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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.

The Sisters of St. Boniface

by
Emily P. Weaver

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The Ryerson Canadian History Readers

LORNE PIERCE, Editor

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IMPERIAL ORDER DAUGHTERS OF THE EMPIRE AND THE
PROVINCIAL DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION

SISTERS OF ST. BONIFACE

By

EMILY P. WEAVER

*Author of "A Canadian History for Boys and Girls,"
"The Story of the Counties of Ontario," "The Trouble Man,"
"The Only Girl," Etc.*

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The Ryerson Canadian History Readers

Lorne Pierce, *Editor*

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SISTERS OF ST. BONIFACE

THE GREY SISTERS took up work in what is now the town of St. Boniface, just across the Red River from Winnipeg, in 1844. But, looking backward from that date, through the vista of one hundred and six years, we discover a curious coincidence linking the sisters with the locality where they were destined to begin their labours in the North-West.

In the autumn of the year 1738, two things happened. The first was that the famous Canadian explorer, La Vérendrye, pioneered for white men the way up the Red river to "The Forks," where it is joined by the Assiniboine. There, on September 24, he held a business conference with two Cree chiefs, to arrange for a supply of furs; and, within a month, he built on the site of Winnipeg, its first trading post, later known as "Fort Rouge."

The second happening was connected with a widow lady at Montreal, Madame

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d'Youville (strangely enough La Vérendrye's own niece) who, all unconsciously, was preparing the way for another kind of pioneering at "Red River."

Hers was a story of misfortune and of achievement. She was the daughter of the *Sieur Dufrost de Lajemmerais*, a Breton and a soldier, who had built a small manor house on his grant of wild lands at Varennes on the St. Lawrence, near the Island of Montreal. But when little Marie Margu rite was only seven years old, the gallant gentleman died, leaving his widow and six children with sadly scanty means of support, for their untilled land was rather a burden than a resource. The problem of obtaining food and clothing for the family was difficult, and—as for education—it was only through the kindness of friends that Marie Margu rite, who, in her childish way, shared her mother's anxieties, had two years' schooling in the Ursuline Convent at Quebec. The girl made the most of this and grew up bright, charming and beautiful.

She had many suitors. Amongst them

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AS THEY JOURNEYED BY LAND AND WATER TO RED RIVER, MANY WERE THE PERILS AND HARDSHIPS ENCOUNTERED BY THE GREY NUNS. SISTER LAGRAVE HAD A SPECIAL MISFORTUNE BEFALL HER WHEN, SLIPPING ON A ROCK, SHE SPRAINED HER ANKLE SO BADLY THAT SHE HAD TO BE CARRIED TO THE CANOE AND WAS INDEED LAME EVER AFTERWARDS.

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was an extraordinarily handsome young gentleman of Montreal, François d'Youville, who was popular and well-to-do. He found favour in the young lady's eyes and they were married. The bride received many congratulations, but her husband soon proved himself worthless and dissipated. He wasted his fortune, and cruelly neglected his wife and children, of whom three died at an early age.

François himself died, when Marie Marguërite was only twenty-nine, leaving her with a load of debt on her shoulders, and two little boys to support. But she was brave, and her bitter experiences helped her to understand the sorrows of others. After befriending many destitute creatures in different ways, she took several unfortunates into her own home. Then three other good women became interested, and on October 31, 1738, the four ladies rented a small house in which to shelter their poor. Thus unostentatiously began the work of the (future) Grey Nuns.

The name came to them in a curious way.

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In the early days, when Madame d'Youville and her companions went about the streets seeking out and caring for the wretched, some of the city roughs flung stones and insults at them. They accused the ladies of selling intoxicating liquor to the Indians, and shouted after them, "*Soeurs grises!*" or "Topsy women!" Years afterwards, when Madame d'Youville had to choose a distinctive dress for her sisterhood, she seemed to hear again that brutal gibe, "*Soeurs grises!*" But it came as an inspiration. She took the sting out of the old affront by deciding that the nuns should wear a grey gown, or "robe grise," which, henceforth, seen so often in dens of wickedness and misery, became a symbol of purity and self-sacrifice, and, though the full name of the order was "The Sisters of Charity of the General Hospital of Montreal," the sisters were usually called simply the Grey Nuns. Their community house became a refuge for deserted children, infirm old people and incurable invalids, while they continued to comfort the sick and poor outside their walls.

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Eighty-eight years had passed after the adoption of the grey gowns, when there came to the sisters an urgent call for help in a field far different from the city where they had toiled so long. On a late September day of 1843, the Mother General gathered her nuns together to listen to the appeal of Bishop Provencher, a tall, worn-looking missionary, in a cassock of which the very shabbiness suggested the hardships he had endured.

For two-and-twenty years he had been labouring at St. Boniface, the settlement he had founded on the east bank of the Red River, amongst the traders and Indians of that wild land, where there were few white women, but many women and children of Indian and mixed blood. For the sake of these, the Bishop longed for good women to act as teachers, nurses, guides and comforters.

He had realized the need from the beginning, but had felt it impossible to ask women to face the cold, privation and loneliness, which meant so much suffering.

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Later, seeing that only women could do much of the work required, he had applied for help to communities of nuns in France, the United States and elsewhere, but always the difficulties had seemed insuperable. One sisterhood was too weak in numbers to undertake the task. Another—the Ursulines of Three Rivers—had offered, five years earlier, to send sisters to open a school in the Red River country, but “they were cloistered nuns: and how could they be cloistered in the boundless prairies of the West?”

The missionary was sadly discouraged when he went to Montreal to visit his sympathetic friend, Bishop Bourget. He told him of his vain quest for teachers to open schools in his distant diocese.

“You must ask the Grey Nuns. They never refuse,” said his friend.

But, being Sisters of Charity, the Grey Nuns were always busy with the infirm, the sick, the dying. Could they be induced to go to the far-away Red River, and give their lives to the teaching of little Indian girls?

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No one knew them better than Bishop Bourget, and he offered to go with his missionary friend and help him to plead the cause of his poor people with the sisters. He was present when Bishop Provencher told how, before leaving the Red River he had prayed to God to lead him to some place where he could obtain the help of nuns; and asked, "Would any of you be willing to come to the Red River?"

The tall father ceased to speak. The nuns made no sign. The room was very still till the Mother Superior put the momentous questions in another way, "Are you willing to make the sacrifice?"

Then—what a moment of deep joy to the anxious missionary—every one of those thirty-eight nuns answered, "Yes!"

Four were chosen, with the kind, capable Sister Marie Louise Valade as their head. She had managed the finances of the sisterhood for several years. She was tall and dignified in appearance, and inspired both respect and confidence. She was at this time nearly thirty-five years of age, having

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spent more than half her life in the convent, or General Hospital, of which the Grey Nuns had had charge, with its hundreds of helpless inmates, since the days of the Foundress.

The eldest of the four adventurous nuns was Sister Margu rite Eulalie Lagrave. She was born at St. Charles on the River Richelieu and belonged to an old and honourable, though not wealthy, Canadian family. She had lived for twenty of her thirty-eight years in the convent, and when it became known that she was going away to the wild, far-distant "North-West" there were many sad hearts in the great house she was leaving. She had been well brought up, and was an unselfish woman, always ready to "take the most laborious part and relieve others." She had much artistic and musical ability, which was to prove very useful in the life to which she was going. She had had charge of the Grey Nuns' choir, and her voice was both powerful and sweet. She was equally skilful in plain sewing and embroidery, and her "aptitude for the indus-

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trial arts was a source of revenue for the house.”

In the difficult times soon after the foundation of the sisterhood, the Grey Nuns had been thankful for work given to them by the Montreal merchants interested in the fur-trade of the North-West. They had made clothes for the Indians, and ornaments for their chiefs, to be exchanged for furs; and often, before the brigades of canoes left for the West, they had been kept so busy that they had had to work far into the night. Now they were glad to repay “the good offices of the early traders,” by the opening of a house in the Red River country.

Sister Anastasie Gertrude Coutlée—or St. Joseph—whose birthplace was Aux Cedres, near Montreal, was the youngest of the party. This lively, charming, healthy girl of twenty-four, had entered the convent as a novice, when her grandaunt was Mother Superior, and an elder sister, named Rose, was a member of the community. But she was eager to go to the Red River; and she set to work gaily to help in making the many

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preparations necessary for the long journey in store for them. Probably she looked forward to it through the busy winter of getting ready as an exciting and interesting adventure.

The fourth sister, Hedwige Lafrance, was of a different type. She has been described as "a frail little creature, of medium height," but was very courageous and energetic. She had been carefully educated in her home at Point Aux Trembles, near Quebec. At this crucial time in her life she was twenty-eight years old, but had been a member of the sisterhood for little more than three years.

Nowadays it is no great adventure to go by railroad from Montreal to Winnipeg. The journey may be accomplished in less than forty-eight hours; but there was no railway for those pioneer nuns to travel by in 1844, and it took them fifty-nine days to make the trip, which practically cut them off from their old homes and former associates for the remainder of their lives. In fact, Sister Lafrance was the only one of

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the four who ever saw Montreal again. When they started on April 24, 1844, after attending service for the last time in the Cathedral of Montreal, Bishop Provencher lay ill in the hospital. But, three days later, he and two priests, who were going to Red River to work under him, set out with Sir George Simpson, the Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, whom people called "the Emperor of the Plains." The Bishop was given a seat in the high-prowed, gaily-painted canoe used by the Governor himself, and so, travelling "express," reached St. Boniface three weeks before the nuns.

They left Lachine in a huge birch-bark canoe, forty feet in length by five in breadth. It was one of the Hudson's Bay Company's flotilla, and had a crew of eight men. Besides its own sails, and the tents, bedding, provisions and cooking utensils of those on board, it carried a cargo of two tons, and the sisters had to pack themselves in as they could amongst the bales and boxes. The first night they slept fairly well at Dorval

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Island, which was but a few miles from their convent-home. When they had to go on in the morning, however, Sister Valade's "poor heart failed" her, but the three others joined in a song of praise to keep up their courage.

It happened that another traveller, the Anglican Bishop Mountain of Montreal, who had the oversight of the few missionaries of his church in the North-West, was journeying to Red River, to visit the mission-stations there, at the same time as the Grey Nuns. He went by the same route, up the Ottawa, and by way of Lakes Nipissing, Huron and Superior, Rainy Lake, the Lake of the Woods and Lake Winnipeg, with the connecting rivers and something like eighty considerable portages, and many smaller ones. He wrote an account of the journey, which, he says, was estimated at eighteen hundred miles. He travelled faster than the nuns in what was called a *canot de maître*, such as was used by the chief officers of the Hudson's Bay Company, and was not cramped for room, but could sleep comfortably in the boat when, as sometimes

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happened, it was possible to sail all night. On nights, when they had to land, the passengers slept in tents—that which the sisters had was, unfortunately, far from waterproof—but the boatmen slept under the open sky or, in wet weather, beneath the canoe, turned upside down.

Usually the travellers rose about three in the morning and journeyed a good many miles before they breakfasted at eight. Going upstream, the crew often had to pole or tow the canoe instead of paddling, but going downstream they joyously shot as many of the rapids as possible. Often the boatmen sang, as they paddled, some quaintly gay or melancholy “Chanson de voyage.” Many of the stories told at night round the camp-fire dealt with peril or tragedy; and the Bishop mentions how all the long way they came at frequent intervals on single crosses, or crosses in groups, commemorating men who had perished in the wilderness, yet they rarely met other travellers, and once went for five and a half

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days without seeing any human being not belonging to their party.

Now and then they fell in with straggling Indians, who tried, by signs, to barter fish for pemmican, biscuits or tobacco; or to earn these luxuries, by helping to carry the white men's loads at some portage. On one occasion, the Bishop's party camped by Rainy River near two hundred Indians, who wore dirty blankets, and dresses of "hare-skin," and were painted, feathered and be-decked with queer ornaments. Fortunately the sisters were not tried by coming into close contact with any such large encampment of these wild people. Nevertheless, they had their own troubles.

The many portages were extremely fatiguing. One was five miles long, and in other cases, the sisters had to climb steep hills, push their way through thickets, struggle through swamps, or cross deep gullies on slippery fallen trees. Sometimes they had to toil along in the teeth of blustering wind or driving rain. Often they landed at

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dusk, soaked to the skin, and though the voyageurs made glorious camp-fires, the poor nuns knew what it was to be scorching on one side and freezing on the other. Their beds consisted of an oilcloth and a blanket spread on the ground, but if there chanced to be a heavy downpour the sleepers woke to find themselves lying in a pool. The younger sisters slept through a great deal, but their elders were much tried by the discomforts and hardships of the journey.

Once, when it came to shooting dangerous rapids, the two girls and Sister Valade were all terrified, but Sister Lagrave's courage rose with the excitement. She enjoyed the novelty and the zest of the boatmen, who "shouted with delight going down." Next day, however, circumstances were too much for her nerves. Not only was a great gale blowing over Lake Huron, but "many serpents," of which the men killed four, were discovered amongst the rocks where they pitched their tents.

A few days later a great misfortune befell

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Sister Lagrave. Slipping on a rock, she sprained her ankle so badly that she had to be carried to the canoe by two men; and was indeed lame ever afterwards. When they got to Fort William the officer in charge decreed that the injured nun must be left behind. This worried Sister Lagrave exceedingly. In fact, she could neither eat nor drink till the Chief consented to let the invalid proceed with two sturdy Iroquois to act as her bearers.

At last, on June 21st, when the long summer days were at their longest, the sisters reached the isolated Red River settlement, which Robert Ballantyne, the Hudson's Bay Company's clerk, who afterwards wrote so many books for boys, compared to "a solitary ship on the ocean." It had then about five thousand inhabitants, scattered for miles along the banks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. These people had a startling fashion of mentioning that certain things had happened "before the flood," as if they were antediluvians. They were, however, only referring to the disastrous

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rising of the Red River, when it overflowed its banks in 1826.

Bishop Provencher and his people (most of whom were French half-breeds) welcomed the nuns whole-heartedly, but perhaps none of them was so overjoyed as Madame Lajimonière, an elderly French-Canadian woman, who was born on a farm a little below Three Rivers on the St. Lawrence. The sisters must have been thrilled to listen to her strange, adventurous story.

Till she was as old as the little Sister St. Joseph, she had led a quiet life on her father's farm, and in the house of the village priest, to whom she became servant. But when Jean Baptiste Lajimonière came home to visit his family, after five years of fur-trading and buffalo-hunting in the wilderness, he fell in love with Marie Anne, and persuaded her to go with him to the land of the setting sun. For years she roamed the prairies; had no roof but a tent; never tasted bread; and, when her husband took her to live on a grant made to him by Lord Selkirk, near St. Boniface (part of which was sold

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by her son, sixty-five years later, for \$100,000), she spent her first winter in a hole in the ground, covered with thatch.

Happily she had a real house of logs in 1818, when the Fathers Provencher and Dumoulin began work at St. Boniface. A few days after their arrival, the priests baptized a hundred half-breed and Indian children under six years of age, and the two youngest Lajimonières, whose mother, the only Christian woman available, stood god-mother to the whole flock of little ones. When the longed-for sisters arrived, Marie Anne's godchildren had boys and girls of their own, thenceforth to be looked after as never before.

Three weeks after reaching Red River, the Grey Nuns opened a school for girls, with the gentle, but firm, Sister Lafrance in charge. A month later lively Sister St. Joseph was set to teach a number of half-breed and Indian lads, in the basement of the Bishop's house, whilst Mother Valade supervised the schools, managed the business connected with them, and later opened an industrial

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school where women and girls were taught spinning and weaving.

Meanwhile Sister Lagrave, despite her lameness, went from house to house in a little conveyance, which she drove herself, doctoring the sick (a task for which she had prepared herself as best she could before leaving Montreal) and teaching young and old to say their prayers and the catechism.

At first the sisters occupied a miserable little house, built of stones and clay—which the rain washed out—instead of mortar. It was frightfully cold in winter, the thermometer, hanging inside, sometimes registering forty degrees below zero, so its inmates had to move to rooms adjoining the vestry of the Cathedral.

That famous building, begun in 1834, was "the pride of the settlements." Governor Simpson had contributed a hundred pounds toward the building, and Bishop Provencher had raised funds for it in France and Canada. Constructed of stones gathered along the banks of the Red River, it was a hundred feet in length, and forty-

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five feet in breadth. Its twin spires, roofed with shining tin, rose a hundred feet in air, and could be seen (as its melodious chime of bells could be heard) from a great distance across the plains. The description of this church, though he never saw it, strongly appealed to the New England Quaker poet, Whittier, and he wrote:

Is it the clang of wild geese,
Is it the Indian's yell,
That lends to the voice of the north wind
The tones of a far-off bell?

The voyageur smiles as he listens,
To the sound that grows apace;
Well he knows the vesper ringing
Of the bells of St. Boniface.

The bells of the Roman Mission,
That call from their turrets twain,
To the boatman on the river,
To the hunter on the plain.

In 1851 the Cathedral was still uncompleted; and in June of that year Bishop Provencher "decided to have it finished, and the interior decorated. There were not, as yet, any artists in the country, but the Grey Nuns had already painted their private

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chapel, and, at the Bishop's request, undertook to decorate the interior of the Cathedral as soon as the carpenters had left their scaffolding."

Handsome, clever Sister Lagrave, who could do so many things, was put in charge of the work, and, lame as she was, went up to sit on a chair on the scaffolding and paint the walls. Sometimes several nuns climbed up to help her, "but most of the sisters trembled when they saw her go up so high." The decorators received many congratulations when their task was completed. The half-breed women "who loved to embroider with silk, beads and porcupine quills, were in the habit of going to the church to take, as patterns for their work, the roses and other flowers that the sisters had painted; and, wishing to pay a grand compliment to the artist, they would say to each other, 'Sister Lagrave is an artificial sister!'" In addition to decorating the interior of the church with "so much art, and such good taste," as to astonish strangers who visited Red River, Sister Lagrave, and her helpers,

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modelled a statue of the Virgin (still a treasured possession of the Nuns' Home at St. Boniface), making the moulds of plaster of Paris, paste and water. The same skilful and resourceful lady made, for the Christmas festival, a crib and statue of the Infant Jesus.

Another of the marvels of that first Cathedral was a small organ, or melodeon, made by Dr. Duncan, an army medical officer who "was devoted to music, and very ingenious." Sister Lagrave played beautifully on the piano, and "accomplished wonders with that little organ."

A short time before the decoration of the Cathedral three more sisters and two novices came from distant "Canada" to Red River. One of the five, Sister Laurent, was very young, and lived to tell, in her ninety-second year, some of her recollections of those early days, which have been set down in that most interesting book, "Women of Red River."

Her father was a leather-worker, and he and her mother were both devout and

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religious people. Born in 1832, the cholera year, their young daughter entered the Order of Grey Nuns at sixteen, and made a vow that she would serve in some far-away mission field. At eighteen she took her final vows and, when Bishop Provencher went again to the Mother House at Montreal, to ask for help, the young girl begged to be taken.

This second party of nuns travelled from Montreal, by boat and stage to St. Paul, in Minnesota, and so "across the plains" to Red River.

Altogether the journey took three months, the latter part of it being made in carts, with high, wooden wheels, drawn by oxen. Day after day, the sisters journeyed through "seas of waving grass." Now and then their progress was interrupted by some stream or river and, as neither bridge nor boats were usually available, the men constructed rafts of branches of trees to convey the passengers and their baggage across. But it might happen that there was no suit-

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able wood to be found near the river. Then one of the cart wheels, five feet in diameter and three inches thick, was taken off, a buffalo robe was thrown over it, for the nuns to sit upon, and a half-breed or Indian, plunging into the water, propelled and guided the odd craft to the opposite bank, or it might be that an ox, tethered to the wheel by a rope tied to his horns, was used for motive power.

The travellers slept on buffalo-ropes or blankets, but the nights were all too short, for the rising hour was three. In any case, the attacks of the mosquitoes, described by one nun as "the most gluttonous creatures in creation," gave them small chance to rest by night or day.

Little Sister Laurent did not at first like pemmican (a later traveller said it tasted like "a mixture of tallow and chips!") but was thrilled by her first sight of the red men. She was delighted to visit all the settlers and houses about St. Boniface. By this time the nuns were housed in a two-storey,

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wooden convent, which, as it happened, outlasted all Bishop Provencher's other buildings.

Soon the new-comers plunged into the varied work of the community—washing, cooking, sewing, working in the convent fields, and, when harvest-time came round, cutting the wheat with scythe or sickle. Sister Laurent "never came to use English," but had been well educated in French, so the work of teaching was assigned to her. On opening the schoolroom door, however, she took fright at the sight of some big boys, and was so sure that they would never "mind her," that she said, "I do not want to teach." Then she was sent out with "a horse and rig," to visit the people in the houses that were, as to the interior, so like those in the country in Quebec, that while she was inside with the family, she felt as if she "was back home," though outside the scene was very different from what she had been used to in the east. After living at St. Boniface five years, she was told that she might join the party, making the annual trip to Montreal

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for supplies, but at the last moment she gave up the opportunity to another sister, whose mother was ill in Quebec, and so it turned out that, in her long life, she never saw the beautiful St. Lawrence again; but henceforth she worked for and adopted as her own the country of the wayward, capricious Red River.

In 1852, the second year after the coming of the second party of nuns, the Red River rose in another devastating flood. Coming down "like a racehorse," as an Indian said, it opened new channels into the Assiniboine, and "struck terror into all hearts." Day after day the waters continued to pour over the plains, with a sound, wrote the first Anglican Bishop of Rupert's Land, "like a waterfall." No one could tell whence the water came, and some of the settlers, fleeing from their houses to higher ground, thought the chance of their dwellings weathering the flood so small that they sold them for such trifling sums as thirty or forty shillings. Many buildings were demolished or swept away.

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The nuns, though driven from the ground floor, were able to remain in their own abode; but at times they feared that the building, which was so delightfully home-like after the makeshift dwellings they had had at first, would never stand the fearful strain. One night there was a thunder storm and a great wind; and the whole house rocked. By that time the chapel was half-full of water, and the nuns had their services in the gallery; then the doors were thrown down. For forty days the nuns were unable to set foot outside the house, and always they looked out on a waste of waters, whether it was overhung by black clouds or lighted by soft moonbeams, by weird, beautiful northern lights, or gorgeous sunlight that set all the birds to singing. At last the waters subsided, and then they had to throw all their energy into the wearisome task of repairing damages, and cleansing away the mud and litter from every corner of the house.

The following summer the sisters lost their true friend, Bishop Provencher, who

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had laboured for thirty-five years in the West. He was laid to rest beneath his Cathedral beside the river, and Father Taché, who had for some years assisted him in the cares of his enormous diocese, succeeded him as Bishop of St. Boniface. There were then eleven sisters in the convent at Red River, but afterwards many other Grey Nuns took up missionary work amongst the Indians and went farther and farther west and north till they reached the banks of the mighty Mackenzie.

But we must go back to St. Boniface, where the four pioneer Sisters lived to the end of their days. As time went on many travellers passed through the Red River settlement, on their way farther into the wilds, and some of them, in written accounts of their journeys, gave little glimpses of the life of the Grey Nuns. The Earl of Southesk, for instance, who visited the convent at St. Boniface in the summer of 1859, told of the nuns' educational work, and described their "extremely quaint and pretty dress," as he called the famous "robe grise," made of

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“fawn cotton,” and almost covered, as to the skirt, with a dark-blue petticoat, dotted with white. A heavy black kerchief crossed over the chest, a black poke-bonnet, and a plain white cap inside it, moccasins instead of shoes, and a girdle round the waist, from which hung a gilt crucifix, completed the costume.

The Earl was much surprised to see a piano “in that remote and inaccessible land,” but it was already a quarter of a century since the first piano had been brought from London to the Red River settlement. Several pupils of Sister St. Joseph—dark girls and little fair children—played pieces for the great man from across the sea.

Eighteen months later, on a terribly cold December day, the beloved Cathedral, with its “turrets twain” was burned to the ground. It happened that one of the nuns and an assistant were making candles for the church, in the kitchen of the Bishop’s house, when one of them upset a dish containing tallow on the hot stove. In a moment there was a terrible flare. The flames

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quickly got beyond control. They caught the rest of the house. Bishop Taché, who was absent, lost his clothes, his library and many valuable papers. But that was not the worst. The flames spread to the Cathedral. "The rich paintings with which one of the nuns had but lately decorated its ceiling" were destroyed, its twin spires tumbled down, carrying with them the sweet-toned bells to be melted into a shapeless mass of metal, and "the pride of the settlements" was soon no more than a heap of smoking ruins. Sister Gosselin, the nun who was in charge of the sacristy, managed to save some of the church ornaments and sacred vessels at great risk to her own life, but very little could be saved. Sister Lagrave, who had worked so untiringly to make the interior of the church beautiful, had not lived to see this disastrous day.

The kind, patient Mother Superior—Sister Valade—passed away in the spring following the fire. She had been ill a long time, and died when the Red River had once again overflowed its banks. The waters

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were out all around St. Boniface. There was no dry spot in which they could make her grave. So they laid her to rest for a while near the grave of her old friend, Bishop Provencher, within the ruins of the Cathedral, but Bishop Taché and the rest of the funeral party had to walk thither knee-deep in water.

A stone vestry, which was built in the following year, had for a long time to do duty as a church, and it was not till the autumn of 1887 that the new Cathedral (smaller than the former one) was opened and consecrated; and new bells, cast from the metal of the old ones, again rang out sweetly over the plains and the river.

Next year, 1888, Sister St. Joseph, the youngest and only surviving one of the four foundresses of the convent at St. Boniface, could count back fifty years to the day on which she made her religious profession in the old Mother House at Montreal, and her "Golden Jubilee" was celebrated joyously in the rebuilt Cathedral.

(Continued from inside front cover)

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