cover the embankment

(2) The first cross which adorned the hill was erected in 1832 when cholera struck the region and made so many victims. At the request of Father Pierre Grenier, pastor of Châteauguay, other crosses were also erected that year in various places in the parish where the faithful gathered to pray for the cessation of the scourge. "Novena prayers went on almost without interruption. God was touched and soon delivered his people from the epidemic" say old manuscripts.

In 1854 the cross on the island had already given way to the ravages of time. It was replaced by the huge crucifix over the main altar of the old Notre-Dame church and which Father Billaudèle, superior of the seminary, bequeathed to our religious family because of the historic value attached to it. This crucifix dated back to 1738. History records that its installation had been the occasion of a great display of faith. Moved by this wave of pious enthusiasm, our beloved Mother d'Youville, then crippled by a knee ailment said to be incurable, had herself taken to the church by means of a cart in order to pray before this cross for her cure. To test his servant, it pleased our Lord to defer her recovery, but how can one not presume that our Mother on that day, received an increase of love for the Savior's cross and a more perfect submission to his adorable will?

As soon as Mother Deschamps, superior in 1854, came into possession of this treasure, she had the Christus applied to a new cross which she then had installed on the hill which our beloved Mother d'Youville had so often climbed. In 1890, this old relic in turn was overthrown and mutilated by strong winds. A single nail remains today of this beloved ruin and it is piously preserved among our souvenirs.

In 1893 a new cross was erected on the hill. It is the one that stands today.

bordering the lake at the base of the hill. Between the ash and the hawthorne which surround it, the old grey walls of the mill stand out. The latter is transformed today into a sort of oratory surmounted by a statue of St. Joseph.⁽³⁾ The life-size patriarch from this rustic throne appears to rule over the whole island. In fact, the piety of the Sisters who live on the island have established him its governor and guardian.

On the other slope of the hill, there are fruit trees. An apple tree said to be in existence at the time when Madam d'Youville

(3) It was in 1865 that at the request of Bishop Bourget Mother Slocombe had the roof of the old mill covered with tin. Open until then and threatened with complete ruin, it was converted into an oratory dedicated to St. Joseph. A life-size statue of the saint was installed on its pinnacle and on June 8, the hundredth anniversary of the purchase of the manor of Châteauguay, Father Billaudèle assisted by Father Rousselot and a few other priests of the surrounding area blessed it solemnly. The following day, Fathers Billaudèle and Rousselot celebrated masses there consecutively during which the Sisters received holy communion and sang hymns. On that day, the old mill thrilled as coming into contact with the living Bread, it was named Bethlehem in memory of the material bread it had formally procured for our Mothers.

Set upon this pedestal, the statue of St. Joseph resisted the violence of the winds until October 26, 1910, when it was ruthlessly upset by a hurricane which occurred at nightfall. When it was discovered the following morning, in pieces on the ground, it caused among the Sisters an outburst of unspeakable regrets. Father Fournet, then our chaplain who was in passing at the manor and who accompanied our Sisters to the mill-tower, promised then and there that St. Joseph would soon occupy his throne again. In effect, a few days later, an order was placed with Raffi of Paris to mould a five foot statue of cast-iron. On September 7, 1911, eve of the nativity of the Virgin Mary, the new statue was received at the manor with joy and gratitude! As soon as the box was opened, allowing all to see the sweet, meditative features of the Patriarch of Nazareth, a hymn to the saint rose spontaneously from the bystanders.

The statue was installed on September 27, and blessed on the 8th of the following November, a Wednesday, by the pious donor, Father Fournet. Never was the weather in greater discord with the mood of those in attendance. An icy wind blew so violently that the Sisters present had to seek shelter in the little chapel in order to sing the hymns which their tender piety had selected for the program. And now, St. Joseph again rules over this territory which he blesses and renders fruitful. To the souls who listen most attentively to this secret, he speaks in a gentle tone of the zeal of the Sons of Father Olier, in promoting his devotion.

bought the property was still bearing fine fruit in 1838.⁽⁴⁾ A branch of this apple tree was grafted on to a younger tree and still today we can admire its vigorous offshoots. It is a special joy to pick its fruit the abundance of which symbolizes so well the inexhaustible charity of our Mother. From the trunk of the first tree, vessels were made for containing salt. These were used on the tables in the Sisters' dining room and perpetuated in some way among us, the souvenir of the simple and modest tastes of the foundress. This attachment of our senior Sisters for what our Mother held dear reminds us of St Dominique's orange tree or of the lemon tree of St. Anthony of Padua which loving brothers and disciples have preserved for centuries for the admiration of posterity.

The Island of St. Bernard measures 690 acres in surface area. Of this, hardly 90 acres had been cleared and were under cultivation when Madam d'Youville took possession of the land. The rest was wood land where oak and maple, elm and walnut trees were prevalent. Part of the forest had to be cleared and the land prepared for cultivation. Farm animals and implements had to be secured. Our mother's initiative was the answer to these necessities. Soon, she even had a stable, a barn, and a bakery built.

These material cares, though they were time-consuming did not prevent the foundress from finding time for God, his glory and the welfare of souls. At that time, Châteauguay had not been canonically established as a parish. There were many families in the area who were deprived of Christian influence and who appeared to languish. Mother d'Youville bemoaned the fact that so many good people were unmindful of their eternal destiny. In the evening, after long days spent supervising operations, receiving and recording the payments of rent, the dear Mother deemed it a joy to gather the workers and the poor of the neighborhood in order to teach them the essential elements of salvation and to enkindle in their hearts a spark of love for God.

⁽⁴⁾ Memoirs of Mother Mc Mullen.

The seed of truth was not cast upon infertile ground. More than eighty years later, a respectable old man recalled with joy these pious meetings. The gentleman was Etienne Duranceau. One day among others, about 1850, Mother Deschamps, then Director of the manor, had according to her custom, gathered the children of the Point, in order to teach them catechism. As she was about to dismiss them, she was distributing bread and milk with maternal kindness when the dear octogenarian appeared. The sight of the youngsters enjoying their little lunch reminded him of the days of his own childhood. "I also learned my catechism here with other children of my age", he said. "That was a long time ago, It was Mother d'Youville who taught us catechism. When we had been good, she rewarded us as you are doing today."

Agreably surprised and edified, Mother Deschamps, however, wanted to be assured of the veracity of her interlocutor, so she put a few questions to him. Among others, she asked him about mother d'Youville's height and complexion. "She was tall, dark and had a rosy complexion", the old man answered without any hesitation . . . and this is in perfect accord with tradition.

"And what color were her eyes?" "Oh, I couldn't say" replied the stranger with perfect simplicity. "These last words convinced me", said Mother Deschamps as she related these facts to us. If this gentleman⁽⁵⁾ had wished to delude us, he would not have hesitated to reply as precisely to this question as he had to all the others.

It is the desire to revive this new trait of the zeal of our holy foundress that determined our mothers to open a school in Châteauguay in 1884 on the town property facing the manor. This school, today controlled by trustees, is frequented by some thirty pupils. The program of elementary schools is in effect. The teachers can refer to the example and the patronage of our dear Mother as they await blessings on this work.

⁽⁵⁾ Etienne Duranceau died at Châteauguay on December 25, 1857 at the age of ninety-four (Extract from records of the parish of Châteauguay).

July 6, 1768 was a memorable date for the parish of Châteauguay. On that day, Bishop Briand was welcomed on a pastoral visit. He was led by the Iroquois of Sault St-Louis with their missionary, Father Well, Jesuit, in the lead. "They were in canoes and the rhythm of their joyous hymns harmonized with that of their oars". The church was too small to contain the throng that gathered there, eager to see and hear its chief pastor after having been deprived of this benefit for almost twenty years. After he had confirmed a certain number of children and adults that the records do not identify, the parishioners offered their respects and expressed their gratitude in an address that gave evidence of their loyalty. In a common accord, they requested the permission to build a new church to replace the old one, now inadequate and also to renovate the rectory which was falling into ruin. Bishop Briand gave his approval and encouraged their projects.

He congratulated them on their mutual understanding and he urged them to persevere in this unity and in their attachment to the faith of their forefathers.

Soon it was time for farewells. The visit had been short but what joy it had brought to everyone! The Island of St. Bernard had had its share of this joy. The bishop had come to bring his blessing to the residents of the manor and to take the noon-day meal there with the priest in attendance. History did not record the names of the Sisters present for the occasion but we are led to believe that Madam d'Youville must have been there to greet the guests with the simple grace for which she was known as a hostess. The meal terminated, after having admired the most interesting points on the island, the prelate and his party embarked in their frail canoes and rowed towards Perrot Island.

CHAPTER XVIII

Madam d'Youville has a country house built at Pointe Saint-Charles; her prayerful spirit; her teachings to her sisters.
1767

In 1767, to answer a need which had long been felt, Madam d'Youville had built at Pointe Saint-Charles a stone house to accommodate the farmer and to provide an abode for the Sisters in charge of supervising the farm operations.

In her beautiful kindness, the foundress thought of reserving and setting up a few rooms of the house in view of bringing there the Sisters or the poor on certain holidays. In her mind, a well-ordered rest was as important in the life of a hospitaller as was diligence in work; and so she procured all the relaxation she could for her Sisters. She considered that nothing restores, nothing gladdens hearts, nothing inclines them to prayer like these innocent recreations amid pleasant and peaceful nature where one is in contact with the works of God.

At that time, Pointe Saint-Charles, almost deserted, offered all the advantages of a peaceful solitude. There was plenty of space, a beautiful sky, a vast, clear horizon, the proximity of the river, the gurgling of its cool waters; and in the distance, beyond the Saint-Lawrence, there was the graceful scenery spreading along

the opposite shores. Amid this simple beauty, walks along the banks held much charm.

On this side, near the house, in a modest well-kept garden, a few fruit-trees planted by the foundress in 1764 now offered shade as well as fruit. The Sisters gathered there in small groups. Some walked through the paths as they prayed piously; others, seated under the trees chatted joyously, telling stories or recalling memories, enjoying the sweetness of sisterly friendship. What delightful times they spent in this way! They returned to their work with renewed strength. It is to recall these comforting excursions that extraordinary holidays granted by the superior through the year were in the ensuing years, called, "Congé de pointe" on days of extraordinary recreation granted by superiors through the year.

Another tradition more precious yet remains as part of this place. Compelled to make frequent trips during the time of construction, our dear foundress utilized every free moment to unite herself to God in meditation. "Even by borrowing forms of human prudence, the activity of the saints appears superior to uncertain diplomacy of men over the superiority of God's counsels", a holy religious so excellently said. Such was the activity of our pious foundress. No matter where she was, no matter what work she was doing, she found time to seek light and renewed vigor in prayer. We can still see today with great joy the nook to which she retired in order to devote herself to prayer.

It was a small hut of common stone and of modest appearance. The main space could have served as a kitchen and the attic could have served for grain storage. It was only a short distance from the main building.⁽¹⁾ Anyone who penetrated into this lowly hut could have admired the marvels of divine grace! What holy thoughts the Master must have inspired there to his servant for her spiritual advancement and that of her daughters! In the ensu-

⁽¹⁾ The house at Pointe Saint-Charles was sold with part of the land on December 31, 1853. The space between the hut and the main building has since been filled.

ing years, each time our senior sisters went to the farm, they did not fail to retire there to pray and to absorb the spirit of prayer of our Blessed Foundress. O remarkable incident! In the fire which destroyed the house in 1872, the flames respected this hut while the barley stored in the attic was somewhat scorched. Still today, one experiences great peace as one visits this place; yet, one also experiences deep regret at seeing this property in the hands of strangers. The transformation of the neighborhood, once so deserted, today so populated, the numerous factories that have appeared rendered obligatory the sale of the property to the Grand Trunk Railway Line.

This diligence of our foundress in remaining recollected in God or attentive in seeking him amid so many duties, conveys to us the secret of her virtue and of her influence on the hearts of her daughters. In fact, what a good influence had on all those around her, this person whose every act was inspired by her union with God. Having found in this union, support and enlightenment, she understood matters of life, and explained them, coordinated them according to the will of him who reigned over her heart and directed her inclinations. Thus, it was in peaceful prayer, that the pious mother learned how best to administer her household. It is there especially that she learned to overcome herself, and to direct more confidently the persons entrusted to her care. We understand now, how she was able, despite her busy life, to instill her own spirit into her daughters. Her example yet more than her words were marvelously efficacious in achieving this. Her biographers have happily noted that the saintly Mother spoke little and wrote even less. All her correspondence is summed up in a few letters written to benefactors, to friends or to her deputies.

She knew, however, how to remove herself from this silence when there was a question of instructing her daughters and of forming them to the virtues of their state. Each thought, each bit of advice from their superior, were received with great eagerness. "We loved to gather around our Mother", several of them recall, "there, sitting on our heels, we found great satisfaction listening to her chatting with us".

In these conversations, she spoke preferably about prayer without which life is lacking in proficiency, the will is without conviction, virtue without consistency and without fruit. She constantly urged them to trust in God, to abandon themselves to Divine Providence who had so often manifested its protection on their work and who continued to assist them so mercifully. She made them appreciate the value of the sacrifice involved in the observance of the rule, in fidelity to common life and to the customs of the house. She made them love holy poverty which she, like the great servants of God, considered the guardian of humility and the most solid foundation of spiritual life. "One is rich in God in the measure that one is poor in the love of worldly things"; and the freedom, which disdain of perishable things gives one, permits one to embrace with greater zeal the interest of others.

A memoir left by this dear Mother reveals what her thoughts were, concerning the unselfishness she expected of the persons associated with her work.

She wanted it to be complete and constant, persuaded that without generous self-forgetfulness, dedication to others cannot last. "Having espoused the poor as members of Jesus Christ, our spouse", she wrote, "all our goods are in common, along with this separation, we have many occupations as a double employment, and often the love of self takes up everything."

For her, "to love the leader", was according to the Apostle, "to love the members". Or rather, it was Jesus Christ abandoned and suffering, whom she loved with a burning love in the poor. None were so unfortunate that her faith did not discover the imprint of this invisible beauty. Thence, the sacrifices and privations of all sorts, which she assumed in order to assist them; thence the marvellous skill in forestalling their complaints and in alleviating their pain. As soon as her other duties allowed her to, she found no diversion more pleasant than to visit them, then to dress their wounds, to serve them with her own hands. A ray of resignation and of joy penetrated with her into the wards of the poor. They vied with each other to see who would get her first smile, to see

who would get closest to her. All were so happy when she was there that they would not let her go. When prepared to leave, the little ones would hurry towards her and try to hold her back by hanging on to her skirts as little ones would do with their mother.

She cleverly turned this childish trust into profit for souls. As she chatted intimately with her poor, she pertinently elicited thoughts of faith or skillfully recalled the duties of Christian life too little known, too soon forgotten; the fragrance of Christian charity which filled her soul always trailed after her. Instructing and consoling "these favorites of the Eternal Father" was not enough for her loving heart. She honored and respected them in every possible way. She willingly drank from their common cup at the water jar placed at the entrance to their ward. Was she thinking, at such times, of Blessed Angela of Foligno, who even drank the water in which leprous patients washed their hands and declared afterwards that she had never tasted a better drink; or of St Louis, King of France, who not only served the poor in his palace, but ate their left-overs.

Madam d'Youville could not stand to see that the poor were in any way, treated less well than the Sisters. One day, as she arrived from Châteauguay after several days of absence, she noticed, at the drinking jar, of the community room, a small shelf on which to set the drinking cup. In the eyes of the foundress, this was a little superfluity. She asked who had had it put up. Sister Thaumur Lasource, her assistant, admitted she had. The good mother, in a tone of gentle reproach told her, "Take the shelf down, Sister, the poor do not have one in their quarters and we should not have any greater convenience than they."

A contemporary writer praised the foundress in this way: "She was a whole person, who in addition to all the qualities of a religious, had the practical knowledge of a perfect housekeeper." No one, in fact, was as convinced as our Mother of the necessity for all persons dedicated to works of mercy, to develop habits of orderliness and good deportment. One can judge by the

preceding of the order that ruled her conduct and all her proceedings. She wished that this same spirit would reign in her daughters in small as well as in important things. She was obviously of those who believe that attention to details flows from a great love and manifests great virtue. In many circumstances, however, this attention becomes the accomplishment of great duties: the maintenance of discipline and harmony of hearts depend upon it. One day, a Sister was caught, taking from the dining room, the wood destined for heating this room, on the pretext that it was drier and she was taking it to her department. Madam d'Youville showed her displeasure right there in the dining room. Abashed and repentant, the guilty one, having fallen to her knees to receive her reprimand, ended by returning the wood to its former place. The watchful mother seized this occasion to recall to all the precept of mutual deference and make them experience the wisdom there is in "never taking anything from another department without the permission of the one in charge."

Faithful in renouncing herself in all things, Madam d'Youville could not imagine that anyone could in religious life, allow the existence of the least selfishness or personal gratification. She wanted these sacrificed without pity. "All is gain in the sacrifice of self; the soul expands in the true freedom of genuine love". Without this sacrifice, she did not believe that obedience could take root and blossom in her society. She thought it equally true of humility, this simple and pleasant virtue, which to develop more fully needs abasement and scorn, shadow and silence, all things opposed to human nature. In short, she expected from her daughters that they be humble, obedient, charitable, and united among themselves.

Unity, "this paradise of convents" according to the saying of Saint Theresa, was so dear to her heart, that she would make it the subject of her farewell message. In the meantime, she constantly exhorted those in her care to practice it. "All the wealth of the world does not come near the joy of living in close union with each other" she wrote. Unity is based on understanding, friendly thoughts, kindly judgments, a mutual exchange of affec-

tion and services; it dispels all quarrelling, jeering, criticism, in short, all that could alter the joy of the community. Madam d'Youville apparently considered the elements of choice which make for fraternal unity, when she begged her daughters "to be of one heart and soul, to honor and serve each other, to bear in charity the failings of others, admiring with astonishment how others put up with their own."⁽²⁾

In the matter of mutual forbearance, nothing escaped her maternal perspicacity, Entering one day a room where three or four sisters were working together, she found them engaged in an animated conversation which ceased suddenly as she appeared. She inquired as to the reason. In the course of the discussion, it appeared that one of the Sisters had not been able to stifle in her heart a sharp word. Filled with moderation and sweetness but emboldened at once by a holy zeal for the maintenance of the common peace, the inflexible mother ordered the guilty Sister to kiss the feet of her companions. And however vigorous were the pleadings of the latter to spare their Sister, this humiliation, the punishment was carried out.

These strong lessons given in the spirit of God and the desire to obtain the welfare and spiritual advancement of souls, were received with gratitude and docility. Everyone knew what charity had dictated them. In the heart of the foundress as in that of all whom God has honored with a spiritual maternity, energy was inseparable from love. And her words, whether of reprimand or of encouragement, always found their way to hearts; the light they shed, created between theirs and hers, an intimate and confident affinity. In their difficulties and their sorrows, Father Sattin reports that the Sisters went confidently to open their hearts to their mother. She received them with friendliness, listened patiently and never dismissed them without having consoled them, without being determined to accept supernaturally, their trials. It is in this way that souls were formed at her school, "to bear with courage and perseverance the sweet yoke of Jesus Christ."

⁽²⁾ Feuilles volantes.

CHAPTER XIX

The first officers — New recruits — Death of Sisters
Beaufrère and Madeleine Céloron, novice — Conduct of
our beloved Mother in the choice of subjects —
Death of Sister Harel.
1767 - 1770

Under this firm and gentle direction the hospital had become a fruitful solitude where all Christian virtues flourished in the accomplishment of humble tasks. On entering there one felt that the members of this pious family trained themselves in the presence of God to live the perfect life.

Nothing was more simple than the program of these early beginnings: no affectation, nothing to attract attention, a joyful but not boisterous activity, lacking any great haste or constraint. It resembled Nazareth with its recollection, its simplicity, its daily labor. Throughout the hours, spiritual exercises interrupted the work and renewed in the Sisters the nourishment of religious virtues. The poor were treated with kindness and love. The resources were restricted, it is true, but they always arrived in time to meet the most urgent expenses and to affirm the Sisters in their faith in the divine promise: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his justice and all the rest will be given you besides". A striving for perfection among the Sisters attenuated what was austere and difficult in their functions as servants of the poor and their many works.

With the help of the sparse notes in our archives, we can, if not establish the part played by each respectively, at least indicate the names of the first officers. Madam d'Youville always appeared to be the leader in this busy hive of which she was the joy. She sustained the ardor and remained the beloved mother. Sister Thaumur-Lasource, her assistant, was always for her a devoted helper since the early days. In the novitiate, Sister Despins initiated the young recruits to the works of charity and led them in the ways of perfection. Sister Catherine Rainville was the first hospitaller of the elderly men. Sister Bénard-Bourjoly looked after the elderly women. Between her duties with them she directed the younger Sisters at choir practice. Sister Angélique Dussault was in charge of the little foundlings. Under the eye of our Blessed Foundress, Sister Coutlée looked after temporal matters of the house as bursar. Sister Marie-Joseph Gosselin was in charge of the kitchen. The duties of the others are less well defined.

While observing faithfully the rules laid down by the court concerning the privileges granted to the twelve administrators, Madam d'Youville gradually increased the number of her co-workers, thus assuring the vitality of the hospital's works as well as that of her religious family.

On April 22, 1766, she admitted Barbe Françoise Prud'homme to religious profession. This honor, which a novice merits at the cost of so much effort and sacrifice, had crowned in Sister Prud'homme virtues acquired by the most meritorious immolations. When fire reduced the hospital to extreme poverty, she was then a novice. Her young age "she was hardly seventeen," the frailty of her constitution, accustomed to easy-living among her family, made one fear that she would not be able to cope with the fatigue and the privations of those trying times. Madam d'Youville suggested that she return to her family and promised she would take her back again when the hospital was restored. But light from above had allowed the fervent novice to understand that God attaches a secret grace to sacrifice and privation.

She preferred to share with our mothers and their poor the harshness of the situation rather than grant herself a few months of an easier life in the family home.

On October 27, 1769 Elizabeth Bonnet was admitted. She was an attractive, generous, and fervent young lady filled with love for the poor and which an ardent desire for self-giving had attracted to our religious family. Once professed, she was named almost immediately to take charge of the elderly women and the contact with the aged and misfortune developed in her the resources of a noble and compassionate nature. Her tact and complete abnegation in the function she fulfilled for many long years, would merit her the honor of being proposed to the community as a model for hospitallers.

This new recruit filled the void created in the ranks a few months earlier by the death of Sister Thérèse Beaufrère. As a boat that skims over the water without leaving a trace of its passing, this humble soul left after her no trace of her work. Her name only, remains linked to those of our mothers who first donned the religious habit. Of a timid nature and having a delicate conscience, that bordered on scruple, she experienced the agony of fear and worked out her sanctification in the acceptance of her intimate and hidden suffering. She died on April 28, 1769 at the age of forty-three. She had spent sixteen years in the service of the poor.

A year earlier Providence had led to the hospital a virtuous lady who soon became a devoted collaborator. She was Catherine Laperelle, widow of the knight Pierre-Joseph de Céloron. For many years already, Madam Céloron had been in communication with Madam d'Youville. In 1761, she had entrusted to her Catherine, her eldest daughter, as a boarder. The latter soon left her boarding place to enter the novitiate of Hôtel-Dieu where she became a religious. She even became superior of the monastery and died in office on May 25, 1809. In 1764, Madeleine, her young sister, in turn became a boarder at the hospital. Fascinated by the attraction of a more perfect life, she requested and obtained admission to the novitiate. She had been there only a few months when

Madam Céloron planned a trip to Europe. Whether it was through a desire to see France or that of assisting her mother by being her travelling companion, we do not know. In any case this incident drew her away from her peaceful retreat. But, by the peculiar instability of human projects, the trip did not take place. Madeleine then, hurriedly requested re-admission to the novitiate. The doors were opened to her only after justifiable testing which she endured in such a way as to prove that this time her determination was sincere.

However, still a greater trial awaited the young candidate. After two years of training, she was not to be admitted to profession. An indiscretion ended her life prematurely. Sister Céloron was strong and vivacious. She loved work and gave herself so wholeheartedly to it that obedience could not always moderate her. In those early years as today, Sisters were warned not to carry heavy loads that could impair their health. One day, Sister Céloron had a heavy tub of wet clothes to carry and seeing no one closeby who could help her, she had the temerity of lifting it alone. This was too much for her strength. She collapsed on the spot. She had an internal lesion and despite the best care, in a few days she was at death's door. One can imagine the pain of our Beloved Foundress before this tragic event.

She who was usually so ready to encourage the generosity of her daughters, felt obliged in this circumstance, to disprove strongly the act that had such distressing consequences for the incautious novice and for which she wished to forestall any repetition in her community. On the advice of her council, she decided that the dying sister would not pronounce her vows in the presence of the community. She did, however, allow her the consolation of doing so privately since our chronicles state that Madeleine Céloron was always considered from then on as being professed in the Institute. She died October 18, 1768.

This measure, harsh in appearance, taken towards her daughter, must have been painful to Madam Céloron, still only a boarder in the house. But far from showing any resentment, inspired by

grace, she resolved to replace her child in the service of the poor. She entered the novitiate at forty-nine and along with the youngest novice she trained herself so courageously in the humble functions of servant of the poor that she merited from Madam d'Youville this praise: "She is not young, but she is kind and her virtue is uncommon". On July 3, 1771, Sister Céloron was admitted to holy vows. She was the last fruit which the foundress would see from the tree she had planted and watered with so much sweat and so many tears.

The conduct of our Blessed Foundress in the choice of subjects reveals her open mind and her practical sense. Her door as well as her heart was open to all forms of zeal when she believed in the sincerity of the subject. Human advantages mattered little to her. In her faith as a Christian and a mother, she deemed that delicate health and even difficult cases should not exclude from her family, persons filled with the love of God and the poor. She willingly accepted that with God's help, "there can be great courage in a frail body and that often, a person with mediocre health can accomplish much."

In her notes on policies to observe in the choice of subjects, she states: "Never will any sister be dismissed for reasons of illness. Not only, the sick will not be dismissed, but we shall accept handicapped persons who are courageous and full of good will."

It has been demonstrated by several examples already with what kindness this charitable mother welcomed into her house, young girls who were penniless and with what watchful solicitude she surrounded them. If she discovered in them any disposition towards religious virtues or for works of charity, she set all her cares to cultivating these precious seeds deposited there by God himself. To ascertain their particular aptitudes and develop in them the spirit of sacrifice without which there is no lasting zeal, she employed them in various works of the house, encouraged them in the most lowly services and made them experience the joy of hidden sacrifice. It is thus that she formed generous recruits for

her work and that she prepared fervent spouses of Jesus Christ and true mothers for the poor.

Sister Harel was one of those choicest subjects. Welcomed by the foundress in 1741 and surrounded by the kindest care, she eventually became her help and consolation. She was not to outlive the foundress. On April 15, 1770 after twenty-nine years generously spent in the development of the work, this humble co-worker died religiously in the arms of her benefactress and mother.

Marie-Antoinette Arelle (or Harel) was the ninth of the fourteen children of Jean-François Harel and of Marie-Madeleine Brunet dite La Sablonnière. During the first five years that she lived at the hospital, Antoinette studied leisurely the spirit of the young community, tested her heart and trained it to the life she wished to embrace. She experienced the most trying times of the society, the stormy days when our mothers were undergoing such bitter public persecution, were being slandered and insulted maliciously and when stones were being hurled at them in the streets of Ville-Marie. But the surge of malice unleashed had no influence on this person in whom Jesus Christ had deposited treasures of mercy and kindness.

Stimulated by the pious example of the foundress and her co-workers, reassured by the serenity which reigned in this family united by bonds of charity, despite the tempest that raged on the outside, she requested the favor of being admitted to its ranks. Her prayer was heard. On August 16, 1746, the day after the feast of the Assumption, she began her novitiate under the guidance of Mary, and on August 23, 1749, she pronounced her holy vows.

Belonging wholly to God from now on, Sister Harel's generosity was sustained by the constance of her fervor. Entire dedication enlightened by a great spirit of religion, was the characteristic of this short life. An exquisitely refined perception increased its worth; death in peace and recollection was its crowning.

CHAPTER XX

Our mothers' disposition towards work; their frugality;
their mortification; their recreations;
the simplicity of their habits — New trials.

The life of our mothers ran its course without any glare, without any clamour, between dedication and prayer, in incessant labor. Affluence had apparently not yet penetrated into this refuge of indigence since we see them still at this time, engaged in work in the fields as well as their ordinary work.

Our memoirs say "They worked at harvesting on the farm at Pointe St-Charles and Tanneries. This is reminiscent of the intense activity of the monks of olden times who dug up the soil, cultivated wheat, and maintained vineyards; rather imitating the manly courage of the St-Ours, the Linctots, the d'Arpentignys, the Tillys who in more recent times, did not despise cutting the wheat and drudging at the plough".⁽¹⁾

(1) Governor de Dennonville wrote to the minister in 1686: "I must render account to your Lordship of the extreme poverty of many large families who, though of noble lineage, have reached the point of mendicity. The St-Ours family tops the list. Mr. St-Ours is a good gentleman from Dauphiné who has a wife and ten children. The father and the mother appear to be really in despair because of their great poverty. However, the children do not spare their efforts. I saw two older girls cutting wheat and drudging at the plough." Mr. de Dennonville named also the Linctots, the d'Ailleboust, the Duguays, the Bouchers, the Chamblys, the d'Arpentignys, and the Tillys. The wife and the daughter of the latter also ploughed the land. (*Histoire du Canada par Garneau, Vol. 1, p. 284*).

These untiring predecessors in their zeal, submitted to many other forms of drudgery; that, for instance, of doing the laundry at the water's edge.

The wives of the early settlers had brought this custom from old France where it is still practised today either in the country, at the edge of a brook or a pond, or in cities at the banks of rivers or by the sea. In larger cities, large, flat, covered boats shelter the workers against the sun or the harshness of the weather. For a small price they use the convenience of stoves, tubs, drying racks, in short, all that is required for perfect laundering. At the time of which we speak, on certain days, the laundresses could be seen in groups along the St-Lawrence or along the St-Pierre river in the region of Pointe-à-Callière. There, while they worked away, they chatted and laughed and became the legend of the town.

Less boisterously no doubt, yet with as great earnestness, the Sisters went to do their laundry in this fashion at Pointe St-Charles. The account books show that they hired a few laundresses but the Sisters themselves took a very active part in the work. The washing was started in the house and the operation was completed at the water's edge. On beautiful summer days this was a pleasant occupation, but in seasons of harsh weather, it was drudgery. It often happened that the laundresses would return at night covered with frost and ice. Undoubtedly, these were diamonds for an immortal crown. How heavy the wet and frozen clothing must have felt to their tired arms! Having reached the house, they still had to go up four storeys with the baskets of wet clothes which they spread to dry in the attic. This state of affairs lasted until 1827 when the first laundry was built.

Far from having an aversion for these hard tasks, the Sisters increased their generosity in proportion to the fidelity with which each one discharged the task in a spirit of penance and service to the poor which the rule required. They even added little pieces of fine workmanship which they made without the knowledge of their mother in order to experience the joy of offering them to her on the feast of her patron saint, Saint Marguerite. The first

feast day was celebrated July 20, 1758. What mother would not be touched by this testimony of filial attention! Zealous as she was, however, to associate her poor to all her joys, Madam d'Youville did not hesitate to distribute the gifts to the poor. Since then the gifts prepared for this occasion have become a traditional offering for the poor. When their occupations did not permit the Sisters to work at their confections during the day, they worked at them during the night. However, their activity did not authorize them to violate thrift and so during these times, they used only tallow candles collected by the Recollets in their canvassing over the countryside and which these religious with a charity worthy of St. Francis shared with them.

These are minor details, it is true, and the reader will forgive us for not omitting them since they reveal such touching simplicity and since they might interest and comfort somewhat our northern missionaries who in 1892 had only fish oil as a source of light. Even today (1916) this is used in times of trouble, and if we consider the long nights of these regions, this method is not without merit. From early November to the end of January, darkness falls on the land as early as 3:30 in the afternoon and day dawns only at 9:30 in the morning.

To their laborious life, our mothers joined a frugality that has disappeared from even the most austere of our modern ways. In the early years they only had dry bread with cold water in the morning. Barley coffee was allowed only three times a week. However, after the fire of 1765, in consideration of the exceeding hard work of the Sisters, coffee was allowed every day.⁽²⁾ This so-called breakfast was taken in the community room where the service was as simple as the menu. There were no plates or cutlery, the duty of the serving Sister consisted in placing the pail of coffee on the little table known today as Mother d'Youville's table, and filling everyone's cup. Butter or the slice of cold meat served on the bread was a luxury reserved for holidays and feast days.

⁽²⁾ Manuscript of Father Sattin.

Only at noon was meat served regularly in the dining room. But if this meat was wholesome, it was far from being of the best quality. Vegetables and milk products were served only on fast days. Fish was hardly ever served. This severe abstinence extended throughout lent when fatty foods disappeared for all the faithful from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday.

Those who loved mortification found many occasions to satisfy their attraction. The foundress was careful to take advantage of every occasion imposed by circumstances and willed by Providence. This type of mortification appeared natural to her. She saw it as inseparable from an intense religious life. In this, her example was her best teaching. In the choice of foods which sometimes she allowed herself, her preferences were always for those of lesser quality. These principles which she put into practice, she applied to others with discernment, no doubt, but with unsparing vigour. She could not tolerate any remarks on the manner in which the food was prepared. If any sister failed on this point, she invited her to renew herself in the practice of self-abnegation. "You are unmortified!" she would say, "You cannot exercise yourself too much in the practice of various privations." If one should leave food on her plate, Madam d'Youville would have it served to her at the following meal without anything else. Persons became strong under this austere regime. Hearts thus emptied of vain cares expanded and rose freely towards God. None could better experience the truth of the sacred scripture: "A light-hearted person has a continual feast (Pr. 15:15)".

To ensure their constancy and affirm their progress in mortification, she wanted this virtue founded on a true love of Jesus Christ. Whence the care she took to constantly keep before their eyes this divine model. Sweet become the privations, easy the sacrifices, attractive the most obscure works for whomever has understood Bethlehem, Egypt, Nazareth.

But what she most particularly recommended for their meditation were the mysteries of the sorrowful life of Christ. Born of the love of the Cross, the little society was bound, it seemed to her,

to draw from this source the main element of its piety. In this thought, she was watchful in providing books imbued with this knowledge of the saints. The Imitation of Jesus-Christ, The Hidden Life with Jesus, The Holy Ways of the Cross by Boudon, the pages of which had consoled her in the bereavements of her childhood and tempered her soul for ordeals obtained a preference in their choices. In addition, she proposed that they honor each day a mystery of the passion by performing a special kind of penance. Sunday was dedicated to the agony of Christ, Monday to the scourging, Tuesday to the crowning with thorns, Wednesday to the condemnation to death, Thursday to the carrying of the cross, Friday to the crucifixion, Saturday to the placing of Jesus' body in the sepulchre.⁽³⁾ Souls meditating attentively these mysteries learned to bear courageously their own sufferings. The burden of their labors diminished with the joys of love and crosses took on a lively imprint of the beauty of Jesus Christ.

In fact, if living was austere and laborious in these heroic times, it held no sadness, nothing that oppressed hearts. Joy blossomed in charity. Old memoirs note that "the young Sisters found mothers in the older Sisters whom they honored, loved, and surrounded with kind and delicate attention". This reciprocal trust appeared as a choice fruit of the family life which gave life to this peaceful milieu. It was not surprising then, if they held all things in common: joys, sorrows, sacrifices and works, if the joys of being together were always fresh. Recreations were thus truly relaxing. They were hours of ease with one another, of real freedom. There was true merriment without any prejudice to mutual consideration among the Sisters, without distracting them too much, either, from the supernatural. Pious topics were not altogether excluded from these recreations. According to the testimony of our elders they were the preferred theme.⁽⁴⁾ Love turns the hearts towards its object and for these people naturally anchored in God, no joy

(3) First Constitutions.

(4) Old Memoirs.

was greater than to direct towards Him their conversations even the most intimate.

Madam d'Youville encouraged this merriment by indulging herself in this exercise. It was in the course of these intimate conversations that one day as they chatted about various things, she stopped suddenly, and, as if struck by a sudden light, she said as she designated Sister Coutlée, "You will be the one who will outlive us all." Spoken in a tone half serious, half joking, this foreboding nevertheless made a deep impression on all present and none forgot it.

Fifty years later when Sister Coutlée had become Superior and had reached old age, her life was threatened. Sister Prud'homme, the only surviving member who was present when the prediction was made, used it to console her companions. "Fear not", she would say to them, "As long as I am living Mother will not die". On February 20, 1821, Sister Prud'homme died in the weakened arms of the beloved Mother Coutlée. The latter must have seen in this event a warning to be ready. In less than five months she herself entered eternal rest.

Our mothers were as simple in their way of life, as they were frugal in their meals. An article of their rule indicated that they should attend as numerous as possible the services of the parish on Sundays and feast days. Only one pew was reserved for their use. They did not believe, however, that lack of suitable space dispensed them from this obligation. Envious of witnessing to God and the faithful their eagerness to honor the sacred mysteries, these persons aware of the nothingness of all things temporal, were satisfied with remaining in the aisles and, without any self-consciousness, they sat on their heels. When skies darkened and rain clouds warned people to guard themselves against the mud and dampness, they bravely wore their wooden shoes and donned old capes, and thus travelled the streets without the least look of envy for the finer attire of the people they met. A number of them, however, belonged to the most renowned and the most wealthy families of the country.

The generosity and sincerity with which the Sisters took on these self-sacrifices were such as to gladden the heart of the foundress. Nevertheless, one day, this joy threatened to be taken from her. God, envious of associating his servant to the cross of his adorable Son, took delight in mixing bitterness with all her consolations. The image of the divine model would not have been complete in her if she had not suffered in her affections as foundress and mother, if she had not experienced resistance, calumny, breach of faith, and all the "bitter-sweet" which is known as "the crown of thorns of founders". In the later years of her life, she had the honor of wearing the painful crown. In this family which she surrounded with tenderness and guided with such solicitude in the ways of the Gospel, there was one member in whom the years had notably slackened the fervor and weakened the religious spirit. The tendencies of this naturally independent person took the upper hand and she became for Mother d'Youville the cause of countless griefs. But God, who knows how to use for his glory and the sanctification of the elect, the very faults of his servants, did not allow the virtue of the Blessed Foundress to be altered. Accustomed to possess her soul in times of trial, she bore this one with her usual humility and charity, keeping for God alone the secret of her tears and of her intimate anguish.⁽⁵⁾ "God has his plans, I adore them", she would say in these excruciating circumstances. This communion with the divine will gave her supernatural strength for silent support and pardon.

One difficulty painful among all others was that which came from her own son. Shortly after his installation as pastor at St-Ours (1759), Father François d'Youville, moved by the dilapidation of the chapel, conceived the idea of constructing a new one. Lacking the funds necessary for this project, he had asked his mother for help. Madam d'Youville was happy in this circumstance to support the zeal of her son. But she did not dispose without restriction of the money which had been dedicated to the poor when she undertook to be at their service. It was agreed that the sum

(5) Manuscript of Father Sattin.

of 9,000 pounds would be loaned to him, under the condition that he would return this sum to the hospital.

The church was erected, but there was no question of reimbursement. After a reasonable and patient wait, Madam d'Youville reminded her son of his obligation. A useless proceeding! "My mother has given enough to the poor from the family inheritance", he objected, "I have a right to some compensation". Such was not the opinion of the foundress. As long as the youth and the vocation of her son had required it, she had generously provided for his education and his other needs. She did not deem it right now, to abandon to him money which was no longer hers. The interest of the poor set forth other duties for her. Despite extreme hardship for herself, to fulfil them, she had to silence her maternal tenderness and undertake a painful argument with her son.

The affair was arbitrated by three wise impartial men which the pastor of St-Ours selected himself and to whose decision he promised to submit. The question was settled, and seeing that the ruling was not in his favor, he changed his mind and refused payment. After future delay, Madam d'Youville, pressed by the needs of her house, reiterated her appeal. This time, she referred the matter to the bishop's tribunal. The prelate examined the question and did not hesitate to opt in favor of the hospital. As a result, he wrote to the pastor a sharp and firm letter which he remitted to his mother for her to deliver.

In the meantime, Father d'Youville broke his arm. Her maternal heart was moved by this accident. Judging that "her son had enough of his pain",⁽⁶⁾ as she wrote to Bishop Pontbriand, she postponed delivery of the letter, and went to her son to help and console him.

Her duties did not allow her to remain more than three days. On her return to the hospital, she sent to him one of the Sisters and Miss Le Gardeur, her relative, who provided care as long as he needed it.

⁽⁶⁾ Letter of 1759.

How the pastor of St-Ours reacted on learning of the will of the Bishop, we do not know exactly. He must have admitted the rights of the hospital since he ended by paying his debt. However, he was in no great hurry and it was painful for our foundress not to be able to settle this delicate problem before her own death. What sacrifices God exacts of persons when he wishes to increase their merit and to complete their sanctity! Mother d'Youville was about to leave this earth. Before engulfing herself in infinite sanctity, was it not necessary that her most legitimate and purest affections be subjected to trial by fire so as to become still purer yet, and more worthy of eternal love.

CHAPTER XXI

Adoption of daily recitation of Invocations to Divine Providence and Aspirations to the Eternal Father — Testimony of a young seminarian — Principal devotions of the foundress — Renewal of the original commitment and jubilee — Tableau of the Holy Family.

In the midst of trials, the life of our Mother had been, so to say, but a hymn of perpetual abandonment to Divine Providence. In labors and suffering she would soon die. A new grace of simplicity of surrender would burst forth.

“We are eighteen Sisters with ill health, who manage a house with little revenue where there are one hundred and seventy persons to feed and almost as many to support,” she wrote the year before her death. “The greatest loss is from the revenue of our work which was reduced by two-thirds in value since coming under the British rule. Always on the verge of complete want, we never lack the bare necessities. Each day, I admire Divine Providence who uses such poor subjects to do a little good.”⁽¹⁾

These few lines reveal what disposition of submission and love permeated this person of faith. Yielded wholly to the action of Providence, she remained under its guidance without any more resistance than an instrument in the hand of a craftsman. Com-

(1) Letter of 1770 to Father de l’Isle Dieu.

pletely given over to its care, she rested as a child rests in its mother's arms. This explains why she was able in difficult situations to remain calm and serene, with complete mastering of her emotions, pursuing her double task of foundress and mother of the poor without flinching.

This abandonment which she had so well understood and which she cultivated with so much care, she attempted to develop in the hearts of her daughters. To this purpose, she suggested to them the daily recitation of the invocations to Divine Providence in the form of a litany. These aspirations would lead to greater trust and gratitude towards Divine Providence who faithfully watched over the little society. All accepted with enthusiasm that practice which answered an inner need. For more than a century these invocations repeated each day by thousands of voices proclaim that Providence is really "the source of all good", that "it governs all with might and gentleness, that it is the consolation of the poor, the defender of the weak, our support in life, our guide on the road to heaven."

In the matter of surrender to Divine Providence, the zeal of the foundress was not limited to her spiritual family. Her kindly influence awakened the love of Providence in other people as well. Even recently a young seminarian who was ill and to whom one of our Sisters had given a biography of Mother d'Youville, asserted that reading this book, had taught him to trust more fully in Providence, and to appreciate better the benefit of the cross. "It helped me greatly to know more about this strong woman."

The surrender to Divine Providence was in Madam d'Youville only the expansion of her tender piety toward the adorable person of the Eternal Father. She was his loving and devoted daughter. This gift from the Spirit of love, seems to have been her personal grace. It penetrated her whole life. It inspired her mornings and consoled her evenings. Whatever the danger that threatened her, the adversity that beset her, or the favor that brought her joy, it is always towards the Eternal Father that her cry of distress or her hymn of praise rose. She loved this merciful God with a passionate

love, the origin of all wisdom, the ocean of kindness.⁽²⁾ She trusted in his eternal love. It was the origin of her great strength that nothing could shake. As one reviews her life, one is both edified and astonished at the actions inspired by her unchanging trust.

As soon as Madam d'Youville felt drawn towards the unfortunate, she turned towards the Eternal Father as the living source from which she drew the charity required to dedicate herself to their service. In 1741, a serious illness threatened the life of Father Normant, her spiritual guide and the initiator of her work. It is to the Eternal Father that she had recourse; she promised to have a painting of the Father made if the patient recovered. No sooner was her prayer heard than she ordered from France the painting now piously preserved in the community as a memorial of her limitless trust. In 1761, after the conquest, while her benefactors were leaving the country and the hospital was reduced to rationing she had an altar erected to the Eternal Father. She wanted to implore him to assist and console her family in distress. Was not the *Te Deum* she recited over the smouldering ruins of the hospital in 1765, an act of complete abandonment, a total remittance of self into the hands of her heavenly Father? In this circumstance, the ardent faith of our Mother received a touching reply. The very evening of the fire, Father de Féligonde put into her hands the tableau of the Eternal Father which he himself had snatched from the flames and which he knew she valued so highly. Was this not for her a sign that this tender father would remain with her to be her consolation and the restorer of her work?

In her gratitude for the benefactors and the spiritual directors of her society, Madam d'Youville knew no better way of acknowledging their charities than by calling upon them unceasingly, the blessings and rewards of the heavenly Father. Finally, wishing to bequeath to her spiritual family this devotion which had been the source of strength and light in her life, she obtained

⁽²⁾ Aspirations to the Eternal Father.

that aspirations to the Eternal Father be composed by Father Lavalinière, a Sulpician priest, in a form identical to the invocations to Divine Providence. Since April 4, 1770, these prayers, so reassuring and full of doctrine, have become a source of strength for the sisters to continue the providential role of Blessed Mother d'Youville.

Each day they experience a new joy in uniting with Jesus Christ, the perfect praise of his Father, to glorify with him his divine attributes. They implore the favor of participating in his paternity, so that their works may multiply and be rendered fruitful. They beg him to make them grow in the knowledge and love of his perfections so that adoring him in Spirit and in truth, they may extend his reign and more perfectly carry out his plan of mercy and of love.

In 1853, Father Faillon, historian of the life of Madam d'Youville, resolved to obtain for her daughters a painting which would remind the Sisters of this devotion of their mother and would enliven love in the institute.⁽³⁾ To this purpose he had painted in France the tableau which today occupies the left wall of the church near the nave. Madam d'Youville is represented kneeling under the gaze of the Eternal Father with a hand stretched out to the poor and the Sisters, as if to exhort them to honor his Providence and to abandon themselves filially to his care.

The foundress equally gained strength from her devotion to the heart of Jesus. In her heart completely dedicated to the interests of the heavenly Father and the object of his eternal love, she adored the model of the purest love, the source of all charity. She gradually took on his disposition to accomplish God's plan of her work. It was by meditation on the Sacred Heart, that she obtained graces of self-forgetfulness and unalterable kindness which sustained her amid endless immolations.

It appears certain that the Ursulines were the providential initiators of this devotion in our Mother. She was one of their pupils

⁽³⁾ This painting was solemnly blest by Bishop Bourget June 11, 1854 on the feast of the Holy Trinity.

from August 9, 1712 to August 1714 while the devotion to the Sacred Heart was flourishing in the monastery. Seventeen years later she remembered this milieu when she felt called to enroll in the Confraternity of the Heart of Jesus. Her registration, in the records of the monastery is dated in 1731. We read: "The hour of Marguerite Dufrost de Lajemmerais will be October 23, from 8.00 to 9.00 o'clock in the morning".

Won over henceforth to the worship of the Sacred Heart, she took every occasion to prove her zeal and devotedness. In 1749, she opened the hospital chapel to members of the Confraternity established in Montreal by Father Normant. To impart a new impact to the fervor of associates, in 1761, she had a shrine built and furnished in the hospital chapel and dedicated it to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.⁽⁴⁾ In imitation of Blessed Margaret-Mary she would have wished to gather all men around this source of love. A document of Clement XIII dated September 24, 1767, obtained through Father Montgolfier, granted indulgences to the confraternity, thus assuring new nourishment for the piety of worshippers. The document arrived in Montreal only the following year and Father Montgolfier proclaimed it in the hospital chapel on September 30, 1768.

But it was especially in the hearts of her daughters that Madam d'Youville attempted to have the devotion to the Heart of Jesus flourish. In the simplicity of her faith, she liked to join the worship of the Sacred Heart to that of the Blessed Sacrament. These two devotions are close to each other in many aspects and on certain points they merge. It is from the tabernacle that the most astonishing manifestation of the love of the Heart of Jesus came. It is from this centre that He communicated to humanity the desire that his Heart be honored with a particular veneration. Persuaded that there was no better way of complying with the spirit of this devotion than to render homage to this living and throbbing heart

(4) This hospital chapel remained the place of reunion for the Associates until such times as the confraternity was definitely established in the church of the Jesuits. (The Prayer Apostolate was established in College Ste-Marie in Montreal in 1864.)

in the Blessed Sacrament, she urged her sisters to daily visits where they could meditate on his loving dispositions and reproduce his admirable virtues in their lives. She suggested that on Thursdays they would recite an act of reparation for the insults directed to Him. On Fridays she invited them to receive holy communion in His honor.⁽⁵⁾ Furthermore, she wished that the Friday, during the octave of the Feast of the Blessed Sacrament, be celebrated with a solemnity equal to that of the Finding and Exaltation of the Holy Cross. She ruled that the feast of the Sacred Heart be considered with these as one of the three main feasts of the Institute. This custom was known and appreciated by outsiders. The amount of alms received each year on that day, testifies that the character and pomp of the solemnity drew friends of the Sacred Heart to the hospital chapel in large numbers.

Kept in a souvenir room, is a treatise on the devotion to the heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ formerly used by Mother d'Youville. It is an anonymous edition of 1737. The first part deals with an explanation of the devotion to the Heart of Jesus based on the writing of the saints: St. Bernard, St. Peter Damien, St. Francis de Sales, St. Gertrude and Saint Margaret Mary. A series of meditations follows as well as practices which testify to the intensity of this devotion at the time. The act of reparation for religious communities was found, a prayer recited during monthly and annual retreats. For lack of more precise information, the fact that this act of reparation was drawn from a book so familiar to our foundress leads us to believe that the practice of reciting this prayer comes from her ardent love for the Heart of Jesus and was established through her solicitude.

It is undoubtedly this attraction of our Mother in honoring the Heart of Jesus which inspired Father Faillon in 1856, to have the painting made, which now faces that of the Eternal Father. At the top, the Heart of Jesus is bathed in a ray of glory, below, nearer the altar, Father Normant is seen standing in an attitude of exhor-

⁽⁵⁾ First Constitutions.

tation. Madam d'Youville is at his feet surrounded by her sisters, orphans and elderly persons listening avidly to the words of consolation and of life he is addressing to them.

From our Mother's devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, flowed a tender devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. She honored this pure heart as the fountain of living graces received from Jesus. On awakening and throughout the day she called upon Mary. At night, she dedicated to her, last homage and thoughts. She willingly recommended this practice to her sisters and had it placed at the beginning of "rules for actions of the day". Furthermore, she wished that the Sacred Heart of Mary be especially honored during communion received on Fridays by promoters of the Heart of Jesus. According to the first constitutions, a confraternity of the Sacred Heart of Mary had been in existence over a long period of time, at the hospital. The exact date of its foundation is not known.

On the other hand, we know that devotion to Mary dates back to the early settlement of the country. We believe that the first circumstance where this devotion is manifested under the title of the Heart of Mary is in 1690 in Quebec on the occasion of a victory of French forces over the British. Summoned by Phipps to surrender, Frontenac made this proud reply: "Tell your master that I will answer him through the mouth of my cannons". A fierce battle ensued. Thanks to the assistance of the Queen of heaven,⁽⁶⁾ the French army, inferior in numbers soundly defeated the British. In thanksgiving for this victory and at the instigation of the first Canadian Superior of Hôtel-Dieu of Quebec, Mother Juchereau de St-Ignace and Bishop de Saint-Vallier instituted the feast of the Sacred Heart of Mary. The letter of institution sheds light on this event dated November 1690.

"We have reason to believe that the Mother of God inspired her daughters to spread her devotion in New France in memory

⁽⁶⁾ The annals of Hôtel-Dieu relate that, inspired by their loving devotion to Mary, the Sisters had had with pious solicitude distributed to French soldiers 'passeports de l'Immaculée Conception' before they left for combat.

of many favors received. Thus to fulfil such a loving duty to the Queen of heaven, the Office and Mass of the Sacred Heart of Mary, written by St Jean Eudes were solemnly sung by the Sisters of Hôtel-Dieu, each year on the third of July".

Since then, this devotion gradually spread in the colony. Montreal soon became an active centre. On January 1, 1722, its parish church had the privilege of housing the first Canadian Confraternity of the Sacred Heart of Mary. It was established there by Bishop de Saint-Vallier.

At that time, Marguerite d'Youville was twenty-one. It is not surprising that at this age, she became fond of this devotion. Hereafter she took to heart its promotion in her society.

Also sweet and consoling for the Christian person, is the devotion to the Holy Angels. According to Father Sattin, "This devotion was particularly dear to our holy foundress". She saw them as messengers of the Eternal Father, sent as guardians to help and protect us. For this reason, she wanted her spiritual family to offer them praises each Tuesday and to honor them by celebrating their feast.

The fervor of our mother seemed each day to take on further development. More deeply recollected in God as she realized her end was nearing, she tried more and more to instill into her daughters, the love of the supernatural and spared nothing to solidify their spiritual life. To this end, she exhorted her sisters to renew themselves unceasingly before God, to disengage themselves from all that is passing and to tighten the bonds that linked them to His service. It is in view of this, that on October 23, 1770 at the close of a general retreat presided by Father Montgolfier, she deemed it good to renew with them their original commitment.⁽⁷⁾

This act of renewal, later recorded in the first Constitutions, was signed on that day by seventeen professed Sisters who with Sister

⁽⁷⁾ Constitutions of 1781.

Laperelle Céloron still a novice, formed the entire community. These same constitutions state also, that it will be good to renew from time to time in the Institute, this family pact, an element of sanctification as well as a bond of charity. As an added spiritual benefit, God granted them that same year through the intermediary of his pontiff Clement XIV, the favor of a universal jubilee.

Throughout her life, Marguerite d'Youville had honored in a special way, St. Joseph, guardian of the Holy Family. About to die, she wished to assure him of a permanent devotion in her spiritual family which she was entrusting to his care. Only three months before her death, she is seen to be concerned about having a painting made, which would be a source of encouragement for the people. In a letter dated September 21, 1771, she sketched its main plan. She wrote to Mr. Maury, "Let me know what a painting would cost which would show the child Jesus with St. Joseph, and a cross above his head as he stands beside a work bench with carpenter tools"... a picture with touching symbolism. In his role as foster father of the Savior, is he not for us a model of interior life as well as Christian hospitality? Chosen by the Eternal Father to be the trustee of his love and the visible minister of his Providence towards his divine Son, with what reverence and what joy he receives this sacred trust. It is thus that the Sister of Charity must receive the poor who come to her. She will be of help to them in the measure that her heart is full of love.

This painting was carried out only fifty years later under the stewardship of Mother Lemaire. Wishing to perpetuate another devotion dear to the foundress, Mother Lemaire had the Holy Family represented. It shows the shop of Nazareth. Joseph, slightly bent over his work bench, receives with an obliging smile, the hammer and nails which the Child Jesus is handing to him. Seated at her work, the Holy Virgin contemplates with delight the mystery of a God in his abasement.

Angels surround the scene. They are there no doubt, to remind us of the part that God gives them in all his works and the duties of confidence and respect we owe them, as his messengers and

our most faithful friends. Nevertheless, as one sees these heavenly beings, one with a chalice, one with the instruments of the passion, a third with the cross which he holds above the head of the Child-God, one would believe they were entrusted with another mission: that of showing us that our founders wanted our institute to be under the standard of the cross, so that the cross would be for it, what it was for the very work of the Redeemer, a source of life and fruitfulness.⁽⁸⁾ It was a clever inspiration which brought together in the same tableau, the preferred devotions of our foundress: the cross, The Blessed Sacrament, the Holy Family, the Holy Angels, preeminently catholic devotions which contain and summarize all others.

The devout foundress spent her life this way with her eyes on heaven, in prayer and self-devotion, in trials and in the growing love of God. Marguerite d'Youville's actions suffice to illustrate the direction of her thoughts and the supernatural character of her preoccupations. She wanted to increase the spiritual treasure of her daughters, to assure the vitality of their work by an unceasing communication with God and his saints. The saintly Mother knew that if charity is the prayer par excellence, in order to remain fruitful, it must be ceaselessly nourished at the living fountains of faith.

Before she dies, let us point out a few traits of her deep gratitude towards those who helped her so effectively, in her work, either by their advice or their alms.

⁽⁸⁾ It is this painting which is seen today above the main altar. It was erected on March 18, 1831, on the eve of the feast of St Joseph. It measures 12 ft in height and 9 ft, 5 inches in width.

CHAPTER XXII

Gratitude of our mothers towards their founders and benefactors. — Death of Father Cousturier — Extracts from the correspondence of Father de l'Isle-Dieu.

Madam d'Youville's trust in God and in his saints, deepened and her heart remained open to another sentiment worthy of her piety. We wish to speak of her gratitude towards her personal benefactors and those of her community. With what care she cultivated the exquisite flower of remembrance! Never did she lose sight of the least mark of interest granted to her household. All those who contributed in some way to the welfare of her poor or to the prosperity of her house were considered as visible angels. She delighted in recommending them to the Lord in prayer; she continually exhorted her sisters and her poor to fulfil toward them this pious duty.

In order to retain in the Institute a lasting remembrance of the kindness and the least services received, Madam d'Youville entered the favors faithfully in her journal along with the name of the person.⁽¹⁾ In perusing the list of the names of those who were ministers of Providence for our still young society, we insert them, in order to offer them to the gratitude of those who, after more than a hundred years, have entered the sacred heritage

(1) Her letters: "This house will never forget its benefactors", we read at the head of her list.

of the foundress. These names will appear at the end of the present volume with those of other benefactors who continued this tradition of generosity.

The gratitude of our Mother went first of all to those whom God had given as support and guide in the founding and affirming of her society. Since the birth of this society, the Sulpician priests, as we saw, had set no limits to their care for it. After the death of the founder, Father Normant, Father Montgolfier, who had inherited his charity and zeal, followed the little family with the authority of a master, and the tender love of a father. Fathers Pellisier, de Féligonde and Poncin shared the more immediate direction of consciences from the year 1755; the first as confessor of the Sisters, the second as chaplain and confessor of the poor. All three worked together for the spiritual advancement of persons in the ways of abnegation which had been opened to them by their first spiritual guides: Father Normant and Father Paigné. The esteem and the veneration which our Mothers had for them in return, was equalled only by their trust and submission.

With reason, they could abandon themselves to the direction of these guides pervaded by the same wisdom and guided by the same spirit: the spirit of charity and biblical simplicity which they had received from their holy founder. To do good quietly and humbly, in imitation of Jesus Christ, "to undertake only works indicated by the will of God", once undertaken, to spend one's life at it without relenting, without expecting any other reward for their work than the salvation of souls: such was always the ambition of the sons of Father Olier. Madam d'Youville appreciated more than anybody the pure and disinterested zeal of these men of God. She found delight in their simple but solid direction. In pouring forth her gratitude, she expressed the wish "that the superior of the Sulpician Seminary would have the charity to be always ours."

The prudent mother did not believe that the fragile branch grafted onto the already centennial tree of the Sulpicians could subsist and bear fruit if it were deprived of the sap that had nourished it until now.

From the Seminary in Montreal, Marguerite d'Youville directed her gratitude to the one in Paris, first home of the Sulpician family. Continually, and more still in her old age, she loved to recall the important services this society had rendered her. In the person of its superior general, Father Cousturier, she rightfully honored the savior of her work. When a violent tempest threatened to sweep into the same ruins both the hospital and her young society, he appeased the storm and warded off danger by his powerful intervention.

After having obtained from the court that Madam d'Youville and her followers be confirmed in the administration of the hospital, Father Cousturier was ceaselessly interested in the development of this work. For her part, the foundress was attentive to communicate to him the various incidents which in turn tried her society, comforted it, or gladdened it.

In the summer of 1770, she experienced the sadness of learning of the death of this noted benefactor. On the preceding March 31, he had returned to God at age 82 with merits and good works. "This is an irreparable loss which has caused much grief",⁽²⁾ Mr. Maury wrote on this occasion. "Though we had long expected it, the pain was no less acute. For my part, I have lost a person who honored me with his friendship and his trust. Though his death saddened us, it also singularly edified us; only saints die as he did."

As soon as this letter arrived at the hospital, Sisters and poor increased their prayers and sacrifices for the repose of this priest who rightly deserved their prayers. The following month Father Mourachot was promoted to direct the society. The election of the new superior was no sooner known to Madam d'Youville than she hurried to offer her sentiments of veneration and respect. Then indicating in what high esteem the memory of his predecessor was held at the hospital, she expressed the hope "of finding in

⁽²⁾ Letter of April 4, 1770. Father Cousturier was born at Chateau-Roux, diocese of Bourges, on Oct. 1, 1688.

his fatherly heart, the kind interest that Father Cousturier had always had for her society”.

To those noted benefactors, Providence added others whose services, of a purely temporal order, were none the less of inestimable value according to the foundress and whose memory deserves to be forever blessed by her children. The extreme condition of the hospital's finances at the time when she became the director, required prudent and experienced management. To assist her in this delicate task, Father Cousturier referred her to men whose capability was equalled by their zeal. Among others, the name of Father de l'Isle-Dieu is not unknown to us. We know what important part was assigned to him in the negotiations that resulted in the confirmation of Madam d'Youville as director of the hospital, and what blessings resulted from his proceedings in the liquidation of the debts of the Hospitallers. Having remained comptroller of the hospital's finances, he was one of its most zealous supporters. The other Canadian communities also took pride in having committed their interests to him. Incapable, however, of managing alone the details of so complex an administration, he took into partnership agents whose management he discreetly supervised. The first such agent admitted to our affairs was Nicholas de Paris, attorney for the Sulpician Seminary. His deed is dated October 14, 1747.

“I put this affair in the hands of an attorney who until now has conducted gratuitously and very adroitly this operation,”⁽³⁾ Father de l'Isle-Dieu wrote of him concerning the liquidation of the debts of the Hospitallers.

The fees which a poor community could offer for such services were far below their worth. No one was more convinced of that than the foundress. She took advantage of the slightest occasions to make up for this by little gifts which drew their value from the pertinence of the act. On May 30, 1762 Father de l'Isle-Dieu acknowledged the reception of a lynx muff sent by Madam

⁽³⁾ Letter of June 10, 1754.

d'Youville to Mr. de Paris. But the recipient did not have the joy of receiving the humble gift having been overtaken by death on the previous January 5th. Father de l'Isle-Dieu praised the uprightness of this man. During the seventeen years he outlived him, the name of his "poor Paris" frequently occurred in his letters. "I have never known a man more honest, more accurate, more punctual nor more precise in all he did."

And elsewhere: "I can assure you that you have lost someone who had your interests as much as his own at heart."

The death of Mr. de Paris revived in Madam d'Youville the desire that Father de l'Isle-Dieu would in a more immediate fashion, govern the affairs of the hospital; she told him so with her usual faith and simplicity. But he, already advanced in years and threatened with blindness did not judge it prudent to acquiesce. He had already named Mr. Savary as his new agent acting under power of attorney. It is in these words that he informed the foundress: "You know Madam, that I cannot take charge of your procurement, but I shall render you better service by supervising the person whom I have chosen for you, who is living in the same house as I am and who has the confidence of everyone here."

On the lips of Father de l'Isle-Dieu this was no idle promise. He not only continued to supervise the agents of the hospital, but he liked to render an account to our Foundress of the state of affairs of her house. Deeply touched by the constancy of his charity, the foundress in thanking him, exhausted all the formulas of gratitude and respect. "I cannot express to you my gratitude and that of my sisters for all your kindness which I always admire. And elsewhere: "After God, I rely on your kindness which never fails, but on the contrary increases. You need only to know our needs to be concerned about attending to them."⁽⁴⁾ Or Again . . . "We have obligations towards you that we can never repay, unless we can do so by drawing from the treasures of Jesus Christ; and yours are of a price that could not be repaid except by this divine

(4) Letter of November 5, 1765.

method. Often my sisters and I implore our divine Savior and his Father who has been the object of my great trust for almost forty years, so that he may uphold you for a few years, and then reward you with eternal glory."⁽⁵⁾

The following year the foundress' gratitude took on a yet more touching expression: "Words cannot express the gratitude we feel for all the kind services you have rendered us. Sometimes I wish that I had business that would take me to France so that I could express my gratitude more amply by word of mouth; but I leave that to God who takes into account the services rendered to the poor. I pray to him and have others pray so that he may grant you all that you desire for time and for eternity."⁽⁶⁾

However, the years and their inherent infirmities were beginning to weigh on this beloved priest. The time seemed to him to have come, he wrote, to take more rest so as to prepare himself in a more efficacious manner for the great eternal rest. To this effect, he wished to retire gradually from the bustle of temporal affairs. But Mr. Savary having died on January 27, 1767, Madam d'Youville pleaded with Father de l'Isle-Dieu to name an attorney himself. She obtained the following answer: "You have found the secret, Madam, of making me fail in my resolution to take a bit of rest and live in tranquility at age eighty and after thirty-seven years of service, with cares and worries for a diocese that I loved and will always cherish as long as I live, and in particular your society which has always shown me so much love and trust."⁽⁷⁾ "Concerning the latest proof you have given me, Madam, since there was question of naming a solicitor who is honest and knowledgeable, I have done so willingly to prove to you that your interests are and always will be dear to me and I believe I can give you nothing better than Mr. Maury, attorney at the parliament of Paris, who has all the trust of Father Cousturier and who is an

(5) Letter of October 12, 1766.

(6) Letter of August 28, 1767.

(7) Letter of April 16, 1768.

agent for the Seminary where he has his office, even though he lives on a neighboring street. Father Montgolfier who knows him, will undoubtedly bear witness to this”.

Here Father de l’Isle-Dieu makes a statement of the state of the hospital and he ends his twelve-page letter by these lines: “It is a task at my age, Madam, with so many infirmities and especially that of my eyesight now so dim, to be able to recall all the topics contained in the long letter that I am now addressing to you; but my attachment for the dear and respectable communities of Canada and especially yours are always the same and will end only with my life. I beg you to assure your companions of this and urge them to remember me in their prayers and communion. I ask also for a share in yours because of the particular faith I have in them and I beg you not to doubt of my gratitude as well as my sincere respect in Jesus Christ. P. de la Rue, Abbé de l’Isle-Dieu”.

Madam d’Youville and her successors could only be pleased with Mr. Maury’s handling of hospital finances. The foundress experienced a satisfaction greater because this problem appeared to be complicated by the gravest difficulties. She expressed her gratitude to Father de l’Isle-Dieu in a letter in which she found it appropriate at the same time to expose the poverty of her house. The reply she received is so touching in affection and interest that we reproduce it here in part: “You have good reasons to consider Mr. Maury as a gift of Providence and not me, Madam, since it is Providence who used me to find him for you. Each day, I congratulate myself for it as I know no man more knowledgeable nor more active. One can only say that business never ends, and I could write you a whole book if I only tried to give you a simple detail of the contradictions experienced, but what puts my mind at ease is that business is in the hands of somebody who can successfully deal with problems where others would fail, and I have yet to entrust him with matters in which he has not succeeded.

“The description you give me of your temporal situation is hardly consoling for one who is as interested in helping you as I am.

But the manner in which you face the situation edifies me, and I am not surprised that Providence should sustain you; you place such trust in God. I would wish Madam, that Providence would use me to procure help and relief for you; but I can only do what I have already done; my age and my failing eyesight leave me with only the desire to help you, a desire that will end only with my last breath.

“Furthermore, I cannot say that I am infirm, Madam and dear daughter in Christ. I will be eighty-three on June 29 and I feel worn out but I am having a peaceful old age. I do not fear death but only the judgment of God who gives me more blessings than I deserve and who for this reason lets me hope that he will have mercy on me. Beg this of him for me, Madam and dear daughter in Christ, and urge your dear companions to do as much for me. I assure you and them that I shall not forget you before God. My dear daughter, let us put all our trust in him and as the prophet king said, let us hope that it will not be in vain.”

This letter was the last the foundress received from Father de l’Isle-Dieu. Younger than he and less infirm, though usually in pain, she was nevertheless to be first to answer the call of God in whom he had urged her to place all her trust.

CHAPTER XXIII

Last illness of Madam d'Youville — Sister Martel of Hôtel-Dieu cares for her — Madam d'Youville's sentiments of resignation; her last recommendation; her death — her portrait is painted.
1771

Blessed Marguerite d'Youville had not yet attained old age and numerous voids had been created around her. The strong and saintly affections that had so powerfully sustained her in the work of her sanctification and in the yet more rugged work of forming her society, she had seen disappear one after another, bringing with them a part of her life.

Of the five children who had shared family joys with her, there remained only her sister Marie-Louise, Mrs. Gamelin. Her youngest brother Christopher was the first to be taken from her by death. As a young man full of bravery he had enlisted in the expedition commanded by Pierre Gauthier de la Vérendrye, his uncle, for the discovery of the Red River. Having left Montreal June 8, 1731, he had by the fall, reached Rainy Lake where he founded Fort Saint Pierre. After several years spent in this region, thanks to his knowledge of its topography, he was able to draw a map of it which was known as "very precious". He continued with great earnestness this work of exploration until May 10, 1736 when he perished from exhaustion and privation at Fort des Roseaux

where he had spent the winter.⁽¹⁾ "His knowledge of business and his devotedness had earned for him the most complete trust of Mr. de la Verendrye; at his death, the latter mourned him not only as a beloved nephew, but also as a precious assistant."⁽²⁾

His older brother, Charles de Lajemmerais, pastor of Verchères died in 1750. His second brother, also a priest, pastor of Holy Family parish in Ile d'Orléans died in 1756. On March 22, 1768, Madam d'Youville was grieved by the death of her sister Marie-Clemence, Mrs. Maugras, who having retired as a boarder at the hospital several years earlier, had lived there as a recluse where "she died a holy death".

These successive deaths had broken many ties in the soul of our Marguerite d'Youville. Others, however, remained. They were the orphans and the elderly persons who were her generous companions, the dearest of families which the Lord himself had formed, that he had visibly blessed and to whom she still "wished to be of some use". But, hereafter, in the plan of God, it is from heaven that she must direct and complete her work. Here below, her work was done.

On October 15, 1771, Madam d'Youville had begun her seventy-first year. Of these, she had spent more than thirty affirming the work she had saved from ruin. Now that she saw it in full vitality, she could without fear leave it in the hands of a family ready to accept any sacrifice to maintain and develop it.

It was at the beginning of December that the end was foreseen. Our mother experienced an undefinable discomfort; her uncertain step and her impaired speech aroused alarm. Soon weakness obliged her to remain in her room, without however, distracting her from the care of her household. Always devoted to the poor, always full of solicitude for her sisters, she did not cease ministering to their needs. On December 9, while she was attending to certain business matters with one of them, she stopped suddenly and

(1) Diary of Mr. de la Vérendrye.

(2) Memoirs of Bishop Taché.

sank to the floor. The doctor declared it was an attack of paralysis. With great trouble, he procured her some relief. But the left side and the tongue remained lifeless. Devastated by this news, Father Montgolfier did not hesitate to authorize Sister Martel, a religious of Hôtel-Dieu, to leave the cloister of her monastery in order to help the patient. Pharmacist at her convent for many long years, this Sister inspired great confidence, even on the outside. At the bedside of our mother, after a brief but careful examination, she prescribed a treatment that had the effect of gradually drawing the patient out of her coma, of making her regain consciousness and the use of her speech, and soon even the ability to walk in her room, supported by her sisters.

This slight improvement was not to last. Madam d'Youville felt it; she took advantage of this respite to prepare her soul to appear before God. She received the sacraments and settled into prayerful recollection which only visits from her sisters interrupted. As soon as they came to her, she enjoyed chatting intimately with them. She encouraged them, consoled them, and gradually prepared them for the approaching separation. What fatigues and what vigils would they not have imposed upon themselves to delay as long as possible this painful hour! "If God would only leave us our mother even in this state", they said to each other, "we would be glad to keep her; we would give her the best of care in order to have her with us." Each day masses were said, collective and personal prayers were made, and sacrifices offered. So many wishes and so much care was not to result in the desired recovery. God was reserving for his servant a greater grace.

On December 13, towards noon, Madam d'Youville was sitting up, taking her meal. More concerned with the required rest of others than with her own relief, she ordered her nurse to go and take her meal in peace, assuring her that she could do without her assistance. The tone of authority, kind but irresistible, was obeyed. The nurse joined the community in the refectory. But before the end of the meal, she returned to Madam d'Youville. What a surprise to find that the patient had fallen over in her chair, her lips discolored, her eyes dim, her head and body leaning to

the left, and the patient giving no sign of consciousness. A second attack of paralysis apparently more serious than the first had occurred. In a moment, the news spread throughout the hospital. Could one still hope or must one be resigned to lose forever this kind mother? Once again, a new effort was made.

Again authorized to leave her monastery, Sister Martel succeeded in drawing the patient out of her coma. Consciousness and lucidity returned and her tongue loosened. Fixing her gaze on those about her, she was able to take note of their alarm and encouraged them to be resigned: "It is the will of God, dear Sisters, I must submit; submit yourselves also wholeheartedly to his divine will. It is God who is requesting this sacrifice." His divine will had been her life; how sweet it was to cling to it in this final hour! She received from it renewed strength to face death with serenity.

Father de Ligneris, pastor of Laprairie and friend of the foundress, paid her a visit. After speaking briefly with her, he was convinced that God wanted her for himself. The sisters urged him to join them in prayer for the recovery of their mother, but he replied: "Oh, I assure you that I will do nothing of the sort! Certainly, I will pray for your mother but not that God should leave her here; it is time for her to go to heaven." As the Sisters appeared saddened by this refusal, he said: "What if she should die? She will protect you as well from heaven and will obtain for you the help and graces you need."

In fact, no further illusion was possible; the dear septuagenarian was going to God. It was time to think of final arrangements. The following day, December 14, she went to confession and received the Sacrament of the sick. Then after a few minutes of recollection, flooded by the light of love for the God she had just received, she raised her eyes towards her sisters assembled around her, and in a voice in which one sensed all the solicitude of a foundress and mother, she said: "My dear Sisters, be constantly faithful to the duties of the state that you have embraced. Walk always in the paths of regularity, obedience, and mortification; but, above all, let the most perfect union reign among you."

Abundant tears flowed at these words, which on dying lips took on the accent of a prayer as much as of a farewell. These simple words included the teachings of her whole life. Before leaving this world, her soul vibrant with charity had just emitted one last spark. Her spiritual family gathered it up reverently and now keeps it as a testament of wisdom and love to enlighten and encourage them in the fulfillment of their most sacred duties.

The same day, our dear mother apparently became concerned about her will. To this end, she summoned Mr. Panet, a royal notary, whom she greatly trusted; Father de Féligonde, the Sisters' confessor and Father Poncin, chaplain of the poor; and in their presence, she dictated her will. After commending herself to the mercy of God, she requested that her body be buried in the hospital crypt, and that thirty masses be said for the repose of her soul. She urgently requested the Sisters and the poor to recommend her to God. She declared that all that was in the hospital and in her room belonged to the establishment. She willed to the poor half of her property and furnishings with the request that the hospital receive her two sons, Fathers François and Charles d'Youville if they were ever in need, to provide them with lodging, food, heat and light, according to their needs and as determined by the bishop or the superior of the Sulpician seminary. The other half she gave to her sons as their legitimate share. She named Mr. Dezaunier, a merchant of Ville-Marie, executor of her estate and begged him to render her this service.

This business attended to, the dear patient entered into a recollection that was inspired by the approach of eternity. Her sufferings increased, thus augmenting her merits and providing her daughters with the occasion of lavishing tender care. The following incident shows what delicate trust was returned for so much filial devotion. One day, Father de Féligonde, in view of assuring more complete rest for the patient, suggested that the nurse who habitually slept beside her, move her bed to the next room. The nurse was probably Sister Coullée as she says she "never left her through the whole course of her illness". Having a presentiment of what sacrifice this would be for her faithful nurse,

Madam d'Youville could not resist saying: "O Father, she will not do it; I assure you she will not be able to do it."

This affectionate tenderness of the mother for her daughters was part of all her conversations. Accustomed to sharing with them her joys on earth she could not think of enjoying without them the happiness of paradise. "How happy I would be", she said a few days before her death, "How happy I would be if I could be in heaven with all of my Sisters!" If the least desire of a dying person is sacred in our sight, what power would not have on the heart of the Eternal Father, this wish of his dying servant which rose towards him as a pious supplication! O Blessed Marguerite, we preserve this wish as a pledge of an eternal rendez vous! Obtain that walking in your footsteps in the ways of regularity, obedience, and mortification, and following your example spending our lives in the service of Jesus Christ in his suffering members, we may all be united with you forever in the realm of divine charity!(3)

The morning of Monday, December 23, a slight improvement was noted in the patient. The Sisters rejoiced and began to hope "not that she would be restored to perfect health", Mother Despins wrote later, "but that they could keep her for some time yet." Eager to unite herself to the God of the tabernacle whom she had loved so much, she had received the sacrament of reconciliation in preparation for communion the following day. In God's plan, the following day for her was to dawn not on earth but in heaven. While the Sisters were nurturing the hope of keeping her, she in the depths of her heart, received the signal to leave. To her niece, Mrs. Benac, who offered to spend the night at her bedside, she answered in a way that was understood by all, "Ah! tonight, I shall no longer be here." Her apparent improvement was so little in accord with her words that no one was alarmed, and the rest of the day went by in this illusory trust.

(3) Prayer composed by our early mothers.

Towards evening, the Sisters, after dropping by to greet their mother, had retired to the community room for evening prayer. Only her nurse remained at her bedside. About 8:30 the patient attempted to speak; she could not be understood. She strained to indicate by a gesture that she wished to get up. No sooner was she out of bed, that she made a sign that she wished to return. She was helped back; then collapsed, struck by apoplexy: her face became livid, her eyes became dim, her head leaned towards her chest. At the first signal of alarm, Mother Despins arrived on the scene and it is in her arms that the patient expired.⁽⁴⁾ The Sisters arrived hurriedly and surrounded their mother, but already her soul had released its bonds and had escaped laden with merits into the bosom of the Eternal Father.

At this sudden departure, the desolation was indescribable. Instantly the news reached the wards. Everyone broke into sobs. To see the Sisters and the poor mingling their prayers and their tears, one understood that the loss of this beloved Foundress brought general distress and great mourning.⁽⁵⁾ "No, I shall never be able to express the intense and true affliction which this sudden death caused us", wrote Mother Despins. "Great is our loss! We no longer have a mother. . . and such a loving and charitable mother can never be sufficiently regretted." Elsewhere she says: "If we grieve, it is for ourselves; for I believe she is in heaven where she went to receive the fruit of her labors."

An incident of good omen soon sweetened the bitterness of their grief. After Madam d'Youville had expired, her daughters kneeling around her saw her face take on an expression of peaceful serenity, her features, until then notably altered, appeared to come alive; her complexion became rosy. Was not such an unexpected transformation, a radiation of the light and peace into which her soul had just entered? The Sisters felt such happiness observing her in this state that they resolved at once to have her portrait painted. In several instances during her life, they had attempted

(4) Letter of Mother Despins.

(5) Manuscript of Father Sattin and letters of Mother Despins.

to obtain a picture of her. Their insistence was in vain: in deep disregard of herself, the humble foundress had always protested against this too-human satisfaction. "If you absolutely want my portrait", she replied with gentle firmness, "you will get it only after my death. As for me, I shall never give my consent".

Time was pressing on. Early the following day, the painter brought in by a nephew of Madam d'Youville, set to work. But he had no sooner taken his brush in hand that the features of the holy foundress altered to the point that the Sisters and persons present could not hide their astonishment. Baffled despite his diligence, the painter could reproduce only imperfectly the features of our mother. Does it not seem that even after the death of his servant, God wished to respect the simple tastes and the hidden life which our Mother forever desired for herself.

Twenty years later, at the point of death, Mother Despins as a last homage of veneration for her model and mother, had a painting made from memory. She utilized the still recent memories of the sisters and persons who had known the foundress well, in order to obtain a portrait which would compensate as much as possible for the unsuccess of the first attempt. This tableau is up to us, especially, her children and her sisters, to be living copies of this figure both sedate and gentle, where kindness mingles with strength, tenderness with austerity. It is up to us to engrave in our hearts and to express in our lives, the virtues which made of our mother, the model religious, the true mother of the poor, the faithful spouse of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER XXIV

Funeral of Madam d'Youville — Letters of Father Gravé — Extraordinary events at the hospital and at Châteauguay on the occasion of the death of the foundress — A few predictions — She is compared to the strong woman of the Gospel.

The feast of Christmas brought joy despite this deep mourning. Heaven smiled through their tears. There was peace in sadness. Never had hearts been so strongly moved by the mystery of the manger; never had its teachings raised hopes higher.

On the very night of Christmas, the body was moved to the chapel still perfumed with the scent of the day's service. The funeral was held the following day, December 26, on the feast of St. Stephen. Priests and faithful from town and surrounding areas had come in large numbers drawn by the reputation of merit and virtue of this true mother of the poor.⁽¹⁾

Father Montgolfier who, since the death of Father Normant had had close ties with the foundress, showed himself a true father of his religious family. Furthermore, as its superior, he presided at the funeral celebration assisted by the two confessors of the house: Fathers de Féligonde and Poncin.

Burial took place in the crypt of the chapel where the grave

(1) Manuscript of Father Sattin.

could be viewed by the poor,⁽²⁾ according to the expressed wish of Father Montgolfier.

The charitable Mother had lived only for her poor; in turn they would happily cover her tomb with the dew of their prayers and the flowers of their gratitude.

The tears of outsiders mingled with those of the hospital. Touching testimonies were collected. Among others, let us quote the letter of Father Gravé, professor at the Seminary in Quebec who, as we have stated earlier, had shown a keen interest in the hospital since the siege of the town: "You know my esteem for Madam d'Youville, and you can conclude what pain her death caused me. If I could be consoled, I would try to console you. This loss is great and difficult to replace! Or rather it is irreparable and deserving of regret! However, I believe that even so, we must praise God who took her from us only to reward her merits, and so that she could be our protector from above. I praise him also that he left her on earth long enough to perfect the work he had inspired her to do. How could it have been, in reality, if he had taken her fifteen or twenty years ago? This worthy teacher, this Mother so tenderly loved, whose merit was above the ordinary, and a new de Chantal. I do not hesitate to compare her to this holy person; in reading the life of the latter, we need in many places only to change the name to remember Madam d'Youville. May she have towards me now that she is with God, the same good sentiments that she had during her life! But alas! now that she knows me better, perhaps she no longer loves me."⁽³⁾

As requested, the Sisters promptly had the masses said for the repose of their Mother. But according to the example of certain, worthy persons who had known the foundress well, they felt more inclined to invoke her. Heaven itself seemed to authorize this veneration. Events which could be described as marvelous, marked her death.

(2) From their windows the poor could see the crypt.

(3) Letter of January 5, 1772.

On the evening of December 23, while the Sisters in tears were surrounding the remains of their Mother, a prominent citizen of the town, Jean Delisle de Lacailleterie "well known for his knowledge of physics", was walking along Pointe-à-Callières when he noticed a light above the hospital. Astonished, he stopped and wondered if there was a fire. At the same time, a brilliant cross perfectly distinct, was formed and remained suspended there for some time. Unable to believe his eyes, he called one of his friends and urged him to look and determine whether this was an hallucination. The latter saw and confirmed the fact with wonder. Mr. Delisle, moved with admiration and fear, exclaimed: "What other cross will the poor Grey Nuns have? What will happen to them? Will it be something sinister or something favorable?" The following day, he learned of the death of the foundress. This was enough to reassure him concerning his vision of the previous night. He came and told the Sisters about it and was amazed that they had not noticed this sign, while several persons from Faubourg Saint-Laurent declared having witnessed it in wonderment.

The whole life of the foundress had been a perpetual homage to the cross; for this reason, no doubt, God wished that the cross honor her death. Source of her strength and of her indomitable courage, it appeared shining to testify to her triumph. Symbol of victory and reward of abasement and labor, the foundress in ascending to heaven, left the cross to her daughters as a way of life.

Mr. Delisle died on March 11, 1814, forty three years after Madam d'Youville. As long as he lived, he did not hesitate to testify to the apparition of the luminous cross, according to him, a supernatural phenomenon. He spoke of it lovingly and respectfully. At his death, journals praised him highly, giving much authority to his testimony.

"Mr. Delisle was a respectable man who in addition to all social virtues, had deep and widespread knowledge which ranked him among men of letters. He also enjoyed the study of philosophy which he pursued successfully."

An event less remarkable but not less extraordinary occurred the following day at Châteauguay in favor of an orphan whom Madam d'Youville had taken in as a child. This young man was named Joseph Lepage. Since his adolescence, Joseph remained at the manor and did farm chores. On the morning of December 24, he had gone to the barn in the early hours as usual to feed the cattle. Alone that morning and consequently without supervision. Joseph was lavish with the feed. According to his own admission, he was wasteful. Suddenly, he heard himself distinctly called to order by these words: "Son, save the hay." Dumbfounded, he looked about and searched the whole barn without seeing a sign of anyone present. The voice was definitely that of Madam d'Youville. How could she come to Châteauguay at such an early hour without his knowing it? He could not understand. Back at the house, Joseph immediately inquired about the foundress' arrival. "Madam d'Youville is not at the manor", he was told; "and how would she come, paralyzed as she has been for several days? More and more intrigued and unable to hide the cause of his trouble, Joseph explained what had happened to him. No one knew what conclusion to draw from this. When news of the foundress' death arrived, in the course of the day, it shed some light on the mystery.

This incident recorded with love, was faithfully kept by our mothers. In the future they recalled it to the younger Sisters and to the hired help as a recommendation from our foundress not to be wasteful in the management of the property belonging to the poor, "so dearly bought at times, so difficult to obtain and destined to the most sacred use."

Besides, God had endowed his servant with remarkable clear-sightedness. We have already mentioned two circumstances in which she foretold events to come with a precision that only superior knowledge could give her and which the event fully justified. The first time was the occasion of the fire of 1765. Standing with her Sisters and her poor near the still smouldering ruins of the hospital, she gave her family the assurance that "henceforth the house would never burn again". One hundred and fifty

years⁽⁴⁾ have now elapsed since and many times the hospital escaped imminent conflagration only by some sort of miracle. We will have occasion of pointing out several incidents of this sort where the intervention of our dear Mother was evident. The second time occurred on the very day of her death. While she was noted to be considerably improved and her daughters, full of hope, were expecting to keep her for some time yet, she declared that she would not last the night. True to the prediction, she died that very night.

These predictions did not remain isolated. The memoirs have preserved two others which were also verified. That which concerns Mother Coullée is already known to us. The other was communicated to our early mothers, by the person it concerned, several years after the death of Madam d'Youville. We quote her own testimony: "As a child", states Miss Charlotte de la Broquerie, "I had gone in the company of my mother, Clemence Gamelin Maugras de la Broquerie, with one of my young cousins, Jean-François Sabrevois de Bleury, to visit my aunt, Madam d'Youville. At the end of the visit, looking at the young lad, she said to him as she touched him lightly on the shoulder: "You will die a priest, my little man". And turning to me: "And you, child, you will come and die with the Grey Nuns". Jean-François de Bleury became a priest indeed and died at Lachenaie, on August 2, 1802, twelve years after his ordination.

As for Charlotte de la Broquerie, she married Jean-Georges Stubinger in 1787 and after a few years she lived in Boucherville. As a widow and a septuagenarian, she had the pain of losing her house in a fire which in 1843, destroyed the parish church and a large number of the village houses. From Boucherville, Mrs. Stubinger retired to Saint-Hyacinthe where she lived with the Grey Nuns of Hôtel-Dieu. This contact with the daughters of Marguerite d'Youville brought on by such unforeseen circumstances reminded her of the foundress' prediction. It was then that she drew up

(4) This was written in 1915.

and signed with her own hand the declaration cited above. It was dated February 8, 1844. Two years later, on March 11, 1846, Mrs. Stubinger died with the Grey Nuns as her beloved aunt had predicted.

A privilege of virtuous souls, this clear vision of the future was natural to Madam d'Youville, whose life was full of charity, of self-abnegation and of constancy in the most humble as in the most sacred duties. Amid the most cruel adversities, she remained submissive to God, always faithful to that with which Divine Providence had entrusted her. The vivacity of her faith transformed everything in her eyes. In this light, work became a relaxation, detachment a strength, poverty, a trait of resemblance to the family of Nazareth, trials, a pledge of the reality of her union with Jesus Christ. Thus, this inalterable serenity, kept her above all change of circumstance.

The traits of this worthy mother are really those of the strong woman of the Gospel to whom she was often likened. It is by one of these comparisons presented by a contemporary writer in a remarkable description that we wish to close the first part of the history of her work. "We do not believe", writes the Count of Palys, "that one can imagine a more beautiful image of a mother, a spouse, and administrator." Each word of this immortal page carries weight. "Her husband places his trust in her". Joys and sorrows are shared; and the cares of the father find consolation in the words of his beloved wife. Alas! She lacked only this last resemblance. She was to experience the austerity of family life.

"Her children have called her blessed but they also can call themselves blessed for having had such a mother, for they owed to her kindness, the joys of their childhood and to the advice of her wisdom, the honor of their lives."

"She is a noble lady, she maintains a large establishment, keeps many servants whom she treats with kindness, with firmness and vigilance; she conducts this inner kingdom of which she is leader and mother. There is in this framework, an exquisite native character."

“The ideal wife considers a field; she apparently makes a reasoned assessment of it, estimates that it is advantageous and buys it, for she knows well how to regulate the future of her family and children.”

“It appears to me that after all we have just said, we find in Madam d’Youville all the splendor of this portrait: the education and care given to her two sons, who both became priests; the activity and the surprising aptitude in bringing up the large adoptive family entrusted to her by Providence; the cares of material affairs and the firmness in defending the legitimate interests of the poor; the untiring energy which made her rise up again after each trial. In addition, this beauty and this majesty with which the Lord had adorned her, represented an admirable copy of this perfect model.”

“Look at her work: the hospital in ruins lodged four poor men, and the Governor and the Intendant were against her. She restored it and filled it: everything burned, she rebuilt it and her radiant figure alone dominated the material and moral edifice, where her flourishing congregation continues its works in favor of so many people. They will be indebted to her for their happiness and their life, peace in their old age and their holy death. She is forever loved as a mother and we hope she will, one day, be honored as a saint!”

PART THREE

CHAPTER ONE

Mother Despins is elected superior — Chapter resolutions — Dealings of Mother Despins with the Sulpicians — Her difficulties with the Indians of Sault Saint-Louis concerning the manor at Châteauguay — Construction of a manor on the Island of Saint-Bernard.
1771 – 1774

Once the final respects were paid to the beloved foundress, and her precious remains were buried, the orphaned community concerned itself with selecting a new Superior. On December 27, the day following the funeral, the twelve administrators assembled in the novitiate to make this choice. Father Montgolfier presided at this meeting, assisted by Fathers de Féligonde and Poncin.

About to proceed with the election, the administrators adopted two resolutions in conformity with the spirit of charity which Mother d'Youville had always recommended to her daughters:

- 1- "To render this election more solemn and in order that all may be more sincerely and cordially attached to the new Superior, all members of the community would vote". This, however, was not to create a precedent nor to be a detriment to the article of the rule which allowed only the administrators to vote.⁽¹⁾

(1) Minutes.

- 2- "To establish more solidly cordiality and unity, those who had just been allowed to vote would no longer be regarded as servants but as associate members, that is, associated to the twelve administrators."

"These resolutions adopted, the chapter opened its doors to Sisters Varambourville, Dussault, Gosselin, Pampalon and Bonnet who welcomed with humility and gratitude the favor of taking part in the choice of a new superior". Soon, Sister Thérèse Lemoine Despins was designated to replace the departed foundress. The assembly maintained Sister Thaumur Lasource in the position of assistant, and elected Sister Thérèse Laforme as Mistress of novices. The distribution of other functions was left to the new Superior and her council. Precedence, undefined until then, was established but in a simple way. After Mother General came the Assistant, then the mistress of novices and the first hospitaller; the other sisters, ranked in the order of their profession. According to tradition, the same assembly ruled that the silver cross be given to the Sisters associate in place of the wooden cross they had worn until then.

The promotion of Mother Despins was a consolation in the deep mourning into which the hospital had been plunged. She was prepared better than any other to assume the heritage of the beloved foundress. Entrusted to her motherly care at the age of eighteen, she had become imbued with her spirit and she had been initiated early to the practices of spiritual life. Having furthermore witnessed the birth of the society, she had followed all its phases and shared its good and bad times. For over twenty years, she had had part in the governing of the house, watching all the while in a more immediate manner, over the novitiate. This function, exercised under the watchful eyes of the foundress, was, according to all, a preparation for the general governing of the house, and the care with which she acquitted herself of her function, was a pledge of hope and security for the future of the society. As to the new superior, naturally cautious and more inclined to obey than to command, she was dismayed and overwhelmed. The high opinion she had of Madam d'Youville's merit increased still further her humility.

A letter received a few days later from Father Gravé could not destroy in the new Superior, her humble sentiments: "I do not congratulate you for succeeding Madam d'Youville: it is not easy to replace immediately a teacher and a mother so tenderly loved and whose merit was so far above the ordinary. But you filled yourself with her spirit and profited by her presence and her motherly advice: I cannot wish you anything better than the grace to make pious use of it."

Father Gravé showed himself to be a true and clear-sighted friend of the hospital. In these lines, he does not conceal the extent of the void left by the beloved mother, and he states clearly the opinions concerning the new superior: faithful in drawing her inspiration from the example and advice of the foundress, she would be equal to her task, and the family would have the joy of continuing in the sweet light of its cradle days.

To this effect, Mother Despins had only to put to use the qualities she had manifested in directing the novices: a strong spirit of faith, a great love for regularity and order, motherly love for the young persons entrusted to her care, and for the unfortunate, a compassion made up of tenderness and respect.⁽²⁾

As well as her community, she will feel her love deepen because of her spirit of recollection, a blending of demureness and charm which attracts people and wins trust. Inclined to forbearance rather than to severity, to those who would reproach her certain condescensions as being weakness, she would say in a charming manner: "I prefer to remain in purgatory for too much kindness than to suffer for being too severe."

Saint Francis de Sales did not think otherwise. Did he not write: "If one must sin by any extremity, let it be that of kindness".

One of her first cares as she took office was to get in contact with the Superior General of the Sulpicians in Paris. Since 1770 the overall direction of Father Olier's sons was in the hands of

⁽²⁾ Old memoirs.

Father Claude Bourachot, doctor of the Faculty of theology in Paris. Mother Despins deemed that there were more than bonds of respect and gratitude to maintain with the Sulpicians. To maintain in her young family the spirit of its foundation, she felt the need to draw from the same source, the elements which in the divine plan, had been until then, its light and strength. Therefore she wrote to Father Bourachot. The new Superior eagerly promised her his devotion and his protection.⁽³⁾

In Montreal, Father Montgolfier continued to show solicitude to this family he had so paternally adopted. As spiritual director of the Sisters and of the poor, Fathers de Féligonde and Poncin continued with the same zeal, their work of sanctification.

Feeling little aptitude for the conduct of the temporal affairs of the house, Mother Despins immediately gave them up to Sister Coullée. Eventually, she spoke of this measure in such a way as to make her supposed incapacity stand out. "If I had not had Sister Coullée", she would say, "I never could have been superior". Events proved more than once, that Mother Despins knew how to deal with all kinds of business herself. It was thus in the difficulties she had with the Indians of Sault Saint-Louis concerning the seigniory of Châteauguay. This seigniory situated on the south shore of the Saint Lawrence occupies the region which stretches between Beauharnois, the seigniory of La Salle, and the Indian reserve of Sault Saint Louis. This latter neighborhood was far from being a guarantee of peace and tranquil possession for the colonists established in these regions.

The Iroquois had their own idea about property rights and had no scruples in attributing to themselves what they liked best on other peoples' property. After having cut and utilized all the wood on their reserve, they ignored border limits and invaded neighboring properties, preferably those of the hospital, and devastated at leisure. In their insubordination, they even prevented the farmers from cutting wood on their own land.

⁽³⁾ Letter of 1772

The Iroquois had used these supposed rights, even in Madam d'Youville's time and the courageous mother had neglected nothing in order to maintain the integrity of the property, which belonged to the poor. On September 23, 1771, she was forced to complain to Sir Guy Carlton, the Governor. Mother d'Youville died three months later without receiving a reply. The Indians knew that the policy of the government was to treat them with caution. Having no gunfire to fear from the Grey Nuns, their audacity knew no bounds. They not only destroyed the woodlands and neighboring fields, but they used guile and threats to prevent land holders from paying their rent at the seignorial manor. Again, in May 1772, Mother Despins was obliged to complain to the Governor.

General Carlton admitted the just cause of her claims, but he had his reasons to refrain from ruffling the Iroquois. The political outlook was threatening; cries of revolt of the United States against England were echoed in Canada. For fear of embittering the Indians by condemning them, the Governor remained silent. However, further outrages obliged Mother Despins to lay another complaint.⁽⁴⁾ This time, she referred to Mr. Cramahé who had a role in governing.

Again, for the same reasons, her request had no more effect than the preceding one. Plundering by the Iroquois remained unpunished. The Governor even urged Mother Despins to give them sixteen acres of land, promising to make fair retribution to the community. The transaction was accepted, but Carlton had to leave Canada before having fulfilled his commitment. The extreme poverty of the hospital obliged Mother Despins in the future, to recall it to his successor General Haldimand; she used the occasion to request the amortization of a debt which the community owed to the crown for the acquisition of the seigniority of Châteauguay. This debt had not yet been paid and weighed heavily on the hospital.

⁽⁴⁾ Letter of January 7, 1773.

This time, the Governor was touched. He wrote: "Desiring to reward the good services that the nuns of the General Hospital have rendered and do render daily to the public, by the shelter they give to the infirm and the poor of both sexes as well as to foundlings, we hereby, in the name of the king, grant the remission of the debt owed to his Majesty for the acquisition by the nuns of the seigniory of Châteauguay mentioned in the present request.⁽⁵⁾

Given at Château Saint-Louis in Québec, on January 29, 1781.
Fred Haldimand.

However, difficulties with the Indians did not end here. To put an end to them, Mother Despins on several occasions, had lines drawn to limit the two properties. All in vain! According to them "Ditches and fences were never in the right place". A whole volume would not suffice to tell of the annoying quarrels. How true was the popular proverb: "Who has property, has wars".

To utilize a simple quote of our old memoirs, "these quarrels did not run as smoothly as on paper". On the contrary, they involved many proceedings and difficult trips, and it was only after many years of effort and renewed sacrifice that peace was definitely established.

Through these difficulties, Mother Despins managed to have a manor house of stone built on the Island of Saint-Bernard. Until then the frame house built by Mr. de Longueuil had been in use. It was on the east slope of the hill midway from the orchard. A century old, the house was falling to pieces and offered no security to its guests. A place closer to the shore line was chosen to erect the new manor; it is the very place where, in an elm and maple bluff, stands the manor house today. The plan for their building was drawn up by Father Montgolfier: it measured 58 feet in length by 48 feet in width. Completed in 1774 this second manor lasted until 1836 when the walls were demolished. The foundation was retained and on it were built the walls that still stand today.

⁽⁵⁾ This remission was estimated at 4000 pounds.

CHAPTER II

An old man's gratitude — The drawing up of our first
Constitutions — Bishop de Pontbriand approves them —
Slight modification of the habit.
1772 – 1776

Not all was difficulty for Mother Despins in the administration of the hospital. While this strife was going on outside, Providence was preparing comforting compensations inside. The blessing poured out on the ministry of the Sisters and the atmosphere of contentment noticed in this family drew congenial help.

One day, an infirm septuagenarian came there, led by a desire to live a peaceful life and the hope of receiving kind care. He was François Brébion dit Saint-Cartier. From Saint-Cybar in the diocese of Angoulême, he had been a soldier with the colonial troops;⁽¹⁾ but the army usually does not transform its heroes into Croesus. Discharged from military service, Brébion had sought subsistence in commerce, and thanks to his ingenuity, he had succeeded in acquiring a small fortune.

Admitted to the hospital on October 8, 1772, "he was given a room next to the ward of the poor, having a view on the courtyard". Thus the old trooper had only to open his door in order to meet someone with whom he could talk of bivouacs and battles.

(1) At his entry into the Hospital, François Brébion was seventy-four.

Aware of his diminishing strength, he thought it prudent to put his affairs in order: old age and its infirmities offered him no guarantee of longevity. He made his will. Was he impressed by his contact with the sisters and their charity as they helped and consoled the poor?

The following lines reveal the answer: "The testator wills that his body be buried in the crypt of the General Hospital where he presently lives, and that after his death, ten low masses of requiem be celebrated for the repose of his soul."

"The said testator wills to the poor of the General Hospital of this town, all his property and furnishings, his debts, his belongings, his clothing all that belongs to him in this province at the time of his death, without any reserve; that all be remitted by the executor of his estate hereafter named⁽²⁾ into the hands of the superior or administrator of the said General Hospital to be employed for the relief, food, and upkeep of the poor of the said hospital whom he institutes, as his universal legatee. The said testator wills that in case of need, his house located on rue St-Paul in this town, only real-estate he possesses at the present time, be sold by the executor of his estate and the sum realized by this sale be remitted to the Superior of the General Hospital."

François Brébion died on March 5, 1773 leaving almost ten thousand pounds to the poor. According to his wish, he was buried in the chapel crypt where the sisters and their protégés gratefully prayed for the repose of his soul.

A good turn of a higher order came at the same time to gladden the hearts of our mothers and to strengthen their walk in the ways of evangelic perfection which they had tried to follow for over thirty years.

Until her death, Madam d'Youville had for the administration of the house, complied with the rules laid out by Father Normant on three loose sheets. These rules along with the wise advice and

(2) Mr. Christophe Gamelin-Lajemmeraye.

the saintly customs of the beloved mother had sufficed to give the community its special character as well as to establish and maintain its fervour.

Since she was no longer there to sustain them and to lead them in the exercises and works of religious life, her daughters felt more keenly the need to constitute for themselves, a way of life that would so to speak, be a faithful reproduction of the life of the foundress. Hence the desire to have a rule had become their chief concern.

This concern had not been foreign to the foundress. It was even at her request and at the instigation of Bishop Briand that Father Montgolfier had pledged himself to redefine the rules drawn up by Father Normant.⁽³⁾ Impeded, however, by his other occupations from completing this work, the vicar general had slowly begun to elaborate the plan by drawing inspiration from the various practices established in the house and from precepts gathered by our senior Sisters, either from the lips of the founder or those of their mother. Finally, on December 10, 1776, five years after the death of Madam d'Youville, he had the satisfaction of giving to the Sisters, four small notebooks as a preliminary to the work he was in the process of bringing into existence.

The first dealt with the purpose of the establishment, its administration, and of persons in charge of various functions. The second was concerned with the direction of novices, of postulants, and of the professed in the novitiate. The third dealt with the mistress of novices. The fourth contained the ceremonial for vesture and profession. Added to the rule laid out by Father Normant, this new outline of our Constitutions still remained insufficient. Fearing, however, that he be overtaken by death, Father Montgolfier approved them provisionally until such time as he could complete the work. In 1781, his wish was realized. The new handbook was entitled: "Recueil des règles et constitu-

(3) Memoirs of Sister Hainault.

tions à l'usage des Filles séculières, administratrices de l'Hôpital Général de Montréal, dites les Soeurs de la Charité."

Father Montgolfier begins by establishing as foundation of the Institute, the Letters patent of the king of France, Louis XIV, authorizing the foundation of a hospital at Quebec in 1692, and another in Montreal in 1694. These Letters patent gave the establishment its civic and legal existence and corresponded to what is known today as incorporation.

The author then tells in full detail how Madam d'Youville and her companions came to replace the brothers hospitallers of the Cross of St. Joseph; then he reproduces the royal decree signed by Louis XV on June 3, 1753 which confirmed the secular ladies (Filles séculières) in this substitution and established them legally as administrators of the General Hospital.

Such is the legal foundation of the establishment. What was its source? It was charity, a "virtue to which must be irrevocably sacrificed one's whole self, health, work and skills." The purpose? It was the spiritual and bodily relief of all the unfortunate entrusted to their care, which in a lively spirit of faith, they will consider as the poor and suffering members of Jesus Christ himself. Thus, had the brothers Hospitallers understood it in founding this pious institute. Thus our mothers wished it in succeeding them as directors of the hospital. If they leave the world, it is in order to work more freely and more efficaciously for the glory of God, for the salvation of souls, and for the relief of the poor. They placed all their belongings in common donating them purely, simply, and irrevocably to the poor.⁽⁴⁾ They consecrate without reserve, their time, their skills, even their life, in order to furnish subsistence for their poor. They commit themselves to receive, to feed, and to care for as many poor as they can. If one of them were to withdraw from the society, she could not claim what she had brought to it, having given it to the poor. In the event that the society could not survive, all agree that whatever goods, property and furnishings there might be, be employed especially for the relief of the poor.⁽⁵⁾

(4 & 5) Original Commitment

At the beginning, as we have said, there was no mention of making vows. However, by the commitment that each sister made as she became a member of the community, she bound herself to keep all its observances. In drawing up the constitution, Father Montgolfier is more explicit. Speaking of this commitment, he says: "Though secular ladies, The Sisters of Charity commit themselves to God by the ordinary vows of poverty, chastity and obedience to which they add the vow of what is most perfect in Christianity, that of charity, by dedicating their belongings, their labor, and their very life to the service of the poor." These vows are evidently simple though perpetual, and dispensation must come from the bishop.

The Constitutions provide for the government of the house by the election of a superior in permanence as long as the council of administration find such an arrangement advantageous.⁽⁶⁾ In the event that a change would be deemed necessary, the matter would be referred to the bishop, or with his consent, to the superior of the house. The assistant and the mistress of novices are also chosen by election; the other officers are named by the superior and her council.

The rule gives the line of conduct to follow for the admission of subjects. It introduces the postulant to the novitiate and indicates to the mistress and the councillors the qualities that will motivate her acceptance. After a first year of probation, the holy habit will be given her if the council judges her worthy; and after a second year of probation, the same tribunal will decide whether the novice is to be admitted to profession. Once professed, she will remain two more years in the novitiate under the immediate direction of the mistress of novices.⁽⁷⁾

In order to fulfil her office with greater fruitfulness, the mistress must become familiar with meditation and draw from the Sacred

⁽⁶⁾ At his pastoral visit of 1835, Bishop Lartigue ruled that the election of the superior, the assistant and the mistress of novices would take place every five years.

⁽⁷⁾ The professed no longer have this privilege since the annual vows (1905)

Heart of Jesus and the lives of the saints the rules of conduct most appropriate to make her grow in solid virtues. She will form the novices to purity of intention in all things: pious exercises and works. She will instruct them thoroughly in religion; in order to make them fond of the main devotions of the house, she will teach them how to honor the Blessed Sacrament, the Savior's cross, the holy Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph, the Holy Family and the Guardian Angels. In order to test their disposition towards the works of charity which are the principal purpose of the institute, she will assign them to the service of the poor and will assign them gradually to the lowest and most difficult services of the house, always however, with prudence and discretion.

As an effective means of growing in the spirit of penance and the love of the Cross, the rule assigns to each day of the week, one of the principal mysteries of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The rule also prescribed the use of daily admittance of failings except on Sundays and feast days.

It enumerates the feasts which were to be celebrated with greater solemnity and were to include high mass and vespers. These feasts are the Finding and the Exaltation of the Holy Cross and the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on the Friday in the octave of the most Blessed Sacrament. It prescribed weekly confession, communion on Sundays and holy days of obligation, on all feasts of Our Lord and of his Blessed Mother and on certain other days of devotion. It confers on the superior the right to permit the more exemplary Sisters to receive communion every Friday in honor of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, and on Wednesdays, in honor of St. Joseph.⁽⁸⁾

After nearly one hundred and fifty years the order of the daily program remained unchanged.⁽⁹⁾ The main difference through the

⁽⁸⁾ This article was removed by the decrees of 1887.

⁽⁹⁾ This book was originally published 1910-1915.

years was silence at meals.⁽¹⁰⁾ The original rule allowed the Sisters to speak at breakfast which up to that time was taken in the community room. At the other meals taken in the refectory, it allowed the Sisters to speak on Sundays, Thursdays, holy days of obligation, devotional feasts, and ordinary holidays.

Monthly retreat was established. Every five years, there was a longer retreat lasting one week. The novices and postulants could take part. In addition, the latter had a special three-day retreat prior to vesturing or profession. The professed Sisters ended the general retreat with the renewal of their vows.⁽¹¹⁾

The ceremonial of vesturing and profession differed little from that of today (1910) but these two ceremonies were celebrated only in the presence of the Sisters in the community room. The custom of holding profession ceremonies in the chapel began with the chapter of 1849. A capitular proceeding dated September 3, 1781, signed by the eighteen professed Sisters, terminates the manual. They declare that the different customs and practices laid down in these constitutions, had been observed since the original commitment taken in 1745, especially since the legal recogni-

⁽¹⁰⁾ It is in 1849 that the General Chapter of November 8, presided over by Bishop Bourget assisted by Father Billaudèle, superior of the Sulpician seminary, established silence at table. This decision welcomed with so much joy by the Sisters apparently stirred up the rage of hell. Our memoirs relate that at the moment when the capitulars adopted this resolution, "the chapter room was violently shaken" as if by an earthquake. Let us imagine the emotion of all. Moved himself, Bishop Bourget, who was presiding over the assembly, believed this incident to be an indication of the evil one's rage against all that is good.

Recalling this incident, several days later, the bishop gave it even greater import. In an official letter of November 15 he says, "It seems that the Holy Spirit wished to make known in an obvious way by the earthquake which shook the chapter room, that he was with you while calm in spirit and united in mind and soul, you were so religiously occupied with the most serious business of a community, that is the perfect regularity of all your houses gathered so to say under the same roof. At least we were singularly struck by this circumstance though it does not belong to us to judge whether it was a supernatural happening, or the common order of nature."

⁽¹¹⁾ Annual retreat was established by Bishop Lartigue in 1835.

tion of the establishment in 1753, and they petition the Bishop of Quebec to approve them. It was, however, only on February 28, 1790 that Bishop Hubert, successor to Bishop Briand, in a pastoral visit to Montreal, sealed them with his episcopal authority with the reservation concerning the vow of poverty to be explained at an opportune time.

On the other hand, the prelate strongly urged the Sisters to adhere as closely as possible to the Letters patent, the basis of their establishment. His worship concluded by this statement in which praise discreetly mingles with the most paternal advice: "We beseech God to preserve and maintain an association which for over fifty years has never ceased to edify this part of our diocese, by its zeal. We particularly recommend that members preserve with care and transmit to their successors the spirit of poverty, of regularity, of simplicity, and of obedience which have distinguished them until now."

There remains to mention here a slight modification of the habit made at the request of Bishop Briand. In principle the sleeve of the habit folded back, and left the wrist uncovered. Madam d'Youville had ruled it thus in order that in doing their work, the Sisters would be less exposed to soiling them and Bishop Pontbriand had approved this detail with the rest of the habit. Bishop Briand, his successor found this same detail strange and suggested that the Sisters remedy it by adding a frill around the wrist. The frill was tried but was inconvenient. It was then that the false sleeve was designed. It was narrower than the real sleeve and extended from the elbow to the wrist. This modification was submitted for the approval of the bishop. On March 20, he wrote: "As long as Father Montgolfier finds the reform appropriate, I am satisfied".

However, Mother Despins still did not appear reassured. She had a doll dressed in the complete habit of a professed sister and sent it to Quebec. This time, the Bishop's approval was complete. He wrote to Mother Despins: "I have received the doll that you sent to Hôtel-Dieu. The vicar general chose the opportune time

so that she spent recreation with us. She was the topic of much conversation which she would not have tolerated patiently, had she been able to talk. This was all she lacked, for otherwise, her modesty, her simplicity, and the integrity of her habit cannot but edify. I found nothing to disprove or to criticize. Therefore, it is approved.⁽¹²⁾

⁽¹²⁾ Letter of April 19, 1781.

CHAPTER III

The American War of Independence — Precarious state of the community — Mother Despins receives girls from Boucherville — Charitable traits in favor of immigrants — New skills — The extreme poverty of the hospital obliges Mother Despins to sell in France the chapel objects willed by Father Normant — Father François d'Youville retires at the hospital — His death.
1775 - 1778

The fires of war had abated after the conquest of Canada by the British, but they threatened to flare up again with a violence of which it was difficult to predict the consequences. This time, the spark came from the Southern states. Since it had established its domination over Canada, England had attempted to affirm the same supremacy over its American colonies. It maintained a permanent army there, tried to bring the judges into subjection, removed the nomination of governors from the colonists and imposed all sorts of taxes and laws that favored English commerce. Cromwell's old republicans had not left England to place themselves in America under the tyranny of British kings. They resolved to shake off the yoke.

There was a Congress in Philadelphia. The old colonies joined in arms. Three million men were claiming their independence. Eager to draw the Canadians into common action with themselves, they made them winning promises and tried to impress them with

the advantages and the glory of liberty. But they offended our ancestors in their love for their religious beliefs. This fanaticism having shown up at the congress, the zeal of the French Canadians cooled off.

The mother country was not about to let itself be robbed of its recent conquest. In order to gain the loyalty of its new subjects, it granted privileges which in other circumstances would not have been easily granted and been costly. By the Quebec Act of 1774, military rule which had lasted fourteen years, was ended and a legislative assembly was formed of English and Canadians. The oath required by the Test Act⁽¹⁾ was abolished; the rights of French citizens were recognized, the use of their mother tongue, their former laws, the free practice of religion, the existence of religious orders and communities were allowed. England even urged France to pay part of the indemnity the government owed the colonists. These concessions stemmed from clever politics. Through them the British Government wanted to assure the neutrality of Canadians. It succeeded in this. Nearly all, in fact, rejected the offers of the Americans and remained loyal to the British crown.

Of those who at first sided with the rebels, most returned to their homes determined to be only passive spectators in the battle between the two armies.

The war began by the invasion of Canada. After having occupied St. Jean, Montreal, Sorel and Three Rivers, the invasion ended in Quebec where General Montgomery was killed on December 31, 1775. Following this defeat, decimated by cold, hunger, and smallpox, the American army retreated before fresh troops recently arrived from England and Canada.

More fortunate in the South, the Americans aided by the French pursued the English from Union territory and proclaimed their independence on July 4, 1776.

(1) This oath barred catholics from public office and was attributed to Charles II.

If this war was not disastrous in itself since the Americans had not treated Canada as an enemy, it was so by its consequences. The movement of troops hindered navigation,⁽²⁾ destroyed commerce and industry and plunged the country into extreme misery. "If I could tell you what state our country is in," wrote Mother Despins to Mr. Héry, "you would not believe it. Crosses are abundant; this is really the way to heaven. The war is still going on. Everything is excessively expensive especially food. Something happened a few days ago near Albany where we lost many people. Nearly all, Germans and Canadians were in the forefront and the army was diverted. Oh! when will these wars end? There is no evidence here that this will end soon; the will of God be done."⁽³⁾

Though Canadians did not take part in large numbers in the insurrection, it appears by this letter that a certain number allowed themselves "to be drawn away from their plows and their fields" to take part in battle. Thus some families mourned the absence of their brothers or the head of the family while they remained without defence at home. A man of zeal, Father Dufrost, pastor of Boucherville, could not see young maidens of his parish deprived of protection without taking their interest at heart.

He begged Mother Despins to give them shelter in her house. At a time when all resources of labor and of charity appeared to have vanished, to increase the hospital's personnel was to multiply its privations. Mother Despins felt this keenly, but judging that her religious family was strong enough to bear these privations, she welcomed these young persons and became their providence until peace was restored in the country.

The same generosity shortly afterwards assisted in another great distress. It was a feast day. There was joy at the hospital. On the

(2) "Your letter of 1775 reached us only in May 1776, after having been held all winter in Quebec, blocked by rebel colonies", wrote Mother Despins on September 11, 1776.

(3) Letter of August 28, 1777.

point of sitting down at table, the Sisters learned of the arrival in Montreal of German and Scottish immigrants after a stormy crossing and great privations. All their resources spent, these unfortunate people were arriving in a land of exile, without food or shelter. The pity of the Sisters was aroused. "It is enough that these poor people are in a strange land," they said, "let us spare them for a day at least the horrors of hunger." Then, joining action to words, in a movement of joy, they removed from the table, the menu which was better than usual that day and sent it to these poor people along with a quantity of other supplies. For the Sisters, they were served yesterday's left overs. But the feeling of having appeased great suffering, gave them such happiness that never was a holiday more joyful.

Constantly grappling with poverty, these generous women were more than anyone able to understand the misfortune of others and to sympathize with them. If we examine the account books of the time, we invariably find a deficit in the hospital's budget.

Yet to what labors and what privations did the sisters not compel themselves in order to pursue the good that was begun? The day came when necessity obliged them to expose their distress to the public. A certain apostolate weighed more heavily than the others on the hospital. It was that of foundlings. While the number of these children increased, resources diminished from all sides. Who deserved more compassion than these unfortunate youngsters? And so the idea of abandoning them could not enter Mother Despin's mind. It was better, she thought, to solicit help for them. She then decided to get Governor Guy Carlton interested in their lot. "I am so bold as to put the foundlings again under your protection," she wrote. "Knowing your great charity, I hope that you will take the means of securing help for them. You know, Sir, the danger these innocent children would be exposed to if for lack of means, we did not take them in. They are numerous. It would be a pity to let them perish. I hope you will agree to help them."

It was apparently not the first time that the cause of foundlings was brought to the attention of the Governor. What is surprising

is that he was not moved by their misery. His heart remained ruthlessly closed. This closure was for the Sisters a new indication that Providence was to remain the sole support of their work. They resolved to rely more completely on it.

They understood as well that this confidence was not to remain idle and they increased their works and their nightly labors. They practised thrift and privation. Orders for needlework by storekeepers had considerably diminished. Other skills were found which showed the ardor of their zeal and the constancy of their self-giving.

In 1777 they bound books. Fifteen hundred copies of the rule of the Confraternity of Happy Death came out of their workshop. Towards 1785 and after they raised canaries and sold them for as much as twenty four francs a pair. Towards 1786 they worked with wax. God blessed their efforts. They acquired such skill that many pastors wanted a wax Jesus for the Church at Christmas time. At this same time, Father Poncin, confessor of the poor and a daily witness of the distress at the hospital, put his mechanical skills at the service of the Sisters. Thanks to his teaching, they were able to make pipes and springs of copper used for altar candles. They learned to make the wax wicks and candles. For this purpose, Father Poncin obtained for them the file, the wheel, and other instruments required for this kind of work, which has since been in use.

He secured for them the principle print characters and taught them the art of printing, thus permitting them to earn new income for the poor. This untiring priest even taught the sisters, the elderly and the infirm to make chains and rosaries in order that they might have the consolation of contributing to the support of the house according to their means.

To the incessant labor, sacrifice was added. One was more painful than all the others for the filial devotion of the sisters. We recall the silver chapel set bought in France and willed to the hospital by Father Normant shortly before his death. The memories which this last gift of the founder were destined to recall for the little

society, gave it infinite value for all. Nevertheless, the difficulty of the times and still more the lack of resources had not yet made it possible to bring it to Canada.

Some of the articles had already been sold while others were in storage at the seminary in Paris. The remainder was at la Rochelle from where it would be easier to ship to Montreal. Informed of this detail by Mr. Maury, Madam d'Youville had written to him on September 2, 1771, "If there are risks in sending these to Canada, it is better to wait. However, do not miss a suitable opportunity even if there is a cost to pay."

Mother Despins' desire to possess these precious articles was no less great. After inquiring and discovering that it would cost four and a half francs per ounce only for the right of entry into Canada, she decided to sell all in France rather than to deprive the poor of help that was so greatly needed.

On the other hand, the community was relieved of the life annuity being paid to Brother Delerme since the take-over of the hospital. We recall that this last survivor of the hospitallers had been left to Madam d'Youville for his upkeep. He had retired in France with one of his nephews where he died on March 19, 1772. Until that date, the hospital paid him an annual pension of three hundred pounds. In the financial difficulty which the little society then experienced, the extinction of this pension, however small, was a real relief.

Time also seemed to have come to end an affair that had been held in suspense over several years to the detriment of the hospital. We have not forgotten the disagreement between Madam d'Youville and her son concerning the nine thousand pounds' loan for the construction of the first chapel of St. Ours. At the death of his mother, Father François d'Youville had not paid his debt. However, in 1773, he loyally admitted the debt and succeeded in paying it with the help of his brother, the pastor of Boucherville. Five years later, on February 24, 1778, the pastor of St. Ours was forced to resign because of ill health. Still young, but worn by his missionary work, he requested asylum at the hospital. The

daughters of Madam d'Youville received him with the respect and kindness they had shown to his mother. But he did not long enjoy this hospitable retreat. Less than two months later, illness got the best of him. He died on the tenth of April.

Father François d'Youville was hardly fifty-three. His life had been relatively short but he had worked without ceasing. Ministry at that time was missionary in nature and comprised much labor and privation.

His remains were buried in the hospital crypt at the feet of those of his saintly mother.

CHAPTER IV

Deaths of Sisters Pampalon and Louise Thaumur-
Lasource — New recruits — Death of Fathers Bourachot,
de Féligonde and de l'Isle-Dieu
1778 - 1782

Man does not live long without seeing voids created about him. The strongest bonds and the memories vanish.

Mother Despins, who was to reach old age was not exempt from those sufferings. Her heart bled often either in closing the eyes of her daughters or in learning of the death of staunch friends or noble benefactors of her religious family.

The first Sister to die under her administration was Sister Pampalon, a sincere and generous soul who in a short time gained great merit.

Madeleine Pampalon was born in Quebec on July 21, 1741 of Jacques Pampalon and Geneviève Legris. We do not know what circumstances brought her to Montreal. We know only that she was twenty-one when she entered the novitiate.

Professed on February 22, 1765, her favorite virtues were abnegation and humility and she sought the hardest and most obscure tasks. By austere self-giving carried too far, in a short time her career was fulfilled. On May 18, 1776 after only eleven years of religious profession, she went to her eternal rest. She was only thirty-four.

Shortly afterwards, it was a pioneer, an intimate counsellor and her own assistant that Mother Despins vainly tried to snatch from death. On September 13, 1778, Sister Thaumur died quietly in her arms.

Marie-Louise Thaumur La Source was born in Ville-Marie on October 9, 1706. Her father, Dominique Thaumur de la Source was a surgeon. Her mother Jeanne Prud'homme, was the daughter of Louis Prud'homme, captain of the militia at Ville-Marie. This virtuous couple had a family of nine of which three entered the priesthood and religious life.

Dominique, the second son was ordained a priest on February 20, 1717 and was associated with the seminary in Quebec. In 1721, he was in Illinois evangelizing the Illinois Indians with Father Mercier les Tamarois. Because of the zeal and virtue of the two missionaries, in his history of New France, Father Charlevoix said of them, "That these two priests, yesterday his disciples at the Quebec seminary, could today be his teachers."(1)

Father Thaumur died at Hôtel-Dieu in Quebec with such a great reputation of holiness, that at his funeral, people touched his mortal remains with religious objects and removed pieces of his clothing for relics.(2)

Marie-Jeanne entered the Congregation of Notre-Dame where she was named Sister Saint-Cécile. Marie-Louise is ours and what renders her especially dear is that she was the first our beloved foundress approached when, inspired by grace and the influence of a wise director, she resolved to dedicate herself to the service of the poor.

The beginnings were difficult. There was so much uncertainty that what is today regarded as a privilege was then estimated as ridiculous and worthy of contempt. After having overcome the repugnance of nature, Marie-Louise bravely made her choice and

(1) Histoire de la Nouvelle-France, vol. 3 p. 392

(2) Latour, mémoire sur la vie de Mgr Laval, P. 101

entrusted herself entirely to the guidance of Madam d'Youville; she embraced without reckoning, her life of poverty, of work, and of abasement, and became one of her most devoted colleagues.

In 1755 the whole community agreed to name her assistant. In 1771, the assembly again ratified the choice with the same unanimity. A judicious mind, exemplary regularity, a deliberate and peaceful zeal made her worthy of this office. What rendered her even more dear to her sisters was her constant merriment, her genuine friendliness.

These qualities did not in any way hinder her courage and her self-dedication. In the clearing of the land for construction of the mill at Châteauguay, we saw her felling the first tree as the *O Crux Ave* was recited.

Besides, faith guided her in all her actions and the memoirs add that she never lost the presence of God. Hence the continual heed that all be well ordered in her conduct: prayer, relaxation, work and rest.

Sister Thaumur died at the age of seventy-two after forty-one years of religious life.

On the following September 18, five days after her death, the assembly of administrators entrusted the office of assistant to Sister Rainville.

The sadness caused by death was, however, not without consolation. As the older Sisters disappeared, the first pillars of the institution, some pious young ladies, urged by the Spirit of God and drawn by the prospects of dedicating themselves to Christian work, offered Mother Despins, the support of their good will and the fervor of their youth. Eager to follow the path of their predecessors, of imbuing themselves with their spirit, they were in turn to be worthy models for future generations.

The first of these recruits was Catherine Pépin, "an ardent and generous soul who aspired only to give herself for the happiness

of others.”⁽³⁾ Having entered the novitiate on May 23, 1773, she was followed shortly afterwards by Marie-Louise O’Flaherty, the orphan girl who, as a small child, was rescued from the hands of Indians by Father De Lavalinière and entrusted to Madam d’Youville.

Sixteen years had gone by since that incident. Surrounded by care and saintly examples, Marie-Louise had become a young lady as remarkable by her piety and virtues as by her fine up-bringing. Deeply touched by the vigilance with which she had been surrounded in this place of safety which had sheltered her from childhood and protected her youth; when the time came to choose a state of life, she thought she could offer God no better testimony of her gratitude than to dedicate herself to a work from which she had received so much through the years. On August 25, 1774, she entered the novitiate and on December 19, 1776, she pronounced her holy vows.

In 1779 the little society was increased by three more members. On April 29, Sister Apolline Boucher de Montbrun preceded by several months her sister Catherine who pronounced her vows on October 14 of that year. Both were first cousins of our beloved foundress. In embracing the life of their cousin, they permeated themselves with her spirit and perpetuated her zeal and dedication. The third, Sister Angélique Bonnet Métras, pronounced her vows on August 23 of the same year.

However death continued to visit the sisters. Earlier Father de Féligonde their confessor, died a saintly death after a life generously spent to the very end.

Jean-François Pelissier de Féligonde was born in Clermont on May 5, 1727. He entered the Sulpician seminary on November 2, 1745. There he studied philosophy and theology and was ordained a priest during the Ember-days of Pentecost, 1751. Three

⁽³⁾ Old mémoires

years later, experiencing a renewed zeal, he came to Canada. In 1754, he joined the last eight confreres to be assigned to Montreal.

The following year Father de Féligonde was assigned as spiritual director of our mothers and for twenty years he guided them with the wisdom and solicitude of a father. Father de Féligonde fulfilled this humble ministry with a charity all the more admirable because he was also bursar at the seminary as well as pastor at Notre-Dame. But his health was soon to wear out under ceaseless toil. He was barely fifty when he was affected by mild symptoms of paralysis. One day, while he was celebrating mass for the Sisters of the Congregation, as he was about to finish, he had a more severe attack. This time there was no chance of a cure. The holy priest's faculties, however, did not appear altered, but extreme weakness followed, that obliged him to retire.

He lived in this state for eighteen months purifying his soul in suffering and embellishing it by intimate union with God. He died on April 11, 1779

A constant witness of the poverty of the house, Father de Féligonde had given generous alms. The library received some precious books from him. Among other works he willed 'Exercices de Piété' for the Sundays of the year, a work in twelve volumes in which are contained meditations which for many years, were read in the refectory on Saturdays.

After the death of Father de Féligonde, Father Poncin, already confessor of the poor, became also the director of the Sisters. For many long years, devoted to the vigilant care of souls, he would add an unparalleled solicitude for the work of the hospital.

In this same year 1779, another priest died who had been devoted to the work of our mothers and whose memory remains venerated in the country. He was Father de l'Isle-Dieu. This deserving priest never came to Canada and yet everywhere in the country his name and kindness were recalled. Religious communities had been helped and guided by him.

Father de l'Isle-Dieu in Paris, was vicar general of the Quebec bishops, and in this capacity, it appears that his attributes led him to defend the temporal interests of the clergy and religious institutions of the colony. The many letters we have of him, make us understand better what he did for our community. We have already reproduced many extracts. The following pages will contain from these same letters, other instances in which his solicitude is expressed in a touching manner.

Thanks to his intervention, as early as 1749, the hospital emerged safe and sound from the tempest, and the work of our mothers became firmer. But the country remained poor, drained as it was by almost continual war. Father de l'Isle-Dieu worried. When he saw Canada about to fall to the English, his perplexity became extreme. What would become of all the people and so many works that he knew and loved! On February 17, 1760, he wrote to the sisters: "Payment of all letters of exchange from the colonies is suspended and if yours become due, I could not touch them. You can imagine that I lacked no firmness with the minister and that I sharply told him that these were the funds of a hospital." The priest goes on to enumerate all the reasons he put before the court in favor of our house.

After the conquest, the French government's tardiness in recognizing Canada's credit and the considerable reductions it imposed, caused him sorrow. Persuaded that this conduct would be detrimental to the clergy and religious institutions, he zealously approached the "Bureau des communautés du royaume" and obtained some satisfaction. With what joy he informed our Mothers! "With great satisfaction I inform you that I have just obtained 6000 pounds for the communities of the diocese. I am notifying the curates who will be as happy as I am. I am presently working to obtain some resources for them. Thus you will see that I am using my time for a diocese that I do not forget and especially for your dear house. I greet you and beg the help of your prayers."⁽⁴⁾

(4) Of these gratuities the hospital received only 1500 pounds.

In another circumstance Father de l'Isle-Dieu begged for the remembrance and the prayers of the community "Since I can still write to you, I do so willingly, but I am given little time to live; this will ensure that you and your companions will remember me. Since I am still alive, I beg you all not to forget me in your prayers and intercessions."

Until 1773 Father de l'Isle-Dieu himself informed our mothers about their affairs. After this date, his correspondence ceased completely, but he continued to look after the interest of the hospital through agents. On May 25, 1774, Mr. Maury, our attorney, wrote to Mother Despins: "We are happy to see him holding on in spite of his old age. The years have not robbed him of the zeal he always had for the Canadian communities. He still cares for them and remains attached to them."

In 1774, the same correspondent said this of him: "Providence adds to his years so as to add to his merit for he is concerned only with doing good." The following year, the venerable octogenarian was completely blind and his secretary signed for him, for he did not give up interest in his works in Canada. From this date, Mr. Maury's letters indicate that he is progressively failing. The year 1779, marked the end of his long career of kindness. Father de l'Isle-Dieu had reached the age of 91.

I have no doubt that you will miss him, "wrote Mr. Maury as he announced his death, "for he was especially attached to your house."⁽⁵⁾ This attachment of which our mothers had received such precious proof inspired their fervent prayers for the repose of his soul. God who hears prayers of gratitude will no doubt hear those said in favor of the one he had himself raised up at the most critical time in our history, as the defender of our work and the instrument of its salvation.

In 1777 the society of the Sulpicians had lost, in the person of Father Bourachot, its beloved leader, and the Grey Nuns a pro-

(5) Letter of February 19, 1780.

tector and a friend. His successor was Father Pierre Le Gallic. He did not lead the company for long; five years had not yet elapsed since his election when he wished to retire. Distrust in his personal ability coupled with serious deafness had persuaded him that he could not discharge the functions and the duties of his office. A man of conscience and of duty, he handed in his resignation. This measure yet without precedent in the society, met with resistance. But the humble priest insisted and was replaced. At the assembly of September 19, 1782, Father Emery became superior general of the society.

CHAPTER V

Other deaths: deaths of Sisters Benoit, Lassert, de Rainville, Demers and of Marie-Anne Robutel de Lanoue.
1780 – 1785

After the deaths of the venerable priests of whom we have spoken, there followed that of a humble Sister all hidden in God with Jesus Christ: Suzanne Amable Benoit, daughter of Claude Benoit, a surgeon, and of Thérèse Baby.

Not gifted by nature, without talent or health, Suzanne, however, possessed a treasure: a heart in love with God and great patience in suffering. This rare attraction was fully satisfied. Having entered the novitiate at age twenty, Sister Benoit, almost immediately after her profession on July 20, 1773, was overcome by sickness and infirmities which she suffered with courage. Seven long years of suffering hastened her sanctification. On July 17, 1780, she went to sing in heaven, her hymn of deliverance.

Less than three years later, the hospital lost more precious collaborators. They were cooperators of early years who had carried over longer periods the burdens of the day, who had more deeply and more laboriously beaten the path. As they disappeared, they left a greater void and deeper regrets.

Sister Marie-Thérèse Lassert was the first to go. She was born in Ville-Marie, on January 25, 1714, of William Lassert dit Laforme, a surgeon, and of Angélique Boisseau. While still young, she lost

her father. From her mother's second marriage to Mr. Chaufour was born a son who became pastor of Saint-Michel de Bellechasse.⁽¹⁾

The piety with which the young levite prepared himself for the priesthood had an effect on the soul of his sister. In turn, she heard the call of God and made her decision. On September 23, 1744, she offered to share with Madam d'Youville the labors of the budding society. Despite her frail health, neither the privations nor the strain of the laborious beginnings succeeded in shaking her courage. On October 22, she dedicated herself with a joyous heart to serving the suffering members of Jesus Christ.

To count for nothing in the community, to have only a small place there, to be heard little, to be employed in the most humble occupations, such it seemed to be the goal she resolved to follow. However, God, who exalts the humble, raised her up in the esteem of her sisters who each day witnessed her spirit of mortification and prayer. On the day that Mother Despins was elected superior, Sister Lassert was called to replace her as director of the novitiate. In this function, she became still more humble, more mortified, and more united to God.

However, her interiority did not exclude zealous activity nor the business of serving her neighbor. It was rather its source of dynamism.⁽²⁾ Moreover, she tried to develop in her novices the virtues so indispensable to servants of the poor. This solicitude increased her zeal for personal sanctification. Thus, on the day she was recalled to God, May 13, 1783, she left to her companions the memory of an edifying life.

Six months later, Sister Catherine de Rainville followed her virtuous companion in death. She was born in Montreal on June 25,

(1) Old memoirs

Pierre Chaufour was ordained a priest on September 23, 1747. He served the parish of Saint-Étienne de Beaumont; then was named pastor of Saint-Michel de Bellechasse where he died on July 20, 1760 at age 36.

(2) Old memoirs

1711. Her father was Charles de Rainville and her mother Suzanne Cabassier. From its crest, this noble family had retained only honor and virtue: distinctions and riches which make ancestry truly great.

Catherine de Rainville was already thirty-one when she was admitted into Madam d'Youville's society. Her solid piety and her sense of values ripened by age, allowed her to embrace the service of the poor with courage and abnegation. The foundress on her part did not delay in recognizing the worth of the new helper Providence had given her. After two years of novitiate, on July 24, 1745, Madam d'Youville received her commitment and soon placed her in charge of elderly persons.

This was a delicate task. In addition to caring for aging bodies, she strived to alleviate their personal suffering or indifference. What tact is required to recall the truths of Faith in minds that are darkened, to soften hearts embittered by misfortune or tortured by despair, to pour into souls the salutary hope of eternal joys, as well as joyous resignation and submission to the will of God! Sister Rainville knew how to carry out this ministry. She loved the unfortunate like a real mother. All had a claim on her compassion; but especially those most neglectful of their religious duties. She enjoyed no rest until she had brought them back to their Creator.

Thirty years of this obscure labor had given Sister Rainville a full measure of wisdom and self-giving. At the death of Sister Thaumur, she was ready to continue her role as assistant. Four years spent in this office sufficed to fill to the brim the measure of her merits. On November 29, 1783, she was called to her eternal reward in her seventy-third year.

At the community assembly of December 13, the same year, the office of assistant was filled by Sister Marie-Joseph Bénard-Bourjoly, and that of mistress of novices by Sister Catherine Céloron.

However, the days of mourning were not yet over. The family decreasing on earth was increasing in heaven. This time death took from our mothers the devoted Sister Demers, thus removing the last link that bound them to the early community.

Catherine Demers was born in Montreal on August 2, 1698, of Robert Demers and Madeleine Jeté. Open to self-giving, from the day she learned of Madam d'Youville's charitable project, she had been won over. She was the first to follow in the path of the foundress and with her to assist the poor whom Providence placed on their path. Her example soon drew after her Catherine Cusson and determined Louise Thaumur who was then besieged by fear. Soon these three women of virtue, destined to lay the foundation of the society with our foundress, made their irrevocable commitment to dedicate the rest of their life. It was December 31, 1737.

Since this memorable day, forty-eight years had gone by; forty-eight years of privation, of hard labor, of obscure self-giving. Nowhere in our memoirs do we see that this beloved sister was assigned to any important function in the house. Care of house-keeping chores probably occupied most of her time. But on seeing the spirit of faith in her whole conduct, one can imagine the perfection of her work.

In the humble functions, Sister Demers had exercised and preserved the activity of her youth. One after another her first companions had gone to a better world. She stood alone, the only one of early days, firm and vigorous like an old oak among younger sprouts. Her robust constitution seemed to defy every misfortune. Sister Demers, however, was nearing the end of her exile. She had no sooner entered her eighty-eighth year than almost without suffering, she was brought to extremity. Accustomed to keeping her mind fixed on God, her will in submission to his, this person of faith greeted death with trust and serenity as the beginning of true life. August 20 was the day she entered immortality.

In recalling the memory of these dear departed, chosen by God to be our mothers and our models, we have one regret: that no one thought of recording the traits which constituted the moral physiognomy of our senior sisters. The fragments of notes we have just reproduced have allowed us to admire the generosity of their beginnings and the constancy of their self-giving. But these are

only general traits. What more personal traits, what thoughts, what actions which remained hidden might have shed light on their virtues!

However, let us not forget that the best lesson to draw from the life of our early mothers comes from the very obscurity that shrouds their memory. They tell us that no virtue is better guarded or bears more abundant and durable fruit than that which grows in the shade, which is hidden to view and develops in the vivifying light of God.

A few months later the hospital lost another benefactor and friend: Marie-Anne Robutel de Lanoue. Admitted as a boarder on August 5, 1748, Miss de Lanoue had never left that peaceful abode. She had lived there in quiet recollection dedicated to serving the Lord and meriting eternal reward by good deeds.

Since the sale of the Seigneury of Châteauguay in 1765, Miss de Lanoue received from the community a life annuity of 900 pounds. Of this amount she took only what was necessary for her upkeep. Exercising thrift, she gave the rest to the poor, thus assuring herself of a goodly number of intercessors before God.

She died on November 30, 1785, and as a benefactor, she was buried in the hospital crypt.

CHAPTER VI

New recruits — Privileges granted by the Sovereign Pontiff — Pastoral visit of Bishop Hubert; he receives the vows of Sister Lemaire — Bishop Briand resigns, Bishop Hubert and Bishop d'Esglis — Visit of His Royal Highness William Henry, son of George III
1786 - 1789

While death was decimating the ranks of our early mothers, God, who proportions consolation to trial, did not abandon the little society. He sparked in new and fiery souls, the flame of zeal and charity. After having eagerly answered the call of God, some, it is true, allowed the flame of their early zeal to go out and they withdrew. But others were more persevering and generosity compensated for their small number.

It is thus that in 1786 the profession of Sister Catherine Millet took place; in 1787, that of Sister Clothide Raizenne; in 1788 that of Sister Marguerite Lemaire. Each young lady that Mother Despins received was for her a new cause of joy and hope. She felt new life in each new recruit full of sap and promise for the future.

For the whole community, these profession days were a cause of particular joy. They were days of renewal and of pious memories. The sight of these smiling persons so full of youth and purity offering to God the tenderness of their first love always, has something sweet and touching about it. On seeing these volun-

tary sacrifices, the persons already dedicated to God, even those who had aged in his service, felt a revival of the fervor of their early gift. They received inner strength which renewed them and prepared them for further battle. As they attached themselves more closely to the One who had never failed them, they determined to serve Him with great fidelity.

These feasts had a resounding note even in the family and childhood friends of the newly professed sister. Such celebrations told everyone that the love of God is not vague and abstract and that once this love is established in the heart, it banishes egotism and disposes to self-giving and to sacrifice.

The liturgical feasts of the year, the episcopal visitations, the favors granted by the Sovereign Pontiff, were added to the profession ceremonies and brought to the community their share of intimate and supernatural happiness.

On September 5, 1783, His Holiness Pious VI granted the following privileges: a plenary indulgence on the two feasts of the Holy Cross; the same indulgence to the annual retreat provided it lasted at least five days.

Lastly, a privilege was attached to the altar of the Sacred Heart each time Mass for the deceased was celebrated there for a member of the confraternity of the Sacred Heart. The same privilege was extended to all the other altars of the hospital, but only on the day of death or burial of the same associates.

The present letters were declared perpetual and to be valid for all time to come. This was the great benefit of this concession. These indulgences and these privileges had been previously granted but for only a limited time.⁽¹⁾

The year 1787 was noted by a happy event for the hospital. On August 5, Bishop Hubert, recently named coadjutor of Bishop

⁽¹⁾ On April 2, 1735, the Charon brothers had obtained privileges and indulgences but these were limited to ten years. Madam d'Youville had these renewed and extended over fifteen years. This was granted on September 24, 1767.

d'Esglis, made a pastoral visit. Added to the joy the bishop's visit always brings was a confirmation ceremony in the hospital chapel. Seventeen persons received this sacrament. Among the candidates were two professed sisters: Sisters Catherine Millet and Clothilde Raizenne and a young novice, Marguerite Lemaire.

The fact that these young girls were admitted to vows before having received the sacrament that makes a Christian perfect is astounding today. But the difficulty of the times, the scarcity of episcopal visitations, and the need for recruits account for the overlooking of the ordinary laws of the Church. Furthermore the members did not make solemn vows so such a dispensation could be more easily granted.

Among the other candidates was a young lady with an open and lively countenance. She was Mary Ann Nobless, a young English convert whom Mother Despins had taken into the hospital on the advice of Father Poncin and whom she guided with special care. Hardly twelve, Mary already held great hope for the future. Soon she would be in the novitiate and later at the bedside of the sick where she would spend her life in the exercise of heroic charity.

On January 24 of the following year, another pastoral visitation from Bishop Hubert brought an even greater joy, an honor unknown until now. His grace condescended to preside at a religious profession. Sister Lemaire was the happy elect of the day. Deeply touched by the condescension of the bishop, she kept a grateful memory of it throughout her life.

We have just come across the name of a new bishop. Had the see of Quebec changed pastors since we saw Bishop Briand exercising functions there? In fact, work more than age, had prematurely exhausted the strength of the venerable prelate. Authorized by the court to create a coadjutor for himself, Bishop Briand had without delay, chosen Father Louis Philippe Mariaucheu d'Esglis, the pastor of Saint-Pierre on the Isle of Orleans. In doing so he wished to ward off the difficulties and delays that had accompanied his own promotion to the episcopate. The new prelate had been

easily accepted by the government. His priestly virtues made him commendable to all. But being older than Bishop Briand when infirmities obliged the chief pastor to leave some of his work, Bishop d'Esglis was unable to replace him. Nevertheless, so as not to deprive the Canadian Church of the help she needed, Bishop Briand gave up his see to Bishop d'Esglis who was recognized as Bishop of Quebec. Then, Father Jean-François Hubert, a Canadian and a member of the Quebec seminary, became his coadjutor.

Well accepted by all in Canada, this latest election had to suffer unforeseen delay at the British Court. The name and superior qualities of Father Montgolfier had been brought to the attention of George III, the new king.

His Majesty did not wish to disregard them. His minister, Lord Sidney, brought the matter to the attention of Canadian administrators. He wrote: "The king approves of the resignation of Bishop Briand, but concerning the nomination of Father Hubert as coadjutor, his Majesty, though convinced of his merits, does not wish to ignore the also distinguished merit of Father Montgolfier. For this reason, his Majesty wishes that the office of coadjutor be offered him first, and if for any reason he refuses the king's offer, His Majesty would then consider the nomination of Father Hubert".⁽²⁾

Father Montgolfier was touched concerning the delicate attention of the king, but he did not hesitate to decline the offer, thus proving how little he thought of worldly honors and though he had once offered himself for the good of the country, he knew how to appreciate the salutary advantages of obscurity. Father Hubert thus received the episcopal consecration on November 19, 1786. In the spring he had begun the visitation of the vast diocese of which he would soon be the main pastor.⁽³⁾

⁽²⁾ Letter of April 30, 1785.

⁽³⁾ The diocese of Quebec had been set up on October 1, 1674 and included all French colonies in North America. By 1800, it was bordered on the east by Newfoundland and the ocean; on the south by the United States on the west by the Pacific and on the North by the Arctic Ocean.

As for Bishop Briand retired at the Quebec seminary, he dedicated the rest of his life to prayer and suffering for the flock that remained so dear to him. At the time of his retirement, Pius VI informed him that "The Holy See could not appreciate enough the services he had rendered to the Church". Bishop Briand was the last French bishop to occupy the see of Quebec. His sufferings came to an end on June 25, 1794 at the age of seventy-nine.

Apart from a few kindly letters, the name of Bishop Briand is mentioned most often in our archives among the list of benefactors. His alms totalled 3,860 pounds, and yet, the Grey Nuns were far away while nearer to him were many needs that cried out for his generosity.

Despite this title of Bishop of Quebec, Bishop d'Esglis preferred to remain in his parish of Saint-Pierre where his heart was. He died there on June 4, 1788 at the age of seventy-eight. After his death, Bishop Hubert took possession of the see of Quebec.

The preceding year, 1787, there was an event that was previously unheard of in the life of the Canadian people. A prince of royal blood, William-Henry, third son of George III, came to visit Canada.

Halifax and Quebec where he came first, greeted him with loyalty and even with enthusiasm. Montreal received him on September 18 on a beautiful fall day when the temperature was warm and the mountains were picturesque. The Governor-general, heading a delegation of important persons, had gone to meet him at Pointe aux Trembles. As he entered the town, the coadjutor, the clergy, the authorities, prominent people and British and Canadian army corps were waiting to greet him and to accompany him to the residence that had been prepared for him.

The prince remained several days in Montreal where he received outstanding ovations. He had the kindness to visit the old mission on the mountain and to take a meal with the Sulpicians at the Seminary. He was received with all the splendor and courtesy that became his dignity.

Mother Despins could not offer the prince the same honor and respect; but following the example of our Blessed Mother d'Youville who always rendered to authorities the respect due to them, wrote to the famous visitor: "Most gracious prince, I am greatly humiliated because all compliments resemble each other, because there is such a great difference in ways of thinking and such a little difference in ways of expressing oneself. I do not doubt however, the respectful sincerity of the homages presented to your Royal Highness on his arrival in this colony. But if I yield to them for the delicacy of their expression, I reserve for myself the deep respect and trust that befit the son of a king as kind as the one under whom we live. This is why I take the liberty of requesting your Royal Highness' protection for the General Hospital of Montreal which is filled with poor of both sexes and a large number of foundlings. With my whole community I will offer prayers to God for the preservation of His Majesty and that of your Royal Highness of whom gracious Prince, I am the most humble servant."⁽⁴⁾

On August 12, 1791, a brother of William Henry, Prince Edward, later Duke of Kent, landed in Quebec. He was to remain for two long years. No one suspected at the time that this young prince, the fourth of George III's seven sons, would one day give England Queen Victoria, who would govern the British Empire with so much wisdom over a period of sixty-three years.

⁽⁴⁾ Letter of September 10, 1787.

CHAPTER VII

The precarious situation of the community; its surrender to Divine Providence. — Flood of January 1, 1789; the seminary and the faithful assist the hospital — Gift and blessing of a bell — Legacies of friends.
1789 – 1791

Among the numerous crosses bestowed on the institute under Mother Despins, poverty held a prominent place. At that time the anxiety of our mothers seemed to increase as the crisis became worse in all of Canada. "Distress is extreme in this country", Mother Despins wrote to Mr. Maury. "It is not unusual to see people spend three or four days without eating; many live only on herbs like the animals; many are so weak they cannot walk. Wheat sells as much as seventeen francs a bushel."⁽¹⁾

At the hospital, people were reduced to rationing. Had it not been for Father Montgolfier and a few other friends, they would undoubtedly have spent several days in compelled fasting. Mother Despins' great resource in this extremity was prayer and trust in God. When supplies became scarcer, she gathered her poor, knelt with them, and together with hands raised towards heaven, they recited slowly the Our Father, emphasizing the request: "Give us this day our daily bread".

⁽¹⁾ Letter of July 13, 1789.

If after these earnest supplications, material bread delayed in coming, divine grace did not fail these trusting people. Comforted by this heavenly manna, all could bear with a more submissive heart the rigor of this distress. The delays, however, were not long; he who clothes the lilies and feeds little birds sent them help sometimes by unexpected means.

One day, it was Mr. de Rainville who worried about the fate of the Sisters, sent them thirty bushels of wheat. Another day, it was Reverend Well, a Jesuit, missionary at Châteauguay, who, informed of their distress, helped them with money and supplies. Such divine consideration made Mother Despins and her sisters repeat after their foundress: "Always on the verge of being deprived of all things, we do not lack the bare necessities. Each day I admire Divine Providence."

It is in the midst of these alternatives of privations and of help that the terrible flood of January 1, 1789, occurred. As early as four o'clock in the morning, while the whole hospital slept, Sister Lemaire was drawn out of her sleep by an unusual sound like the splashing of waves. She lent an ear. The sound seemed to be coming nearer. She ran to the window. Great was her alarm when the space between Pointe à Callières and the St. Lawrence River appeared to be like a stormy sea. Water already reached the enclosure walls of the hospital and the tide was rising rapidly. Immediately, she gave the alarm. In no time the community was up and each one went to where the danger appeared greatest. The elderly men were on the lower floor. There were more than thirty of them of whom a few could not even walk. It was these poor cripples who had to be helped first. Awakened brutally from their sleep they were taken to the infirmary on the upper floor. Then the orphans had to be rescued. Short of space, the community room was placed at their disposal.

After assuring the safety of persons, animals had to be seen to. The water level rose so rapidly that one could not reach the stables without a boat. While a few men improvised rafts, others assembled boards to make platforms which they placed on the main

floors for the horses. These poor beasts were already shivering from cold at their contact with the cold water. At the sight of the rafts, they took their place on them with docility and reached safety.

The most difficult business remained . . . that of saving the cows, and space to lodge them was scarce.

With minds alert and imaginations in high gear, ideas came forth. Someone proposed to bring these beasts to the attic of the chapel. This plan was not canonical and aroused certain scruples, but the need was urgent and the plan was put into action.

However, they had not counted on the resistance of the poor animals for whom this mode of travel was unusual. So they experienced great difficulty in getting them on to the rafts and even greater difficulty to make them ascend four flights of stairs. This laborious ascension was helped by three priests from the seminary, namely, Fathers Borneuf, Lécuyer, and Marchand. The process cast a certain mirth on a situation which was otherwise sombre. The work was still going on when the bell rang for Mass. People had not had time to think of its being New Years' Day, and what a gift had they not already received!

The floor of the chapel was still intact at the beginning of Mass but soon the water began to rise. The sisters came into the sanctuary while other persons got on platforms. Soon a deep recollection followed the morning agitation. To the sacrifice of the Divine Victim was joined that of hearts submissive to the will of God. These admirable dispositions must have moved the Eternal Father to bless in a special way the year that began in such painful circumstances.⁽²⁾

“As a measure of prudence”, say the memoirs, “Father Poncin had all the sacred hosts consumed at this Mass. The following day an altar was erected in the choir loft and the Holy Sacrifice was offered there each morning through the three weeks that the

⁽²⁾ Old diary p. 307.

flood lasted. The good priest was exposed to danger in coming to this house in the middle of a lake. He was brought by canoe up to the enclosure wall of the hospital compound. He climbed it by means of a ladder. There he awaited the canoe that would take him to the hospital. On his return he was also obliged to climb a ladder into the house of a citizen devoted to the hospital, before he could reach firm ground."

A touching witness of evangelical charity, Father Poncin knew what other privation our mothers would have to endure. They needed Holy Communion. He wished them to have the divine strength which comes from the Holy Sacrament of the altar. A letter from Mother Despins written at that time describes the need they had of being comforted by this heavenly food.

"On the first of January, the St Lawrence River swelled so horribly that all the lower floor of our hospital was flooded. Water rose seven inches above the floors of the chapel, the ward of the poor, and that of the children. This flood having damaged the floors of the whole lower level of the house, we have to make major repairs. We are consequently in extreme necessity having had such a difficult year. I shall not give you all the details of the sad situation we were in. In a few words, I shall tell you that the river rose twenty-one feet above its normal level, that we were in the middle of the river with Canadian cold temperatures, obliged to fish heating wood out of the water, unable to make bread as the bakery was under water. This was our situation for three weeks."

But God who inclines hearts at will, raised up protectors for our mothers and assured them help. The very morning of the disaster they were recommended for public charity. From the pulpit Father Latour Désery, pastor of Notre-Dame, so moved his audience to pity that after high Mass, the river was covered with canoes, laden with all sorts of supplies. Some brought bread, some meat, others brought hay for the livestock. All the needs were taken care of. Furthermore, Father Borneuf, P.S.S. bursar at the seminary sent them a hot meal, the very one that had been prepared for the priests. During the three weeks that followed, the hospital was under public assistance especially that of the seminary.

As soon as the water had withdrawn, the damage had to be repaired. In the impecunious circumstances which the hospital experienced, it would have been easy to place elsewhere the 4,164 pounds that these repairs cost. But no doubt God would have been less glorified. Such a rich offering of merits and acts of abandonment would not have been made and our chronicles would not have recorded such touching proofs of sympathy. To cite only the main one, Governor General Lord Dorchester sent the hospital 1,285 pounds of supplies, Bishop Hubert 920 pounds, Father Brassier, superior at the seminary, 420 pounds, Father Dufrost, pastor of Boucherville, 322 pounds, Father Gragé from the Seminary in Quebec, 66 pounds. In fact, a public appeal brought in 6,473 pounds, these results are astounding if we consider the poverty that existed at that time in the whole colony.

What is still more astounding is the fact that despite poverty a few friends took it upon themselves the following year to provide the hospital chapel with a new bell. In the fire of 1765 when the chapel burned along with the rest, the bell had suffered the effects of the disaster.⁽³⁾ Since then the chapel had been rebuilt but the idea of replacing the bell had not occurred to our Mothers, reduced as they were to the strictest economy. Even the sanctuary in its decor did not measure up to the tender piety they had towards the God of the Eucharist.

However, modest as this sanctuary was, it attracted numerous faithful. On feast days it was full and the collections were a proof of this. People liked its atmosphere of recollection, and the simple beauty of the celebrations. On leaving this temple, they planned to return. When its walls were out of sight, people wanted to hear its bell.

A man of faith took it upon himself to fulfil this wish. John Sussol, a respectable citizen of Montreal, feeling urged in his old age to give God one last proof of his piety, came to tell Mother Despins

⁽³⁾ It is not known whether this bell belonged to the Charon Brothers or the one bought in 1755 (ancien journal p. 66).

of his project. He offered her 200 francs if she would go along with his plan. The offer was generous, but isolated it was insufficient and would have remained ineffective. John Sussol found a way of interesting a few friends in his project. Soon enough money was raised to persuade Mother Despins to comply with the wishes of all. The order was sent to London in early January 1790, and, a few months later a British ship brought to Montreal the much-desired bell. Weighing 359 pounds, it measured 18½ inches in height. The edge of the bell was two inches thick.⁽⁴⁾

Its arrival was a great event for the community, and the blessing which took place on June 17 was a new occasion for friends of the hospital to show their generosity and their sympathy. Father Pierre Denaut, vicar-general of the diocese, and later, Bishop of Québec, proceeded with the blessing amid a large gathering of faithful. Mr. Michel Alain Chartier, Lord of Lotbinière, Vaudreuil, and Rigaud, accepted to be its godfather and Mrs. Louise Prud'homme, wife of the Lord of Longueuil, its godmother. The bell received the commemorative names of Michel-Louise-Thérèse.

The collection made that day by the Lord of Longueuil and Mrs. Fleurimont yielded 272 pounds.

The blessing over, the captain of the ship that had carried the bell sought the honor of raising it with his sailors. As soon as it hung from its lofty tower, Michel-Louise-Thérèse rang joyously, calling down God's blessings on its donors and the attendants. Generations of another age, we can still enjoy its harmonious sound, for it is the same bell that rings on feast days at Mount Saint-Croix, the present Mother-House and that tolls its mournings.

At the end of the ceremony, the captain and his sailors were led to the ward of the elderly men where they were served a delicious lunch. They enjoyed it; and left happy and grateful as if they were the ones who had been gratified.

⁽⁴⁾ The cost of this bell, including transportation was 725 pounds.

Jean Sussol who had started this project was not very rich but his heart was larger than his wallet. His faith had taught him that to give to God of one's prosperity is to fulfil a sacred duty of gratitude and at the same time to sanctify oneself by means of the prosperity which one enjoys. At his death, the poor received the greater part of his modest fortune. This extract from his will, better than words, will testify to his Christian sentiments: "Wills and bequeaths to the ladies of the general hospital, the Grey Nuns, as he had promised them, the sum of two hundred pounds or shillings of twenty coppers which shall be paid to them only when the said bell arrives.

The said testator wills and bequeaths the house and land he owns at Saint-Sulpice or value of same, half to the poor of the general hospital in this town and the other half to Captain Bourdon, to Mr. Papin, senior and to the poor of Saint-Sulpice."

When Jean Sussol's property was sold, the part attributed to the hospital amounted to 2,092 pounds.

On March 14, 1790, Simon Sanguinet, Esquire, Lord of La Salle, judge of the King's court, also remembered the poor of the hospital as he drew up his will: "The said testator wills and orders that his body be buried at his home in La Salle near the water and flour mill where presently stands a garden. On his grave shall be erected a stone chapel covered with shingles and each year on the first of May a mass shall be celebrated in the chapel for the repose of the soul of the said testator, and this shall be in perpetuity. On the same day, each year, 200 bushels of wheat shall be delivered to the poorest 'habitants' of his seigneurie at La Salle only.

"The said testator wills and bequeaths to the poor of the general hospital of Montreal the annual sum of 400 shillings, old currency, to the capital of 8,000 shillings, old currency, including 4,000 shillings which Mr. François Simonet had willed them . . . this being to satisfy his intention and that of Mr. François Simonet who had willed for the same purpose in favor of the said hospital, commissioning the Grey Nuns to set up a foundation for two poor

people in perpetuity, who will be nominated by the family of said testator each time there is a vacant place.”

A year earlier, Mrs. Ignace Gamelin remembered the poor in her will. Mrs. Gamelin, née Marie-Louise-Dufrost de Lajemmerais, was the sister of our beloved foundress and therefore considered herself to be of the family of the Grey Nuns.

Received as a boarder on May 13, 1775, she paid an annual sum of 400 pounds. Feeling her strength gradually failing her and warned on the other hand by her advanced age that her end was near, she put her affairs in order. After requesting the favor of being buried in the hospital crypt, she assured herself the benefit of two hundred masses to be said after her death for the repose of her soul. The remainder of her fortune she willed to the poor, and on April 10, 1789, she passed away at the age of eighty-three. By her charitable donations, Mrs. Gamelin upheld the title of benefactor which several members of her family had earned.

By his will made in 1771, Father Pierre-Mathieu Gamelin-Maugras, a Sulpician priest and nephew of our beloved foundress, willed 1,000 pounds to the hospital. Father Ignace Gamelin, pastor of Saint-Philippe and also a nephew of the foundress, was also devoted to her work.⁽⁵⁾ Alms varying in amounts cause his name to appear almost yearly in the annals of the times.

We were unable to find the text of Mr. Etienne Auger's will, but old books reveal to us that this merchant of rue Saint-François Xavier left the hospital a legacy of almost 20,000 pounds. Wise and prudent administrators, these persons favored by fortune, employed part of their wealth for good deeds, estimating above all else the invisible treasures which faith reveals to them and which only charity can give.

About 1791, Reverend Well, Jesuit, made a gift of 6,000 pounds to the community. Father Cazot last survivor of the Jesuits in

⁽⁵⁾ Pierre Mathieu Gamelin-Maugras' mother was Clemence de Lajemmerais. He died at Saint-Philippe on September 20, 1799.

Canada and last administrator of the company's property, sent to our Mothers from Québec, the sum of 4,600 pounds.

There is a long list of persons whose alms were less considerable in amount but which contributed nonetheless to the support of the work, found at the end of this book. It was always Divine Providence who, through the intermediary of wealthy persons or of the humble worker, came to their help. Docile instruments of its merciful plans, they have a claim on our prayers and our remembrance. Charlevoix in *Histoire de la Nouvelle France* eloquently praises the way of life of Canadians.⁽⁶⁾

"Gentle and polite manners are common to all", he says, "Churlishness in language or in behavior is not known even in the remotest countryside." Dainville in *Beauté de l'Histoire du Canada* says: "True courtesy and good manners reign among these people. The fine arts have made little progress so far. But good morals, innocent and industrious behavior are better than beautiful paintings and pretty poems." Our old memoirs reveal the exquisite refinement of our founding mothers. For this politeness born of cordiality and sweet simplicity, they were frequently cited by outsiders as models of these virtues. Therein lies perhaps the secret of the sympathy towards their work on the part of the clergy as well as that of the older and noble families in the country."

(6) Vol. III P.80.

CHAPTER VIII

Death of Father Dufrost — His dealings with the community — his charity towards the poor — Last years of Father Montgolfier; his death.
1790 - 1791

On March 6, 1790, great mourning hovered over the parish of Boucherville. That day God took from it Father Charles-Marie-Madeleine d'Youville Dufrost, its devoted pastor. This loss was keenly felt at the hospital where this worthy priest, last son of Madam d'Youville was held in respect.

Born on July 12, 1729, Father Dufrost was not yet one year old when he lost his father. His childhood was surrounded by the solicitude of his virtuous mother. This was seen in the piety and the amiable qualities of mind and heart that he showed forth. After having given all her care to the early formation of this child, this Christian mother led him to the seminary in Québec where his older brother was studying. She provided the cost of their education by hard work and countless privations. But these sacrifices gave way to great joy when she saw one son after the other become a priest.

Ordained to the priesthood on August 26, 1752, by Bishop Pontbriand, Father Dufrost served successively in the parishes of Sainte-Rose, of Pointe-Levis, and finally of Boucherville. In 1788, Bishop Hubert honored him by making him vicar-general. This testimony

of trust and esteem confirmed the sentiments that Father Dufrost had inspired among those who knew him.

The dealings of this holy priest with the Grey Nuns was at once that of a respectful son and a devoted brother. The controversy that had once arisen between Father Youville, his brother, and the community, had not found him insensitive. Loyal above all, he could not disregard the rights of the poor and he did all in his power to promote justice.

As he was pastor at Boucherville, Father Dufrost often visited the hospital. He was regarded there as a member of the family. On certain holidays he was invited to spend the day there. Sometimes he even went on the previous day so that he could preside at the morning meditation which he made aloud. Then he celebrated holy mass with pious hymns after which he had breakfast in the community room with the sisters, as was the custom at that time. Nothing was more primitive and more simple than breakfast in those days. While one sister served, the others seated on their heels around the table held in one hand a cup of barley coffee, in the other a slice of bread buttered for the occasion or with a slice of meat; thus breakfast was merrily taken. The more timid, the novices among them, were not quite at ease at such feasts and would have preferred the dry bread of ordinary days. For them this was the drop of bitterness with which earthly joys are seasoned.

The day unfolded in prayer, pious conversations, and innocent pranks, which filled the time left free by service of the poor. The poor also had their share in the rejoicings of the day. A visit from Father Dufrost to their ward, an anecdote, a word of comfort and hope, put smiles on anxious faces or brought a tear of thanksgiving to eyes about to close to earthly things. Everyone was happy at the visit of the sympathetic pastor. Towards evening Father Dufrost returned to his parish happy at having spread joy in this family of God. And the hospital returned to its usual calm and uniformity.

Donations of considerable size earned Father Dufrost the title of benefactor of the hospital. But he acquired a greater right to our gratitude by the biographical sketch he left us of the virtues of his saintly mother and which he had himself drawn up with filial love. As a sketch, this work is necessarily incomplete. We can, however, consider there the characteristic traits of our foundress and imagine what treasure of virtue and dedication was in her great heart.

Of delicate soul and generous heart, Father Dufrost had been for his Christian mother the most loving and the most dedicated of sons. When she died in 1771, he was pastor at Pointe-Levis. The distance and the approach of Christmas did not allow him to come to the hospital. Having a presentiment of the deep pain that this loss and the circumstances surrounding it would have on this loving son, Father Gravé wrote to Mother Despins: "I told him of the death of his mother. I would have liked to spend several days with him to console him. He needs great faith to sustain such a blow."

Father Dufrost had all the zeal and the tender charity of his pious mother. Like her, he knew the poor and the indigent. We remember with what paternal solicitude he surrounded the young girls of Boucherville during the American invasion. He had no rest until he had assured them protection and shelter. This solicitude he extended to all those who were in need. All suffering moved him to compassion; every misfortune received help from him.

In his dying moments, thinking of his favorites he said to his attendant: "Do not let my agony cause you to forget the rations you must distribute to the poor."⁽¹⁾ Had not this forgetfulness of self in favor of the unfortunate already assured him of divine mercy and entrance into the abode of the blessed? Blessed by God and regretted by man, Father Dufrost ended his too short career at the

(1) Memoirs of the Dufrost Family.

age of sixty. He was buried in the crypt of Boucherville where an extraordinary number of priests and faithful honored his burial.

Death was still to spread mourning among our Mothers, Father Montgolfier who since the death of Father Normant had been considered as their father, their counsellor, and the visible providence of the hospital, came to the end of his career.

Father Étienne Montgolfier was born at Sainte-Marguerite near Annonay in the diocese of Vienna on December 24, 1712.

The Montgolfier family had numbered crusaders among its ancestors. As early as 1140, a Montgolfier returned from Damascus with the art of making paper, an industry that has been successfully practised in this family to our day.

Étienne was the fifteenth child of Raymond who in the middle of the seventeenth century had left Baugé to establish himself at Annonay. His nephew, Joseph, was the famous inventor of the balloon known at first as the Montgolfière. Joseph shared the glory of this invention with Étienne who had helped him and who was known as the brain of the family.

Old family letters allow us to believe that the Montgolfiers became members of nobility as early as the fifteenth century. In effect, their occupations in the state imply nobility. These old titles, Louis XVI wished to revive them at the same time as he granted nobility to the inventors. Either the family was indifferent towards these distinctions or it was impossible to find the documents, therefore, these titles were not presented to the king. Nobility was granted only to the family of Pierre, brother of the Sulpician and father of the inventor. The sons received a pension and the ribbon of Saint-Michel.

The Montgolfier name has not disappeared in France. It is perpetuated with the reputation of knowledge and religion left by the beloved priest whose virtues we recall. Several members of his family joined religious orders where they were a source of edification. His correspondence with them speaks of piety and dedication to souls.

Most of his letters are addressed to Anne and Marie-Thérèse, his two sisters both religious and alternately superior of the convent of Boulieu near Annonay under the names of Sister St-Charles and Sister Sainte-Croix. It is touching to note the earnestness with which he begs his older sister Sister Sainte-Croix, to obtain from heaven the graces he needs to fulfill the obligations of his task.

In 1851, one of his grand nephews was superior at the seminary of Vernoux in Ardèche, and from his mother we have these intimate details about the family.

From his early childhood young Étienne had shown an eager disposition towards piety and study. After having passed with honors his classical course, he obtained the same success in philosophy and in theology. As a priest, he wished to put his priesthood under the protection of a company dedicated to the formation and sanctification of the clergy. Shortly afterward, he joined the Sulpicians and he felt moved to request of his superior that he be sent to Montreal to labor there in the Lord's vineyard. Father Cousturier had made him wait several years when an incident indicated the plan of Providence on this soul. Worn out by age and hard work, Father Normant requested a helper in Montreal who could, if need be, take over the charge of the seminary. The Superior General turned to Father Montgolfier and allowed him to come to Canada. Embarking at La Rochelle on May 3, 1751, Father Montgolfier reached Montreal only the following October, a five-month perilous journey.

Father Normant, who kept a fatherly watch over the Sisters of Hôtel-Dieu, the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame and the Grey Nuns, all established in Montreal, did not delay in initiating his new assistant as their director. It was as if, in view of his approaching death, the beloved superior had wished to spare his spiritual daughters a painful transition. When this distressful event did take place, our mothers found in Father Montgolfier the same dedication as they had known in their beloved founder.

However, the reknown of this man soon went beyond the seminary and the religious communities. The elegance of his man-

ner, his courtesy, his generosity, won all hearts and because of his undeniable talents, he was judged worthy of every responsibility. Named superior at the seminary, then vicar-general of the diocese, he was twice proposed for the episcopate. We know how Providence, and the humility of the holy priest spared him ecclesiastical honors. On the other hand, his dedication to the Church and to souls appeared to be more active and more complete. At the time of the conquest, when poverty was so great in Ville-Marie, the charity of Father Montgolfier knew no bounds. To assist the religious communities by his alms and his counseling, to assist entire families was his first concern. "We can truly call him father of the poor, of orphans and widows and of all the unfortunate", wrote one of the Sisters of Hôtel-Dieu to her sisters in Laflèche. "Without his charity, we would have died of hunger."⁽²⁾

The Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame also shared in the generosity of Father Montgolfier, especially in 1768 when he contributed to the restoration of their convent ruined by a fierce fire. But a gift precious, among all others, which they hold from him is the life manuscript of their Saintly Mother Bourgeois which he drew up a few years before his death.

The generosity of the beloved superior extended beyond the limits of the Island of Montreal. The great quantity of alms made to the Ursulines of Québec were recorded in their chronicles with touching gratitude. In the spring of 1760 he learned that their land had been ravaged and their crops ruined. He immediately sent them forty bushels of wheat for seeding. Shortly afterwards, he sent them supplies "valued at three hundred and fifty pounds". In another circumstance, in 1764, he sent them two bolts of material for veils. They had not been able to get this material since the country was under British rule.

But towards our community, documents are lacking to show the extent of his generosity. All that we can affirm is that our

⁽²⁾ Letter of July 23, 1763.

mothers enjoyed perfect security under his care. In their difficulties, no matter of what nature, it was to his advice that they had recourse. One day facing a financial problem, the foundress wrote: "Father Montgolfier told me he would settle the affair, I am not worried. He has done and still does for us much more than I would have dared ask of him."⁽³⁾ He did so much that in several circumstances the sisters and their poor escaped the horrors of hunger. The amount of his alms entered in our old memoirs is more than twenty thousand pounds.

Love of the poor was his passion. According to Father Brassier it was his favorite virtue. Among all the virtues which shone in Father Montgolfier, he wrote to his superior general, "his favorite one was charity towards the poor. He would have desired to possess much in order to give more to the poor."⁽⁴⁾

In his fatherly compassion, he could not see misfortune without being moved. To relieve it he not only gave all he owned, but gave so profusely from the seminary coffers that at his death there was a large deficit which took many years to clear.

The latter years of Father Montgolfier were saddened by a deep concern. A wave of godlessness was passing over France threatening to destroy both the crown and the Church. To distract himself from these sombre visions of the future and to rest from his work, the elderly priest enjoyed visiting the hospital from time to time. His visits were short. . . just long enough to reveal the constant preoccupation of his priestly soul: to do good to souls, to ease the difficulties of virtue and by his teachings he urged them to counterbalance the evils of the mother country by their generosity, the calm and fervor of their life. Penetrating into the detail of their sorrows, their joys, their labors, and the obscure dedication which was their web, Father Montgolfier knew how to kindle their courage and fortify their will. He taught the Sisters to utilize their

(3) Letter of August 21, 1766 to Father Cousturier.

(4) Letter of September 25, 1791 to Father Emery.

every action for their personal sanctification and the salvation of others.

The most precious pledge of his solicitude for the advancement of the Institute are the constitutions which he drew up despite his many occupations. No heritage in fact could be more useful for the sanctification of souls. Our mothers understood it. Deeply grateful, they received these rules as salutary bonds, as a sacred legacy which was important for them to perfect by faithfully following them.

Since then, apart from a few additions rendered necessary by the expansion of our works, these constitutions which summarize the teachings of the founders, have remained the basis of our rule.

In the meantime, the years weighed heavily on the shoulders of the beloved Sulpician. Feeling his strength failing each day, in April 1789, he took advantage of Bishop Hubert's visit to offer his resignation as vicar-general of the diocese and as ecclesiastical superior of religious communities. But the prelate did not wish to deprive the Church of Montreal so soon of his kind guardianship. He gave him an assistant in the person of Father Brassier.

Father Montgolfier sincerely wished to continue serving this Church which he had served with his whole heart for forty years. However, he could not overcome his feeble nature exhausted by work. The draining of his physical strength was gradually followed by a weakening of his mental faculties. Soon he was able neither to write nor to dictate a letter. He even had to give up celebrating Mass which had been the joy of his life. Finally, having become almost senile, his infirmities came to an end on August 27, 1791. He was 78 years of age.

Soon after the death of the beloved superior, our mothers had celebrated in the hospital chapel a service as solemn as their poverty would allow. But their gratitude did not end there. In reverence for Father Montgolfier the successor of Father Normant, they wished to honor and preserve his memory in the community as being a noted benefactor and a second founder.

CHAPTER IX

Eight young priests prevent the ruin of the seminary in
Montreal — Repercussion in Canada of the French
Revolution — The last trials of Mother Despins —
Her death.
1791

At the death of Father Montgolfier, there remained at the seminary only two French Sulpicians: Fathers Brassier and Poncin. Father Brassier, worn out more by work and infirmities than by age — he was only sixty — had hoped to retire. The sickly state of his beloved superior and the great scarcity of priests in Montreal alone kept him active. "If I remain here", he wrote to Father Emery⁽¹⁾ "it is because of Father Montgolfier. He so begged me not to leave him".

In order to provide the faithful of Montreal with religious service, the Sulpicians had admitted eight young priests whom they had educated for the priesthood. They were François-Xavier Latour-Déziry, François-Xavier Dussault, Jean-André Guillaume Guillemin, Charles Écuyer, Jean-Baptiste Marchand, Michel-Félicien David, Joseph Borneuf, Louis-Amable Lamy-Hubert. This reinforcement was still considerably insufficient. However, thanks to the courage and devotedness of these generous helpers, the

(1) Letter of October 10, 1787.

seminary could escape imminent ruin as the government had since the conquest, closed entry into Canada of French priests.

However, the time soon came when the tempest of revolution blowing over France would send priests and guardians of the faith to the scaffold or into exile. It was the time marked by Divine Providence to move hearts of kings and people and to endow our country with pious and knowledgeable priests. But for the Sulpicians of Montreal, the future was mysterious and held God's impenetrable secrets. The two elderly priests prayed and hoped, believing that God would not abandon the work of his Blessed Mother and allow the faith to perish in Ville-Marie. We shall see later that their hope was not in vain.

Meanwhile, our unfortunate country continued to sustain the consequences of the political events which upset the mother country. The crisis had its repercussion in all classes of society in all parts of the administration. One of the distressing effects for religious communities was the cessation of revenue from the French government.

In 1760, Mother Despins did not receive any letters from Mr. Maury, her correspondent in Paris. The following year the latter apologized for not having written. The new operation overburdened him and he was unable to draw the usual revenue. All payments were made in paper money the value of which changed each day. After 1791, all correspondence ceased with this faithful agent.

The cessation of payment of which this precarious time rendered the need so pressing, the pain of seeing the mother country a prey to revolutionary anarchy, caused Mother Despins and all Canadians who were French at heart indescribable grief. She wrote to Mr. Maury "we do not ignore the troubles France is going through. This causes us to lament. How can we, without sadness, witness the state of this distinguished monarchy? With all my heart I hope that peace and tranquillity will follow this violent storm" . . . then returning to the interest of her institute she adds "I hope you will have the kindness to give us news of our affairs as soon as

it is possible; I do not think the national assembly will make us lose what is ours nor take over what belongs to others.”⁽²⁾

A profound silence was the only answer to the perplexities of Mother Despins and her daughters.

However, having inherited the virtues and works of our beloved foundress, her sufferings continued. To steep her soul more deeply with the spirit and strong virtues of our saintly mother, she had yet to undergo one last trial, a pain compared to which material losses and even mournings are nothing.

In this little group of virgins which Mother Despins had tried to form to the virtues of our holy vocation, and on the faithfulness of whom she thought she could count, there were two who betrayed her hopes and tore her maternal heart. The first, Sister Varambourville, had filled with bitterness the final days of the foundress. After the death of this pious mother, her unsurbordination and intrigue obliged the community to dismiss her from its ranks. This painful event took place on January 1, 1775.

Nine years later repentance and misery brought her back to the origin of her early religious life. But the community did not deem it advisable to re-instate her. It gave her refuge in the women’s ward. There for twenty-nine long years, she repented for the errors of her past. Each new profession ceremony revived her regrets: “There goes another who is taking the place that God had reserved for me”, she would say amid her tears. After this harsh atonement suffered with humility and constancy, Marie-Anne Varambourville died piously on May 22, 1813, at the age of seventy-nine.

The second defection was that of a poor girl from a good family whom Madam d’Youville had received in 1754, on the recommendation of her son, Father Dufrost. She was Marie-Louise Lanouillère de Boisclerc. Nothing vexatious had marked her early years of religious life. A certain firmness of character coupled with a secret basis of independence had allowed her to contain

⁽²⁾ Letter of October 17, 1791.

spurts of a fiery temperament under a quiet and reserved appearance. But she was unable to sustain this dissimulation for long. The yoke of discipline and obedience ended by weighing on her impetuous nature.

Proud of a nobility which was self-exaggerated, she persuaded herself that the whole household owed her consideration. The protection with which Father Dufrost had surrounded her youth increased her unreasonable claims. She abused of the confidence which the latter showed her in order to discredit Mother Despins to him. Because of the silence and discreet charity of Mother Despins, these calumnies were long believed. Mother Despins declared she preferred to burn in purgatory for excessive kindness than for severity, and she would have remained indefinitely under the weight of injustice; but the good of souls, unity of hearts, the preservation of the family spirit, rendered urgent the repression of evil. After having exhausted the ways of mercy and pardon, the council of administrators deliberated and the expulsion of the culprit was decided. On October 16, 1791, Father Brassier, superior, in the presence of the sisters assembled, caused tears to flow from the whole group, when he intimated to her the order to don secular clothing.

Six years after her departure, Marie-Louise Boisclerc returned to our mothers to solicit her pardon and readmission. Pardon had long been granted but discretion and prudence ruled out her re-entry into the society. Admitted among the poor, she prolonged her penance until the age of eighty-one and died on September 28, 1812.

Mother Despins' life had been lived through all kinds of vicissitudes. To maintain and fortify the works of blessed Mother d'Youville, to revive the traditions of abnegation, of charity, and of fervor had been the mission of the twenty last years of her life, and she had been faithful to it. Despite delicate health, it was especially by example that she had tried to draw her sisters along the path of the foundress.

She was seen as a fervent and modest observer of the least prescriptions of the rule, faithful, above all, to the great duties of spiritual life, strong and upholding religious virtues. She loved silence and filled it with thoughts of God. Even in recreation, she preferred religious topics and they came instinctively to her lips. In relaxation or work, she desired that all be directed towards peaceful contemplation. She used to say, "To be a true Sister of Charity, one must first be a person of Prayer". In this, she was in accord with Saint Theresa who said "Where there is prayer and charity, care and eagerness towards the sick will never be lacking". Extremely careful about the recitation of vocal prayers she required that all answer with a firm and distinct voice. Unity and harmony of voices help towards the fervor of praise and make up for the aridity of hearts. If a sister abstained from uniting her voice to the recitation of common prayers, Mother Despins never failed to see her once the prayer was over, to say to her with kindness, "Sister are you ill today? I could not hear you at prayer".

Though Mother Despins' piety was deep, there was nothing austere about it. The supernatural thoughts with which she nourished her soul taught her the secret of going to all with freedom, ease, and sweet modesty. Throughout her life, the poor had had her preference and she had given them touching testimonies. Her respect for them was such that when engaged with persons of rank, she would leave the latter without hesitation to answer the needs of the poor who wished to speak to her. Seeing the kindness and the simplicity which guided her in these circumstances, one was not even tempted to be vexed. Her fine training and her exquisite tact were so well known by all that no one could suspect her of breaking rules of decency under vain pretexts.

Her rich inheritance had allowed her to pay in part for the seigniority of Châteauguay and to make considerable gratuities to the hospital. Far from using this as a pretext to seek for herself a relaxing of the rules, she conformed with the most austere fidelity. The poverty which prevailed in the colony during the whole duration of her administration was so great, that despite her generosity, Mother Despins was submitted to rigorous privations

along with her poor. In these difficult situations, after turning to God and entrusting herself to the care of Providence, to follow the example of the Foundress, she gave herself along with her sisters to hard and continuous work. If she had to interrupt a task to answer some urgent need, she would work on into the night.

Worthy of serving as a model, she offered in her life the example of inviolable fidelity to the spirit of the foundress, and of limitless self-devotion to the works of the Institute. The poor had had her wealth and her time, the sick and infirm, her care and her consolation, her daughters had experienced all the sweetness of her maternal solicitude. As the principal fruit of her solicitude, she also gave them the constitutions which Father Montgolfier had drawn up at her bidding and in which are condensed the great traditions which were to bind them together, them and all those who would come after them. The time had come to crown a life that had been so filled.

God who was the All of this faithful spouse, was to put the seal on her merits by purifying them in adversity. We know of the trials of these latter years. To these external difficulties was added physical suffering that would leave her no reprieve.

A stubborn cough led to the belief that she was afflicted with consumption. Stronger and more persistent than pain, Mother Despins continued with diminished strength but with as ardent a zeal, to go about her duties.

Early in the year 1792 aggravation of her illness justified fears and increased the solicitude of those around her. Familiar with the thought of death, Mother Despins alone remained calm, submissive and resigned. More and more recollected in God, she abandoned herself with renewed trust to his holy will.

With the return of spring, while sap was rising in plants, she felt the unrelenting pain draining her source of life. Towards the end of May it was thought prudent to have her anointed. The patient agreed without reluctance to this new expression of the divine will and received the last rites with fervor and serenity. June 6

was to mark the end of this beautiful life. Called to her bedside for the final struggle, Father Poncin recited the prayers for the dying with the community assembled. These prayers over, a ray of heavenly joy lighted up the features of the dying patient. Folding her hands on her chest and glancing at her sisters, she said with the surrender and artless trust which had stamped her whole life: "Now, I am happy". Then smiling with hope, she fell asleep in the Lord. She had just reached her seventy-first year. She had dedicated forty-one years to the service of God and the poor.

This good and faithful servant could die in peace, she who had had but one care: to love God and make him loved by radiating kindness. This kindness of which so many unfortunate people had felt the benevolent effects earned her many deep regrets according to the testimony of Mother Coullée. Friends, benefactors, protégés of the hospital, all those who had had some relationship with the now deceased superior, shared the veneration the sisters had for their mother and shared also their sorrow and their prayers.⁽³⁾

If we compare these regrets to the picture of the worthy superior as traced by a friendly hand⁽⁴⁾ we find them both justified and legitimate. Summing up the traits of this humble life, the writer expresses himself thus: "A great mark of sincerity honored the entire life of Mother Despains. One finds neither guile, nor cunning, nor reckoning, nor hypocrisy. All in her is truth: quality of soul, sensitivity of heart, simplicity of inclination, and loyalty of character. She is one of these radiating persons whose gracious and salutary influence draws people and who lives only to render them both good and happy."⁽⁵⁾

(3) Letter of Mother Coullée to Mr Maury.

(4) Father Rousseau, p.s.s.

(5) One of the three brothers of Mother Despains, Jacques-Joseph settled in Quebec. He was the great grand-father of Father Georges Lemoine, who for many years, was chaplain of the Ursulines in that city, of James Mc Pherson Lemoine and of Edward-Louis Darby Lemoine, well known gentlemen.



PART FOUR

CHAPTER I

Election of Mother Coullée — Deplorable state of the Church — The arrival of French priests — Father Roux is named ecclesiastical superior of the Grey Nuns — Death of Father Brassier, superior of the seminary in Montreal.
1791 – 1798

On June 9, the day after the funeral of Mother Despins, the assembly presided over by Father Brassier, vicar general of the Bishop of Québec, accompanied by Fathers Poncin and Borneuf, placed Sister Thérèse-Geneviève Coullée at the head of the community. The same assembly maintained Sisters Bourjoly and Céloron in the offices of assistant and mistress of novices. Also taking part in the deliberations were the four latest professed who were not part of the council of administrators. This privilege however, granted as a testimony of fraternal understanding, was not to be renewed. In the very act of this election, Father Brassier declared that it would belong to the bishop in future similar occasions, to state whether all the sisters or only the administrators would have the right to vote as the number of simple professed sisters might multiply and in time could surpass by far the number of administrators.

A month later, Bishop Hubert, on a pastoral visit in Montreal, came to our mothers to bring his advice and blessings to the newly elected. He approved and sanctioned the election by a circular letter dated July 11, 1792 with the reservation, however, that in

the future only the administrators would have an active voice in the election.

Meanwhile, Mother Coutlée did not envisage without fear, her new responsibilities. As she announced to Mr. Maury the death of Mother Despins, she wrote, "Another sorrow for me, is that I was named to replace her". This sorrow was so vivid and so deep that the superior could not overcome it at first. Finding her in tears one day, Father Bédard from the seminary made her this kindly reproach, "Well, Mother, if you continue to cry, I will not come any more to your house". Was Mother Coutlée one who would retire within herself and be easily rebuffed by responsibility and fear of difficulties? By no means; according to our memoirs she was energetic of character and in her laborious hands the sacred heritage of the foundress was not about to decline. Like all true servants of God, she joined this energy to contempt of self and a great distrust of her own strength. Observing her more closely, this is how she appears to us.

Thérèse-Geneviève Coutlée was born in Montreal on November 23, 1742. Her father, Louis Coutlée, a former soldier in the colony, was from Saint-Germain Vitry, Paris. Her mother, Geneviève Labossée, was born in Montréal of a French family, which came from Blanza en Saintonge.

Thérèse was almost twenty-one when she entered the novitiate. As a young professed, her orderly spirit and her understanding of administering an institution, had awakened Madam d'Youville's attention. She was initiated at an early age to the details of bur-sar. From the time she took charge, Mother Despins trusted her with the material care of the house. Placed daily before the needs of the community and the mediocrity of its resources, Sister Coutlée was trained to the difficulties of administration. Furthermore, her intimate and frequent rapports with Mother Despins in whom she had found the insight and charitable disinterestedness of the foundress, had made of her a true mother of the poor at the same time as an accomplished religious. Besides, Mother Coutlée was by her very nature well endowed. Good judgment, a strong will, a lively and penetrating mind were combined to

a great kindness of heart and a rare affability of manner. The rectitude of her character and her insight made her ignore trifles and vain sensitivity which are the martyrdom of common life. Dignified and kind, she inspired confidence and commanded respect.

Mother Coullée was in her fiftieth year when the chief authority was entrusted to her. After having at first shuddered before her grave responsibilities, this soul of faith rose firmer and more courageous than ever and trusting in God, she resolutely accepted the burden.

One of the reasons why this burden had appeared so heavy to her was the deplorable state of the Canadian church since the surrender of the country to the British. England "maintaining the idea of protestantizing its new colony" persisted in refusing entry to French priests. Here is a significant fact. Father Ciquart from lower Auvergne inflamed with the desire to dedicate himself to the Indian missions of Canada, resolved to come to Canada despite English hostility. On March 8, 1783, he left France with the hope that on arriving in Montreal, he would be given the freedom to practise his ministry. He had however, presumed too much. No sooner had he arrived at the seminary in Montreal than Governor General Haldimand made him go to Quebec and sent him to Malbaie with the order to await the ship that would return him to Europe. This infortunate disappointment did not discourage the missionary. He had no sooner set foot aground than he escaped through the forests of Malbaie and returned to Montreal in the early part of July.

Indignant, the Governor General had him sought out and this time made him a prisoner. On July 13, the missionary under guard was sent to l'Île du Bic about sixty leagues below Québec, and on August 20, he was embarked and taken to Europe.⁽¹⁾

(1) Father Ciquart was superior at the seminary in Bourges when the French revolution drove him away in 1791. He went to New-Orleans and then to Baltimore where he was entrusted with the Indian mission of Passamaquody. In 1803 we find him at Memracook where he established a mission which he served for nine years. In 1812, he became pastor at Saint-François du Lac. He was back at the seminary in Montreal in October 1815 where he died on September 28, 1824, at the age of seventy.

Left on its own the seminary in Montreal now numbered only two French-born Sulpicians, Father Brassier and Father Poncin, and the few Canadian priests added to the company, who shared in the parochial ministry, the service of Lac des Deux Montagnes, of the religious communities, and the maintenance of the college. This was far from enough to answer the needs of the population.

The order of the Jesuits and that of the Recollets were becoming extinct and their estate was to be taken over by the government.⁽²⁾ The diocesan clergy was at a standstill and even a reduction of its members. From 1789, writes the annalist of the Ursulines, the lack of priests elicits a great cry of distress.⁽³⁾

From 1759 – 1800, two hundred and ten priests had died or returned to France. From 1775 – 1800, only one hundred and two priests were ordained; thirty-six others had been ordained in the twenty-five preceding years.

The same annalist reports a strange fact on this subject. "We have noticed that since the conquest, for three priests ordained, four die. This verifies the prediction of a holy woman confined to bed by a strange illness that reduces her to silence. At the arrival of Bishop Briand, she recovered her speech to say that even if he ordained priests, their number would not increase because more would die than would be ordained. I have never been able to approve of her prophecy nor even to have faith in it; however, such is the lot of our poor church, afflicted beyond all expression".

The consequence of this extreme scarcity of religious help was a considerable diminishing of the faith among Canadians. But God had pity on this people whose indifference and incredulity came less from contempt of the faith than from the ignorance of its truths. This is how his goodness drew good from evil.

(2) On July 21, 1773, the Jesuits were suppressed by the brief "Dominus et Redemptor" of Clement XIV. But the Jesuits remained in possession of their property in Canada until the death of Father Cazot, in 1800 with the exception of part of their college in Quebec which had been taken by the troops in 1776.

(3) *Les Ursulines de Québec*, vol. 111 pages 157-158.

In the critical times of which we speak, the elite of the French clergy forced to flee to escape the fury of the revolution, sought refuge abroad.

England, forgetting its sectarian hatred, was moved by the woe of these noble outcasts. She opened wide her doors, welcomed them with respect, and allowed them to practice their ministry freely. "Mass was celebrated everywhere", stated the Bulletin of the Confraternity of Our Lady of Mercy; "and more than one Anglican who had cursed it, now gave it the best room in his house". In London for example more masses were celebrated each day than in any great city in the Catholic world. Christ, the Redeemer, was present everywhere on British soil, with his powerful prayer and his fruitful graces. He shed his blood in abundance and there were few villages which were not sprinkled with it".

England's generosity drew the attention of Bishop Hubert then Bishop of Quebec. Thinking of the spiritual profit his people could draw from these virtuous exiles and reassured on the other hand by the attitude of the British towards them, "he wrote hurriedly to London to solicit the authorization to bring some of those priests to Canada." His request having been granted and passeports obtained from the Minister of British colonies, thirty-four French priests came to offer Canada the help of their ministry, the light of their knowledge, and the examples of their virtues. Of this number, eleven Sulpicians were assigned to the seminary in Montreal. They were Fathers Jean Henri-Auguste Roux, Anthelme Malard, Jean-Baptiste Thavenet, François Joseph-Michel Humbert, Claude Rivière, Antoine Sattin, Antoine-Alexis Molin, François-Marie Robin, Jean-Louis-Melchior Sauvage de Chatillonnet, Philibert Nantelz and Guillaume-Marie de Garnier des Garets. The latter was as yet only a sub-deacon. He continued his theology in Montreal where he was ordained to the priesthood on April 28, 1796. In June of the previous year, 1795, Father Candide Michel le Saulnier had been received in the seminary.⁽⁴⁾

⁽⁴⁾ The colony consisted of twelve priests at the beginning but was reduced to eleven by the illness of one of them. *Life of Father Emery*, P. 470.

Having arrived in Quebec on September 1, 1794, the courageous colony was in Montreal by the twelfth, on the eve of the feast of the Holy Name of Mary. This coincidence appeared to these men a good sign from the queen of heaven. The citizens of the town who had adopted her as its patron, saw in this a new pledge of the protection with which the divine mother had always gratified them.

Having arrived at the end of the island of Montreal, the missionaries "found ten of the chief citizens who had come to meet them and who brought them in their carriages. The following day, feast of the Holy Name of Mary, patronal feast of the parish, the people came to church in throngs to see the French priests and to receive the sacrament of the Eucharist from their hands. Persons of distinction hurried to visit them and to tell them what joy their arrival caused in the whole country."⁽⁵⁾

But the greatest and deepest joy was for the two beloved champions of the company of the Sulpicians who, broken by work and old age, but nevertheless standing on guard, had not anticipated to enjoy a retirement which their age and infirmities required.

On September 13, 1794, the new Sulpicians made their first visit to our mothers. The following day, feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, all returned to celebrate Mass in the hospital chapel.⁽⁶⁾ Good Father Poncin, was thrilled with joy at the sight of this host of spiritual workers in whom the love of Jesus Christ and of souls had lit the flame of apostolic zeal. In the ardor of his gratitude, he said, "Now I can sing my *Nunc Demittis*".

Great as was the joy of Father Brassier at the arrival of these much desired helpers, it could not restore his health which had for some time been weakened by paralysis. But nearing death, the holy man took consolation in the thought that the work for which the Sulpicians had made so many sacrifices would live on.

⁽⁵⁾ Father Emery, P. 470.

⁽⁶⁾ Old memoirs.

In the hands of these youthful and zealous workers, he could in advance, see it becoming strong and flourishing.

Recognizing in Father Roux a remarkable aptitude for the management of business, he lost no time in initiating him to the details of administration. In 1796, he named him ecclesiastical superior of our community. This paternal attention was the last will of the holy man for our mothers. It would put the seal on the solicitude that he had always shown them since the death of Father Montgolfier. Two years later, on October 20, 1798, Father Jean-Gabriel Brassier died, at the revered age of seventy and in the forty-fifth year of his ministry in Canada.

His alms in favor of the hospital and the poor ranked him among the devoted benefactors of our Institute. As Father Brassier had predicted, Father Roux inherited the trust of his confrères who soon named him their superior.

CHAPTER II

The final days of Bishop Hubert, his consideration for our house; his death — Bishop Denaut — Consecration of Bishop Plessis — Death of Sisters Bénard and Céloron.
1794 - 1798

Hardly four years had gone by since the arrival in Canada of the French priests when death came to the one who had called them to share the missionary labor. Bishop Hubert was only fifty-nine but his life had been filled with the difficult work of his ministry.

A devoted friend of religious communities, he surrounded them with his solicitude and his protection. A circular letter he addressed to them on February 27, 1789 and which is still read publicly and solemnly in several monasteries, reveals to us the bishop's benevolence. He says, "I consider the institution of religious orders in the Church as one of the most precious gifts which God had given it." This esteem which Bishop Hubert had for religious orders in general, our community was particularly honored to enjoy. His rapports were always most paternal. In matters in which episcopal sanction was required, Mother Coultée resorted with assurance to his advice. Requested one day to give his advice on a question of finance, the prelate replied:

You could not have taken a better course than that which you took of renting part of your land⁽¹⁾ to Mr. Franchère

(1) This land had been rented on long term lease.

especially under the clauses and conditions of the contract. It would be desirable that you could rent the rest in the same way. I received in good order the passion plant that you had the kindness to send me by captain Dugal. It is in the care of Father Gravé who is greatly interested in it. I beg you to tell Sister Céloron that the relics of St. Vincent de Paul have been placed in the reliquaries I received from her. This obliges me to recommend her frequently to this saint without however, forgetting the other sisters.

I recommend myself anew to your prayers and remain sincerely in Our Lord,

Your most obedient servant,
† Jean-François, Bishop of Québec

Bishop Hubert condescended to visit our community each time he came to Montreal. It was in the course of one of these visits that he gave his approval to our Constitutions drawn up by Father Montgolfier. In 1787 he came to administer confirmation to a few adults; on January 24, 1788 he received the religious vows of Sister Lemaire; in 1790 he sanctioned the election of Mother Coullée ruling that in future, only the administrators would have an active voice in the election of the superior.

In these visits, poverty and the suffering that it entailed did not escape the sharpness of the devoted pastor. Touched by so many privations, he demanded that the sisters share the meal that was served to him whenever he ate with the community. He went so far as to insinuate to priests who accompanied him that they should pay for their meal so as to leave an alms for the house and he was the first to set the example. His generosity did not end there. Almost each year the hospital received large amounts from him. According to the records, these alms together amounted to nearly 10,000 pounds.

True pastor of souls, following the example of the Master, Bishop Hubert could say: "I know my sheep and my sheep know me". To visit them he considered neither distance nor difficulties of travel. These pastoral visits were strenuous work but brought abun-

dant fruit.”⁽²⁾ In July 1795 he undertook the long and difficult voyage to Baie des Chaleurs. He was eager to bring the service of his ministry to these people whom no bishop had yet visited. Consequently, their joy was great if we judge by the manifestations of their filial love and of their faith.

After having provided for the various needs of this Church and scattered the seed of life in hearts eager for divine truths, the prelate returned to Quebec happy and consoled. But obliged to travel one hundred and fifty leagues by land, nearly always on foot, he returned with his health in a state that neither care nor rest could ever restore. On September 1, 1797, he resigned his see in favor of Bishop Denaut, his coadjutor for the past four years, and retired to Château-Richer where he hoped that fresh air and a change of pace would restore enough strength to allow him to exercise a curate’s duty. A fortnight had not gone by since his installation when instead of the desired improvement, he was warned of his end. He was taken immediately to the General Hospital of Quebec where he died on October 17, only six weeks after his retirement. His death was mourned as that of a saint.

His successor, Bishop Denaut, had received the episcopal consecration in the Church of Notre Dame, Montreal on June 29, 1795. Because of the scarcity of priests in the country at that time, he had remained in charge of ecclesiastical ministry at Longueuil for the first three years that he was coadjutor while sharing the administration of the diocese. As he took over the episcopal see of Quebec in 1797, he wished to have a coadjutor according to the example of his predecessors. Thus he had the honor of giving to the Canadian church a great bishop in the person of Bishop Plessis. However, because of the events the Church was then experiencing,⁽³⁾ Bishop Denaut could not receive the confirmation

⁽²⁾ Funeral oration.

⁽³⁾ Pius VI, forced to leave the Vatican on February 20, 1798 was taken from prison to prison and was to die in Vienna in August of the following year. Pius VII, elected to succeed him on March 14, 1800, hurriedly settled matters which had accumulated in the last two years. On April 26, he signed the papal bull by which Father Plessis was named bishop of Canthe and coadjutor of Quebec.

(Biographies of Quebec bishops p. 466)

of this nomination before the end of the year 1800, and the consecration of Bishop Plessis was deferred until January 25 of the following year. The zeal of the former pastor of Quebec for the interest of religion, the trust which his virtue and merits inspired to all, made Bishop Denaut resolve to entrust him with the general administration of affairs. Happy to return to his dear parish of Longueuil, he continued from this parish to watch over the spiritual interest of his vast diocese and to direct its works along with his coadjutor.⁽⁴⁾

The protection of Bishop Denaut for the work of the sisters was assured. The sum of 9,865 pounds, which he had paid in several installments, places him among its main benefactors.

The prelate died on January 17, 1806 at the age of 62 in this same parish of Longueuil which he had so paternally helped by his charity and so constantly edified by his virtues. His memory remained blessed.⁽⁵⁾

At the death of Bishop Denaut, Bishop Plessis took possession of the see and the title of Bishop of Quebec and for nineteen years he governed the Canadian church with tact and wisdom.

Two other names worthy of being joined in the same sentiment of gratitude must be added to those of these benefactors: that of Father François-Henri Gravé de la Rive which we have already mentioned several times in these pages and that of Father Antoine-Bernardin Robert. The first died at Hôtel-Dieu of Quebec on February 14, 1802 at the age of seventy-one. The second died at the General Hospital of Quebec on January 11, 1826 at the age of sixty-nine. Successively superiors at the seminary of Quebec, both made generous alms annually to our house and followed its trials and development with deep interest.

About the same time, two other deaths which occurred at brief intervals afflicted more painfully the family of Mother Coullée.

(4) Old memoirs, Vol 1, p. 323.

(5) Old memoirs, Vo. 1, p. 323.

Besides, God who tries his own, would open for the new superior a series of mournings which in various degrees would touch her sensitive and affectionate heart.

The first death was that of her assistant, Sister Bénard Bourjoly. Born in Boucherville on February 11, 1725, Marie-Joseph Bourjoly was hardly sixteen when she joyfully offered to share the works of our foundress in 1741. Four years of devoted care to the poor and of serious effort in the work of her personal sanctification obtained for her the acceptance of being associated to the first companions of the foundress on August 16, 1746. Three years later on August 23, 1749, she signed their original commitment.

Named almost immediately as first hospitaller of the women, she had only to perfect the virtues which grace had deposited in her flexible and submissive soul in order to become an excellent mother of the poor.

During the rare leisure time she had, she made wax figures of the Child Jesus or she trained her younger companions in Gregorian chant. These occupations responded to the attractions of her deep piety and our memoirs testify that she obtained marked success.

Elected assistant on the death of Sister Rainville in 1783, she remained in this office for the thirteen last years of her life. Gentle but austere for herself, she had the tenderness of a mother towards her sisters, especially the younger ones. In the bitter cold of winter, for example, when the latter had been employed at hard labor, she prepared their cells at night, distributing clothing she had warmed for them so that they might go to bed earlier and be warmer.⁽⁶⁾ Small details one might say, but they let one imagine others of greater worth and reveal to us that exquisite refinement of Sister Bénard which constitutes the charm of community life.

The divine Friend of the meek and humble must have received with kindness this soul so sweetly scented with charity when she

⁽⁶⁾ Old memoirs.

appeared before his judgment seat on January 23, 1796. She was seventy-one years of age and had spent fifty as a sister.

Sister Céloron, mistress of novices, followed Sister Bénard closely in death. The views of the Lord on these two sisters had been very different at the beginning of their career, but they had the same aspiration in the latter period of their life.

Catherine Eury de La Perelle was born in Louisbourg, an important sea port of Cape Breton of which her father was major under French domination. Her mother was Charlotte Aubert de la Chesnay de Gaspé. Catherine received a careful upbringing in line with the distinction of her birth. She had a bright intelligence and an open mind and cultivated with definite success her musical aptitude and her harmonious voice. She excelled at preparing family feasts and when there was need, she could translate her sentiments into charming rhymes. Her exterior charm along with her intellectual gifts assured her the sympathy of many in the world where she settled.

At age twenty Catherine married Pierre-Joseph Céloron de Blainville, son of Jean-Baptiste Céloron, a brilliant military officer who had rendered remarkable services to the colony.⁽⁷⁾ Sought out by a select society, gratified with intelligence and fortune, having become successively mother of nine children, this great lady could not foresee the modest role that Providence would call her to fulfil some day. Gradually, bereavements and isolation occurred in her busy life. Several of her children died at an early age and her husband died when she was hardly thirty-eight. In 1761, her eldest daughter, Catherine, entered the hospital as a boarder; yet this was only a step towards a more retired life. After six months, she entered the novitiate of Hôtel-Dieu where she made profession and later died in office as superior on May 25, 1809.

In 1765, Madeleine, her youngest daughter, aged 16, also went to the hospital, as a boarder at first, and after two years of an easy life in this house, impelled by the virtues which she saw practiced,

(7) Nos gloires nationales P. 563.

she requested to share the work of the sisters. Admitted to the novitiate on September 13, 1766, she had for two years practiced a life of abnegation and zeal when the accident of which we spoke elsewhere suddenly robbed her from our affection.

Suffering greatly from the void that had occurred in her home, Mrs. Céloron had lost no time in joining young Madeleine at the hospital. It was there that God awaited her to request one last sacrifice, that of imitating this beloved child in her fervor. Fifteen months after her daughter's death, on February 5, 1770, she was admitted to the novitiate in the place of her beloved daughter.

This woman of high rank, with no selfish motive did not seek any privilege because of her age, forty-six years, nor the position she had held in the world. She became simple and humble for the love of Jesus Christ and his suffering members. This is what caused our blessed Mother d'Youville to say: "She is not young but she is good and of uncommon virtue." Because of fervor, her novitiate was shortened by eight months and she was admitted to holy vows on July 2, 1771.

The new professed sister showed herself more and more worthy of the trust she had inspired. Used to commanding and being served, Sister Céloron became humble, serviceable, and obedient as a child. These strong virtues coupled with sound judgment and a solid piety soon designated her as appropriate for the function of mistress of novices. Promoted to this office in 1783 she endeavored to instill in the young sisters along with the love of Jesus Christ, that of the poor, also the love of work and of the Institute.

She remained in this office until her death on November 4, 1797.

CHAPTER III

The fiftieth anniversary of Father Poncin's priesthood —
Virtues of Mother Coultée, her devotion to St. Anthony
of Padua; history of the tableau of St. Anthony — Charity
of Mother Coultée towards the sick; the opening of an
infirmary for the Sisters — M. A. Nobless in the novitiate.
1798 - 1804

Better days had dawned for the Church of Montreal with the arrival of new Sulpicians. The religious communities in particular had taken on new life which contributed much towards reconciling Mother Coultée with her responsibility.

Named superior of the three communities of women soon after his arrival, Father Roux had taken with zeal the interest of their souls and that of their works. As soon as he learned the qualities and the virtues of Mother Coultée, he gave her all his esteem and she in return gave him all her trust. This mutual understanding was a great help for the superior as yet unfamiliar with her new functions. In many circumstances it merited advice which strengthened her and lightened the burden of her office.

However, there was another source of enlightenment who inspired the community for almost a half-century. There was another guide in whom Providence had deposited treasures of wisdom, of self-devotion, and of zeal for the welfare of the young community. This guide, so constant and so devoted, instrument of

divine graces for our mothers and the last survivor of their early benefactors, was the good Father Poncin. Father Poncin had dedicated forty-five years of his active life in the service of the hospital. Since 1754, he had been chaplain and confessor of the poor. To this ministry he had added the spiritual direction of the Sisters in 1779.

Now this holy, elderly priest, was nearing the fiftieth anniversary of his priestly life. On such a solemn circumstance, our mothers had a right to manifest their gratitude. On December 30, 1799, there was a great celebration in the whole hospital. The sisters sang couplets of great simplicity no doubt, but which proclaimed the hero. They sang:

What a happy destiny
To have a beloved father
Who leads us straight to heaven
With a heart so gentle and charitable.

And the elderly, on this happy feast, also brought their homage and good wishes to the beloved jubilarian. We extract from their song this verse which, though awkward, does not lack charm:

His virtues let us extol;
His happiness stems from them;
Humility, mother of them all,
Must be esteemed a gem.
She is the vine, they the shoots,
She keeps his soul so humble
That praise, springing from our soul's roots,
Leads him to silence even more humble.

The artless character of these songs shows the simple way that they lived in those good old times. Mother Coullée shared and contributed generously in filial rejoicings.

Completely dedicated to this family whose sanctification was her work at the same time as her joy, in all circumstances she gave it the example of the most respectful veneration and submission towards ministers of the Lord. One of her sisters wrote: When the superior had manifested a desire or simply expressed

a wish, we were no longer able to know the liking of our mother. Her only answer to the observations we sometimes allowed ourselves was this: "My dear Sisters, God wants only our obedience, but let us obey without retort and good-naturedly".

Of amiable and joyous character in times of recreation, Mother Coultée loved to be surrounded by the younger sisters and was entertained by what diverted them. She could never tolerate any sign of sadness in her daughters. If she noticed a gloomy face, she would set her eyes on her in a kindly fashion, and in a persuasive way she would say: "Sister, how sweet is the yoke of the Lord!" Thanks to her excellent memory, she could lighten conversation with a thousand facts which she related humorously. On holidays, she mingled such anecdotes with hymns which she sang herself or had the sisters sing so that God's praises always sanctified these relaxations.

This kindness sometimes inclined her to deeds of charming condescendence which the austere and loving saint of Avila would not have disclaimed. We can judge by these. In the hospital, then as elsewhere for that matter, one could not enjoy lighting in the evening as we do today with gas and electricity. Rare candles disseminated here and there left many corners of the house in darkness. If timid novices exhibited fear when sent on errands to these dark places, the kind mother was happy then to be on their path and as St. Theresa used to hasten to the spot on hearing the halting steps of her sisters to offer light and help, so Mother Coultée did not fail to accompany novices in difficulty and to reassure them while she made light of their fear.

At the end of the day when laundry was done at the river's edge⁽¹⁾ it was a joy to notice Mother Coultée from afar waiting on the porch for the return of her daughters. At recreation time, their fatigue was quickly forgotten with the lively chats in which the kind mother excelled. The best encouragement she gave to

(1) The laundry system was modified in 1827 when the first stone laundry was built. Vol. 11 p. 69.

work was her own diligence. To her, the use of time was sacred. Skillful at needlework, she spent her rare leisure moments doing embroidery. She excelled with good taste in cutting and matching silk cloth. Church vestments and altar linen were her preference. Our sacristy still possesses precious pieces embroidered by her.

First at spiritual exercises and also the most energetic at work, Mother Coullée was a model of constant edification. Her piety, however, had nothing austere about it: it was rather simple, unaffected and solid. Her greatest devotion was to: Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin and St-Joseph. She also loved and venerated in a special way St. Anthony of Padua. In her difficulties she had recourse to him with a trust that suffered no refusal. The tableau of this saint which is still seen in the bursar's office, was often a witness of her vibrant faith. When an urgent need arose Mother Coullée would draw up a request immediately and insert it in the frame of the tableau. Saint Anthony was thereby to get a more exact knowledge of the matter and he never failed to reward her invincible trust.

This tableau has its own little story which deserves to be told here. It comes from Miss Marie Vitré who was a boarder at the hospital under our blessed Mother d'Youville and who bequeathed it to us by her will in 1770 along with the sum of 500 pounds for the poor.

A few years before her admission to the hospital, Miss Vitré's house was one day threatened by a fire which had already engulfed the neighboring houses. Her shock was such that she had to flee before the imminence of the danger without saving any of her furniture.

Disconsolate and tearful, she entreated St. Anthony to protect her house. In the meantime a person who had come to assist the victims risked entering the home in jeopardy in order to save a few items from the fire. In removing the tableau of St. Anthony, to his great surprise, he felt the canvas resisting so that the picture remained attached to the wall while he carried away the frame. At that very instant the wind died down, the flames

withdrew, and the house which had seemed doomed to destruction was happily saved.

The attendants recognized the author of this unexpected protection. All with common accord attributed it to Saint Anthony. This contributed greatly to the increase in Miss Vitré of the devotion she already professed towards the great miracle worker. Her aim in willing us this precious picture was to assure in the future, the same veneration she had had for it.

Equally dedicated to mortification, to work and to exercises of piety, Mother Coullée would not tolerate for herself the least exception to the common rule. She required little for her nourishment and this little was taken from the more simple foods. When her age and her infirmities required a more delicate diet an expressed order from the superior was necessary to make her accept it.

On the other hand, she knew how to make others accept what she obstinately refused. If she saw a sister weak and ill, she promptly obtained for her all the mitigations possible. She increased her solicitude when illness kept someone in bed. In such a case, she did not fail to visit her each day and when she could not herself, she sent a senior sister to bring her apologies and her encouragement. It is in these times so meritorious and so crucifying for human nature that she recommended with the greatest earnestness to her daughters conformity to the will of God. "Fortify yourself more and more in the sentiments of perfect resignation to the will of God", she wrote to an ailing sister whom she had sent to the country in order to regain her strength in the fresh air. "Have patience in your illness and take the necessary time to arrive at a complete recovery if that is God's will. May you have this conformity to His will in all that God will be pleased to ordain for you."

Mother Coullée did not allow this great kindness to decline into weakness. She was not insensitive to even the slightest faults of her daughters. She took care above all to see that charity, the consolidation of family life, be scrupulously guarded by them.

If conversations threatened to breach it, she did not fail to raise her voice and to say firmly, "Sisters, let us spare the neighbor!" She had a profound respect for all persons dedicated to God and especially for priests. Never did she tolerate the slightest joking where they were concerned.

Mother Coutlée's charity applied firstly to members of her community and to the poor of her house, but she did not stop there; she reached out to all who were struck by misfortune. Her heart was especially moved by hidden distress. One day an unfortunate person who had once enjoyed a certain affluence called her to the parlor. He informed her about his misfortune, the distress of his wife and children who were without shelter and without food, and casting himself down before her, he said. "Mother, I and my family are lost if you do not come to our help". This was more than was required to move the heart of the compassionate mother. She raised the solicitor to his feet, spoke to him with kindness, inquired about the needs of each of his children and dismissed him well supplied with relief.

It was a great consolation for Mother Coutlée to be able in 1804 to provide a place of retirement and rest for the sick. Up to this time . . . and this shows the spirit of mortification that reigned then in the community . . . the sisters had no infirmary. The generosity of the three Misses Gamelin⁽²⁾ and of their sister, Mrs Trottier de la Monodière, nieces of Madam d'Youville, provided for an infirmary. A few years earlier in 1776, they had offered to have repaired at their expense, the rooms they were to occupy as boarders at the hospital on condition that after their death these rooms be converted into an infirmary for the sisters. The last of these generous Christians having died in 1804, their rooms were soon prepared according to their intentions and opened up to the sick sisters.

Among the recruits who came in the course of the five last years to warm the heart of Mother Coutlée, let us mention the entrance

(2) Daughters of Mrs Maugras, the sister of our Blessed Foundress.

of Marie-Anne Nobless, a young convert of English origin about whom we spoke earlier. Born in Canada — we do not know where — on April 12, 1775, she was deprived as a young child of her mother and a home.

Her father, a simple soldier without means, though he was an unbeliever, entrusted her and her older sister to the care of our mothers. With his consent, the two were instructed in the faith by Father Poncin and baptized by him. The eldest received the name of Catherine and the younger that of Marie-Anne. As an adolescent, Catherine returned to the world where she settled. Marie-Anne, on the contrary, was to know no other home than that where the flame of faith had enlightened her soul. Her vicacious nature and her open mind soon drew the attention of Father Poncin: he wanted her as a pupil. He used his leisure time to teach her grammar and history stressing preferably Bible History. The child grew up studious and intelligent, using all her free time to increase the treasure of her knowledge. With the kindness of a father, Father Poncin rejoiced and encouraged her for her success. But this virtuous priest tried especially to implant in this soul a liking for piety, the love of duty, and a great compassion for the unfortunate. Flexible as soft wax, the heart of Marie-Anne lent itself marvelously to the formation he tried to give her. One day, the love of the poor became such a burning flame that resolving to serve them, she begged Mother Coullée to admit her immediately to the novitiate. But the prudent mother feared that a natural attachment for the home of her childhood prompted this resolution. She required her to give it more thought.

Finally, she was admitted on October 13, 1800 and after two years of training, on October 19, 1802 Sister Nobless joined her adopted family. If the former convert was not surrounded by her parents on that day, she did have “to witness her vows a venerable old man whose wrinkles of seventy years disappeared behind smiles of happiness”. It was the beloved Father Poncin who with tearful eyes, rejoiced as he considered the generosity with which his pious student offered herself to God.

This generosity remained the characteristic virtue of this beautiful life. It grew in proportion to the sacrifices that were required by her new role of servant of the poor until the day when a deadly epidemic afforded the courageous sister, then a septuagenarian, the glory of dying a victim of her nightly labors with victims of the plague.

CHAPTER IV

Deaths of Sisters Gosselin and Dussault — Biographical sketch of Father Poncin; his zeal for the house of God; his devotedness for the spiritual affairs of our house; his priestly virtues; his admirable conduct in his last illness; his death.
1804 - 1812

To better the condition of the sisters so that they might give themselves more completely to works of charity, such was the objective of Mother Coultée who was always so attentive to seize every occasion to favor zeal. It was thus that four years earlier, in 1800 she had found a way of sparing them from work in the fields. Only one among them had been designated to reside at Pointe-Saint Charles to supervise the farmers. This was Sister Marie-Joseph Gosselin. These duties were not unfamiliar to her. In the time of our beloved foundress she had done this type of work to everyone's satisfaction.

This dear sister had been abundantly endowed, not with remarkable gifts, but with solid ones which were a precious resource for the quality of life and hard work. Her health and her love of work were untiring; she feared no difficulty and this without prejudice to fervor. Sister Gosselin was faithful to pious exercises. This is proved by a high regard for the rule and a deeply religious spirit. On communion days neither rain nor cold prevented her from travelling the distance from Pointe-Saint Charles to the com-

munity. It did one good to see her then in deep recollection as she approached the communion table; then after mass to see her return eagerly to her work, joyful and comforted.

When the orphans were old enough and capable of working on the farm, they were entrusted to her. It was with these children that the kindness of her heart was revealed. Like a real mother she was as careful to allow them rest as to assign them work and knew how to make them take an interest in what they did. The trust she inspired in these children she herself showed it towards her superiors. Her prompt obedience and her childlike simplicity towards them made her a docile instrument in their hands, a helper they could count on for all kinds of work. Sanctified by these humble virtues practised with constancy, Sister Gosselin went to God on August 22, 1805 laden with merits and good works. She was in her seventy-sixth year and had fifty-one years of religious vows.

This fervent sister left in the community a sister who had followed her closely in the ways of devotedness and sacrifice and who was to outlive her by ten years. She was Marie-Geneviève. Though we precede the dates, this is the place to recall her memory and to insert the account of her death.

Received into the community by our blessed foundress on November 1, 1756, Geneviève was at her profession given the name of Sister Marie. This second oblation generously offered to the Lord by her parents shows well what spiritual nourishment was received in the family home.

Like her older sister, Sister Marie, she inherited excellent dispositions of virtue. Mirth and pleasantness made up the background of her character; a great attraction for mortification and an immense need to give of herself were her principle traits. The office of bursar which she held most of her life gave a free reign to her instinct for generosity. Having a gift of patience that withstood testing, she had such self control that never a fiery or hurtful word altered her peace or that of others. In the most delicate situations, prudence and the spirit of conciliation always dictated her response and her final word.

This dear sister intensified her contempt of self and her love of poverty. The time she gave to the poor always appeared too short and most precious: she coveted it. So as not to lose any of it, she did not take the time to knit her stockings but wrapped her feet in cotton or linen.

After spending herself during fifty-nine years in the service of God and the poor in complete self-forgetfulness, this generous soul was called to eternal rest on October 11, 1815.

Six years earlier on June 7, 1809 Mother Coullée had witnessed the death of Sister Dussault who had been her assistant for thirteen years.

Marie-Angélique Dussault was born at Levis in 1736. Her father was Jean Dussault and her mother was Angélique Huart. Having joined the little society of our mothers on November 14, 1756, Marie had been practising true virtues for four years when our Blessed Mother d'Youville resolved to undertake the work of foundlings. As we said earlier, from 1754 to 1759, seventeen of these children had been taken in by this charitable mother. In adopting this work definitely in 1760 the foundress thought of Sister Dussault. This person of good will would be the instrument prepared by Providence to fulfil this mission of mercy and of zeal. Her devotion and abnegation responded to the mother's hopes. For thirty-six years, sustained by her spirit of sacrifice and her piety, Sister Dussault watched with loving tenderness over the cradles of these little ones whom the world rejects but whose angels see the face of God; whose souls formed in the divine image were redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Absorbed in this work of protection and of love, she went her way among the sisters quietly without contention, without meddling in affairs that did not concern her. In 1796 because of her wisdom and prudence, she was named to the office of assistant. She continued to edify her sisters by her respect for higher authority, her mortification, her diligence at work.

To add more worth to this life already full, God submitted her in her latter years, to great physical suffering. Among other things,

she had to undergo a painful bone operation. Struck shortly afterward by dropsy, she had been languishing in the infirmary for some time when one day, feeling urged to visit the Blessed Sacrament, she said candidly to one of the sisters: "I am going to adore Jesus". It was the eternal adoration that would begin for this soul hungry for God. As she knelt at the infirmary window opening on to the chapel, she sank suddenly. The sisters hastened to her, but she was already dead. Jesus himself had come to meet her as she sought him with so much love.

Sister Dussault was seventy-two years old and in the fifty-third year of her religious life.

Now we come to a trial more painful than others. The beloved Father Poncin, who for fifty-six years, had been dedicating to the service of the hospital his experience, his knowledge, his solicitude, his whole heart, had now reached the age when everything brings to one thoughts of death and eternity. These thoughts were so familiar to him that he no longer expressed a desire, no longer planned anything without adding: "If God lends me life, I shall do such a thing."

Before this wonderful apostle and father dies, let us cast a glance at the virtues which rendered his memory so dear to our mothers. A few biographical notes written by Father Bédard, his confrère, for their edification and consolation, will reveal the main traits which endeared him to us.

Claude Poncin was born in Jarcieu, five leagues from Vienna, on February 24, 1725. His father, Jean Poncin, a middle-class merchant, and his mother Marie Clameron, enjoyed comfortable living. They were, above all, solidly virtuous and tried to give their children a Christian upbringing. Still young, Claude was entrusted to the Jesuits. He took academic studies in Vienna where his fondness for study and his exemplary conduct earned for him the esteem and praise of his professors. From Vienna he went to Bourg-Saint-Andeol for his philosophy.

His priesly vocation soon crowned a childhood thus spent in love of work and of virtue. Having entered the theological seminary at Viviers in 1746, he was ordained to the priesthood during the Ember Days of December 1749, and admitted almost immediately into the society of the Sulpicians. It is there that he felt in his heart a zeal for faraway missions, and the following year he obtained the permission to dedicate his life to them by coming to join his confrères in Montreal.

He was then only twenty-five years old, but his mind was prepared for work and for the difficulties of the ministry. According to his biographical sketch, he was already considered a saint. The most humble and the most laborious functions did not hamper his zeal. To catechize the children of the parish, to instruct them in schools, "to initiate with apostolic simplicity the Negroes and the Pawnees in the practices of Christian living", to visit the sick of the town and countryside, to comfort the dying and bring them the hope of true joys, such were his chosen occupations — those which took up the leisure moments when not engaged in ministerial duties.

His rare moments of leisure were dedicated to teaching Latin to young men destined to the priesthood. Numbered among his pupils are Bishop Denaut, Father Louis Payet, and several other priests remarkable for their knowledge and virtue.

The beauty of God's house impassioned this zealous priest. For many years in charge of the parish sacristy, he did not limit himself to simple supervision. With remarkable care and good taste he decorated the altars himself, prepared the singing, and saw to the perfect execution of the divine office. He shared this zeal with generations of children whom he trained for the formalities of altar service and for the regular chant of the psalms and other Gregorian melodies.

The fatigue attached to these practices, the levity and indocility of the children, did not discourage a man so taken up with the dignity of the cult. He found a reward for his trouble in the honor

he procured for God. All that related to it was the object of his solicitude.

Until then the lighting in churches of the town and country and even in the cathedral of Quebec was maintained by means of fish oil. One can imagine the unpleasantness that resulted from such a system. To remedy this, Father Poncin introduced into the country the use of wax candles and he taught our mothers how to make them. He repaired organs, revised hymn books, and had them printed by our mothers⁽¹⁾ and for many years drew up the ordo for the seminary.

If the care that this priest took to embellish the house of God was so great, how much greater must have been the care he took to embellish souls which are the living temples of the Holy Spirit! Since 1754 we saw him exercise the duty of spiritual guide to the poor of the hospital, at first, for twenty-three years and then to the sisters and the poor for thirty-three years. By the way Father Montgolfier praised him to Father Emery, his superior general, we can see how his spiritual family was uplifted by his long and persevering ministry, his knowledge, encouragement and good example. Father Montgolfier said, "He is a saint, a man perfect in all his proceedings."⁽²⁾ If he did not have the prestige of outstanding gifts, he had that much more efficacious one of self-effacement, a hidden virtue which does much good. He had a persevering zeal which was rebuffed neither by obscurity, nor duration, nor responsibility for any task of giving Jesus Christ to souls and souls to Jesus Christ.

To give souls to Jesus Christ, to form fervent spouses for him, such was the main solicitude of Father Poncin and the great work of his life. To succeed in it, he utilized more than the wisdom of his own determination more than the power and the kindness of his exhortations: he used the persuasion of his example. En-

(1) Our studios still have the print he ordered from France for this purpose.

(2) *État de la compagnie des prêtres de Saint-Sulpice*; M. Emery, supérieur. 15 sept. 1784.

tirely dead to the world, an enemy of its principles, refusing even to hear about them, he seemed moved only by the interests of God. To live by faith, to judge things only in its light, without ever acting through any human motive, to walk in the presence of God, trying always to please him, to do everything and to suffer everything for love of him, such were his preferred guidelines, those he tried to inspire to the persons he directed. He urged everyone to walk firmly in the ways of self-abnegation and of Christian simplicity. One's perfection was to be based on humility, the entire relinquishing of human views, and self-seeking. To affirm souls in this manner, he was first to tread the path. Poor, with a simple life-style he tolerated nothing in his use that was not of inferior quality or was not an absolute necessity. His preference was for old clothes. The evangelical counsel to have only one tunic seemed to be his rule. He had difficulty exchanging his old and only cassock for a new one, though the old one was well worn out. One had to use innocent devices to gain his consent. His room was very simple. He had no arm chair. He used a board instead of a cushion on his chair.

His politeness was founded on self-abnegation. He had great charity towards his confrères and considered himself the least of them all. He was as attentive to the needs of others as he was forgetful of his own. He was careful not to disturb anyone, not even the servants whose services he accepted only in urgent need and always reluctantly.

One of his preferred mortifications was to submit to common rule in all things. Not only for pious exercises was he with his confrères, but at recreations he was always in their company. He was cheerful and pleasant and yet full of deference and reserve. Never did he give advice on any subject whatever without adding, "That is my humble opinion". But humility is not faint-heartedness. When he believed his sentiments were in line with the truth and founded on good principles, he could uphold them with firm modesty always tempered by a pleasant smile.

His obedience toward his superiors was that of a loving and respectful son. "Whatever his desires or his sentiments, as soon

as authority had spoken, all was settled. He submitted without arguing and good-naturedly". At all times his superiors could count "on his exactitude and his services". The traditions and customs of the society to which he was happy to belong were sacred to him. The least items of discipline had his respect. It is even according to his observations that a handbook was drawn up for the service of the parish.

Accustomed to deprive himself of superfluity in all things, Father Poncin observed the most austere frugality at his meals. His breakfast consisted most often of a piece of dry bread taken from left-overs of the previous day and a bit of wine mixed with water. Even until the age of eighty-two he observed rigorously the fasts that were obligatory. Had it not been that illness obliged him to accept certain mitigations, advanced age did not appear to be a sufficient reason to use the Church's dispensations.

Thus subdued by self-denial, penance, and fasting, simple in his relationships, completely given to the action of the Spirit who teaches one to despise worldly things in order to savour only the heavenly, the saintly priest loved to retire often in the company of the Divine Host and to prolong his conversation with Him. He was often taken unawares kissing the floor in his room or absorbed in meditation. With the authorization of his superior, he rose daily at three thirty so as to utilize the silence of the night for reciting his breviary and to give more time to prayer and meditation.

From meditation in a solemn and recollected demeanor he went to say Mass. On seeing him imbued by the divine majesty and radiant with joy, one felt that he was enveloped by the presence of God. All the functions of the ministry he performed revealed in him the same religious spirit. We admired above, the precision with which he observed Church discipline and the least details of the liturgy. This precision he tried to impress on our mothers. He went as far as holding practices of sacred chant in order to enhance the solemnity of their feasts and religious ceremonies. Thanks to his teaching, our church was long renowned for the beauty and solemnity of the singing heard there.

After so much care given to the sanctification of souls and to his own sanctification, at the age of sixty he had something to reproach himself. Not gifted with preaching, as yet he had never preached. However, he supplemented with instructions and exhortations. He reproached himself that preaching was lacking in his ministry.

He wished to make amends. About to enter his eightieth year, he applied himself to drawing up and memorizing sermons which he gave in the hospital chapel with touching simplicity.

Later stricken with deafness, he feared that this infirmity would be detrimental to the good direction he wished to give to the community, so he begged his superiors to relieve him. Father Roux did not share his fears. He figured, on the contrary, that Father Poncin in whom the weight of age and infirmities had diminished neither the fervor of his zeal nor the love of regularity, could with his intimate knowledge of souls and of the needs of the hospital, still do much good. However, in order to leave him more leisure, on September 29, 1807, he gave him as an assistant Father Jean-Baptiste Chicoisneau, the oldest of his confrères.

Father Poncin's zeal was not limited to souls; it extended even to the temporal needs of the house. We spoke earlier of the industries he taught the sisters and the poor for the support of their work. Not content with putting at their service his knowledge and his mechanical arts, he opened his wallet to them. Shortly before his death he gave them fifteen hundred pounds to order from Europe a fire pump. However, the generous donor did not have the consolation of seeing it installed.

Already in 1800 an attack of paralysis had obliged Father Poncin to give up temporarily the religious services of our house. The sequel of this attack was not serious. Despite his seventy-five years, thanks to his strong temperament, he was able a few months later to resume his ministry. But complications soon occurred and when Father Chicoisneau was given him as assistant, he discontinued saying mass regularly at the hospital. On rare solemnities, such as titular feasts for example, or ceremonies of religious

profession, our mothers still had the joy of having him celebrate the sacred mysteries. It is thus that he presided at the renewal of their vows at the close of the retreat of July 1807.⁽³⁾ On February 24, 1811, the anniversary of his baptism, they saw him approach the altar for the last time. It was from his sick room that he would henceforth recommend to God the interests of those souls for whom he would soon answer. It was for them, according to his words that he would offer the better part of his sufferings.

Toward the end of the following month, the beloved patient had to move definitively to the infirmary. Before making this sacrifice, he arranged everything with care in his room and put his business matters in order to the smallest detail. In a few days the illness progressed alarmingly. On March 30 his condition appeared so serious that Father Roux, his superior deemed it expedient to administer Holy Viaticum. However, the doctor succeeded in drawing him out of this first crisis. The following day which was a Sunday, the patient found the courage to go to the sacristy in order to hear mass. Taking advantage of the respite from his illness, he spent the rest of the day and the following days in spiritual exercises: breviary, readings, meditations, etc. Reflections on God's judgments by Father Saint-Jure, appeared to preoccupy him and to tire him. The book was taken from him and another was substituted: *The Suffering of Jesus Christ*. Immediately his heart was gladdened and his confidence restored.

Always, even when he was in pain, he received his visitors courteously. He pitied the doctor and those who had to render him unpleasant services; yet his own sufferings did not make him complain. In order to forget them, he plunged his thoughts more deeply into God. His breviary did not leave him through the day or night. If its reading tired him and his superior dispensed him, he would give it up for the time being. But the following day the patient begged to be allowed to draw a few insights from this faithful companion of his long life and to read a few prayers. No

(3) Notes of Sister Raizenne

longer able to hold the book in his weak hands, he begged the orderly to render him this service. "A brave and generous soldier, he would not lay down his arms until he had reached the very end."

On May 8, the imminent danger called for the administration of the last rites. The patient accepted this with visible contentment; he joined with fervor in the prayers of the Church, presented his own hands for the anointing and received the plenary indulgence. All the treasures of divine mercy having been applied, he could without fear go to meet his judge. To those who suggested similar thoughts to him he expressed loving gratitude. A confrère, having, however, reminded him of these words of Paul to Timothy: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; for the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice", he was saddened and protested with a gesture that he was not worthy of that crown. His confrère spoke of a "crown of mercy". Immediately the humility of the dying man was satisfied and a smile of contentment brightened up his features.

As life was receding, his recollection became deeper. His lips were seen to be moving in prayer or to kiss his crucifix. Finally, the evening of May 10 brought the end. His confrères, assembled for prayers. The dying patient joined in these prayers, kissed his crucifix one last time, and expired.

The Grey Nuns had lost one of their most devoted guides here below; but they numbered one more protector in heaven. The veneration in which his memory was held, the high praise given to his virtue, further increased this hope. A solemn service was held at the hospital more out of grateful duty than to relieve this soul undoubtedly admitted to the vision of God.

Doctor Selby, noted for his piety as well as for his talents and skills, had treated Father Poncin the last twelve years of his life. He declared he had never noticed any selfishness in his patient and that after witnessing his virtues as well as that of Sister D'ailleboust from Hôtel-Dieu, he needed no miracles to vouch

for the truth of our holy faith. We relate the details of Father Poncin's edifying life because of his closeness to the hospital.

It was for so long and so intimately linked with that of our religious family that it was, so to say, part of it and belongs to its history. From each of its traits there comes a lesson and we did not wish to lose any memories that could make them live on.

We must now come back on earlier facts which we forcibly omitted so as not to interrupt the course of our story.

CHAPTER V

The hospital cares for mental patients — The excessive poverty of the hospital; legacies and help received on time. New wards opened to the poor; five are maintained by the Sulpicians — New industries — Death of Sister Demers — A few recruits — Fiftieth anniversary of Mother Coultée.
1800 – 1814

With the work of foundlings definitively taken up in 1763, Madam d'Youville had opened an asylum for mental patients. Continued as long as the lodges in the hospital enclosure could shelter the patients, this work was forcibly abandoned when these lodges went to ruin; the community could not afford to rebuild them.

In January 1801, the government requested Mother Coultée to resume this work. The charitable mother could not refuse any type of service and consented to give way to it once again. But she thought the occasion would be good to point out to the Legislative Council the precarious financial situation of her house. Responsible for transacting this affair, Judge Panet requested that she set up a statement of accounts and expenses of the hospital.⁽¹⁾ This report was not preserved but the few lines that accompanied it show to what extreme poverty our mothers were reduced. These words are dated January 29, 1801. "You see Sir, that the expense

(1) Old journal — vol. 1, p. 14.

far exceeds the income. Thus we lack things that are necessary; some of the buildings will soon be in ruins because we have not the means to repair them. It would not be possible to increase the hospital personnel because of lack of space and the great number of poor this house already shelters. However, if these gentlemen will construct buildings to receive these mental patients, we shall display great zeal for their relief."

The following year, Sir Robert Shore, governor, had a stone building about 30 X 20 erected a short distance from the hospital, and parallel with the sidewalk of the church. It contained eight lodges. These lodges usually housed eight mental patients.⁽²⁾ At the same time the government established a commission to examine the insane and to see to the protection of the foundlings and it ascribed to the hospital certain allocations for the support of these two works. The commission was made up of Mr. James Mc Gill, Mr. Jean-Baptiste Perinault, Mr. Louis Panet, Mr. R. Sym and Mr. George Selby. Hence the name of commission of foundlings.

On the other hand, Providence inspired to a few good people the generous thought of endowing the poor hospital. It is true that our mothers could not immediately benefit from these legacies, but they could count on them for the future. It is thus that in 1801, Mr. Nicolas Berthelet, uncle of Mr. Olivier Berthelet whose name and generosity are known to all Grey Nuns, willed the sum of 6,000 pounds. In 1814, it is Mr. Simon Mc Tavish, a man of another faith but with wide and disinterested views, who inserted

(2) Towards 1830, we read in the memoirs, "the community without dismissing the patients entrusted to their care, ceased to admit new ones because the building destined to shelter them had become unsanitary and insufficient. As there were now only two patients in the lodges, the hospital made the necessary repairs at its own expense.

The community did not intend to discontinue forever the care of the insane. It ceased admitting them in the lodges of the old building because it felt these were no longer suitable for the poor patients; but it would probably have continued to care for the insane if the Legislature had built on the property of the General Hospital a suitable building to shelter them . . . one proportioned to needs of the population."

in his will the following clause: "I give and bequeath to each of the two religious communities in this city commonly called the General Hospital of Grey Sisters and Hôtel-Dieu, the sum of one thousand pounds, current money aforesaid, being convinced that the said communities are of great public benefit and deserving attention."

In 1805 Mr. Pierre Martel bequeathed to the hospital the sum of 2,400 pounds. In 1809 Father Cherrier, pastor of Saint-Denis: 8,092 pounds. The community was, however, to receive this money only in 1844.

This help came in time to restore courage and make our mothers appreciate the truth of our foundress' words: "Providence is always watching over those who serve it and trust in its care." Never, perhaps, had their trust been more severely tested. There were times where wheat was altogether lacking. The year 1810, among others, was particularly harsh. "Intense cold lasted all winter that, as a result, there was a great dearth of grain and fruit. An interesting detail: strawberries and raspberries appeared in the fields only at the end of September. Apple trees, plum trees, and cherry trees which blossomed in October did not bear fruit that year." Few in number and obliged to work hard and frequently in to the night, the sisters had only potatoes and a bit of beef to nourish them. One morning two of them fainted from exhaustion as they approached the table.

Meanwhile, one day, Father Roux came to celebrate mass at the hospital. After mass he was led to the community room where the Sisters were assembled for breakfast. The chaplain, Father Chicoisneau, sat next to him at table but did not take anything. Astonished, his superior asked him the reason. "How can I eat," Father Chicoisneau answered emotionally, "when these poor sisters have no bread". One can imagine the bewilderment of the sisters on seeing their distress thus exposed. Father Roux was pleased, on the contrary, and the first thing he did as he returned to the seminary was to have one hundred portions of wheat sent.

Later, in a similar circumstance, it is Mr. Saint-Luc de Lacorne who, informed of their privations, sent them an abundant supply of molasses and rice.

About 1812, at the time of the American Revolution, which kept many Canadians under arms for so long, there was the same distress. Wheat sold at eight, twelve, and even twenty-four pounds a bushel. Under such conditions, it was hardly possible for the hospital to replenish the supply of flour about to be exhausted. Our mothers found it prudent, therefore, to preserve for the sick what remained, and they resolutely adopted a diet of potatoes. Warned to restrict the quantity of bread to the sick, the baker, Isaac Dupuis, saw to what fast the sisters were submitting themselves, and he was saddened. One day, unable to stand it any longer, Isaac called Mother Coullée to the parlor. "Mother," he said with a baker's faith, "let your sisters eat bread. Providence supplies us some. Though I bake, there is always enough flour left for another ovenful."

This maternal Providence even imposed real sacrifices on the people inspired to help the sisters. Thus, this same year and the next, the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame took from their own poverty fifty measures of wheat which they gave to the hospital.

In 1816, the seminary established a foundation for five indigent people, providing 400 pounds and twelve bushels of wheat a year for each one. On the space between the lodges and the hospital, a ward of 30 to 40 feet was built to shelter them. It was called Molin Hall in memory of the first payments made by the bursar of the seminary to cover the cost of this foundation. The indigents were installed there on October 28 of the same year and until 1844 when these wards were demolished, five indigents were always maintained under the same conditions by the Sulpicians.

The will of Father Jean-Baptiste Pouguet, pastor of Berthier who died on May 17, 1818, shows him at this time to be filled with charity for religious institutions.

After providing for the subsistence of his two sisters, he ordered that what would remain of his estate after their death be sold and given to the two hospitals in Montreal. Furthermore, he willed to Hôtel-Dieu, to the Congregation of Notre Dame, to the General Hospital of this city, and to the Ursulines of Three Rivers the sum of 4,000 pounds each on condition that the sisters of these institutions would recite in common at church in one of their spiritual exercises, a Reparation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus once a week for six months or twice a month for a year.

Among other benefactors of this time we find the names of Father Jean-André Rimbault, Father Candide-Michel le Saulnier, Sulpician, Louis Gauthier, Michel Brunet, Denis Viger, Joseph Lafleur, Lanctôt, Mc Gill, Tardy, Fortier, M. de la Vérendrye, Fréchette, Gilbert, etc. So many generous people about to die wished according to the gospel, to send their treasures on before them.

While alms came from outside, the diligent workers were not idle inside. Given to unceasing labor, they learned all sorts of industries that anyone was willing to teach them. In 1800 Father Jean-Joseph Roy, pastor had taught them the secrets of gilding. Since then they have gilded tabernacles, tableaux and objects of art furnished by the studio of Philippe Liébert, painter and sculptor who was set up above the bake-shop of the hospital.

We spoke elsewhere of their first efforts at book-binding. Thanks to more detailed instructions given them by Mr. Barichon and to the two presses they received, they perfected themselves in this work and practised it on a larger scale. Sister Demers, among others, had succeeded in binding and gilt-edging so well that her teacher sent her his customers.

An unfortunate incident, however, obliged them to suspend this work momentarily. On June 6, 1803, a terrible fire destroyed the College of Montreal and the presses recently loaned to this Institution were destroyed in the ruins. Let us mention in passing that this college, the first which existed in Montreal, was opened on October 21, 1773 in the old Château-Vaudreuil at the place known today as "Place Jacques-Cartier."

Named a few years later to the farm at Pointe-Saint-Charles, Sister Demers did not remain there long. On July 3, 1811, she was struck in full activity by cholera. Carried immediately to the community, she died there after two hours of intense suffering. She was only thirty-six years old.

She was a generous collaborator that Mother Coutlée lost at that moment. Having entered the novitiate at sixteen with a robust constitution and an exceptionally happy disposition, Marie-Joseph Demers had put no restriction to the gift of herself to God and the works of the institute. Lowly works, repulsive duties, the most trifling as well as the most austere practices of religious life, found her equally punctual, generous, and faithful. A spirit of faith permeated this upright and sincere person; therein she found the secret for obeying promptly to her superiors and that of joyously rendering kind services to her sisters and the poor. If a job had been forgotten or forcibly postponed and was discreetly accomplished by an intelligent and good worker, one could guess which charitable hand had repaired the omission.

This detail proves that Sister Demers possessed the virtues of mortification. Her preference for worn and patched clothing, her attention to avoid superfluity in all things, betrayed a soul filled with deep contempt of self and entirely penetrated with the Christian spirit.

In going to heaven, Sister Demers would not abandon her family to whom she had been so filially devoted and which had been in jeopardy the last four years. Death had created voids which had not been filled. A few days after her death as of a favor due to her intervention, two new recruits, Marie-Angélique Leduc and Marguerite-Madeleine Lempron came to the novitiate and consoled the grief of our mothers.

These recruits were a rebirth in the present; they were also a promise for the future, for from now on candidates for the novitiate would not be lacking. Our mothers experienced a joy that was all the greater because the scarcity of subjects had until then been the great trial of the society. Since its foundation in fact, the

novitiate had never numbered more than three or four candidates at one time. After Canada had fallen to the British, vocations were still scarcer. On two occasions, in the year 1793 and 1797, the novitiate of the institute remained completely empty.

Why was recruitment so slow? Here are two reasons: The obligations the sisters were under to remain faithful to the Letters patent of the king; also the hostile dispositions after the conquest of the British government toward religious communities. According to Jesuits after 1766 (the date is not precise) the government forbade religious communities to recruit novices, and on November 15, 1722, Bishop Briand complained about this to Cardinal Castelli in the following terms: "I asked the king of Great Britain the permission to receive subjects in an address signed by the clergy and the people; I fear I will not obtain it. Two years have elapsed and I have yet no reply." The prohibition of receiving novices was reiterated in the Royal ordinances of 1791.

Before such opposition by civil authorities, ecclesiastical authority could not prescribe for religious communities any other rule than that of the strictest prudence. Thus in approving the constitutions set up by Father Montgolfier in 1790, Bishop Hubert insisted on the discretion to observe in admitting subjects.

It belonged then, only to time and events to modify the attitude of minds in this regard. But when came the era of far-away foundations, of epidemics, of the opening of hospitals, we would see young women eager to devote themselves, disdaining wordly pleasure, come eagerly to increase the ranks of the Sisters of Charity and disperse in numerous groups all over North America in order to spread to a greater number of poor the knowledge and charity of Jesus Christ.

At least, if vocations were scarce in the beginning, they were solid and cultivated with care. This small number naturally rendered easier the unity of views and principles, and a greater union of hearts. Mother Coullée who was the soul of the family and who had reigned over it with kindness and gentleness for over

twenty years, was in 1814, to receive a touching testimony of this cordial unity.

October 14 of that year marked the fiftieth anniversary of her dedication to the Lord. Works, privations, and bereavements had filled her long career without altering the energy of her soul, without diminishing her sweet and maternal solicitude towards the persons the Lord had entrusted to her. The gratitude and tender affection with which she had inspired her daughters rendered this anniversary particularly dear to them. They wished to solemnize it by joyous demonstrations.

We have no details on the essentially religious part of the feast, but it is permissible to presume that on the morning of such a day the beloved jubilarian must have renewed her vows at the foot of the altar, surrounded by the sisters and the poor, aided in her thanksgiving by their prayers and their singing.

As for the family celebration, we believe we can grasp its intimate character by the songs and the dialogues which our records have preserved. A trait of old-fashioned simplicity arises from these playlets.

“All that comes from the heart is good” the jubilarian’s daughters said to themselves. Without worrying about art, in displaying their filial love, they celebrated this half-century of works, of immolations, and of joys resulting from a goodness that knew neither weariness nor weakness. They could sing this refrain:

.....Your fifty years
Are a garland
Of everlasting flowers
Which time will not wither.

The poor, these privileged of the jubilarian, also had their note in this sweet and simple concert. She must have thrilled with joy at these charming verses:

Of poor folks
whose misery you relieve,
Of poor folks

receive congratulations.
Our homage is pure and sincere
When we address it to the mother
Of poor folks.

Poor folks
Do not contradict themselves
Poor folks
Do not hide their sentiments.
Enjoy a long career
Is one of the wishes made
By poor folks

To poor folks
Your kindness was always pleasing;
Of poor folks
You relieve the weight of years;
Like a charitable mother
You give beneficial care
To poor folks.

Of poor folks
If God receives the humble prayer,
Of poor folks
If he grants the ardent wish,
Heaven will be your salary
It is the only one worthy of the mother
Of poor folks

CHAPTER VI

Conversion of Robert Wolsey and of Anne Freenan —
Death of Sisters Bonnet and Anson —
Details on the Raizenne family.
1814 - 1818

A few weeks later, on December first, God gave a new consolation to Mother Coutlée and her daughters. Surprised by illness, Robert Wolsey, a merchant native of Quebec and living in Ontario, had come to the hospital for help and healing. The most considerate care was lavished upon him. But a healing superior to the one he was seeking was to be granted him. It is written that "a holy and faithful house sanctifies the infidel who seeks shelter there". Wolsey whose soul was shrouded in error, learned the truth of this word.

Several days passed and the patient, witnessing the devotedness and the abnegation of the sisters wondered what spirit urged them on in their daily sacrifices, what strength sustained them in their laborious ministry towards such unfortunate and ill-favored persons. By God's grace, truth gradually penetrated this well-disposed heart, light came and the desire to join the Catholic Church became his constant preoccupation. On December 8, feast of the Immaculate Conception, this desire was realized, Wolsey made his adjuration in the presence of Father Bédard, a Sulpician priest, chaplain of the poor. His sister, Lucy, a fervent convert who had come to the hospital to console him, pronounced for him the ad-

juramentum formula. The patient sealed his profession of faith by a fervent communion; then after a fortnight of suffering and intimacy with God, he died a holy death, December 22.

On the 24, a funeral service was held in the hospital chapel by the beloved priest who had opened this soul to the light. His remains were interred in the cemetery of the poor. The burial record carries the signature of Messrs. Levesque and Louis Panet, cousins of the deceased.

Many events of this kind, say the memoirs, took place for the consolation of the sisters and the encouragement of their zeal. It was the most envied of rewards. Recorded among other facts is the case of an English lady named Ann Freenan, spouse of John Grant. This lady, it would appear had to overcome much opposition in the pursuit of her vocation to the Catholic faith.⁽¹⁾ Remaining steadfast and being persecuted by her family, she decided to stay at the hospital with the poor in order to keep her faith. She died a holy death in early October 1795.

In the three years that followed, there was no outstanding event at the hospital. On the other hand, illness and bereavements were not spared to Mother Coutlée's family. Thus on August 31, 1815, Sister Angélique Bonnet-Métra died after a long bout of dropsy.

This elder sister of Elisabeth Bonnet had entered the community ten years after her. But if the younger sister was first to enter religion, she could not outdo her older sister in fervor and generosity. To compensate for her delay in embracing God's service, Sister Metra resolved to set no bounds to her devotedness. She was not gifted with robust health; on the contrary, she was rather frail and always appeared to be unwell. But a courageous soul animated this feeble body. Unsited for hard work she fulfilled humble jobs with exactitude knowing that the smallest actions draw their worth from one's aim in performing them and to which they lead: to delight the Lord, imitate Him in his life of labor and suffering.

(1) Old journal, Vol. 11, p. 307.

Thus schooled, she drew the strength to remain at work despite suffering that sometimes caused tears.⁽²⁾

Stricken with greater infirmities during the last years of her life, she continued to work assiduously as a seamstress. Surprisingly, despite continual pain, she maintained a flexible and harmonious voice which she used freely to sing God's praises. It is thus that, generous in her immolation, she prepared to participate with greater confidence and love in the eternal concerts.

The following year, on July 10, 1816, Sister Marie-Charles Raizenne-Anson or Henneson would in turn join Him whom she had loved uniquely and in whose service she had dedicated herself from her twentieth year.

This short life was a quiet one. Drawn early to a life of silence and recollection, Sister Anson seemed to have adopted the rule of the Imitation of Jesus Christ: "Love to live unknown and counted for nothing". At all times she kept an attitude of modesty and reserve, courtesy and serenity. One felt that she lived in the continual presence of God. The function of sacristan which she fulfilled through the greater part of her life, contributed greatly in developing this grace of recollection, and inspired with this religious sentiment, she decorated altars with taste.

"Extremely laborious", faithful steward of her time, it was easy to forgive her a certain slowness because of the perfection with which she performed the smallest task.

Sister Anson also had an elder sister who preceded her in the community. She was Marie-Clothilde who preserved the name of Sister Raizenne. Both excelled in works of embroidery. We owe them the embroidery on the cope and the chasuble of red velvet which are worn on feast days. The cope was used the first time on September 14, 1801, feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, the chasuble on the feast of St. Stephen, first martyr, on December 26, 1802.

(2) Old memoirs

The eminently Christian character of the Raizenne family and the exceptionally touching circumstances which marked their arrival in this country merit that we devote to them a page in this account. The father was born in Salem, Massachusetts on February 2, 1694. Of English origin, his name was Isaias Raisentown or Josiah Rising. Having lost his mother at the age of four, Josiah was adopted by Mehuman Hindell, cousin of his father and a rich citizen of Deerfield, where he went to live. It was from this home that in 1704 after the famous battle in which Deerfield was taken and plundered by a French Army Corps under the orders of Hertel de Rouville, that the child was taken by Indian allies of the French and brought in captivity to Sault-au-Recollet with other young Englishmen. In this group was a young girl of four named Abigail Nims who was adopted at Mission de la Montagne by an Indian lady named Ganastarsi.⁽³⁾

Guided by her zeal of neophyte, Ganastarsi obtained from Father Quéré, a Sulpician priest, that her protégée be baptized on the following June 15, and she was given the names Marie-Elisabeth. Eighteen months later, on December 23, 1706 Josiah Rising was also baptized and received the new name of Ignace and soon the name Rising was changed to Raizenne, a name that the family has kept since then.

The two captives had first to go through the trial of the hard and roaming life of Indians. But as soon as it was possible to assure these children a life more in keeping with their origin, the Sulpicians looked after Ignace and obtained that Elisabeth be entrusted to the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame.

The parents of Elisabeth, however, had not given up hopes of recovering their daughter. Motivated by them, several peaceful but official attempts were made by an influential man of Boston. The efforts were useless. The constant refusal by Indians of New England to free their French prisoners maintained the Indians of

⁽³⁾ Abigail Nims was born at Deerfield on May 31, 1700. Memoirs of the Raizenne family.

New France in the same obstination towards their English prisoners. It was only after the Treaty of Utrecht passed in 1713 that full freedom was granted to captives of both camps to return to their respective countries. Immediately, delegations were organized both from New England and New France. The parents of Elisabeth, rich protestants of Deerfield, came themselves to Sault-au-Recollet. The amazing thing, or rather through the marvels of God's grace, neither entreaties nor promises could unsettle this heart already enlightened on the vanity of worldly goods. The child declared "she would rather be a poor prisoner among Catholics than become a rich heiress in a protestant family."⁽⁴⁾

Solicited also by his family, Ignace also preferred to give up his liberty rather than risk in finding it, the loss of the treasure of his faith. One can easily imagine the desolation of the parents. Nevertheless, before the persistence of the young captives, they had to desist: the treaty passed between France and England prohibited any restraint to oblige the return to the country of the religion of one's parents any child of twelve who had resolved to remain in captivity and faithful to the religion he had embraced.

Deeply touched by such firmness in such young believers, the Sulpician priests increased their efforts and earned their ransom from the Indians. The young protégés responded to these sacrifices by an increase in piety and virtue. These excellent dispositions made them so worthy of one another that when time came for them to settle, it was thought that no marriage could be more suitable than to unite them; and on July 29, 1715, their marriage was blessed by Father Quéré, p.s.s. in the church of Sault-au-Recollet. Ignace Raizenne was then twenty-one, Elisabeth Nims was fifteen.

In 1721, the mission of Sault-au-Recollet was transferred to Lac des Deux Montagnes. Enchanted by the edifying conduct of the couple, by their knowledge of business and their love of work, the Sulpicians brought them to the new parish where they were given a large stretch of land half a league from the church. It is

(4) Life of Mother Bourgeois and memoirs of the Raizenne family.

there that these good Christians raised their numerous family in the practice of the most admirable virtues.

The seminary continued to protect them. It took interest especially in the education of the two sons the eldest of whom Simon, was ordained to the priesthood and became successively pastor of Saint Pierre les Becquets of la Visitation de Champlain, of Saint-Jacques Deschaillons and died as chaplain of the General Hospital of Quebec on April 14, 1798. The Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame shared the education of the six daughters of whom two entered the institute where they rendered important services. Madeleine, the eldest known by the name of Sister Saint-Herman was assigned to the convent of Lac des Deux-Montagnes where her perfect knowledge of Indian language allowed her to dedicate more than fifty years of her life to the education of young Indian girls. Her sister, Marie, in religion took the name of Saint-Ignace and became the thirteenth superior of the institute. The four others established themselves at Lac des Deux-Montagnes and brought to the families of the Castonguays, the Seguins and the Cheniers the spirit of piety that they had drawn from the family home. A detail will show what vigorous formation was received in this Christian home. At her death, the mother was found to be wearing a hair-cloth shirt which she had not wished to set aside even during her illness.

Drawn towards the priesthood like his older brother, Jean-Baptiste-Jerome was getting ready for Rhetoric when bishop Pontbriand died. Because of the long vacancy of the episcopal see which followed and the impossibility of going to receive holy orders abroad, he decided to remain in the world. On February 15, 1762 he married Marie-Elisabeth Sabourin, a virtuous girl who had been received in the novitiate of the Congregation of Notre Dame but who could not follow through with her project because of the government's hostile attitude towards religious communities.

The new couple settled at Lac des Deux-Montagnes and lived up to the reputation of virtue which the Raizenne family had acquired. Their home soon presented life habits so uniformly ordered

that they vied in exactitude with the most exemplary of communities. There were times of silence, of recreation, of study, and of work.⁽⁵⁾ Rising early, the father and the mother made their meditation before beginning work. During meals, the reading of the Holy Bible or the lives of saints, filled hearts with vivifying thoughts and engraved in them edifying traits. In the evening, after supper, the father explained points of Christian doctrine to the children and the servants together. Then followed prayers in common after which everyone went to bed in silence at the appointed time.

The brightness of such well-ordered conduct shone not only within the family; it radiated outside and created an atmosphere of sympathy and trust. A model to his co-parishoners, Jean-Baptiste was also their friend and counsellor. Father Cuoq wrote, "The Indians had even established him chief of one of their three bands". The poor did not knock in vain at his door. The helpless found assistance, and the orphan a refuge. Thus he had the merit of taking in successively into his home seven young orphans whom he instructed for first communion and who later became respectable citizens.

The fruit of his charity was poured out in blessings on his ten children. Seven of them dedicated themselves to God. One of his sons, Marie-Joseph-Jerome was ordained a priest in 1793. Two of the girls entered Hôtel-Dieu where a third would have followed had the Lord not required the sacrifice of her life at the age of eighteen. Our community happily opened its doors to Marie-Clotilde and to Marie-Charles.⁽⁶⁾

The virtues of the latter are already known to us and we shall see later that the life of Clotilde responded to the faith and honor that distinguished this line of virtuous Christians.

⁽⁵⁾ Memoirs of Marie-Clotilde Raizenne.

⁽⁶⁾ Two descendants of this family belong to the Grey Nuns of Ottawa: Walburge named Sister Raizenne and Guillemine known as Saint-Jean l'Évangéliste.

CHAPTER VII

Death of Father Chicoisneau; he heals a young man afflicted with insanity — Father Sattin is named confessor — Death of Sisters Boucher and Papin — Extraordinary phenomenon commonly known as “the year of great obscurity” — Difficulties concerning the Peace Islands — Division of the diocese into episcopal districts: Father Jean-Jacques Lartigue is named auxiliary bishop for the district of Montreal.
1818 - 1820

In the peaceful family which Mother Coutlée led to God with energy and tenderness, trials soon reminded one of the great law of separation and detachment.

On February 28, 1818, the Sisters and the poor of the hospital saw Father Chicoisneau suddenly taken from them, he had been their guide and spiritual father for the past eleven years. That very morning, Father Chicoisneau had celebrated Mass at the hospital, heard confessions of the community, and visited a sick person in town. On his return to the seminary, he went to the community room for particular examen a little earlier than usual. “He was piously reciting his breviary” when he suddenly collapsed. There was time only to anoint him, and life had ceased.⁽¹⁾ In calling him so quickly, God had answered one of the most ardent desires of

(1) Memoirs of Sister Raizenne.

his servant to spare his neighbor whom he had served with such zeal, all cause of trouble concerning him. This death put an end to a life of eighty years, sanctified by an active and fruitful ministry.

Born in Orléans, Jean-Baptiste Chicoisneau was for many years director of philosophers at the seminary of Lyon where he earned a reputation of great virtue. Driven from France by the revolutionary uprising, he came to the seminary in Baltimore in 1793, and from there to Montreal in 1796. As soon as he arrived, he was named director of the college where he remained until 1807. At this time, because of his advanced age (he was seventy) and the need for a more peaceful ministry, he was named confessor at the hospital. This institution soon became the object of his greatest solicitude. Long formed in the imitation of Christ who was poor, humble, and obedient, he accomplished in the obscurity of a simple and seemingly ineffective life, marvels of devotion to God, and to the people he served. He developed in those entrusted to him the humility and zeal with which his own soul was filled.

Not only did this zealous priest have at heart the salvation of souls, he also extended his solicitude to the temporal interests of the community. We have not forgotten the incident in which Father Roux was impressed by his fast at breakfast after the two had said mass at the hospital. No sooner had they returned to the seminary that the superior had one hundred measures of wheat sent to the sisters in distress. Learning one day that a few animals had been stolen from one of their farms, Father Chicoisneau was moved to tears.

With the poor and the sick his charity appeared still more compassionate. To alleviate to some extent, the bitterness of their state and the sadness due to abandonment by their loved ones, he visited them in their wards, became their confidant, and tried to encourage them by reminding them of the consoling realities of the faith. Our Lord took pleasure in answering the desires of a soul so accessible to pity. This became known and his prayers were sought for in the solution of difficult cases.

In the month of May, 1817, a man named Jean-Baptiste Martin stricken with a violent attack of insanity was taken to the hospital. After several weeks, his mother, who could stand it no longer, came to visit him. At finding him in the same state, she was desolate. She spoke about it to Sister Raizenne and begged her urgently to help her obtain the healing of her son. Touched by such great affliction, the latter had an inspiration. She suggested to the mother to bring Father Chicoisneau to the patient: "He is a saint", she told her. "He can heal your son, but insist strongly". The mother, full of hope, came to the old priest and begged him tearfully to perform this healing. Surprised and embarrassed, Father Chicoisneau protested that God only is the master of minds as well as physical health. His humility only increased the mother's trust and rendered her insistence more urgent. Conquered by such an ardent faith, Father raised his heart to God and requested that he be given the key to the lodge. From the wicket he observed the patient for a moment; then calling him with kindness, he said, "Son come here and let me bless you". At these words the patient's intelligence was aroused and his agitation ceased. Docile, he approached and knelt at the feet of the charitable priest who blessed him and opened the door to return him to his mother, inviting her to take care of him. The healing was complete. The same night, Jean-Baptiste Martin and his mother full of gratitude, returned joyfully to their village.

On March 2, 1818, two days after the death of Father Chicoisneau, Father Sattin who, since 1816 had ministered to the poor of the hospital, was now spiritual director of the whole house. This holy priest also belonged to the group of apostles who preferred exile to the constitutional oath.

Four months later, another sudden death saddened our mothers. This time the victim was chosen from among their ranks and died while in full activity. Despite her sixty-three years, Sister Boucher carried on briskly with her ordinary work. As she was about to close a window, she fell, victim of a severe stroke. It was on June 4 about three o'clock in the afternoon.

The life of this humble and faithful servant must not have been found wanting by Him who weighs merits and probes hearts. Sister Boucher had humbly rendered useful services to the institute by the exactitude and the constancy with which she performed her humble duties. The orphans to whom she had dedicated the greater part of her religious life, mourned her as a mother. She left in the community her sister who, as we know, was mistress of novices. The latter would live another eleven years.

Sisters Boucher and Montbrun were close relatives of our Blessed Mother d'Youville. Their father, Etienne Boucher, sieur de Montbrun, formerly governor of Three Rivers, was the son of René-Jean Boucher de Montbrun, grandson of Pierre Boucher of Boucherville. Captain in a detachment of the marine, René Boucher was the son of the founder of Boucherville who rendered the greatest service to Canada by his sword and his bravery.

On September 19 of the same year the community lost another pious and devoted worker, Sister Catherine Papin, sometimes called Barolette. She died at sixty-nine after having spent forty-five years caring for the poor.

Scorning the sweetness and the ease she had enjoyed among her family, at age twenty-three Catherine embraced the poverty of Jesus Christ. Seeing the modesty of her dress and the quality of all that was for her use, one felt this pledge was not for her mere words.

Patched clothing and tarnished objects were those of her choice. As she emptied her heart of created things, God delighted in filling it with supernatural treasures. How lavishly these flowed to the poor she so loved! Ingenious in helping them in their distress, she was not less clever in pleading their cause with the rich. She never gave up until she had received some help.

The foundlings experienced the tenderness of her charity. Discreet inquiries, laborious proceedings, nothing stopped her when there was a matter of saving these innocent lives from a brutal death and especially of putting them on the road to paradise.

Once these children were settled at the foundling home, she watched over them with solicitude. Not satisfied with dedicating her days to them, she also sacrificed many of her nights as well.

Later in charge of the farm at Châteauguay where she remained nine years, she had the consolation of preparing the way for a priestly vocation. At age twenty-two, Pierre Toupin, son of Jean-Pierre Toupin, foreman at the farm, learned to read with her help. Then the young student developed a liking for studies, completed his classical course and in 1794, he had the happiness of becoming "a priest for eternity". He died as pastor at Ile Perrot on September 4, 1825. In his will he bequeathed to the community the sum of 1,760 pounds, the same amount as to his nephews; it was the payment of a debt he owed for the lessons given to him by the charitable Sister Papin — Barolette.

One can well understand that a person so attentive to seize every occasion to be of service to others, would be especially delicate toward her sisters. Forgetting herself for their welfare and their pleasure, she was kind, gracious, eager to help them in difficulty and attentive in conversation to avoid any word against charity or any that could damage serenity. Consequently, there was deep sorrow when she joined our sisters in heaven. She was born in Montreal in 1749.

In 1819, our memoirs testify to a phenomenon which dismayed, not only the hospital personnel but the entire town and even a part of the country. It was often spoken of at the fireside by grandparents. Here in brief is the report of our manuscripts. In the morning of November 7, which was a Sunday the sky took on a tender green color. Soon afterward the sun, piercing this foggy veil, appeared with an unusual brilliance. Of a bright pink color, it tinted the horizon. This brilliance was followed by dark clouds which increased in size enfolded in deep darkness the whole mountain side. In the afternoon, a torrential rain deposited on earth a blackish substance which, to the eye, to the touch and to the smell, resembled soot.

There was nothing remarkable the following day except that the temperature was extremely cold. Tuesday the ninth was the day of terror and distress. The sun of an orange color at rising, became successively blood red and then a dark brown emitting only weak rays of light at intervals. The clouds became denser and darker as the day advanced and gave off a heavy mist. Towards noon there was complete darkness. One could hardly walk in the streets. For want of lamps, houses and public buildings were lit with candles. Everyone was filled with fear and thought the end of the world was at hand. Such a strange phenomenon offered matter for much conjecture. Some supposed that a great fire had devastated neighboring prairies and forests and that the violence of the wind carried the ashes. Others feared the eruption of a volcano in the country. According to others still, the mountain could well be the crater of some volcano which had been inactive for many years but which was becoming active again.

Towards three o'clock in the afternoon, it became still darker. The brave as well as the timid were terrified. Soon lightning flashed rapidly through this darkness; claps of thunder mingled with the ominous cracking of houses. Suddenly, a more threatening flash pierced the sky. A thunderbolt repeatedly struck the steeple of Notre Dame Church. Immediately the fire reddened the iron ball that supported the cross and made it shine like a meteor in the depth of night. The lower framework appeared gravely threatened. At the first sound of alarm the people flocked there to ward off the fire. With boldness, a man named Poitras succeeded in bringing down the cross thus saving from imminent ruin this temple so dear to the piety of the faithful. During this time the clouds let down a ceaseless rain mixed with soot more abundant still than that of the preceding Sunday. The water in flowing away carried a foam like that of laundry water. Finally by nightfall, the storm grew calm, the wind ceased, and the haze was gradually dispelled.

Thus ended this extraordinary phenomenon commonly called since, "dark Sunday" by the English and "the year of the great

obscurity" by the French Canadians. The cause has remained unexplained.⁽²⁾

In the year 1820 the temporal difficulties which had plagued the administration of Mother Coutlée decreased. These difficulties concerned the Peace Island acquired by our foundress, in 1765 along with the seigniori of Châteauguay.

These islands, twelve in number, are situated in the St. Lawrence River facing the seigniori of Villechauve or of Beauharnois. Their names and extent are as follows:

| | |
|-------------------------|----------|
| Ile Sainte-Marie | 88 acres |
| " Saint-Joseph | 15 " |
| " Saint-Gilles | 35 " |
| " Sainte-Geneviève | 35 " |
| " Sainte-Marguerite | 35 " |
| " Sainte-Julie | 10 " |
| " Sainte-Elisabeth | 3 " |
| " Saint-Louis | 40 " |
| " Saint-Charles | 8 " |
| " Saint-Antoine | 10 " |
| " Saint-François-Xavier | 20 " |
| " A la Pierre | 8 " |

These were first conceded on October 29, 1672, by Jean Talon to Sieur Perrot, captain of the regiment of Auvergne, then governor of Montreal. A contract signed before B. Basset, royal notary, established that on March 2, 1684, Charles Lemoyne, lord of Longueuil bought these islands from Sieur Perrot "for the sum of twelve hundred pounds". Twenty-two years later, these same islands were included in the sale by Charles Lemoyne of the holding at Châteauguay to Zacharie Robutel de Lanoue, his first cousin⁽³⁾ and the latter remained in peaceful possession of them until his death on September 7, 1740.

(2) The account of this event drew such attention that in Europe research was carried out with great care and was read before the Plinian Society of Edinburg.

(3) Contract of August 6, 1706.

The seigniory of Châteauguay then passed successively to the hands of his sons, Thomas and Joachim, and in 1746, to their sister Marie-Anne.

There arose difficulties with the neighboring lords, the Marquis de Beauharnois and Mr. De Beaumont. These had, in 1729, obtained from Louis XV the grant of the seigniory de Villechauve. The proximity of the Peace Islands to their new property made them presume that the former were part of it. Claims and quarrels followed, and finally a court case.

The dispute lasted six years. It is useless to reproduce the details here. Let us note only that Miss Lanoue fought her case with such vigor that in 1754 she was confirmed in the possession of these islands by a judicial act signed by Bigot, the intendant. She enjoyed the peaceful possession of this property until the summer of 1765 when she sold the islands to the community along with the seigniory of Châteauguay.

Forty years went by without trouble for the new owners. They had reason to believe that the islands were no longer coveted by strangers, when in the summer of 1795, news reached Mother Coultée that the Peace Islands had just been included in the sale of the seigniory of Beauharnois to James Milnes by the Marquis de Lotbinière. With her generous nature, her essentially peaceful spirit, it was painful for Mother Coultée to begin a dispute. But as guardian of the interests of the poor she was faced with the duty of carrying it out. She wrote to Jean-Baptiste Peladeau, a surveyor engaged in this affair by Miss Lanoue, to ask him for a copy of the judicial act signed by the intendant, Bigot. What the result of this was, our memoirs do not state. We see only that in 1812 Judge de Beaujeu, who had the case in hand, gave the community a legal ruling maintaining their rights on the said islands.

Eight years later, on August 13, 1820, a Sunday, James Milnes had an announcement made at the church doors at Châteauguay and Beauharnois that he considered himself proprietor of the Peace Islands. After decisions previously formulated, this pretention became a usurpation. As soon as the Grey Nuns were informed,

Sister Lemaire, their bursar, begged lawyer Quesnel to write to Mr. Milnes about the case. To give witness to her determination not to sacrifice anything of the patrimony of the poor, early Tuesday morning she sent twenty men to the islands to cut the hay. The opposite party did the same thing.

This time again, the question was brought before the courts and Mr. Milnes had to pay thirty "louis" in damages and costs.

To end this troublesome question, let us say that towards 1838 new discussions arose concerning the islands by Edouard Ellice, the new lord of Beauharnois, "but when he was made aware of the titles and the property rights of the community, there was no further question about this affair".

An event important for the good of the faith marked this same period. It was the division of the diocese of Quebec into episcopal districts placed under the jurisdiction of auxiliary bishops and assistants.

Before pointing out these divisions, it will be interesting we believe, to meet the one whom Providence destined to govern the diocese of Montreal. This person was born in Montreal on June 20, 1777, of Jacques Lartigue, surgeon from Gascogne, and of Marie-Marguerite Cherrier whose name and family are perpetuated with honor in the country. This home had remained barren for ten years. After earnest prayers and a vow made by Mrs. Lartigue, heaven sent them a son who at baptism received the name of Jean-Jacques.

Born of an act of faith and raised with care by an eminently Christian mother, the child grew up in piety and the love of God. At an early age he displayed a love of work and a keen intellect. From his fourteenth year, at the death of his father, he became acquainted with the hardships of life and his fresh and brilliant nature became conscientious and serious. This trial increased his love of study. He studied with such ardor that at an age when other boys were beginning their course in philosophy, he had completed his and undertaken law.

However, despite the success his talents allowed him to hope for at the bar, at age twenty he gave it up because of an irresistible desire to give himself to God and souls. His theological studies completed, he received the priestly anointing on September 21, 1800, at the hands of Bishop Denaut in the church of Saint-Denis where Father Cherrier, his uncle was pastor. At this time, the young priest had been serving as the bishop's secretary for a year. But this occupation did not respond to his liking. What he preferred above all was the modest, laborious, and recollected life of the Sulpicians. He, however, had to repress this attraction and wait until providential events would allow him to follow it. In 1806, the death of Bishop Denaut was for him a manifestation of the divine will. This link broken, he obtained his admission to the Sulpician seminary where he hoped to live and die. But as if Providence wished to prepare him in advance for the ministry reserved for him, six times in fifteen years he had, at the wish of his superiors, to leave his retreat to accompany Bishop Panet in his episcopal visits.

The immense expanse of territory which the diocese of Quebec encompassed at the beginning, made it desirable to divide it into districts. This wish would at last be realized in part.

As early as 1817, Nova Scotia was detached, erected into an apostolic vicariate, and entrusted to Father Edmund Burke who was consecrated in Quebec the following year under the title of Bishop of Sion. In 1818, Upper Canada and New Brunswick with Prince Edward Island were also detached from the diocese and the following year erected into ecclesiastical provinces.

But this was only a part of the division judged necessary by Bishop Plessis. He wished also to place a bishop in the area of Montreal and another in the North-West. For this reason, he made a trip to Europe in 1819 in order to negotiate these new divisions with the courts of Britain and Rome. Along with the principal purpose of the trip, there was a secondary motive. It was a question of defending the rights of the seminary in Montreal "which was threatened with the loss of its property". To this effect the Sulpi-

cians sent Father Lartigue at the same time to London because his knowledge of law could be a precious help in this circumstance.

After staying some time in England and having obtained from the minister not all that he wished but all that was possible, Bishop Plessis went to Rome where he was received with honor and affection by Pius VII and the cardinals. On August 16 the following year, his people celebrated his return to Quebec. Soon afterward, a pastoral letter gave the results of the Bishop's negotiations as follows: "The court of Rome did as I wished; it was not thus with the court of England. It was with much difficulty that I obtained my two suffragans and only as vicars general with episcopal authority. The government would not recognize me as the metropolitan so that my diocese is not really dismembered as I would have wanted it, but only divided into districts with bishops IN PARTIBUS under my authority".

The two suffragans of whom Bishop Plessis speaks here were Father Joseph-Norbert Provencher for the territory of the North-West and Jean-Jacques Lartigue for the district of Montreal. The reluctance of the latter to accept the responsibility was very great. Difficult circumstances, among other things the pain of having to leave the seminary, made him hesitate for some time. On a second injunction from the Holy See, he submitted, and on January 21, 1821, he was consecrated by Bishop Plessis in the parish church of Montreal under the title of Bishop of Telmesse en Lycie.

The coming to Montreal of a suffragan bishop changed from then on the character of the relationships between our community and the first pastor of the diocese of Quebec. The respect and trust remained, but henceforth rare and casual would be the occasions of resorting to his authority. As we withdraw from the hearth that had been for us a source of light, goodwill and generosity we gratefully remember Bishops Pontbriand, Briand, Hubert and Plessis.

CHAPTER VIII

Death of Sisters Prud'homme and Saint-Pierre — The beginning of a fire — Proceedings to recover the investments of the hospital — Father Duclaux, superior general of the Sulpicians entrusts these negotiations to Father Thavenet — Illness and death of Mother Coullée.
1821

The year 1821 was to be noted for great bereavements for the little community. As early as February, death snatched from it one of the last survivors of the foundress, Sister Barbe Françoise Prud'homme.

We remember the frail novice who, in 1765 at the time when fire reduced the community to extreme poverty, refused the offer to return momentarily to her family. Gifted with the spirit of sacrifice which makes a true sister of charity, Sister Prud'homme wanted to share the misfortune of the mothers and the poor. We can ascertain from this what resource for the Institute, a novice capable of such abnegation would be.

In turn sacristan, hospitaller of the elderly, and assistant to the superior, she was for the community a model of charity and religious obedience. The elderly had the better part of her life. For twenty-nine years she cared for them. Nothing could equal the love she had for the most unfortunate, the most infirm. As ingenious as she was, compassionate and kind, she foretold their needs, understood their oddities which she covered discreetly with

the veil of charity, and she tried to procure for them alleviations compatible with the restraint of their poor hospital. She utilized her rare leisure moments to make artificial flowers, the revenue of which was used to procure sweets or clothing for her protégés. No ward was set up better than hers with linen or furnishings. The zeal of her industries was fruitful; the refinement of her charity enlightening.

With her keen wit and joyful spirit, Sister Prud'homme was the joy of the community. Outside of recreations however, she was serious and discreet in her behavior, always gracious to those who required her services, and keen on minute acts of mortification.

Her respect for superiors was a constant trait of her religious perfection. In the novitiate, she had been a companion of Mother Coullée. After the latter's promotion to the government of the society, she saw in her only the authority of God. Even when she became her assistant, she had for her the deference of a novice.

Her ardent and affectionate piety was nourished at the purest source: the tabernacle, the crib, the throne of the Eternal Father. She inherited the latter devotion from our foundress. The altar which the latter had dedicated to him, was her frequent meeting-place. In her last years, her weakened memory caused her many humiliations on this account. Carried away by her piety and forgetting earthly preoccupations, she prolonged her visits to the chapel to the point of forgetting to go to recreation or to bed. If she was absent at the time of religious exercises, we never failed to find her kneeling either in the choir loft or on the steps to the altar of the Eternal Father, her face lighted up and absorbed in deep recollection. The conventional word: "Mother is waiting for you" had no sooner struck her ear than she came crest-fallen to accuse herself before her superior. With a childlike simplicity, she listened to the reprimand which the latter judged suitable to address to her, and she withdrew only after thanking her.

Sister Prud'homme had a particular attraction for honoring the Holy Childhood. The feast of Christmas enlivened in her soul this devotion. We have at hand at this moment a note yellow with

age which she had written listing the gifts she was pleased to offer the Child Jesus. It appears as a bouquet of violets, so penetrating is the scent of the flowers that compose it: it is silence, kindness, modesty, all virtues that are rooted in humility.

To this simple and limpid soul, it was given at times to read into the future. She was the first to have a presentiment of the role our religious family would have to fulfil in the North-West. Before 1818, these regions were occupied only by Indians and fur-traders in the service of Protestant companies. Only a few French Catholic families had settled there. There were no resident priests. Our community had no foundation there and there was no human indication that there would soon be any. Despite this, Sister Prud'homme affirmed that the Grey Nuns would one day go to assist the zealous missionaries in these far-off lands and would do much good. Time and events have proved this prediction.

When Mother Coullée had become a septuagenarian the alteration of her health caused rightful fear. Basing herself on the promise of the foundress, Sister Prud'homme affectionately reassured her sisters: "Do not fear", she said to them, "as long as I am living, Mother will not die." "But," she added "she will follow me closely". Sister Prud'homme did, in fact die first, on February 21, 1821 after only seven days of illness.

On February 24, the administrators assembled in chapter and named Sister Clotilde Raizenne to the office of assistant.

In June of the same year, the community lost a young novice which particularly painful circumstances had rendered dear to it. Marie-Véronique Brayer, Saint-Pierre, was born at Saint-Eustache. From her tender youth she had heard the Master's call to a more perfect life. Determined not to refuse the Lord anything, she went to Hôtel-Dieu where in humility she sought her admission as a lay sister. This wish granted, she had begun her novitiate, when God, who wanted to sanctify her by humiliations, allowed her harsh ones in her new life. An evil tongue invented against her a web of lies so well plotted that the superiors were taken in and decided to dismiss her.

Véronique withdrew in anguish, but resolved to pursue a life of sacrifice. On leaving Hôtel-Dieu, she obtained entrance to our novitiate. This was only a ray of sunshine between two dark nights. Soon slander stirred up the same tempest and brought the same failure. Returning to the world for the second time the poor girl believed her plans to be destroyed forever.

However, her courage did not fail. Her generosity increased to the size of her trial. She did not even think of returning to the world. Works of charity had the same attraction for her, so she was allowed to remain with the poor, to give them her devotion and care.

People are sometimes bad judges concerning supernatural virtues. Certain persons did not understand such devotedness. They called it hypocrisy and pretense and treated the supposed culprit with humiliating pity. Nothing, however, could moderate her zeal nor cause her to utter the least complaint. Such solid and constant virtue could not be disregarded any longer. It came to light, and as the sun appears brighter after the storm, the innocence and the patience of this humble servant of God shone with greater brightness after the long period of darkness. The doors of the novitiate reopened for her, and her former companions, who with regret had seen her leave, now welcomed her back with joy.

But a life so purified by suffering was not to last long here below. Such efforts had notably affected her constitution. A bad cold was contracted during a fire which was controlled with great difficulty.⁽¹⁾ This cold degenerated into a lung condition that completely exhausted her. Seventeen months after her second entry into the novitiate, the soul of Véronique was ripe for eternity. On May 31, 1821, feast of the Ascension, she was allowed to make her vows before the Blessed Sacrament and the community assembled. The following June 15, she went to receive in heaven the reward of her labors and “the ineffable compensation for her humiliations”.

(1) Letter of Mother Lemaire, February 27, 1822.

The fire in question here started in the morning of December 8, 1820, feast of the Immaculate Conception. As the sisters left the chapel, they were warned by the smell of smoke and discovered fire in one of the chimneys of the hospital. Immediately, measures were taken to extinguish it. The sisters believing they had succeeded, dispersed to the wards. Towards mid-day as they were assembled in the community room for recreation, there was a violent knock on the door. Astounded, Sister Cherrier, who related the fact, went out immediately to see who it was who had knocked so hard. Seeing no one there, directed "by a movement she could not explain", she went to the attic where the fire had begun earlier. From the door a thick smoke was already escaping. In reply to her cry of alarm, her companions came running and began to remove boards already ablaze and to apply wet cloths. Thus they succeeded in controlling the fire.

The strange knock heard just previously was no longer mysterious for the daughters of Madam d'Youville. Recalling the promise of their mother, all recognized a sign of her protection, and fervent thanks went up to her.

Apart from these fears and these bereavements, Mother Coullée was taken up with serious difficulties of a temporal nature. The latter had not been the least of the worries of her administration. The lack of resources in the country coupled with the withdrawal of investments in Paris, kept her family in incessant poverty.

This explains why the twenty-nine years of her administration were not a period of expansion for the society. In these conditions, merely to maintain what was established was a feat of wisdom and energy.

At the death of Mother Despins, all correspondence was discontinued with Mr. Jean-Louis Maury, the hospital's business man in France. In 1802, that is ten years later, Mr. Maury wrote to Mother Coullée only to inform her of his lack of success in dealing with the French government concerning our affairs. According to this letter, income from the state continued to be paid in paper money which depreciated as soon as it was issued. Since

1793 he had not even received any of the interest due, but he hoped to receive it later, "the Bourbons having promised to pay off the debts of the state no matter what their origin."

In view of this, after the confiscation of our investments by the French government, he had the foresight to place the hospital's papers in safekeeping at the national archives and to withdraw certificates of deposit.⁽²⁾

In 1815, Mr. Maury died without having obtained anything from the court. At this time, Father du Pouget Duclaux, superior of the Sulpician seminary, was moved by the destitution of Canadian communities and wanted one of the priests of his society to make to the government all the claims necessary to recover their assets. To this effect he recalled to France Father J.B. Thavenet, an intelligent young priest, who, having sought refuge in Canada after the evil days of 93, was working zealously at evangelizing the Indians at Lac des Deux-Montagnes.⁽³⁾

The preliminaries of these negotiations were difficult, long, and thorny, and would have discouraged a person less vigorously steeled than he. Evaluating at less than 40,000 francs the Canadian credits entrusted to him, government agents who were advising him, did all they could to dissuade him, from pursuing his enterprise. But the young Sulpician was not accustomed to recoiling before difficulties.

To succeed in these operations, he counted less on his skill and zeal than on help from above. He wrote to Mother Coutlée, "By your prayers you can do much more for your affairs in Paris than I can by all my efforts. I work zealously at this, but the government is slow in paying off the national debt. Be patient and pray. Pray especially for peace, for if we have war with England, that

(2) Letter of April 24, 1817. Father Thavenet.

(3) Father Thavenet was 32 and in the sixth year of his priesthood when he came to Canada. Totally given to his adopted work, he composed several works among others, an Algonquin grammar which was a precious help in teaching young Indians.

will be the end of your investment.”⁽⁴⁾ In the year 1820 mass was said each day for the success of these negotiations.⁽⁵⁾

Six years earlier, by the treaty of May 30, 1814 concluded between France and England, two commissions had been established: one English to examine the petitions of British subjects, the other French to review them. In 1818, the money of Canada was evaluated at sixty million francs and the revenues were invested and began to circulate on March 22 of the same year.

Happy with this first result, Father Thavenet informed the community in the following terms “I had the honor of writing to you on October 28 that your affairs were safe and that all you had to fear was a revolution. Today, I have the consolation of reassuring you. Our options are excellent; confidence is reviving. Stocks are at 95, I hasten to inform you so that you may thank God for His Providence over you.”⁽⁶⁾

Mother Coullée was not to see the outcome of this. The very year that she caught a glimpse of it was to mark the end of her earthly pilgrimage. It was nevertheless, a great consolation for her to note that negotiations were being actively carried out and that, despite the difficult times the community was facing, there were better times ahead.

Having attained the age of seventy-nine, she believed the time had come to fold up her tent. As if to accustom Sister Lemaire, the bursar, to her approaching departure, she had entrusted to her the temporal care of the house, entrusting to her all the details of administration. Having become freer, she dedicated her time to the internal affairs of her house. The response to her care was an increase in fervor and virtue. Devotion to Mary expanded in the community. The association for actual and perpetual love of the Most Holy Virgin came to be in honor.

(4) Letter of January 21 and of October 7, 1817.

(5) Letter of August 4, 1821.

(6) Letter of December 20, 1820.

The aim of this devotion was to elevate souls through the love of Mary to the love of Our Lord. A delicate conscience, a closer union with the virtues of Jesus and Mary, a more intense interior life, such were the fruits expected from this devotion. To this purpose the associates committed themselves "to complete dedication to the Virgin Mary with the promise to do everything for this dear mother the rest of their lives, through the purest love after that which is due only to God." They were to select an hour each day during which they would unite themselves more intimately with Mary and allow this love to penetrate all their actions.

"It is easy to see", say the statutes of the association, "There is nothing difficult about this practice. It suffices to offer one's actions to the Virgin Mary at the beginning of the hour and then from time to time, to remember the Blessed Mother so as to perform them in her spirit and according to her views avoiding with care all that might displease her."

The first names inscribed in the register of the association appear on October 28, 1820.

Wishing to encourage this pious thrust towards Mary, on the following November 7, Bishop Plessis sent to the community a considerable piece of the black veil which touched the holy house of Loretto and which served to veil the statue of Our Lady on Holy Thursdays and Good Fridays. This relic, carefully enshrined with the proof of authenticity is still preserved today in our museum.

About the same time, Mother Coullée saw realized a wish she had cherished all her life. At her request, Father Sattin consented to write a new biography of our foundress. It was she, the beloved septuagenarian, who collected the memories engraved in her heart by a filial and grateful love, and supplied the greater part of the edifying facts in this precious manuscript. At the beginning of those pages is inserted the following testimony:

"We hold these details from a sister highly respectable by her age and who had not left Mother d'Youville throughout the course of her illness. Her testimony has all the more weight in our view

that, apart from the trust she had acquired by reason of the rank she then occupied, to a faithful memory she joined a sure judgment, an uncommon wisdom, and an integrity beyond reproach."

This was one of the last services Mother Coullée rendered to her community. Soon afterward, illness made her its prey. She stopped working about mid-May 1821. From her sickbed where she was confined for seven long weeks, she continued to pour into the hearts of her daughters the pious thoughts that filled her own. Thoroughly imbued with kindness, she urged them to preserve always among themselves the spirit of charity which renders relationships so comforting and so sweet. Following the example of the beloved disciple she kept repeating to them, "My dear Sisters, love one another".

"Never waste your time" she also told them, "but let your whole life be spent for the service of the poor". She had confirmed these solemn lessons by fifty-eight years of active charity. At the end of her life, she could say these astounding words: "I shall die, but I can testify that I have not lost a single moment since my entrance to religious life." Fearing, however, that such an avowal had offended modesty, she added immediately with great confusion, "Do not believe however, that I am not in need of prayers. I have many other faults and I beg you not to leave me burning in purgatory."

She knew the value of time and of work. Constantly facing a situation she could overcome only with hard work, she had to arm herself with courage in order to urge her sisters to struggle on bravely so as to conquer the depths of privation by the generosity of their zeal. In this work she had spent all her energy. There now remained for her only to waste away in suffering. The latter fell upon her in an unpitiful and persevering manner. Mother Lemaire wrote after her death, "The Lord purified her as gold in a furnace. Her illness was most cruel; her patience and resignation most perfect."⁽⁷⁾

⁽⁷⁾ Letter of July 23, 1821.

Such submission in trial increased the Sisters' affection for her. They shuddered at the thought of "such a holy mother" being taken from them, and they followed anxiously the progress of her illness. Bishop de Cheverus of Boston, having been received at the hospital during these days of anguish, was struck by the sadness that reigned over everyone. In the community room where breakfast was served to him, he found the Sisters in tears. Astounded the prelate thought for an instant that their pain was exaggerated. He reproved them gently and urged them to be more abandoned to the will of God. An interview he had with the patient changed his mind and made him easily excuse what first appeared to him an excess or a weakness in the sisters. Before leaving, he assembled them in order to make a sort of retraction. "Sisters", he said "I appeared to condemn your sensitivity before knowing your worthy and beloved superior, but I now see for myself and I appreciate better that the reasons for your grief over such a loss are justified and well founded."

Meanwhile, the more the patient approached God, the more she became conscious of her unworthiness of appearing before this ineffable purity. Trust outweighed the feeling of her wretchedness and she cried out: "Yes, my God, I trust in your mercy. Even if my soul were red as scarlet because of my sins, your goodness could make it white as snow". Abandoning her soul and her body to suffering, she remained in the hands of God like a host ready to be sacrificed.

When the time had come to receive the last sacraments, she offered herself to God in complete abandonment and on July 17, 1821, she expired.

On the following Thursday, Bishop Lartigue presided at the funeral assisted by Fathers Ciquart and Sattin, both from the Sulpician seminary.

A few days later, the sisters had the consolation of hearing the virtues of their mother praised by him who had been one of her most intimate and most faithful advisers. As a last homage rendered to this long life, Father Roux insinuated that "if inside the house

Mother Coutlée had been loved and venerated by all the sisters beyond all that could be said, she had enjoyed outside, the esteem and veneration of the other religious communities and of the clergy; that all the people in town honored her as a saint and had faith in her merits; that finally she had been esteemed and rightly so, and had been in fact, the superior of superiors in Ville-Marie''.

Mother Coutlée had lived seventy-nine years and had governed the institute for twenty-nine years. With her, ends the first era of the institute!

APPENDIX

List of the benefactors who gave alms to the hospital under Mother
d'Youville.

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------|--------|
| Miss Jeanne Guy | 11,467 | pounds |
| Father Normant, sup. s.s. | 8, 731 | " |
| The Commissary | 4,970 | " |
| Father Bouffauveau, p.s.s. | 6,000 | " |
| Father Cousturier, sup. s.s. | 8,000 | " |
| Mr. Héry, merchant | 4,818 | " |
| Mr. Rangé, merchant | 4,450 | " |
| Mr. Monière | 3,248 | " |
| Mr. Guy | 2,460 | " |
| Father Hourdé, p.s.s. | 2,391 | " |
| Father Jollivet, p.s.s. | 2,342 | " |
| Mr. Charles Rhéaume | 2,060 | " |
| Father Montgolfier, p.s.s. | 1,898 | " |
| Father Poncin | 1,500 | " |
| Father de Villars, foreign missions | 1,813 | " |
| Father de Lavalinière, p.s.s. | 1,629 | " |
| Mr. Hervieux | 1,369 | " |
| Mr. Gaudet | 1,355 | " |
| Father Isambart, p.s.s. | 1,205 | " |
| Mr. Boudrias | 1,000 | " |
| Mrs. Sanscartier | 959 | " |
| Bishop Briand | 824 | " |

| | | |
|-------------------------|-----|---|
| Marquis Duquesne, Gov. | 807 | " |
| Mrs. D'Hauterive | 791 | " |
| Father Déat, p.s.s. | 718 | " |
| Mr. Martel | 702 | " |
| Father Peigné, p.s.s. | 687 | " |
| Father Sartelon, p.s.s. | 626 | " |
| The Maugras family | 608 | " |
| Mr. Varin | 607 | " |
| Bishop de Pontbriand | 596 | " |
| Father Gravé, Qué. Sem. | 574 | " |
| Father Brassier, p.s.s. | 550 | " |
| Mr. Benac | 543 | " |
| Father Cerré, p.s.s. | 500 | " |
| Mr. Amyot | 500 | " |

Benefactors whose alms were less than 500 pounds:

Fathers Navetier, Favard, Chambon, Degeay, Reverchon, Sulpicians;

Fathers Floquet, Huguet, Jesuits; François, Récollet; Fathers Moreau, Gervais, de Rigaudville, General Murray, the marquis de Vaudreuil.

Messrs Desjardins, Curotte, Cadette, Duplessis, Dupré, Larche, Poudrette, Céloron, Guichart, Livernois, Saint-Paul, Saint-Luc, Guillet, Douaire, Boisderet, Neveu, Toupin, Bellerose, Pagis, D'Eschambault, Courtois, Péan, Favre, Mézière, Sauvage, Perthuis, Arelle, Dumais, Saint-Blain, Vincelotte, Despins, Porlier, Lalonde, Brassard, Lacroix, Blotte, Grenier, Louvigny, Carpentier, Chevrefils, Belisle, Sansoucy, Gosselin, Gamelin, Dagenais, Demeule, D'Auteuil, Cirier, Vaillant, Lamothe, Papin, Parent, de Bleury, Dubreuil, Vallière, Pommereau, Carignan, Pillette, Dufix, Dessermont, Cuisy, Chaboyer, de Lachasse, Barbin, Landriessé, Chartrain, Varambourville, Mercier, de Senneville; The Indians of Sault Saint-Louis and those of Lac des Deux Montagnes.

Mrs Latour, Sabrevois, Magnan, Lajoie, Ville-monde, Benoit, Legras, de Ligneris, Lahaye, de Belestre, de Bienville, Legault, Guy,

Baribault, de Saint-Ours, Portneuf, de Sermonville; the Misses Cuillierier, Saint-Michel, Legardeur and Lanoue.

BENEFACTORS UNDER MOTHER DESPINS AND COUtlÉE
Fathers Curateau, Jollivet, Molin, Bréguier, S. Pierre, Borneuf, Perthuis, Latour-Dezery and Ciquart, Sulpician priests, Rev. Frs. Racine, Dufaux, Noisoux, Foucher, Bruguier, Lemaire-Saint Germain.

General Haldimand, governor; Lord Dorchester, gov.; Messrs. Lavallée, Mayville, Chénier, Viger, Lajemmerais, Forbisher, de Denonville, Langlois, Captain Grant, Bellerive, Adhémar, Craite, Fortier, Jourdain, Lapalme, Meunier, Ducharme, Como, Samson, de Bleury, Panet, Nox, de Montigny, Desrivières, de Saint-Ours, Ménard, G̃asson, Tardy, Lanctot, Fréchette, Cardinal, Robillard, Desrochers, Robitaille, Signay, Lartiçue, Berthelot, Brunet, Proulx, Lalonde, Vanfelson, Confrey, Henry, Robinson, Payette, Périneau, Blondeau, Lafleur, Lacroix, Rinfret, Besson, Coutlée, Paquet, Lacombe, Drouin, Belaird, Jéliani, McCord, Beaudry and de la Valtrie.

Mrs Quesnel, Jordan, Sanquinet, Vallée, Toulouse, Blondeau, Kemble, Huart, Langevin, d'Eschambault, Simon, de la Vérendrye, Saint Germain, de Boucherville, Lalonde, Lévesque, Beaubassin, Duverger, de Rouville, Misses Magnan, Lacombe Dubreuil, Gay, de Longueuil, Lamothe, Sarault, Monette, Noel, Rouleau, McCormick, Cabanac, l'Espérance.

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