

# **The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois**

Anon.

## Table of Contents

<b><u>The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois</u></b> .....	<b>1</b>
<u>Anon.</u> .....	1
<u>AUTHOR'S PREFACE</u> .....	2
<u>CHAPTER I. THE DISCOVERY OF CANADA AND COLONIZATION OF MONTREAL</u> .....	3
<u>CHAPTER II. MESSRS. DAUVERSIERE AND DE MAISONNEUVE VISIT MONTREAL</u> .....	6
<u>CHAPTER III. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE HOTEL DIEU ECCLESIASTICAL APPOINTMENTS FOR CANADA, ETC.</u> .....	9
<u>CHAPTER IV. EARLY YEARS OF MARGARET BOURGEOIS, AND HER VOCATION FOR THE CANADIAN MISSION</u> .....	12
<u>CHAPTER V. MARGARET BOURGEOIS, AFTER MANY TRIALS AND MORTIFICATIONS, AT LENGTH SAILS WITH M. DE MAISONNEUVE FOR CANADA</u> .....	16
<u>CHAPTER VI. SISTER BOURGEOIS' ARRIVAL IN CANADA</u> .....	22
<u>CHAPTER VII. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SISTERS OF THE CONGREGATION OF NOTRE DAME AT VILLE-MARIE</u> .....	23
<u>CHAPTER VIII. M. FRANCOIS DE LAVAL DE MONTMORENCI IS APPOINTED FIRST BISHOP OF CANADA SISTER BOURGEOIS SUCCEEDS IN BUILDING THE CHURCH OF NOTRE DAME DE BON SECOURS</u> .....	27
<u>CHAPTER IX. THE RULES OF THE CONGREGATION, AND ESTABLISHMENT OF MISSIONS</u> .....	35
<u>CHAPTER X. THE PRIVATE AND SOCIAL VIRTUES OF SISTER BOURGEOIS</u> .....	42
<u>CHAPTER XI. SISTER BOURGEOIS' HAPPY DEATH, AND THE WONDERS THAT FOLLOWED IT</u> .....	46
<u>CHAPTER XII. THE EXCELLENCE OF HER INSTITUTE, HER MAXIMS, INSTRUCTIONS, ETC.</u> .....	52
<u>CHAPTER XIII. A RECAPITULATION OF THE PRINCIPAL EVENTS OF THE LIFE OF SISTER BOURGEOIS</u> .....	57

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- AUTHOR'S PREFACE
- CHAPTER I. THE DISCOVERY OF CANADA AND COLONIZATION OF MONTREAL.
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- CHAPTER III. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE HOTEL DIEU ECCLESIASTICAL APPOINTMENTS FOR CANADA, ETC.
- CHAPTER IV. EARLY YEARS OF MARGARET BOURGEOIS, AND HER VOCATION FOR THE CANADIAN MISSION.
- CHAPTER V. MARGARET BOURGEOIS, AFTER MANY TRIALS AND MORTIFICATIONS, AT LENGTH SAILS WITH M. DE MAISONNEUVE FOR CANADA.
- CHAPTER VI. SISTER BOURGEOIS' ARRIVAL IN CANADA.
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[Illustration: SISTER MARGARET BOURGEOIS Foundress of the Congregation of Notre Dame  
ESTABLISHED IN MONTREAL, CANADA. 1659.]

THE LIFE OF VENERABLE SISTER MARGARET BOURGEOIS,

FOUNDRESS OF THE SISTERS OF THE CONGREGATION OF NOTRE DAME.

*ESTABLISHED AT MONTREAL, CANADA, 1659.*

*TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH*

BY A RELIGIEUSE, CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA.

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

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Having read a French edition of the Life of Venerable Sister Bourgeois, published in 1818, the translator of the present work was so charmed by its perusal that she resolved on rendering it into English for the spiritual edification of others.

Many years ago the work of translation was commenced, but from some preventing cause or other, was as often laid aside. Yet the idea of presenting it to the public remained, as no *English* Version of Sister Bourgeois' life exists, at least in the United States.

Therefore determining at last to obey an impulse of long standing, the scattered translation sheets have been prepared for publication, with the humble hope that the reader may derive as much benefit from their perusal as did the writer.

In this age of miscellaneous and corrupt literature, when people of every condition of life are literally devouring irreligious magazines and serials, it surely cannot be amiss to add another volume to the already rich store of our libraries in order to help roll back the torrent of universal depravity that threatens the rain of our beloved country, and also to place before the minds of the young, the glorious example of one of God's heroines.

The *Second Centennial* of Sister Bourgeois' advent to America is already past, and more than a hundred years before the *Declaration of Independence*, was she laboring in the cause of humanity for the glory of God in the New World.

If reading the lives of such women as Mrs. Seton a Protestant American lady, who after her conversion to the Catholic Church in Italy so burned with the love of God, as to return to her native land in her early widowhood to form a flourishing religious sisterhood in New York; of Nano Nagle, an Irish aristocrat, who turned from a useless fashionable life to the lowly spirit of the gospel on seeing the poor artizans of Paris crowding to early Mass in the Church of Notre Dame before beginning their daily toil, while she lolled weariedly in her carriage after a midnight ball; heroically putting her hand to the plough, she never turned back, and left behind her another religious Sisterhood in Ireland to perpetuate her philanthropic sanctity: of Catharine McAuley, who receiving from her adopted Protestant parents a princely fortune, expended every shilling of it in building up the Order of Mercy, one of the latest and most flourishing outposts of the Church of God; of St. Jane de Chantal, who after having been tried in the fire of affliction for years founded in her advanced widowhood the Order of the Visitation, under the direction of St. Francis de Sales and who attained such an extraordinary degree of perfection as to be seen ascending to heaven like a luminous meteor after her happy death.

If the perusal of the lives of these, and a host of other sainted women, such as the Catholic Church alone can produce, has filled many a young heart with high and holy aspirations perhaps the contents of this little volume will not be less efficacious for the glory of God, the interests of religion, and the salvation of souls.

A literal translation has been adhered to as far as possible one or two remarks at the close being the only additions. So if any defects exist in the work they belong solely to the translator, whose aim has not been rhetorical composition, but the greater glory of God. And if but one heart be won more closely to the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ by its perusal, she will be amply repaid, and prays that the blessing of the Sacred Heart of Jesus may be given to her humble effort to advance His honor and glory.

Respectfully, THE AUTHORESS.

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## CHAPTER I. THE DISCOVERY OF CANADA AND COLONIZATION OF MONTREAL.

Every one knows that America is called the New World because, until the close of the 15th century, it was unknown to the other nations of the earth at least it was then unknown to Europe. Until quite near the end of that century, Canada was absolutely a *terra incognita* being one vast forest, inhabited only by the red man, and by beasts as wild and untamable as he. In the year 1534, James Cartier, a skilful navigator, being provided with a commission from the King of France, set sail from St. Malo, with two ships of sixty tons burden, carrying one hundred and twenty-two well-equipped seamen, in order to reconnoitre that part of the New World. Cartier's first voyage was quite successful. He discovered Canada and took possession of it, in the name of the French King. Having made his observations from the different posts which surround the Gulf that receives into its bosom the waters of the great river of Canada, since called the St. Lawrence, he conversed as well as he could with the savages, whenever an opportunity offered, in order to study their characters, and thought he occasionally discovered in them dispositions favorable to Christianity.

This led him to hope that the King would form a colony in the country, that might be equally useful to commerce and religion. He accordingly returned to France, to acquaint his sovereign with his projects and the success of the expedition that inspired them.

His plans met with a very favorable reception, and were immediately acted upon. The following year he received a new commission from the King and three well-appointed ships, several Breton gentlemen at the same time volunteering to accompany him. They left the port of St. Malo on the 3rd of May, but did not arrive at the Canadian Gulf until the 10th of August. This being the festival of St. Lawrence, they called the Gulf by the Saint's name, in thanksgiving for their safe arrival. Having entered the river with his little fleet, he sailed as far as the Jacques Cartier River, so named in *his* honor. Here they landed, and tradition says, he lost one of his ships at this place, although his biographers make no mention of the occurrence. Perhaps the vessel was stranded, and therefore became useless. But whatever accident happened, it did not cool his enterprising spirit in the least, nor prevent him from ascending the river as high as the Isle of Fochelagu (the present city of Montreal), which was described to him as a delightful place by the savages he met along his route. At Lake St. Pierre, three leagues above Three Rivers, he failed to procure material to repair his ships, and was compelled to leave them there. However, he manned two shallops and embarked on them with the bravest of his volunteers, arriving safely at Fochelagu on the 2d of October. Here he found a village of savages at the foot of a mountain (the site of the City of Montreal is a little to the right of that old Indian village), who received him very kindly and he completely gained their friendship by making them various little presents. He was enchanted by the situation of the island, and surprised and dazzled by the beauty of the scene that presented itself to his view. He called it, in the enthusiasm of the moment, Mont Royal since corrupted into Montreal. He remained, however, but a few days, as the season was advancing, and on the 5th of October set out to rejoin his fleet and return to Europe, convinced that the beautiful island was the most desirable locality in the country for a new colony. He related his success a second time at the French court, but as all attempted discoveries then had only one object in view viz., the finding of gold and silver and as Carrier's journal of discovery made no mention of the precious metals, he met with a very cool reception. However, in 1540 the King deemed it advisable to appoint Francis de la Roque his viceroy and Lieutenant-General of Canada. To be sure, the office was not a lucrative one as for many years he had only the woods and forests to govern, and though boundless wealth lay concealed in these woods and forests, he had not the means to bring it forth. He made some voyages to Canada in virtue of his appointment, and attempted the foundation of a few colonies, which proved sadly unsuccessful, as France, being then occupied with domestic troubles, seemed to have forgotten Canada. It was not until 1598, in the reign of Henry IV., when a commission was given to the Marquis de la Roche a Breton gentleman (such as had been given to Francis de la Roque more than forty years before), that renewed interest in the affairs of the New World was awakened. This

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

commission expressly provided that he should have chiefly in view the establishment of the *Catholic Religion* in all the countries under his jurisdiction. He received no assistance from the government, however, for the success of the enterprise, and it therefore failed, like the preceding ones.

These successive failures damped the ardor of the French court, and further colonization plans hung trembling in the balance. But during the period of this fluctuating policy several navigators and merchants of Normandy, Bretony, and elsewhere, sailed up the St. Lawrence on their own account, established many trading posts, and carried on a sufficiently lucrative trade with the savages. Their mercantile success excited the emulation of M. Chauvin, a sea-captain, who solicited and obtained from the King a continuance of the commission that had been formerly granted to Lords Roberval and de la Roche, with the additional privilege of an exclusive trade in furs. The subject of religion did not trouble M. Chauvin very much, his negative Protestantism being quite satisfied with the good things of this life. He made two voyages one in 1601, the other in 1602 realizing great wealth each, time, but died while preparing for a third enterprise. The Commander de la Chappe, Governor of Dieppe, succeeded him in 1603, having the same privileges accorded to him that had been bestowed on his predecessors. In order to extend his commercial pursuits he formed a company of traders and other persons of wealth and distinction. They prepared a considerable fleet, entered the St. Lawrence, and reconnoitered the island of Montreal a second time. On their return to France they heard with regret of the death of de la Chappe, and learned that his commission had been given to Pierre Dugats, a Protestant gentleman, but an honest man, who intended in good faith to establish the Catholic Religion according to the articles of the Commission. But God had not chosen any of these people to found *Montreal*, although Pierre Dugats continued the trading association formed by his predecessors, and increased its wealth very considerably, by carrying on commerce with the principal ports of France. He prepared a much more considerable fleet than any that had been hitherto attempted, and sailed again from France in 1604. Lord Champlain was one of his companions on this voyage, which, however, accomplished nothing beneficial for France. In 1608 he carried into effect the intentions of the court by establishing a permanent colony at Quebec on the St. Lawrence, and erecting a barrack for its security. This he did in the name and at the expense of the colony.

Champlain remained there through the winter to prepare ground for agriculture but in the spring of 1609 he made war against the Iroquois, who had been constantly harrassing the military post since its establishment. He pursued them as far as Lake Champlain, to which he gave his name, having first left a light garrison at Quebec, and in the autumn returned to France. About this time the name of *New France* was first given to Canada. Champlain returned in 1610, and visited Montreal, intending to establish another colony there. But Providence had other designs in view. He was not successful, and contented himself with building a few huts for the purpose of trading with the savages.

The death of Henry IV., which occurred at this time, produced a great change in the affairs of the new country. The commission of Governor of Canada was transferred from M. de Monts to Champlain, by the Queen Regent who also appointed him Lieutenant-General to the Prince of Conde, which step was intended to pave the way for his additional title of Viceroy of New France.

Champlain gave quite a different form to the Mercantile Company of Canada, and by his influence with Conde, obtained from the King letters patent and many new privileges. He returned to Canada in 1614 with a goodly number of colonists, and also a few Recollets to minister to their spiritual wants. Intending to pass the summer at Montreal, with some of his companions for the purpose of trading more advantageously with the savages, he left Quebec. But again his plans met with very partial success.

In 1620 the Prince of Conde conferred the viceroyalty of Canada on the Marechal de Montmorenci, his brother-in-law, who in turn bestowed it on the Duke de Ventadour, his nephew. Until this period the affairs of the colony had been entirely in the hands of Protestants, who sought nothing but material wealth. Everything was languishing, and there were not more than fifty persons at Quebec. Some Jesuit Fathers arrived this year, having been sent over to assist the Recollets, and it was proposed to exclude Protestants from the colony, as they were

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

becoming more numerous than was convenient for a Catholic settlement. Cardinal Richelieu, then minister of France, during the minority of Louis XIII., lent them his powerful assistance in their designs for the glory of God. By an edict dated May, 1627, given at the camp before La Rochelle, all the old Commercial Companies of Canada were suppressed and dissolved, new ones being erected in their stead, with the express conditions and stipulations that the colony was to be exclusively *French* and *Catholic*, that the new company should, at its own expense, support a sufficient number of priests, and that agriculture should be actively encouraged.

His majesty empowered the company to make grants of land throughout the whole extent of New France, in such proportions and with such title–deeds, as they deemed most prudent for the settlement of the country. He gave them also the exclusive control of the fur–trade, particularly that of the beaver, requiring the colonists to bring this kind of merchandise to the store–houses of the company, where they were to receive fixed prices for it, in order to ensure the success of the colony during the first ten years of its existence. He promised to all classes of persons, no matter what their rank or condition of life might be, whether ecclesiastics, nobles, military men, or others, that by incorporating themselves in the association they should not in any case forfeit the privileges of their rank. The Duke de Ventadour resigned his viceroyalty to the French minister, and Cardinal Richelieu, with M. Marechal d'Effiat, were named the heads of the Association. Many ecclesiastics and seculars at once became members of the Society, and with them were soon incorporated several of the wealthiest and most enterprising merchants of the kingdom. But while the Company was being thus enthusiastically formed in France, the English made an attack on Quebec, and the effect of the edict was suspended for a season. The King came almost to the conclusion of abandoning Canada forever, as he had only been influenced by religious and honorable motives in preserving the treaty of peace he had made at St. Germain in 1632. The newly–formed company, in this predicament, began to assert their own rights. They presented Champlain to the king as the man best suited to their wants, and his Majesty at once appointed him Governor of New France. He had the command of several well–appointed ships, and many Jesuit missionaries offered to accompany him to labor for the salvation of souls in the new field that was opened to them. The Associates decided that the sons of St. Ignatius would be more useful in the colony than the Recollets, who complained that they did not find sufficient support in Canada, and who had in fact left it for a time, nor did they return until 1670, when the colony had become quite populous. Champlain died at Quebec in 1635, and the same year the Jesuits of New France began to build their *first college*. The following year Chevalier de Montmagni succeeded Champlain as Governor of Canada. The settlers had now become very numerous, being encouraged by their trade with the new company, and many of the savages had embraced the faith, a mission having been opened for them at Sillery, near Quebec. France again took an active part in the success of the enterprise, and as the settlements were more French than Indian, an organization for a hospital was set on foot, and also a school for children. The Duchess d'Aiguillon took upon herself the foundation of the Hotel–Dieu, and defrayed the entire expense of the undertaking.

She sent over some experienced Hospital Sisters from the hospital at Dieppe, who were glowing with zeal for the New World missions. Madame de la Pellerie, a rich young widow of high birth, undertook at the same time the establishment of the Ursulines, consecrating herself also to the good work. She was ably seconded by the celebrated Sister Mary of the Incarnation, and Sister Mary of St. Joseph, whom she brought from the Ursuline Monastery at Bourges. All these pious women met at Dieppe in 1639, and thence set sail for New France, arriving the same year at Quebec.

Yet, notwithstanding the philanthropic exertions of so many holy people, the colony was backward and languishing. The cruel and ceaseless attacks of the Iroquois had nearly disheartened the Christian world, men, women and children being mercilessly butchered, burnt alive, or carried into a still more horrible captivity. But Divine Providence remedied this terrible state of affairs, by means not naturally looked for, and which in the commencement seemed not only foolhardy, but little suited to the end. Yet a very special providence was visibly at work, in a chain of events that were altogether miraculous, as the sequel proved. A new colony was founded at *Montreal*, which was intended as a barrier against the inroads of the savages, and of which it will be necessary to speak a little in advance. While the French seemed to be taking an enthusiastic interest in the colonization of Canada partly from political motives, partly from individual and private interest, and partly from zeal for the

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

spread of religion and the conversion of the Indians, Almighty God was quietly preparing a number of pious persons who would have His glory *really* at heart. The first to whom He was pleased to manifest His designs, was Jerome le Royer, Receiver-General of the King's domains. This gentleman was an exemplary Christian, and quite remarkable for his devotion to the Blessed Virgin. It would appear that God had specially chosen him for the accomplishment of the work we are going to relate, and that the glorious Virgin herself had revealed to him the means by which he would succeed, as he rendered the greatest assistance to Sister Bourgeois in after years, in the establishment of her Congregation. Although he had never been in Canada, nor had ever seen the isle of Montreal, he had a supernatural and distinct knowledge of it, and knew it better than its present inhabitants. It was a vision that he never lost sight of, and he felt confident he would obtain from the king the proprietorship of the island, in order to consecrate it to the Blessed Virgin, and build a city on it, which he intended to call Ville-Marie (City of Mary). The aim of all his enterprises and hopes of the future centered in one grand idea, viz., the propagation of the Faith among the savages, and the greater glory of God. But as he knew well that he alone could not accomplish so great a work, he conceived the idea of forming a new company, that would not be devoted either to self-interest or commercial pursuits, like the preceding Associations, but whose chief desire would be the propagation of the Faith in America, and the conversion of the Indians. Full of these pious aspirations, he came to Paris, for the purpose of procuring means to put them into execution. He had many interviews with persons of distinction there, but, as generally happens with the works of God, he experienced so much difficulty, and encountered so much opposition, that a person less devoted to the divine honor, and less susceptible of the impressions of grace, would have been completely disheartened. Cardinal Richelieu himself, who was so clear-sighted in human policy, when spoken to on this subject, treated it as a chimera full of imprudence and temerity. M. Dauversiere (le Royer) made no reply to his distinguished opponent, but went quietly to seek an interview with M. Olier, then professor in the Seminary of St. Sulpice, a man who had devoted all his masterly energies to that great undertaking. This true servant of God generously assisted every good work, and when there was question of promoting devotion to the *Blessed Virgin*, his unbounded confidence in her made him act instantaneously. One cannot doubt by the splendid sequel that he had a very strong presentiment of the ultimate success of the pious project. Therefore he applied himself earnestly to the task of persuading influential persons to join the company when formed, and also took the necessary steps to secure to the company, when formed, the proprietorship of the isle of Montreal. In 1656 he did secure it, with ample concessions from M. Jean de Lanson, the King's counsellor and minister of finance.

### CHAPTER II. MESSRS. DAUVERSIERE AND DE MAISONNEUVE VISIT MONTREAL.

It has been stated that Cardinal Richelieu at first opposed the building of Ville-Marie, but this he did, not through apathy for anything relating to the spread of religion, but lest the work was a human impossibility, as indeed it then appeared to be. However, his opposition, from whatever cause it had arisen, disappeared before the reasoning of M. de Lanson, for whom the Cardinal entertained the most sincere respect. He now gave the project his unqualified approbation, and obtained from the King a renewed confirmation of all the privileges conferred on the preceding associations, with undisturbed possession of the land. Being thus furnished with the best means of procuring funds, and being under the protection of His Eminence the Cardinal, Messrs. de Faucamp and Dauversiere, with a great number of other influential persons, who were pledged to support them, no longer hesitated to announce themselves as The Company of Montreal, bound to uphold the Catholic Faith in Canada, and more especially to convert the savages, which was the real end they proposed to themselves. But it was not only the associates themselves who provided the necessary funds. Other persons also contributed, and none more generously than M. Alexander Bretonvilliers, a priest of the community of St. Sulpice, and afterwards its second Superior. Being son of the minister of state, he was the wealthiest ecclesiastic in France, and bestowed the greater part of his patrimony on this undertaking. The Duchess de Bullion also, who preserved an incognita for a long time, gave large sums of money to M. Dauversiere to assist the Montreal Association in the propagation of the Faith, as she had hitherto provided the principal funds for the establishment of the Hotel-Dieu, as shall be noticed again.



## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

It is now time to give the names of the principal members of this pious association, as they are undoubtedly written in the Book of Life. Most happily heading the list is the name of the great Cardinal Richelieu. Then follow such names as Marechal Duke d'Effiat, M. Jean de Lanzon, Jean Jacques Olier, first Superior of St Sulpice, Alexander Bretonvilliers, Gabriel de Quelus and Nicholas Barreau, all priests of St. Sulpice; Pierre le Pretre, priest by name and office, Louis Le Pretre his brother, Pierre Chevrier, Jerome de Royer, Jacques Gerard, Michael Royer Duplessis, Bertrand Drouart, a member of the suite of the Duke of Orleans, Christopher Duplessis, Antoine Barrilon, Jean Galibal, Louis Seignier, Louis d'Aibout de Coulonges, Paul de Chaumeday, the Duchess de Bullion, and the Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois, whose life we are about to record, and who, without being formally a member of the Society, took a most active part in it. We shall soon see her concealing the brightest virtues under the veil of humility.

But pre–eminently was M. Olier the guiding spirit of this splendid association of Catholic hearts. He it was who projected the plans necessary for the greatness and security of the enterprise. The first thing he declared necessary was to secure the blessing of God and the protection of the ever Blessed Virgin. This was to be accomplished by an imposing ceremony that might be recorded in after ages for the edification of those who should undertake a similar work for the glory of God. It was a spectacle worthy of the complacency of heaven, and the zealous children of the Church who participated in it. On the 3rd of February, 1641, the day following the Feast of the Purification, all the members of that illustrious Society being assembled in Paris, went in the morning at an appointed hour to the church of Notre Dame. M. Olier celebrated Mass at the Altar of the Blessed Virgin, and all the associates who were not priests received Holy Communion from his hands. The priests at the same time offered the holy sacrifice at other altars. With one accord they supplicated the Queen of Heaven to bless their undertaking, and forever keep the Isle of Montreal under her special protection. At the close of the edifying ceremony the Associates assembled at the Hotel de Lanzon to hold their first meeting. The plan being already matured, it was resolved that in the spring of the year they would get ready a sufficient number of ships, three of which were to be devoted to the transportation of such respectable and honest families as were willing to go to Montreal and commence the foundation of a permanent colony. They were required to take with them all the provisions, clothing, furniture, and mechanical or other tools necessary for the first two years, and were to take possession of the isle in the name of Mary, whom they were to regard as their mother and mistress.

With the King's permission they were to build a city in her honor, which was to be called Ville–Marie. Under the protection of Cardinal Richelieu, and during the first session of the assembly, M. de Lanzon was named administrator of the Society, M. Dauversiere being appointed its principal agent, which duty was especially suited to him because of his devotion to the Mother of God. When the plans were finally agreed upon, each member made it a point of honor to contribute as generously as possible to the success of the colony, and before the meeting broke up they received more than two hundred thousand livres. With this substantial aid, M. Dauversiere set to work in good earnest to prepare for the voyage across the Atlantic, the remainder of the winter being employed in preparing the necessary fleet. Authorized by the King, he enlisted a number of soldiers, whom he foresaw would be required to garrison and protect the colony. He also assembled a great number of families who volunteered to accompany him to the New World, and devote themselves to agriculture, retaining in his own service about thirty married people of various avocations, so that religion rather than worldly interest should range under his standard.

Among the emigrants, the nobility were represented by such names as De Beletre, Closse and Mignon; merchants, by Lemoine, Lebert, Charly, etc.; mechanics and farmers, by Caron, Barbier, Archambault, Cavalier, Decari, and others. In the spring of 1641 all these different classes of people met at La Rochelle, from which port they were to embark. M. Dauversiere was everywhere now at Paris, now at Rochelle and all were ready to depart, when the idea suddenly struck him that a man of prudence, experience, and authority was still wanted to govern the miscellaneous crowd, and take the lead in the young colony. It was now the month of May, and the embarkation had not yet taken place because of this void. But Providence did not forsake him, and the want was supplied in a rather remarkable manner. Being one day in Paris he was invited to dine at the house of an intimate friend. During the conversation the subject of colonizing Montreal was discussed, as it was his absorbing idea, and he spoke of

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

the embarrassing want that delayed him. After dinner one of the guests, until then a stranger to him, but who had listened very attentively to the colonization plan, of which he had not before heard, freely offered to accompany the expedition. I am a gentleman of about forty years of age, he said, I have spent my youth honorably in the King's service, and flatter myself with having acquired both experience and reputation. A desire to devote myself to the service of God in some way or other has induced me to withdraw from the service of his majesty, and I have lived for some time in a simple, quiet way, on a pension of two thousand livres, which is sufficient for my subsistence, but I see in the enterprise you have undertaken for the honor of the Mother of God so special a field for the spread of our holy religion, that if my services are agreeable to you, I willingly make the sacrifice of repose, and even of life.

This man was Paul de Chaumeday, *alias* de Maisonneuve. On hearing these words Dauversiere, filled with gratitude to God, adored His Divine Providence, and believed that the noble volunteer was appointed by heaven to lead the colonists. He embraced him with tears of joy and departed forthwith to relate the circumstance to his associates. The name of de Maisonneuve was well known to many of them, and his services were gladly accepted. A second meeting of the association was then held, at which it was unanimously agreed to appoint him Governor of Montreal. In this quality he was presented to the King for the purpose of expediting an official appointment. He was certainly a suitable person to head such an expedition, as he had long been a faithful client of Mary Immaculate. Many years before he made a vow of perpetual chastity in her honor, and recited her office every day. His reputation stood very high, and being in the full vigor of manhood, had given proofs of courage and prudence, even in religious matters. His business being quickly settled up, he set out for Rochelle with M. Dauversiere, each rejoicing at having met the other. They had scarcely arrived there, when another singular intervention of Providence took place, which was quite as remarkable as the preceding one. This was the vocation of Jean Mance, whose name will appear again. She was a young woman, about thirty years old, the daughter of simple, honest parents in Langers, where she had spent her youth in the most fervent exercises of piety, and was ignorant of the extraordinary exertions then being made in France to colonize Canada, but she felt inspired to pass the remainder of her life in some place consecrated to the Blessed Virgin, and waited for Divine Providence to direct her. She proposed her views to her confessor, but he being also ignorant of the projected establishment of Montreal, treated her as a visionary. Yet as she persisted in asking advice, he spoke of her in Paris to persons more enlightened than himself. Those with whom he conversed did not fail to recognize something remarkable in her vocation, and she was accordingly introduced to the Duchess at the Hotel de Bullion. As this lady was already laboring for the colonization of Montreal she took a lively interest in Jean, retaining her for some time as a confidential attendant in her own household. In this capacity the Duchess could not but admire the special designs of God, manifested in her well-formed habits of virtue. She encouraged her to go with the volunteers to the New World, and remain faithful to her vocation. As the day appointed for the embarkation drew near, after giving her a well-filled purse to supply her wants, she exacted a promise to apply to her in future for assistance in carrying on whatever good works Divine Providence might appoint for her. She then took an affectionate leave of Jean, and sent her to M. Dauversiere at Rochelle. On her arrival he desired to test her zeal and courage as a postulant, and represented the difficulty of such an enterprise for a young, friendless girl. He spoke of his intention to found Ville-Marie, but added that it might be reddened with human blood, if the savages should attack the colonists, and that she might possibly have to attend alone in the hospital on the wounded and dying. Finding that such pictures of horror only increased her zeal, he blessed the inscrutable ways of God, and joyfully permitted her to embark with the others. He did not hesitate even to enrol her name among the Associates, and she eventually became a most useful instrument in the hands of Divine Providence for completing the establishment of the Hotel-Dieu of St. Joseph at Ville-Marie.

The events we have just recorded delayed the sailing of the fleet until the end of June, at which time it left the port of Rochelle, but did not arrive at Quebec until the close of September. The season was then too far advanced to ascend the river to Montreal, and if it had been attempted they would have been compelled to winter at some place where there was neither human habitation nor fort, and would consequently be exposed to the attacks of the fierce Iroquois. They therefore concluded to pass the winter at Quebec as best they could. The Governor, Chevalier de Montmagni, welcomed them with much cordiality, but had views of his own in the Quebec colony,

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

which were not favorable to an establishment at Montreal. He supposed naturally that in a country so weak as Canada then was, it would be unwise and imprudent to divide their strength, and that the success of a settlement at Montreal was impossible on account of its proximity to the Indian camping grounds, and their constant attacks on the French. He intended asking them to select the isle of Orleans, which was still unoccupied, and where assistance could more easily reach them in case of an attack. Like a wise politician, however, he was slow to reveal his plan, preferring to await the return of the ships to France, which had scarcely set sail when he convoked a general assembly in order to disclose his projects. It is not to be doubted that the garrison were as interested as he was, and so were the other inhabitants of Quebec. But the firmness of M. de Maisonneuve was a match for their intrigue, and when his views and opinions were asked during the debate, he replied with much dignity, that he was surprised the Governor of Quebec thought it necessary to convoke a public assembly on a matter which concerned the speaker only that he made no secret of his intentions that the settlement of the isle of Orleans had never been proposed by the Montreal Association that he came expressly to found a *new city*, which was to be dedicated to the Mother of God, on the isle of Montreal that he had not the least idea of changing his original plan and finally, that unless he lost his life, he would execute his commission. It was impossible to gainsay him, and the assembly dissolved without deciding on anything. De Maisonneuve contented himself with sending some of his party to Montreal to cut down trees during the winter, that they might have a cleared section of land to work on in spring. He and the rest of the colonists passed the season quietly in their tents at Quebec, awaiting the arrival of fine weather, and the breaking up of the ice.

In the month of May, as soon as the river was open to navigation, they were again in readiness to move on, and Governor Montmagni expressed a strong desire to accompany them. De Maisonneuve invited the Jesuit missionaries, Simon and Poncet, to go with them and bless the site of the new city, and take charge of the church they intended to erect when circumstances permitted. As there was no road through the country, and no settlements along the river between Montreal and Quebec, the journey was long, and everywhere beset with difficulties, so that they did not arrive at their destination until the 17th of May. Then they encamped, and called the neck of land at the mouth of the little river Pointe a Calieres, in honor of the third Governor of Montreal, M. de Calieres, who built a fort there, in which he resided during the term of his administration.

The fervent colonists erected a tent immediately, in which the holy sacrifice of the Mass was celebrated, and in which they afterwards kept the Blessed Sacrament. M. de Maisonneuve's first care was to give every family sufficient land on which to erect a house, and each one built to suit his own convenience. He erected a house for himself also, which was known long after as the Old Seminary.

To Jean Mance he gave sufficient ground for a hospital, the expense of building which was to be paid out of the fund bestowed by the Duchess de Bullion. The hospital was as large and convenient as the young colony required, and the people took the precaution to build their church near it. This building served for years not only as a parish church, but likewise as a chapel of devotion for the sick and wounded. As the houses were all wooden structures, they were speedily erected, and on the 15th of August, 1642 being the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin the Adorable Sacrament was taken from the tent in which it was hitherto kept, and carried in solemn procession to the church with all the pomp and magnificence possible under the circumstances. Curiosity attracted the savages from all quarters, and as they were then less familiar with the ceremonies of our holy religion than now, they were transported with admiration and joy at what they saw. Nor were they less edified by the simple fervor and piety of the first French settlers. This glorious festival of Mary was long remembered in Canada by both French and Indians, as was the singing of the *Salve Regina* by Columbus and his crew, when he neared the shores of the New World.

### **CHAPTER III. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE HOTEL DIEU ECCLESIASTICAL APPOINTMENTS FOR CANADA, ETC.**

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

While M. de Maisonneuve was arranging matters to insure the success of the new colony, he received a reinforcement which, though not so numerous as the first band of emigres, was equally well selected. It was led by M. Louis d'Aillebout de Masseau, a man of eminent piety, and a member of the Montreal Association. With this opportune and important addition, De Maisonneuve undertook to inclose the young city with palisades in the manner of a fort, as a barrier against the attacks of the furious Indians. These attacks they might any moment expect, and very justly feared, on account of the atrocities that were daily related to them. The Governor of Quebec being informed of the proposed fortification, or rather being assured that it was nearly completed, determined to oppose it, but de Maisonneuve would permit no outside interference. In order, therefore, that there might be no clashing of interests, he returned to France the same year, leaving the command of the garrison to M. d'Aillebout, with the title of Lieutenant-Governor. This gentleman discharged the duties of his office to the entire satisfaction of the people, securing both their esteem and their property. On his arrival in Paris de Maisonneuve sought an interview with the King, and related faithfully to him, as likewise to the members of the Association, the exact state of things in Canada. Every one was astonished at his success, and approved of his conduct. The King, moreover, on learning the opposition policy of the Governor of Quebec, gave De Maisonneuve a letter to place in the hands of that gentleman, which read as follows:

M. DE MONTMAGNI, Being especially informed by the Montreal Association, at present residing in Montreal, that their intention is to establish a colony on that island, in order to labor more effectually for the conversion of the savages, we strongly approve of their design, and have given them permission to erect a fort on the said island, at their own expense, which fort they are to furnish with artillery and all other military supplies that may be needed to secure them from the fury of the savages. We desire that *you* render them all the assistance in your power, and we have named M. de Maisonneuve governor and controller of the enterprise, so that nothing may occur to prevent its success. LOUIS.

*February 21, 1643.*

Furnished with this letter, Messrs. de Maisonneuve and Dauversiere labored in concert to procure a third fleet and a new set of recruits, and they were quite as successful as on the two former occasions. The volunteers were select and numerous, their voyage across the Atlantic safe and pleasant, and at the end of July that year they arrived at Ville-Marie. The death of Louis XIII. occurring at that period, the Associates deemed it prudent to apply to the Queen Regent, mother of Louis XIV., for a confirmation of their former privileges, which she freely granted, permitting them also to organize militia companies for their future safety, and to secure the services of such ecclesiastics as they should judge most useful for the rising colony. Yet, notwithstanding repeated royal favors, and untiring exertions to promote the general prosperity, the colony was languishing, and had much to suffer from the increasing ferocity of the Indians. But de Maisonneuve was always equal to the occasion, and derived advantage from their fury, that is, spiritual advantage. Many and many a time, he had the consolation to see those barbarous warriors throw down the bloody tomahawk and embrace Christianity. He was truly an apostle in their midst, attracting them as much by affability, as by the benefits he conferred, and it was his greatest pleasure to act as sponsor for them in baptism. Almighty God blessed the new settlement so visibly as to cause astonishment and admiration in the hearts of all devoted to His glory. Jean Mance also labored zealously in the service of the sick, who were cared for in the hospital she established, and already the work was greater than she alone could accomplish. Madame de la Peleterie, who founded the Ursulines at Quebec, came to Ville-Marie to offer her services to Mlle. Mance, who admired her generosity and good will without accepting her assistance. The members of the Association resident in Paris labored meanwhile very earnestly to establish the hospital in Montreal, but declined the interference of outsiders. The Duchess de Bullion had already made large advances for its support, and in 1648 donated an additional fund of sixty thousand livres. With this money M. de Maisonneuve assisted Jean Mance in building a wing of 60 by 24 feet for the nurses, who were *still wanting*, and whose services it was time to secure, as the number of patients was constantly increasing. The ladies of the Hotel Dieu at Quebec, on hearing of the crowded state of the hospital, presented themselves as nurses, and two remained in Ville-Marie a considerable length of time to watch how matters would be arranged. Even the French court approved of them as nurses, but Providence ordained otherwise, as at that very time the Associates in France were making their *own*

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

arrangements, and disappointed those who wished to press the matter in Montreal.

There existed at La Fleche a new congregation of Hospital Sisters, partly secular, who by simple vows added the service of the sick to the ordinary duties of a religious community. They were in their first fervor, the members applying themselves with zeal and edification to serve the poor invalids in the Hotel Dieu of St. Joseph, lately established in their city. Dauversiere, who was acquainted with their piety, asked and obtained a few Sisters to go to Ville-Marie and establish the Hotel Dieu of Canada. As soon as his proposal was made known, these pious women strove who should be first to claim the sacred honor of expatriating themselves for the cause of charity, and sacrifice life, if necessary, in a strange land, among wild savages who would most likely, in return, confer on them the crown of martyrdom. The French emigrants of those days had no other idea of the Canadian mission, and prepared themselves accordingly. On the 20th of May, 1656, the community pledged itself to send four of its zealous souls, who awaited the time of their embarkation with eagerness, but from some cause or other did not leave France until 1660. On their arrival at Ville-Marie, Jean Mance received them with every mark of esteem and affection that Christian charity could inspire. She put them in immediate possession of that portion of the hospital set apart for them, reserving to herself only the administration of the funds for the poor and destitute, a duty which she discharged faithfully, and with solid benefit to the recipients, the rest of her life. The new Sisters were little more than a secular congregation, until 1666, when Pope Alexander VII. approved of them as a religious order, by a bull dated January 8th, 1666, in which strict enclosure was enjoined, and a religious dress appointed to be worn.

While the interests of the *hospital* were being thus carefully attended to in France, it was evident that the *spiritual wants of the colony* were becoming every day more pressing. Montreal was now populous, and numbers of the Indians who embraced Christianity were anxious that their respective tribes should do the same. Yet there was but *one* Jesuit Father in the whole colony, who could not possibly discharge all the duties required of him. When M. Olier heard of it, he thought seriously of sending to Canada a mission from the Seminary of St. Sulpice, and as he was suffering painful infirmities for many years, brought on by the laborious discharge of his official duties, he contemplated accompanying them himself. He accordingly selected four priests of his community, who were gentlemen of merit and distinction, viz., Gabriel de Quelus, Abbe of Laudieu (one of the Montreal associates), M. Francis d'Allet, Gabriel Souart, and Dominick Gallitier. M. de Quelus was a man of illustrious birth, and was appointed by their ecclesiastical Superior (the Archbishop of Rouen) Grand Vicar of the missionaries in Canada, with the entire spiritual control of New France. He was received both at Quebec and Ville-Marie with all the respect due to his dignity and birth, encountering no opposition in the discharge of his duties in either city. M. Souart was appointed pastor of Ville-Marie, the Jesuit Father, Claude Pigots, who had until then discharged the duties of pastor, resigning gracefully in his favor.

The new pastor before becoming a Sulpician, had been a rich aristocratic Parisian. His parents, expecting he would have a brilliant career in the world, almost forced upon him a marriage suitable to his rank and wealth, and the day of the ceremony, which was the Feast of the Assumption, 1660, was fast approaching. His simple piety led him on the eve of that day to the parish church of St. Sulpice, where he heard an eloquent sermon, on the necessity of seeking light from heaven in the choice of a state of life. He was deeply impressed by the preacher's convincing eloquence, and entering into himself, found that he had not sufficiently consulted God on the alliance he was about to contract. The next day, therefore, instead of plighting his troth to a willing bride, he went to the seminary of St. Sulpice to make a retreat, during which Divine Providence clearly manifested to him that he was called to the ecclesiastical state. Faithful to the call of divine grace he renounced the world, entered St. Sulpice, and devoted his young life and rare talents to the service of the Church. He was joyfully admitted into the seminary, and having already received a university education, was soon promoted to holy orders, and raised to the dignity of the priesthood. His glowing zeal impelled him to volunteer for the mission of Ville-Marie, where he eventually succeeded M. de Quelus as Superior of the Montreal Seminary, which he governed happily for many years. He was the first priest who undertook the perilous task of forming the baptized savages into villages, and his successful attempt at civilization resulted in the famous Mission of the Mountain, where he died shortly after.

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

Two other missionaries, le Maitre and Vignal, arrived subsequently, and were killed by the treacherous Iroquois while laboring for their conversion with incredible self-sacrifice. It is a tradition of these times, that the savage who killed le Maitre, having wrapped the bloody head in a cloth, the face of the martyred priest was distinctly imprinted thereon, and so indelible was the impression that when the terrified savage displayed the cloth in his native village as a trophy of the war-path, the features of le Maitre were instantly recognized, the murderer being cuttingly upbraided for his cruelty by the braves of his tribe.

It was now several years since the French had established themselves at Ville-Marie, and during all that time they suffered the most shocking cruelties from the relentless Iroquois. The earth might be said to have been constantly wet with the blood of the noblest and best sons of France, and the survivors, disgusted and disheartened, resolved to abandon the country. In speaking of this period of horror and dismay, Jean Mance says, In 1560 the Iroquois had conquered and almost exterminated the Hurons, their ancient foes, and full of barbarian pride and insolence, turned their arms against the colonists, who were an easy prey, as their attacks were sudden, fierce, and stealthy. They killed several persons in the suburbs of Ville-Marie, and burned their houses; even our hospital was not secure from their brutal recklessness, and we were obliged to fortify it by a garrison. At length people despaired of being able to protect life or property, and resolved on abandoning the enterprise. In this extremity I reflected that many souls would be forever lost to God if the young city was forsaken, and that it would be a national humiliation for France to abandon Canada to the vengeance of wild savages, who were constantly killing each other. Therefore, fluctuating between hope and fear, I implored M. de Maisonneuve to hasten back to France and secure additional military protection for Montreal and its martyred people.

He willingly acceded to the brave woman's request, and in September, 1651, returned to France, having first appointed de Masseau commander of Ville-Marie in his absence. He was obliged to spend two entire years inducing recruits to enlist for Canada, so great was their horror of the Indians, and had to labor hard against disappointments, and go to great expense to secure his object. But God at length blessed with success his efforts in the cause of religion. He secured a company of more than a hundred brave soldiers, who sailed with him to the New World in 1653. It was during this voyage he first became acquainted with the remarkable virtues of Margaret Bourgeois, who accompanied him from France at a period when the whole nation was disgusted with the Canadian mission. This admirable young woman, who had no other resources than courage and confidence in God, did not hesitate to cross the sea, to consecrate herself to the service of the Church, and to propagate devotion to the Mother of God. How perfectly she succeeded is proven by the splendid monument of her zeal which still exists in almost primitive fervor, after the lapse of more than two centuries. That monument is the Congregation of Notre Dame, which has rendered such incalculable service to the cause of religion in Canada.

### **CHAPTER IV. EARLY YEARS OF MARGARET BOURGEOIS, AND HER VOCATION FOR THE CANADIAN MISSION.**

Margaret Bourgeois was born in the city of Troyes, in Champagne, on the 15th of April, 1620. Her father, Abraham Bourgeois, was an honest merchant of that city, who espoused Guillemette Garnier. If these good people were not distinguished for high birth or the possession of great wealth, they were at least remarkable for the purity of their lives, for sound religious principles, and for unusual probity of character. As they belonged to the middle class of society, their means were limited, yet they took care to have their children educated, and instilled into their young minds a cordial love for the duties of religion. Their family consisted of five children, two boys and three girls, Margaret being the third born to them. She was baptized in the parish church of St. John of Troyes, and nothing is known of her infancy or childhood except that at a proper age she learned to read and write, with the other attainments of early school years. Of this we are certain, that, at an early period, she became a practical Christian, and never deviated from the principles she then imbibed. Almighty God had special designs on her future life, and from childhood infused into her heart a great love of labor and mortification, which foreshadowed what she was one day to become. Scarcely had she attained her tenth year when she was to be seen among her little companions, like a mother in Israel, assembling them together in secluded places, far from the noise and

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

bustle of the city, instructing them in the discharge of their duties, principally in practices of piety, advising them to love labor and shun idleness, the fruitful source of the sins of youth, and to select such work as Almighty God had given them particular inclinations for.

These assemblies of children were so many little communities of innocent souls in which God took great complacency, and it was at this time she made her first Holy Communion. Her mother's death occurring soon after, she had an opportunity of practising the virtues of obedience, etc., under circumstances far in advance of her years. By the death of his wife, M. Bourgeois found himself embarrassed with the care of a helpless young family, but noticing in little Margaret a certain air of gravity and prudence, accompanied by sincere piety, he seriously thought of giving her charge of the household, and particularly of the education of a younger brother and sister. Nothing is known with certainty of the after lives of these children, except that, in 1653, when Margaret was making arrangements to leave France for Canada, two of them were minors, in whose favor she voluntarily dispossessed herself of *her* share of the family inheritance. Neither can anything be recorded of the virtues she displayed in discharging the laborious duties of the position in which her father placed her at so tender an age. No one could speak of these years of responsibility except herself, and humility would never permit her to raise the veil, or speak of what must have been a most interesting portion of her saintly life. Only one circumstance of these early years could she ever be induced to mention, and of this she sometimes spoke with great bitterness of soul, and much exaggeration. It was that, a few times, during seasons of worldly dissipation, she had attached undue importance to dress taking great pains to arrange her toilette fashionably so as to display her personal attractions to advantage. Although this happened without dressing beyond her station of life, or exceeding the bounds of modesty, she acknowledged that it tarnished the purity of her heart, and filled her mind with vain and foolish thoughts. It was one of those youthful faults for which she took care to punish herself severely in after life, being remarkable for the simplicity and modesty of her attire, even before she became a religieuse. Her beautiful and well-concealed spirit of mortification made her correspond faithfully to the motions of grace which Divine Providence infused into her soul, and by which she was to become so intimately united to God. As He always makes an instrument of His Blessed Mother to bestow such graces on His elect, it was by devotion to Mary that He attached Margaret Bourgeois irrevocably to His service. She had always been a devoted client of the Blessed Virgin, and the singular favor she received, that will now be related, was probably not the first vouchsafed her by the Queen of Heaven. The circumstances under which she received it prove that she was a member of the Rosary Society, which was then effecting such wonders in the spiritual life of Christendom.

On the first Sunday of October, 1640 the Feast of the Holy Rosary the Dominicans held grand processions in honor of Mary, and celebrated the feast with all possible splendor. Margaret Bourgeois, being then twenty years old, came with many others to assist at the procession, which was to take place within the monastery enclosure. The public were allowed on such occasions to join in the ceremony, but by a particular dispensation of Providence, the crowd was so great this year that the procession was obliged to pass along a public route, and file off before the church of Notre Dame—the cathedral of Troyes. There was a very fine marble statue of the Blessed Virgin placed on a pedestal in the porch of the church, and as Margaret turned reverently to gaze upon it, it shone brilliantly with supernatural light the face of the Virgin beaming with an extraordinary life-like beauty. She had often seen the statue before, but never as now, and, like St. Paul, was almost blinded by the dazzling vision. To the last day of her life she felt her heart moved to its inmost depths when she recalled this celestial favor.

On entering the church she reflected seriously on what had occurred, and felt convinced that God demanded of her something more than she had yet accomplished for His glory, and that His Blessed Mother was to be hereafter her strength and support. She immediately resolved by the help of God to eradicate from her heart the two imperfections that counteracted the influence of divine grace. These were an inordinate love of dress, and a strong desire to attract to herself the esteem and love of creatures. Accordingly she determined for the future to wear a simple dress of cheap material, to use no color but black or brown, and never again to display the vain ornaments of jewelry that young girls so much prize. In her fervor she made a vow to receive humiliations as coming directly from the hand of God, and we shall see that as SISTER BOURGEOIS she received many such favors.

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

With these dispositions it was natural she should seek admission into a religious community, which in effect she did. There existed at Troyes a Carmelite Convent, of the reform of St. Teresa. Every one knows that the Carmelites are in a special manner devoted to Mary, under the title of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, and that their congregation is the origin and centre of the Confraternities of the Scapular. There is not a community of women in the Church whose discipline and manner of life is so austere, if we except the Poor Clares. During all seasons of the year they dress in a heavy coarse habit, wear sandals on their feet, never make use of linen, are seldom seen in the parlor, sleep on a hard mattress, rise simultaneously, to chant the Divine Office, spend at least two hours each night at prayer, and are familiar with the use of the discipline, hair-shirt, etc. In a word, their mortifications are continual and rigorous. Now these extraordinary penances were what especially attracted Margaret Bourgeois to join them. But in order to act prudently, and learn the will of God clearly regarding her vocation, she addressed herself to M. Antoine Jandret, a virtuous and enlightened priest, who was confessor to the Carmelites. Having heard her attentively, he was struck with admiration at the manner in which God was working in her soul. She continued for some time to be his penitent, and after he had made trial of her virtue, he no longer hesitated to propose her as a subject to the Carmelites.

The chapter met to discuss the matter, but some changes in her exterior manner of living (the motives of which they did not know) led them to suppose that her disposition was frivolous and volatile; and they refused to admit her. But it was not there Almighty God intended her to become a religieuse, and their refusal did not lessen her esteem for the austerities practised by them, and on which she modelled her own penances for the remainder of her life. Neither did a *first refusal* discourage her; on the contrary, she redoubled her prayers to learn the will of God, and it pleased His divine Majesty to unfold to the eyes of her soul, gradually but clearly, his designs regarding her. Being rejected by the Carmelites, she next sought admission into the extern congregation of young girls, at Troyes. It will be necessary to give some explanation of this society, as the singular graces accorded to Sister Bourgeois while she was one of its members influenced her very much in the formation of the congregation she afterwards founded.

There existed in Troyes another convent of religieuses known as the Congregation of Notre Dame, who were founded by Pere Fourier, cure of Martincourt, a man eminent for piety. They were cloistered nuns, who added to the ordinary duties of a religious life the education of young girls. This duty they discharged within the cloister, and without secular assistance. The Ursulines conducted their schools more publicly, and had established several successful missions. The former, therefore, were obliged to use as auxiliaries an extern congregation composed of virtuous young girls, who lived in their own families, but assembled on Sundays and festivals for the exercise of works of charity. They went two and two together, wherever the glory of God or the good of their neighbors required, always subject to the appointment of the religieuses. Most of the young ladies of the city belonged to this association, which was of course secular (enclosure not being suitable to their work), and they willingly admitted Margaret Bourgeois among them. It was in this edifying association that God manifested his designs on her future life, and it was for her a real apprenticeship in the school of virtue. Once received, she was soon distinguished for zeal and fervor, and was to be seen everywhere, exercising the duties of Christian charity. Her distinguishing trait, however, was the instruction of the ignorant, and teaching young girls the principles of religion, as well as the rudiments of education. It may be truly said of her from that period, that the animating principle of all her actions was to unite them in spirit with the human actions of the Mother of God.

She never relaxed in her efforts to imitate this high model of sanctity, and never ceased by word and example to animate the Christian virgins who afterwards joined her religious order to imitate as closely as human infirmity would permit, the daily actions of Mary during her sojourn on earth. To quote her own words will best exemplify her spirit. She said: Our Lord before His ascension into heaven left behind Him on earth a kind of congregation or community that would embrace persons of every condition of life, the first superior being His own divine Mother. The holy spirit in the Gospel has given us the name of this community, which had a two-fold object, and was to serve as a model for all future associations of women to be established in the Church. This was no other than the community of Magdalen and Martha, the disciples and friends of Christ. The first represented religious congregations devoted to prayer and contemplation in the cloister. While Martha was to be a model for those who



## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

devote themselves to the service of their neighbor. But the Blessed Virgin reserved to herself the duty of instruction. She was the Mother and mistress of the rising Church, which she formed and trained to the practise of virtue, by word and example. Not that she undertook to preach the Gospel, which was the mission of the Apostles, but she instructed the *little ones* in the virtues of poverty and humility, of which she herself made profession, knowing that the majority of the followers of Christ would be the poor and lowly. Thus was she the true model of a missionary congregation.

By such admirable sentiments as these did she excite her companions to fervor in the discharge of their several duties. Yet her labors as a member of the externs at Troyes did not satisfy her. She felt that God required more from her, although He had not yet manifested his will, so she again determined to seek admission into a religious house, applying this time to the Poor Clares. It is true she saw nothing in their institute that corresponded to her ardent desire of consecrating herself to the service of the Blessed Virgin, and of laboring for the salvation of souls, but she felt she would be unfaithful to grace if she did not make another effort to find out the will of God concerning her vocation. She therefore consulted her director, who advised her to present herself for admission, which she did, but as before, met with a humiliating refusal, as it was not there *either*, that Almighty God intended to make use of her for His glory, and He took this means of putting her humility to the test, and proving and perfecting her virtue.

The first refusal of the Carmelites only served to animate her to greater perfection, and she made the same use of this second mortifying rejection. Being more and more impressed with a desire to consecrate herself to God, she resolved on making a vow of perpetual chastity, first acquainting M. Landret, her confessor, with her intention. He was a prudent man, and thought that circumstanced as she was, she might sometime repent having made the vow, or something might occur to change her resolution, and therefore told her to postpone such a promise until she was at least thirty years old, being then twenty-two. She submitted to his decision in silence, as humbly as if God had spoken. He soon changed his opinion, however, being convinced by her submission that God was operating great things in her soul, and permitted her to follow her inclination by consecrating her virginity to Jesus, which she did with fervor on the Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle, December 21st, 1643, being in her twenty-third year. Shortly after she added the a vow of poverty, and from that time her career of sanctity was unmistakable. She advanced in virtue as she advanced in age, and the practise of every good work, and held the office of Prefect of the extern congregation for many years. In 1647, her father falling dangerously sick, she attended him with all the love and charity that might be expected from such a daughter, and had the consolation of seeing him die full of hope and trust in the mercy of God. She arranged his body in the coffin with her own hands, although others were willing to spare her the performance of that duty of filial love, and the pious practice of preparing the dead for burial she ever after continued in Canada, until strength and life failed her, although it was often repugnant to her feelings.

As M. Jandret knew the humiliation she endured by being refused admission in two religious orders, and knew also her virtues, he did not feel justified in advising anything that would stifle the operations of divine grace in her soul. He was, moreover, an eye-witness of her successful efforts in instructing young girls, both secularly and religiously, and thought it might be pleasing to God to associate with her other pious young persons, who could easily be found in the congregation of which she was Prefect, and establish them *permanently* in the discharge of that duty. He accordingly made the proposal to her, which she did not refuse, believing it would contribute to the glory of God, and be a means of accomplishing His will. In order to act prudently, however, M. Jandret consulted his superior, M. de Theoloyal, of the cathedral of Troyes, who assured him that the project was a wise one, and the two priests in concert drew up a formula of rules which they judged fit to lead those for whom they were intended securely in the path of Christian perfection. M. le Theoloyal went to Paris to submit the rules to the doctors of the Sorbonne, who decided in their favor, and advised that they be reduced to practice.

Two virtuous young ladies were thereupon associated with Margaret Bourgeois, and Mme. de Chuly, of whom we shall have occasion to speak more at length, gave them an apartment in her own house to make the experiment. In proposing the rules to these pious young women, the persons who had written and approved of them had

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

undoubtedly the *future* in view, but God had still wiser and other designs. It was only a preparation or foundation for the rules and constitutions that Margaret, many years after, sought to have approved in France for the government of the Community she established at Ville-Marie, she and her first companions having had a most happy experience of them during their early religious life. They engaged zealously in the education of the children confided to their care, always making moral training the principal object, but most especially did they seek to guard those whose surroundings endangered their virtue. On one occasion, a set of libertines managed to entice a poor but honest girl away from home. Margaret Bourgeois fortunately heard of the intended outrage, and taking a crucifix in her hand fearlessly followed the ruffians in order to rescue the girl. Without taking any notice of the violence they threatened, as they were well armed, she spoke so forcibly of the judgments of God, that would inevitably fall on them if they persisted in their diabolical purpose, that they retired in confusion, leaving the trembling girl at liberty, and overpowered with gratitude for her benefactress. She afterwards became one of Margaret's life-long companions, and accompanied her to Canada, where she was known as Sister Crolo. But the trial establishment of M. Jandret did not last very long. One of the two associates died, and the other left, so that Margaret, finding herself alone, was forced to abandon a position in which she could not succeed without companions, and again occupied herself as a simple congregationalist. The mortified life she had thus been leading for years, always uncertain of the future, and without a particle of human consolation, could not fail to draw down upon her signal favors from heaven, and those she experienced were of the most precious kind. Almighty God favored her many times with ineffable and sweet consolations when she approached Holy Communion. The fire of divine love then burned so vividly in her heart that she could hardly refrain from letting appear exteriorly the ecstatic joy with which her soul was inundated. Once she saw Our Lord in the Holy Host during Mass, in the form of a little child, of a ravishing and incomparable beauty, and by such a singular favor we may easily judge of the state of her soul at that period of her life.

On the Feast of the Assumption, 1650, which was the principal Feast of the externs, she was appointed to remain in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament during the annual procession in honor of the holy Virgin, which was that day held. After remaining a considerable time in prayer she felt suddenly inspired to raise her eyes and look at the holy Host in the ostensorium. A vision of the Redeemer was distinctly presented to her, and she was so profoundly penetrated with love and gratitude that earth had no more charms for her from that happy hour. Such is always the effect of celestial manifestations, and it was by these favors Almighty God prepared the soul of His servant for the great designs He had upon her, of which she was then ignorant. However, they were not much longer unfolding, and we shall, in the sequel, everywhere find occasion to notice the watchful care of Divine Providence and the marked protection of the Blessed Virgin over the colony of Ville-Marie, over Sister Bourgeois herself, and over the Institute of the Sisters of the Congregation.

### **CHAPTER V. MARGARET BOURGEOIS, AFTER MANY TRIALS AND MORTIFICATIONS, AT LENGTH SAILS WITH M. DE MAISONNEUVE FOR CANADA.**

In a proceeding chapter we have spoken of M. de Maisonneuve, who was a native of Champenois, and consequently a fellow-countryman of Margaret Bourgeois so favorably does divine Providence dispose the course of future events. We have also seen what a remarkable chain of circumstances led to his appointment as first Governor of Montreal. One might almost consider it *miraculous*. He laid the foundations of the new city, under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin naming it Ville-Marie, City of Mary. He had two sisters in the city of Troyes, one a religieuse of the Congregation of Notre Dame, the other a secular lady Mme. de Chuly, of whom mention has been made. Before he left France he confided to these pious ladies his views for the advancement of religion, and his intention to build a city in honor of the Mother of God engaging them to unite with him in prayer for its success. As soon as the Congregation Sisters heard of the project they offered to accompany him, and establish in the New World a community of their Order. But as he was not prepared to make such an establishment, and as they pressed him very urgently to comply, he contented himself by promising that, in the future, if both parties agreed, he would attempt a foundation. As a pledge of their mutual understanding, they

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

presented him a statue of the Blessed Virgin, on which were inscribed the following words: Sainte Mere de Dieu, et Vierge au Coeur loyal, Gardez nous une place, en votre Mont-Royal.

It is true there was to be, in the new city, a community of Christian virgins specially devoted to Mary, but it was not the *religieuses of Troyes* God intended to be there, and so the matter ended. Three years after, when M. de Maisonneuve returned to France to procure assistance for Ville-Marie, he again visited these religieuses, who importuned him anew to take some of them to Canada, but he assured them as before that matters were not sufficiently matured in the New World for the establishment of a cloistered Sisterhood. So neither party took any more decisive step than a renewal of good wishes, and indefinite promises for the future. Divine Providence, meanwhile, was quietly preparing the way for the accomplishment of its inscrutable designs, not yet manifested. While these good ladies were filled with ardent hopes of the near future of their Canadian establishment, Margaret Bourgeois had many business interviews with them, being Prefect of the extern congregation connected with their monastery, and her singular virtue being very well known, they spoke to her confidentially of the expected mission they had so much at heart, frequently asking if she did not wish to be one of those selected for Ville-Marie. This was plainly hinting that they would not object to her joining their community. But, though God *did* intend her for Canada, He did *not* intend her for that Order; therefore she made no other reply to their proposal than that she desired to do the will of God with her whole heart, whenever and wherever He would please to manifest it to her. Although she had hitherto met with refusals on applying for admission to religious communities, yet she was not discouraged, and the proposal of the Canadian mission only incited her to learn the will of God, with more ardor than before. She sought the advice of her spiritual directors, knowing that their decisions were the usual means God makes use of in the direction of souls. M. Jandret being consulted, advised her to think seriously on the matter, as it seemed to him it might be the will of God she should go to Canada. However, diffiding in his own light, he recommended her to consult M. Pertuis another experienced priest, who was of the same opinion with the former, and both advised her to ask advice of the Bishop of Troyes. This distinguished prelate being absent at the time, she had recourse to M. Rose, his vicar general, who counselled her at once to go to Canada, as it seemed to be the will of God she should. Having thus taken every precaution that prudence suggested to learn the divine will, Sister Bourgeois no longer doubted of her vocation for Canada, but God had not yet declared either the time or the manner of her going. It was natural to suppose she would accompany the religieuses of the Congregation, but the Great Disposer of events ordained differently. During all this time, the savage Iroquois had repeated their attacks on the people of Montreal with the wildest fury. Men, women, and children fell beneath the tomahawk, and in 1651, M. de Maisonneuve was obliged to return a second time to France for military assistance. On these occasions he never failed to go to the city of Troyes, to visit the members of his family who resided there, and also to pay a visit of respect to the religieuses of the Congregation, for whom he entertained a sincere friendship, his sister being a member of the community. On the eve of his arrival, Sister Bourgeois had a singular prediction of the future. She saw in a dream, a grave, venerable-looking man, dressed like an ecclesiastic, standing silently before her. The form and features of the man, who was not then known to her, remained distinctly imprinted on her imagination, and she had an indefinable inspiration that he was to be in some way connected with the work for which God intended her. She related the dream to some of her friends, and three days afterwards M. de Maisonneuve arrived at Troyes. He called at the Convent, when as usual the subject of the proposed foundation at Ville-Marie was discussed. Sister Bourgeois was sent for, that *her* opinion might be heard with the others. On entering the parlor, the first person that attracted her attention was the strange gentleman, who corresponded exactly to the person she had seen in her dream. Struck with astonishment, she could not help exclaiming, Behold the priest of my dream. She was requested to relate the dream, which she did quite simply, and as a matter of course, had to submit to a good deal of badinage about her vision, as they called it, but jest soon turned to earnest, and before parting M. de Maisonneuve and Sister Bourgeois conceived a lasting friendship for each other. He asked if she would like to go to Montreal and teach a primary school for girls, to which she promptly replied that nothing would afford her greater pleasure, and that nothing was more suited to her inclinations. By her reply he understood that Divine Providence had fitted her for the New World, although he had not the most remote idea of the great things intended to be accomplished by her ever-increasing zeal. In the then state of the colony he felt convinced that nothing was more conducive to its welfare than the Christian education of children, and as the inhabitants were few, one skilful mistress would easily suffice; nor

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

could he, at the time, procure a suitable dwelling for more. He accepted the offer of Sister Bourgeois on the spot, and the religieuses thanked him for even that concession, awaiting, as they said, a happier occasion for the foundation they so eagerly desired. The occasion, however, never presented itself, and they seemed to have some such presentiment, as they charged Margaret Bourgeois with breach of faith in accepting the proposal without their consent. Seeing they were touched with a sort of holy jealousy, she pleasantly replied, that if she had promised to go with them to Ville-Marie, she was ready to fulfil her promise, but if she had *not* made the promise, or if they delayed too long, she should certainly go without them.

As soon as Mlle. Crolo (whom she so heroically saved from dishonor) heard of her determination to cross the sea, she begged with much earnestness to accompany her, but this M. de Maisonneuve would not permit at the time, because he was bringing a regiment of soldiers to the New World, for the defence of Ville-Marie. This circumstance frightened Sister Bourgeois very much, as she found herself alone, and without escort, in the midst of a troop of soldiers. Her modesty was alarmed, and she sought her confessor's advice in the new danger. He told her that to judge according to the ordinary rules of prudence, it would be unsafe for an unmarried female to undertake a voyage of so much consequence, unaccompanied by one of her own sex, but that in her case, there were so many marks of a particular providence, the common rules of prudence might be set aside, and as he knew the exalted character of M. de Maisonneuve, he said to his penitent, confidently, Go, repose entire trust in the prudence of that gentleman; he will be the guardian of your chastity, as he is one of the first chevaliers of the Queen of Angels. But even this assurance did not calm her fears, until the Blessed Virgin herself reassured her. One morning before she arose, being fully awake, and occupied with holy thoughts, a lady clothed in dazzling white robes, and of extraordinary beauty, suddenly stood before her, and said, slowly and distinctly: Go to Canada. I will never abandon you. After which the glorious vision disappeared. Margaret's heart was filled with strength and joy, because she knew the peerless Mother of God had spoken to her. When M. Jandret heard it he rejoiced exceedingly, and predicted great results from the voyage, even hinting that she might possibly be able to form in Canada the community they had both failed to establish in Troyes. She replied that nothing was further from her thoughts than the establishment of any community, more especially, as she was to live alone at Ville-Marie. Nevertheless, responded the good priest, my good angel and yours shall be the first members. Satisfied with the pious ideas thus suggested, she quietly set to work at the preparations for the voyage across the Atlantic, which was then considered a very extraordinary affair. M. de Maisonneuve told her they would set sail at the end of May, it being then February, that the embarkation would take place at Nantes, in Bretagne, and advised her to be there in advance of him. He also gave her a letter of recommendation to M. le Coq, a merchant of that city, requesting him to offer her the hospitalities of his home during her stay, and promising to rejoin her as soon as his business was satisfactorily arranged. Everything else he left to her own prudence and discretion. Any other person, except Sister Bourgeois, or an apostle, would have prepared a good supply of clothing, and provided a sufficient sum of money for so long a journey, but she being fully convinced that to follow Jesus Christ it was necessary to forsake all things, began by despoiling herself of what she possessed, bestowing her money and clothing on the poor, and reserving nothing except a little package of linen, in order to appear decent. She carried the package to the ship herself, feeling that no one was worthy of wearing the livery of Christ, who was not poor and lowly like Him. She had not as yet informed her relations of her intention to leave the land of her birth, that she might escape their solicitations to remain where she was known and loved. Therefore she resolved to go to Paris on the pretext of business. At the same time, her uncle, M. Cossard, who was guardian of the minors of her family, and Mme. de Chuly, with whom she was residing, had each occasion to go to Paris, and so all three travelled in the same conveyance. This was on the 6th of February, 1653, Margaret Bourgeois being thirty-three years old. It was thirty-six leagues from Troyes to Paris, and when they were some distance on the road, she told them her intention for the first time, declaring that she had left Troyes never to return, and that she went to Paris only to take the route for Canada, whither she was to accompany M. de Maisonneuve. Her companions supposed she was talking to amuse either herself or them, and were not in the least disturbed by her declaration, nor convinced of the reality, until they arrived at Paris. Then she requested her uncle to conduct her to a notary's office, as she had business to transact. He complied with her request, but was astonished beyond measure when she assured him seriously that she was going to relinquish, by a legal procedure, all that might revert to her of the family inheritance, and place it in *his* hands for the benefit of the two children who were minors, knowing that her

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

trust would not be misplaced, as he was their guardian. She had already made the sacrifice interiorly, many years before, by the vow of poverty, and she now determined to make it legally, in a manner not to be reversed. M. Cossard endeavored to dissuade his niece from such an absurdity, as it appeared to him, but his eloquence and reasoning were useless, and the property was deeded away. He next tried to convince her that her vocation was chimerical, and the result of a sort of religious enthusiasm, which would die a natural death. And lest his rhetoric should not produce the desired effect, he started back to Troyes, where she was universally known and esteemed, to tell the news, and call to his aid the sympathies of her friends. As a matter of course, every one disapproved of her proceedings (when was anything undertaken for the glory of God, approved of by the children of this world?), and she was overwhelmed with letters from all quarters, containing criticisms on her conduct, and assuring her that she was acting a very foolish part. But her constancy remained unshaken, as conscience told her her resolution was made for the glory of God. This trial was followed by two others, which were calculated either to unsettle or confirm her vocation, as, under the guise of prudence, a seemingly greater good was proposed. In fact, a person less enlightened in the ways of God would have wavered at this period of her life. During her sojourn in Paris, she resided with a certain Mme. de Bellevue, a woman of merit and and virtue, but who, it must be acknowledged, used her tongue pretty freely on certain occasions.

This lady had two distinguished brothers, one a canon of la Sainte Chapelle, the other being Provincial of the Carmelites in the Province of Paris. Both gentlemen were informed of the arrival of the lady from Troyes, whom Mme. Bellevue described as wonderfully as possible. However, they learned from *herself* two things, which the devil endeavored to turn to *his* advantage; first, that she was on the point of going alone to Montreal with M. de Maisonneuve, and second, that she had at one time a strong inclination to join the Carmelite Order, which had so far refused to receive her. These good people conceived a high idea of her sanctity during her short stay among them, and persuaded themselves they would be doing her a service, if they could induce her to give up the Canadian mission. The news of the murderous attack of the savages on the colonists of Montreal had reached them, and they made the most of the information. They even represented M. de Maisonneuve as a dangerous man, who was quite capable of abusing her confidence, and although she would not permit herself to believe such an assertion, she experienced much interior trouble. In this perplexity of mind, she sought advice from M. Carme, a holy priest who held her in great veneration. To console her, he promised to procure her admission into any Convent of the Carmelite Order in the province, that she should select. It was human policy to attack her weak side, *if she had any*, touching the Carmelites, and the temptation to abandon her original design was so much the more pressing, as she still had a greater desire to embrace and practise the austerities of Mt. Carmel, than any other order of the Church. She had, moreover, time enough to deliberate, and although she secured her seat in the coach from Paris to Orleans, which was to start next day, she now gave it up, fearing exceedingly that by refusing the offer made her, she would be refusing the will of God. This fear threw her into an agony of doubt. It was only a temptation, however, and in order to restore her peace of mind, she went to the Jesuits of Saint Antoine, that she might discover more clearly, if possible, the will of God by the decision of these wise directors. The Father to whom she revealed the state of her conscience was the oracle destined by heaven to decide her vocation for life. After hearing the wonderful history of God's providence over her, he told her to go to Canada without fear, and leave the result in the hands of Mary her Mother. A great and blessed calm instantly succeeded to the storm that agitated her soul, and leaving the Jesuit church, she went directly to the Provincial of the Carmelites to thank him for the good will he had shown her, and without more ado, again took her seat in the coach for Orleans, which was to leave on the morrow. But this was not the least of her trials. It seemed as if the contemplated voyage was to bring upon her a series of the saddest and most insupportable humiliations. As there was no female travelling with her, and as she evidently possessed nothing but the clothing she wore, and the package she carried, her companions of the coach made her feel that they regarded her as an adventuress, who ought not be admitted into honest society. When they arrived at Orleans, the host would not permit her to remain at the inn, although she begged humbly and tearfully for shelter during the night, offering to sit by the fire, if they would not give her a room. Seeing her reduced to the extremity of staying all night in the street the driver of the conveyance offered his room to her. He was prompted to do so, however, not by charitable, but by criminal motives. In her ignorance of the man's villany, she accepted the offer, and remained on her knees in prayer till the sun rose next day. Several times during the night, this person and his depraved associates attempted to force open her door, but Margaret

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

Bourgeois was safe under the protection of Mary, her powerful guardian, and their repeated attempts to effect an entrance proved unsuccessful. In the morning she discovered another smaller door in the room, concealed by a curtain. This opened directly into the scene of the past night's debaucheries, and then she saw the horrors she escaped. Full of gratitude to the Immaculate Mother of God, who had so signally preserved her, she prayed and wept together. Very early in the morning she started off alone, and unobserved, to continue her journey, and secured a passage in the boat on the Loire, which had twelve other passengers. Among them there was only one woman, who carried an infant in her arms. Sister Bourgeois had the address to engage the entire party in exercises of piety during the river journey, which lasted several days, as the distance from Orleans to Nantes was almost one hundred leagues. Each day they recited together the office of the Blessed Virgin, and the rosary, after which she read a chapter from a spiritual book, on the duties of a Christian life, to which all listened attentively. One Saturday evening she obtained permission from the captain of the boat to go ashore, and enjoy the privilege of assisting at Mass on Sunday; which was a favor not usually accorded to the passengers. After sailing for some days they arrived at Saumur, where they made a short stay, as the boat needed repairs. Here also a public humiliation awaited this extraordinary woman. On presenting herself at the inn, in company with so many men, suspicion again closed the door against her. She was told plainly that an honest woman would not travel as she did, and that the credit of the house would be injured, by receiving her as a guest; nor did the companions of her journey sympathize with her in the least, on receiving the insult, although she had edified them very much since they left Orleans. Such marks of man's inconstancy frequently occur in every grade of society. However, a charitable citizen of Saumur, who was present, being touched with compassion by the modesty and meekness with which she received the affront, offered her the hospitality of his home, which she gratefully accepted. It is remarkable that these cruel insults cooled neither her determination nor her fervor; on the contrary, she interiorly rejoiced at the high honor God conferred upon her, by permitting her to share in the contempt and humiliation of His divine Son, whom the Jewish rabble maligned and cursed, and almost as extraordinary is the fact that she completely regained her influence over her inconstant fellow-travellers, when they again met on the boat to continue their route. They arrived at Nantes three or four days afterwards. One of the party was a young man who had determined to enlist in M. de Maisonneuve's regiment for Canada.

He had many opportunities of noticing the exalted virtue of Margaret Bourgeois during the week, and politely offered to carry her little package when they left the boat. Even this attention of Christian charity drew upon her a fresh humiliation. Accompanied by the stranger, she enquired for the residence of M. le Coq, merchant of Nantes, which was the address given her by M. de Maisonneuve, but the gentleman was not known by that name in the city; he was there styled M. de la Bassonniers. She walked along every street in Nantes to find him, and was about giving up in despair, when she suddenly encountered at a crossing a brusque, business-looking man, whom she timidly requested to direct her to the residence of M. le Coq. *I am the person you seek, madame,* he replied, *and if I mistake not, you are the lady concerning whom M. de Maisonneuve wrote me a few days since,* handing her the letter of her friend at the same time. Margaret was very agreeably surprised by the providential rencontre, and began to hope that the mortifications of her eventful journey were drawing to a close. The merchant directed her to his home, which was not far distant, and assuring her of a hearty welcome from his wife, left her abruptly to attend to his own concerns. On arriving at the house, she met Mme. le Coq, who was highly indignant to learn that her husband sent her a young woman to entertain, accompanied by a rustic who carried her clothing. *I will positively receive no such people into my house,* she said, *you must depart forthwith.* And poor weary Sister Bourgeois did depart, but she went on her way rejoicing to suffer reproach for the cause of Jesus, and entered a neighboring church, where, at that very hour, was being held a procession in honor of the Blessed Sacrament. She assisted devoutly at the ceremony, and as she was not easily disconcerted by the repulses which were now becoming familiar to her, and also being fortified by prayer, she coolly determined to pay another visit to Mme. le Coq. Being an utter stranger to the strong-minded woman, she was severely reproached for permitting a young man to carry her package, but as M. le Coq himself then came in sight, the harangue upon propriety suddenly came to an end. He made the necessary explanations to his irate lady, and Margaret was received and entertained with cordial hospitality. The great day of the final embarkation was now approaching, and God had yet another trial in store to test the fidelity and constancy of her vocation. While she awaited the arrival of M. de Maisonneuve she had a strong desire to approach the Sacraments once more before leaving

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

France, and as she always preferred a Carmelite confessor, she sought one, and was successful, as there was a Carmelite church in the city. It was one of her lifelong principles to do nothing by halves; therefore she once again related her whole past experience to the good Father, who unhesitatingly advised her to remain in her native land, and become a Carmelite nun. Humanly speaking, it was natural he should so advise her. But his suggestions threw her into a dreadful state of perplexity. On leaving him, she entered the Capuchin church, where the Blessed Sacrament was still exposed, and prostrating herself in the presence of God, shed abundant tears in the bitterness of her soul, protesting that her only desire was to *know* His will, and *do* it. During this hour of spirit trial and loving colloquy with her divine Lord, a light from heaven suddenly enveloped her, her heart was replenished with the sweetest consolation, and she was made clearly to understand, at once and forever, that God willed she should go to Canada. Yet, although she was thus divinely reassured, she would not neglect the duty of holy obedience, and as her last confessor directed Her to write to those persons in Paris who had manifested an interest in her vocation, she did so, rather to thank them for what they had already done, than to ask them to renew their exertions. But during the three weeks she still remained in Nantes, she received no reply from these friends. It seemed now as if the devil had left no stone unturned to destroy her vocation for Ville-Marie, yet true to his old malice, he made one more attempt, and this time the trial came from M. de Maisonneuve himself. As soon as he arrived in Nantes, in order to hasten the preparations for their departure, he received an anonymous letter, in which it was alleged, among other unpleasant things, that Margaret Bourgeois was unfit to accompany him to Canada, as her vocation for the order of Mt. Carmel was evident, and that this preference would render her useless to him across the Atlantic. But as he was an upright man, who could not be terrified by shadows, nor influenced by the assertions of persons who would not honorably give their names, he contented himself by showing the cowardly communication to Sister Bourgeois, and calmly awaited her reply, which, when given, entirely disabused him of any doubts that might have lessened his confidence in her, and so he decided to set sail for the New World in July, 1653. During their stay of three weeks at Nantes, she completely won the esteem and friendship of M. le Coq and his family. Not only did they refuse to receive payment for her board, but eagerly pressed her to accept an outfit for the sea voyage, which they saw she took no care to provide. The kind-hearted merchant thoughtfully procured a comfortable bed for her, which she never slept upon, the ship's cordage being her only hammock during the voyage. He would also have given her a supply of wine, but knowing she would not use it, he substituted a few casks of fresh water, the lack of which often causes such frightful sufferings at sea. These were useless precautions for one who was determined to suffer in the flesh a portion of the mortifications of Jesus Christ. The water was stored in the ship, but she did not use it, as she drank only once a day, from a little leather cup that she carried by her side. She never deviated from this measure, and used only the tainted water, which was the ordinary beverage of the common sailors. M. de Maisonneuve wished her to eat at his table, but to this she would not consent; therefore he sent her daily a portion of the food prepared for himself, which was more delicate and better cooked than the ordinary mess. She took it thankfully, to divide among the sick, using herself only a small share of the common ship rations. During the voyage she carefully instructed the soldiers and sailors in the sublime though simple lessons of the catechism. She served the sick day and night, as there were many invalids to be found in a raw regiment of one hundred men. She solaced them in their sufferings with unwearied assiduity, and gave them the delicacies she received from the commander. Each day she read a lecture on the practical duties of Christianity, and induced all to recite aloud the morning and night prayers. Her courage and strength never failed during the inconveniences of a stormy sea-voyage, which was remarkable, as she had never been to sea before. She was really the guardian angel of the ship, and in the exercise of such heroic acts of charity did she arrive in Canada. However, in spite of her self-sacrificing virtue, she was the subject of uncharitable criticisms, as M. de Maisonneuve, who knew her worth, paid unceasing and deserved attention to her wants, and she testified the most humble and respectful submission to his wishes. Some who observed this wickedly construed it into hypocrisy to mask lost virtue, and although the lynx-eyed slanderers did not dare to assert as much openly on board, yet she knew it was discussed in private. But she endured the humiliation in silence, as was her custom when calumny of any kind assailed her.

## CHAPTER VI. SISTER BOURGEOIS' ARRIVAL IN CANADA.

The voyage from various causes having lasted three months, the fleet did not arrive in Quebec until the 22d of September, 1653. She therefore set her foot on Canadian soil for the first time in the capital of New France. It was like taking possession of the Province she was afterwards to edify and instruct, by word and example, not only by her own immediate labors, but also by the zeal of those who were in the designs of God to continue the good work she so happily commenced, and to continue it for centuries throughout the whole extent of that vast country. Yet it was not Quebec but *Montreal*, that God intended to be the centre of her missionary zeal, and that of her spiritual daughters. She therefore made but a short stay in the capital, and could not rest until she arrived at her final destination, accompanied by M. de Maisonneuve. Words would be quite inadequate to express the joy she felt on approaching Montreal. She was overpowered with gratitude to the Almighty God when she first beheld the young city for which she had so long sighed, and which was indeed the City of Mary, having been consecrated to her, and this joy was so much the purer as it was purchased by the pains and humiliations she endured for Christ's dear sake. In addition to what has been already related of this voyage, Sister Bourgeois says in her manuscripts, that as soon as they weighed anchor, it was discovered the ship was rotten, and leaked in many places. However, as it was well manned, having, besides the usual number of sailors, 108 soldiers on board, it was hoped they would be able to brave the sea, but the hope was vain. Although they worked night and day at the pumps, the ship could not be kept afloat. The water gained rapidly, and their provisions were nearly destroyed. They were obliged to return to the port of St. Lazare, on nearing which they must have perished but for the timely assistance rendered by the inhabitants of the place. Margaret Bourgeois felt the danger more keenly, as there was not a priest on board, and very few were prepared for death. M. de Maisonneuve took the wise precaution of putting the soldiers ashore on an island, to prevent desertions; but a few in despair cast themselves into the sea to effect an escape, as the ship was sinking before their eyes, and they believed M. de Maisonneuve was leading them to perdition. One alone was calm amidst that wild tumult of passion, and that one was Sister Bourgeois, who willingly and repeatedly offered the sacrifice of her life to God. In the meantime M. de Maisonneuve was fortunate enough to secure a new ship, and all other things necessary to continue the voyage. So they set sail again on the feast of St. Margaret, after having assisted at Mass, a happiness they had not enjoyed for a long time. As if to add to their misery, sickness now became general, and Sister Bourgeois was alternately priest and infirmarian, eight persons having died in her arms. As soon as they were finally settled in Ville-Marie, She requested M. de Maisonneuve to lead her to the cross he had erected in 1640. But that one having been weather-beaten and broken, he replaced it with another, higher up on the mountain, with an image of Mary near it. This was a rendezvous for the savages, who assembled there to receive religious instruction. He carried the second cross on his shoulders through thorns, and rocks, and forest trees, there being no pathway up the hill-side, and having secured it on the platform prepared for it, placed beside it the statue of the Blessed Virgin given him by the Congregation Sisters. The erection of this cross was quite a religious ceremony, and occurred on the *same day*, and at *then same hour*, on which Sister Bourgeois received the first miraculous favor from the Mother of God, in the porch of the church of Notre Dame, in the city of Troyes. She always believed that this extraordinary event determined her vocation for Canada. The consecrated hillside became afterwards the Mission of the Mountain. The following year an altar was erected at the foot of the cross, and the early missionary priests of Ville-Marie celebrated Mass there for the converted savages. It happened once, that of fifteen or sixteen persons present at the Holy Sacrifice, not one knew how to serve Mass, and Jean Mance had to get a little child, four years old, to wait on the priest, by suggesting the responses, and indicating the ceremonies. At the foot of this mountain, in after years, the Indians assembled by hundreds, to embrace Christianity, and receive instruction from the priests and the Sisters of the Congregation. The first time M. de Maisonneuve conducted Margaret Bourgeois to the time-honored cross, he was obliged to have an escort of thirty men, lest the Iroquois should surprise and maltreat them. What then must have been her disappointment and grief to find it thrown down and broken. The Indians had watched their opportunity to insult the Christian standard, yet wonderful to relate, the statue of the Blessed Virgin was not in the least injured. She resolved on the spot to erect a third cross, with M. de Maisonneuve's permission, which she of course obtained, and for three days and nights they labored together on the mountain until the pious work was completed. This time they surrounded it with a strong palisade of stakes, and for years the colonists were in the habit of making annual pilgrimages to it.



## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

It was still standing in 1760, when the English became masters of Montreal, but from that time it was seen no more. Sister Bourgeois soon after her arrival, commenced her labor of Christian love. Ville-Marie then contained about fifty houses scattered here and there, with a fort for the garrison. A few colonists settled in the surrounding country, where they made successful attempts to cultivate the ground, and some converted savages erected cabins in the vicinity. These constituted the entire population of Montreal at that remote period, and our heroine visited each house daily, like the Apostles of old, to animate the people with a portion of her own zeal in the discharge of their religious duties. She was to be found everywhere that the good of her fellow-creatures required, either waiting on the sick, consoling the afflicted, instructing the ignorant, washing and mending gratis the clothing of the poor soldiers, preparing the dead for burial, or despoiling herself of necessaries in favor of the destitute, which was the routine of her daily life. And it might be truly said in the words of Scripture, that her days were full. We have already related that M. le Coq gave her a sleeping outfit, consisting of a mattress, palliasse, two comforters, and a pillow. Although the first winter she spent in Montreal was an unusually severe one, she never used these articles of comfort *herself*, but freely bestowed them on *others*. A poor soldier, badly frozen, hastened to tell her his misery; the mattress was instantly given to him. A comrade hearing of his good fortune, presented himself for relief; the palliasse became his property, the comforters being bestowed on a third, who was as wretchedly lodged as the others. There was as yet no applicant for the pillow, which was a useless article of furniture to her, as she slept on the bare ground, or a plank, resting her head upon straw, notwithstanding the inclemency of Canadian winters. Yet she felt amply rewarded for her privations, by being permitted to perform charitable offices for others. She was the common mother of the young colonists, being an eye to the blind, a foot to the lame, consolation to the afflicted, a support to the weak and indigent, making herself like the Apostle, all to all, in order to gain all to Christ. But her principal aim was the instruction of the little ones, and as she had no school-room to teach in, she followed them from house to house, instructing them in their religious duties, and inspiring them with devotion to the Immaculate Mother of God. While M. de Maisonneuve, her faithful fellow-laborer, struggled for the material prosperity of the colony, she endeavored to erect a spiritual empire in the hearts of the faithful. But as the population increased the extent of her foot-journeys covered a vast tract of country, and the number of children she instructed was greater than one teacher could attend to. Although her strength and courage never flagged, she evidently required assistance, which Almighty God provided in His own mysterious and adorable manner, as will soon be related.

### CHAPTER VII. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SISTERS OF THE CONGREGATION OF NOTRE DAME AT VILLE-MARIE.

Sister Bourgeois had now lived four years in Ville-Marie, during which time she had practised the most heroic virtues. Her zeal for the glory of God was ever increasing, her only desire being to win souls to His service, and to love and imitate the virtues of His divine Mother. About this period she felt interiorly inspired to build a church in honor of Mary, in which she might at times assemble her little pupils for instruction, in order to effect greater good among them. Hitherto she had literally to run after them from house to house, which unavoidably caused a great loss of her precious time. Yet, obedient to the inspirations of grace, she first consulted her confessor, Father Pizart, a Jesuit, who was then the only priest in Ville-Marie. To test her firmness he represented and exaggerated the difficulties she would have to encounter, but her zealous determination overcame his objections, and he approved of her design, not doubting that God would assist her to accomplish it. Being strengthened in her resolution by his approval, and full of confidence in God and His Holy Mother, she went directly to M. de Maisonneuve to ask for a suitable tract of land on which to erect the building. This he gave most willingly, as there was nothing dearer to him than to promote devotion to the Mother of God by every means in his power. Having unbounded confidence in Sister Bourgeois, he desired her to select a site for the edifice, wherever she pleased, and she accordingly took possession of the ground on which the church of Bon-Secours stands today, being about four hundred paces from the city of Ville-Marie. The extent of the lot was only 40 by 30 feet, which small enclosure she judged sufficient for her purpose, but she had no earthly means to carry out her design. However, she set to work hopefully, and enlisted the sympathies of the colonists. Nor was she disappointed, as all were disposed to assist; some prepared lumber, others quarried stone, mechanics worked as their services were

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

required, laborers waited on the workmen, several contributed money quite liberally, and in a few days the foundation was ready to receive the ponderous wooden structure to be laid upon it. Everything seemed to be progressing favorably, but it was the work of God, and had to encounter contradiction to make it perfect. The contradiction came, too, from a quarter the least expected, God having so permitted in order to purify still more the heart of this holy woman. Until then, there had been no bishop at Quebec, and M. l'Abbe de Quelus, first superior of the Seminary of St. Sulpice at Montreal, arrived from France, at the precise time they were putting up the building. He came as Grand-Vicar of the Archbishop of Rouen, in whose name all spiritual jurisdiction in Canada had hitherto been exercised. He had never heard of Sister Bourgeois, and with three other priests of his society, came for the express purpose of founding a *seminary* at Ville-Marie, being the first Sulpicians who visited New France. M. de Quelus was therefore surprised to find a young woman, whose humility concealed her talents and her virtues, take the lead in building a church, for which she had, as we have seen, the permission of a subordinate ecclesiastic. In his wisdom he ordered the work to be discontinued, and she submitted to the voice of authority without murmur or reply, but *reflected*, nevertheless, on the *consequences*. There was a large quantity of valuable lumber ready for the carpenters; it was procured at great expense and labor, but must, in consequence of the interdict, become a total loss, and rot on the ground. Human prudence would have regarded the event as a misfortune, and Sister Bourgeois, obedient as she was, sighed bitterly in secret. But God, who knows how to draw good out of evil, turned the contradiction into a work of enduring benefit. The contemplated wooden building was forbidden, it is true, but a stone church was erected instead, and the Congregation of the Sisters of Notre Dame may be said to date *from that period*. It does not appear that she had previously thought of forming a community, but seeing her hopes thus suddenly dashed to the ground, and feeling she could no longer do justice to the children on the scattered plan she was compelled to adopt, she began seriously to think of associating with herself a few companions.

Full of this idea, and convinced that in Ville-Marie she could not find persons suitable for teachers, she decided on going back to France, to induce the externs of Troyes, her native city, to form a corps of teachers for Canada. She foresaw her return would be considered unwise and ill-timed, but a voice within that would not be silenced, told her that God required her to return. According to the wisdom of the world, it did look badly for a single woman, without means or credit, to recross the ocean for the purpose of inducing others to imitate her wise folly, to renounce all things and sacrifice the peace and security of home for the dangers of a wild, thinly-settled country. The citizens of Troyes knew well that Canadian colonists were the constant prey of relentless savages, being murdered in cold blood, not only on the island of Montreal, but frequently at their own doors. Yet Sister Bourgeois, animated by the Holy Spirit, listened only to the voice of God, as did the Apostles of old, and as did also the holy woman who followed in their track. She left Ville-Marie with a strong presentiment of success. Perhaps she had also a prophetic view of what would follow. At least one is led to think so, by the positive assurance she gave to a confidential friend before her departure, that she would be absent *one year*, which prediction was literally verified, as she left Montreal, September, 1658, and returned in safety with her new companions September, 1659. If the saintly woman herself displayed courage and zeal in undertaking the return voyage, no less heroism was evinced by those who followed her to Canada. It is always a matter of surprise to the worldly-minded, to see young girls courageously sever the ties of kindred and country, and attach themselves to one who possesses nothing but confidence in God, and who promises nothing in the future but humiliations, pain and labor to her followers. Such were the inducements held out by Margaret Bourgeois to those she succeeded in bringing to the New World, and such were the Christian heroines who associated themselves to this great work of charity. Four young girls accompanied her on the first recruiting voyage, whose names deserve to be transmitted to posterity. They were Mlles. Crolo, Raisin, Fyoux, and Chatel. The title of Sister was not given them for many years after, but in 1671 they received letters patent authorizing them to form a religious community. We cannot better describe the rise and progress of the Sisters of the Congregation than by giving extracts from the manuscripts of Sister Bourgeois. She says:

In 1658, five years after my first arrival in Canada, I felt inspired to return to France for help. It happened in this way: Mlle. Mance had broken her arm, and undergone an unsuccessful operation. It continued so painful, that she was obliged to go to France to have it properly treated, having also matters to arrange for her hospital. As she

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

could not travel without a companion being an invalid I offered my services, which were accepted, but I had another object in view, namely, to procure capable young persons to teach my school. Mlle. Mance was well pleased that I should accompany her, and, as our simple preparations were easily made, we left Montreal on the Feast of St. Michael, Sept. 29, 1658. Having been the sacristan of the parish church, I requested M. Galimier, a priest of the seminary, to keep matters so arranged that I could resume the pious duty on my return. I made the request before starting for Europe, and he promised that my desire should be complied with, provided I was not absent longer than a year. I made the promise partly in jest, yet I Divine Providence ordained that I should return safely on the next Feast of St. Michael. The crew of the vessel in which we embarked numbered but six men, and were all Protestants, Mlle. Mance and myself being the only Catholics on board. We scarcely ever went on deck, preferring to remain quietly in the cabin allotted to us, and perform our devotions. The crew, at times, *sang their prayers* too loudly for the comfort of an invalid, and Mlle. Mance was reluctantly obliged to complain to the captain. After that the singing of the prayers ceased, and we were treated with marked attention and respect. We had a prosperous voyage over the blue sea, and cast anchor at La Rochelle, during the Christmas holidays. Mlle. Mance went immediately to La Fleche, to get her arm reset, in that famous hospital, and hoped to bring back with her, on her return, a few of the Sisters, to assist in the management of the hospital she had established at Ville-Marie. I was delighted to have the consolation of again seeing M. de la Dauversiere, that great servant of Mary, and noble protector of Montreal, who resided at La Fleche, of which place he was Lieutenant-General. We remained there a few days, and then set out for Paris. I had become in a manner necessary to Mlle. Mance, as she was not able to dress without assistance, and she willingly defrayed my expenses while we resided with her sister during our stay in Paris. M. Olier, superior of St. Sulpice, died two years before our arrival, and as she had great faith in his intercession, she requested the new superior to allow her to pray at the tomb of the deceased. She was refused the favor *then*, but was directed to call on the following Sunday, which she did not fail to do, accompanied by me. It gave us inexpressible joy to pray by the tomb of the dead saint, and to see the splendid chapel of St. Sulpice. But Mlle. Mance had more reason to rejoice than I, for, while kneeling in prayer, she suddenly recovered the use of her crippled arm, and was restored to perfect health, God being pleased to reward her *great* faith by a *greater* miracle. I went to Troyes on business of my own for a few days, leaving her to continue a novena alone. She wrote to me with her formerly withered hand, thereby proving beyond doubt that she was cured. The physicians declared that human science was useless in her case, and that the restoration of her arm was an undeniable miracle. During my stay at Troyes, I lodged with the religieuses of the Congregation, who entertained me with much kindness and charity. I explained to them my desire of procuring a few young girls, who would be willing to accompany me as teachers to Ville-Marie, and also that I would be glad to get one or two healthy persons to attend to our domestic work. My purpose was highly approved of by them, but I was assured it would be difficult to carry it into execution. Nor could I have succeeded without the special help of Divine Providence, in which I implicitly trusted, and my hope was never in vain. As soon as the purpose of my visit was known in Troyes, three of my old companions at once offered their services. These were Sisters Crolo, Chatel, and Raisin. The first named had asked to accompany me in 1652. M. Chatel, the father of the second, was Notary Apostolic, and on hearing my proposal to take his daughter to Canada (at her own desire), asked how we intended to earn a living in the New World. I replied that M. de Maisonneuve had given us a good *stable* for a dwelling, that it was large, and would suit our purpose, and showed him the contract. 'That is all very well,' he said, 'but what are you going to *subsist* on?' The only answer I could make was, that we should labor faithfully in the school, and that I could promise nothing to my companions, but pain of mind and body, with a mess of pottage. My reply brought tears to his eyes, for though he loved his daughter dearly, he loved religious sacrifices better. He did not give me a decisive answer for a few days, however, preferring to act slowly, and consult his friends on the matter. They advised him to place no obstacle to the work of God, as his daughter freely offered herself for the mission, and so the truly Christian father agreed to let her go. He courageously signed, in her presence, the contract by which he resigned the earthly future of his beloved child to the care of Margaret Bourgeois, a similar contract being drawn up for Sister Crolo.

It is to be regretted that these contract papers have not been preserved in the archives of the community. As poor as Sister Bourgeois was, she did not wish to receive *money* with either party, but M. Chatel would not permit his daughter to depart without providing her an abundant supply of clothing, and about two hundred livres in specie.

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

He also gave her letters of credit, addressed to persons of distinction, who resided in the several places through which she must pass, so that, if she wished to return to Troyes, she might be able to procure the necessary funds. As to Sister Raisin, she was obliged to go to Paris to get her father's consent, flattering herself it would be easily obtained. Astonished at the zealous courage of these Christian heroines, a young student of Troyes determined to leave all for Christ, and go with them to Canada to teach the boys, as the Sisters intended to teach none but girls. He was attacked by a violent hemorrhage during the voyage, and died in the Sisters' house, two years after his arrival. He was known as Brother Louis, but was not the Brother Louis who transacted business for Sister Bourgeois in France at a later period.

To return again to the manuscript. She says: I and my three companions started from Troyes to Paris in an old worn-out conveyance, that we hired for our own use, but had not gone far before we were compelled to stop, as the owners of the *public* carriages, who controlled the road, would not permit a private conveyance like ours to interfere with their traffic. We were therefore obliged to return to Troyes, where M. Chatel obtained for us permission to continue the journey. As we had to travel on Sunday, we requested the driver to stop at some village where we could assist at Mass. This he very disobligingly refused to do. We passed before a church pretty soon, however, and one of the wheels breaking, he stopped against his will, to mend it, and we assisted at the Holy Sacrifice while he worked at the broken wheel. On our arrival in Paris, M. Raisin would not permit his daughter to go to Canada, and stubbornly refused to see her; nor had she the courage to present herself before him. She could only prevail through the intercession of friends, and in this way was successful, as he finally gave his consent, a contract being ratified in her case also. I could not prevent his offering one thousand livres for her voyage, and, as I feared to disoblige him by a refusal, I compromised, and accepted one hundred crowns. However, this did not satisfy him, and he legally arranged to pay to the community an annuity of thirty-five livres, being the interest of the seven hundred livres I refused to accept. After his death, his son, a member of the Legislative Assembly, added to this an annuity of three hundred livres, interest on six thousand, which was donated for three yearly Masses, for the repose of his father's soul, which Masses are celebrated to this day on the 22d, 23d, and 24th of April; so charitable were these gentlemen to the embryo Congregation. In Paris we received an addition to our number, M. Blondel giving one of his nieces as a teacher for Ville-Marie. This young lady was the first person admitted to our community in 1659, and was named Sister St. Claire. There were now assembled eighteen young girls for the return voyage, four of whom were to remain at Quebec, the rest being bound for Montreal. We again hired wagons to make the journey from Paris to La Rochelle, and met with the same mishap as at Troyes, but finally arrived at our destination, where I had the happiness once more to meet Mlle. Mance, who was bringing with her three religieuses for the hospital of Montreal. On the eve of embarkation an obstacle quite unexpectedly presented itself. I had supposed that my companions and myself were to be taken on board gratuitously, such certainly being the intention of M. de Maisonneuve, the master of the ship had heard nothing of such an arrangement, however; at least he said so, and refused to take us, unless each one paid 175 livres for her passage, besides furnishing provisions, and as we had no money, we were on the point of being left behind. I fortunately thought of drawing a double letter of exchange on M. Raisin, which was accepted. We finally set sail and found that the commander, notwithstanding the trouble he had given us, was a very honest man. The vessel was very large and convenient, but had served for a floating hospital during the war, and the very timbers of it were infected with disease. Perhaps this was not the only cause of sickness, as we had a large number of passengers, among whom were two priests, M. le Maitre, and M. Vignal, both bound for the Montreal seminary. These holy men were afterwards murdered by the Indians, in cold blood. We took care to have the priests near us during the voyage, as pestilence soon broke out. Mlle. Mance and her religieuses were the first attacked, but after a few days several of the secular girls succumbed. Eight persons died of the plague, and would have been thrown into the sea, without the decency of a shroud, but for the thoughtful exertions of M. le Maitre, who constructed rough coffins on the spot, and took the precaution to throw overboard everything belonging to the dead. A young mother among the stricken left a nursing infant, which, with its father, was prostrated by the pestilence. The babe's life was despaired of, as no one was willing to take charge of it, and many advised that it be thrown into the sea alive. The cruel suggestion aroused my sympathy, and I offered to take the infant myself, much against the will of my companions, who were all sick. However, I succeeded in getting the little waif in my keeping. When we arrived in Quebec, its cries and horrible appearance caused us much annoyance, and as I had business to transact in Quebec,

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

I was obliged to return it to the father, who was then well, promising to reclaim it before setting out for Montreal. That September, the cold season set in with unusual rigor, and the crew built fires in cabins along the shore, to keep themselves from freezing, and this man, with the babe in his arms, lying down among them, the poor little martyr rolled into the embers and was shockingly burned. However, when we arrived at Montreal it grew better, and in consequence of losing its mother so young, I procured a nurse to supply it with natural nourishment; a few days after it sickened, died, and went to rest in the bosom of God. We arrived at Montreal on the Feast of St. Michael, being exactly one year, day for day, and hour for hour, from the time of our departure.

Sister Bourgeois and her companions immediately took possession of the stable which was given for school purposes by M. de Maisonneuve the previous year. It was built of stone, about twenty-five feet square, and had been for a long time a shelter for all kinds of animals. She had a chimney built on the floor prepared for the school-room, the Sisters cooking and eating there, when school was dismissed. The loft of the stable served for a dovecot and granary, and was reached by an outside ladder. This she arranged as a dormitory and a community-room. All things being now in working order, they began to receive boarders and day-pupils. One of the latter, Marie Barbier, who was afterwards called in religion Sister Mary of the Assumption, succeeded Sister Bourgeois as superior of the Congregation, and was the first member received in Ville-Marie. The school was formally opened on the Feast of St. Catherine, Nov. 25, 1659, and a secular society for young ladies was put in operation on the Feast of the Visitation the following year. This society has never been discontinued, and exists still in almost primitive fervor. In a short time the number of boarders and day-pupils became so considerable, that it was necessary to purchase a small house, in the vicinity of the lucky stable, from a man named St. Ange. As Sister Bourgeois burned with zeal to advance the glory of God in the New World, in addition to the cares inseparable from governing a young community, she undertook another labor of love, which eventually caused her the most bitter sorrow. We refer to the manuscripts: Several young girls accompanied us from France, who were taken from the hospitals, and sent at the King's expense to assist in the colonization of Ville-Marie. While we were repairing the little house we purchased from St. Ange, another batch of these girls arrived, and as I knew they were intended to become mothers of families, I hastened to meet them as soon as they should land, in order to bring them to our new house, and detain them a short time, for instruction. The Sisters (we may as well so name them at once) had for some time importuned Sister Bourgeois to add another story to their dwelling, as it did not afford accommodation for both Sisters and pupils; but she objected on account of her love of poverty, humility, and mortification. However, the arrival of the strangers induced her to comply, and her hasty compliance was a source of lifelong regret, because, as she affirmed, she did not sufficiently consult the will of God and her ecclesiastical superior. In fact she never forgave herself this unintentional error of judgment, as she called it, and attributed to it all the accidents that subsequently befell her community.

### **CHAPTER VIII. M. FRANCOIS DE LAVAL DE MONTMORENCI IS APPOINTED FIRST BISHOP OF CANADA SISTER BOURGEOIS SUCCEEDS IN BUILDING THE CHURCH OF NOTRE DAME DE BON SECOURS.**

In the year 1659 M. Francois de Laval de Montmorenci was appointed first bishop of Canada, having been hitherto known as the Abbe de Montigni. The famous Henri Marie Bondon, author of many ascetic works, succeeded him as arch-deacon of Evreux, M. de Laval having resigned in his favor. He received his appointment from the French King, but as the Sovereign Pontiff had not yet erected any portion of the Canadian church into the diocese, came at first in quality of Vicar Apostolic, consecrated with the title of Bishop of Petree. M. de Quelus, who had until then governed the Church in New France, subject to the authority of the Archbishop of Rouen, did not dispute the jurisdiction of Bishop Laval, but returned to France immediately, accompanied by his secretary, M. d'Allet, to inform his own Bishop of what had transpired in Canada. He never returned, however, and died in Paris, in 1680, in the Seminary of St. Sulpice. M. de Laval met Sister Bourgeois for the first time, during the voyage from France, and having conceived a very high opinion of her virtue, gave herself and companions permission to form in his diocese whatever religious establishments they should consider most conducive to the welfare of the country.

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

Almighty God in His inscrutable wisdom had so arranged matters that the Institute of Sister Bourgeois should be born in a stable, like His own divine Son, the Sisters being much happier there than if they were lodged in a palace. As soon as circumstances permitted after her return, she took occasion to revisit the chapel she attempted to build before her departure, and found to her sorrow what she had foreseen, that the greatest part of the lumber was in a state of decay, and quite worthless. Yet, as she could not yield to despair, she collected from the debris sufficient material to build a sort of shed, to be used alternately as a chapel and a class-room until they could do better. The piety and fervor of the new teachers attracted the attention of the whole colony, and the schools in a short time became overcrowded, so that Sister Bourgeois was induced to undertake the erection of a building large enough to meet their wants. She had neither ground nor money, but Divine Providence provided both, as M. de Maisonneuve, whose devotion to the Blessed Virgin always prompted him to assist her, had already given a deed of the property they then occupied, and added to it fifty rods adjoining, with the clause that if the Congregation decided, in the future, to build on a more extended plan, for which the present site would not be suitable, the said fifty rods were to be deeded to the hospital, in the vicinity, all which was legally arranged in the month of February, 1658. M. Gabriel Souart, superior of the Seminary, donated another piece of ground, upon which the convent stands today. Many other gifts of real estate became also the property of Sister Bourgeois, and were chiefly in the suburbs of the city, which was at last becoming extensive. As soon as the plan for the building was completed every one hastened to offer assistance, as an educational institution was considered a public blessing, and it was evident that God inspired His faithful servant to undertake the work. The building was so arranged that one side should be occupied by the Sisters, the other being fitted up for the boarders and schools. It was not fully completed when Sister Bourgeois reflected that in the then unsettled state of things, and for the security of the institution, it would be necessary to obtain letters patent from the King. The reflection was a wise one, but to obtain the letters would expose her to much personal humiliation, and also to great dissipation and loss of time. At first it seemed possible to arrange matters by procuring the approbation of the home authorities, that is to say, of the Bishop and Governor-General. So she determined to set out for Quebec, to present her petition to these distinguished persons, hoping to have little difficulty in making them understand the utility of the establishment. Messrs. Souart and Perrot gave her letters of recommendation, and the inhabitants of Montreal, who knew the great virtues and talents she concealed beneath the veil of humility, assembled *en masse* in the Seminary, to give to her petition the weight of their united signatures. They also sent by her an humble supplication to his majesty, or his representatives, entreating that the royal sanction be given to insure the success of the establishment. Each one separately signed his name to the document, and placed it in her hands. They were all the more eager to help as they had often been compelled to send their children to Quebec to the Ursulines, and the pressing need of a home institution was becoming more apparent each day. Full of confidence in God and His holy Mother, and furnished with these respectable documents, she finally decided on no half-way course, but set sail again for France, in the autumn of 1670, fearing neither danger, nor the inconveniences conveniences of a third sea-voyage, to obtain the succors she needed for others, more than for herself. What a sublime spectacle it was, to see an humble, unattended woman cross the great sea alone, and go in her simple attire, into the brilliant court of the Great King, Louis XIV., to treat of the interests of religion and the glory of God. Her success was as singular as her enterprise, and though the journey was long, and full of pain and fatigue (she did not return for two years), she felt abundantly repaid by the many advantages and lasting good it produced. On her arrival in Paris, her first visit was to the church of Notre Dame, to renew, before the altar of the Blessed Virgin, the consecration she had there made of herself, in 1646, in company of the Montreal Association. She implored the blessing of the Queen of Heaven, on herself, her fellow-laborers in the schools of Montreal, and her present undertaking, and then set to work to accomplish her end. She visited some of the old friends of M. de Maisonneuve, who were all persons of merit and high social position, and were known to have much influence at court, in order to induce them to procure her the favor of an interview with his majesty. These people had not at all forgotten her, and had several letters of recommendation in her favor. They knew the good she was capable of effecting, and made it a point of honor to assist her. The King was in due course of time informed of the matter, and seemed to be rather favorably inclined to grant her request, yet six weary months elapsed without his giving a decisive answer. Learning that his majesty was at Dunkirk in the May of 1671, she repaired thither, to renew solicitations, and at last obtained the long-sought letters, which contained Catholic sentiments worthy of the great French monarch. Being authorized by the royal patent, she next tried to procure a new corps of volunteers, who would, like the first

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

heroic band, generously renounce home, family, and country, without hope of ever returning, who would be willing to cross the great ocean, then but imperfectly known, and devote their future lives to the instruction of wild savages, as much as to the advancement of the French colonists, expecting also that the relentless Iroquois would repay their Christian love with the tomahawk or the scalping-knife, and in those days how often was the expectation verified. Yet these considerations were precisely what attracted a great number of talented young girls, fully capable of sustaining and perfecting the enterprise, and worthy to share with the holy Foundress the labor, the glory, and the success that awaited the Congregation in Ville-Marie. She procured her postulants in the towns that lie scattered between Troyes and Paris, and she as often travelled on foot carrying her little bundle of poor clothing, as she did in the public conveyances, that were disagreeable to her, because the roads were rough, and the companions she met were frequently dissolute libertines, although her modest exterior and edifying conversation frequently silenced their licentious discourses. In fact her travels were a sort of continuous mission, effecting good for the souls of her neighbor, and advancing her own spiritual perfection. At such times she refused all personal convenience, so great was her spirit of poverty, humility, and mortification, and she possessed these virtues in an eminent degree. Liberal and generous to others, when there was question of charity or the glory of God, to herself she was rigorous in the extreme. She truly possessed nothing, giving all the fruit of her labors to the poor. But Divine Providence never failed her in the hour of need.

Once, during this visit, she met a gentleman in the streets of Paris, who suddenly stopped to ask if she knew a lady from Canada, named Margaret Bourgeois. I am the person, she replied. Surprised at the unexpected rencontre, he placed a considerable sum of money in her hands (she had not wherewith to pay her night's-lodging at the time), which she refused to accept, not knowing his motive for doing so, but was soon relieved of her embarrassment, by his assuring her he was only repaying a charity she had done him in Ville-Marie, and that it afforded him great pleasure to be able to return her generosity, as he could well afford to do it at the time.

Travelling thus, through the towns and villages like the Saviour of the world, He prevented her by the unction of His grace, and prepared beforehand faithful hearts, who were willing to enter the new society, and consecrate themselves to the service of God under her guidance. Six young persons responded to her call. Their names were Sisters Elizabeth, Genevieve, Constantine, Durant, Marianne, and Margaret. Filled with holy joy, and accompanied by her new companions, Sister Bourgeois went to cast herself at the feet of her Bishop, and offer him the fruit of her journeyings and prayers.

M. de Laval was at that time in the college of Foreign Missions in Paris, not only in quality of Bishop of Petree, Vicar-Apostolic of Canada, as he had been up to that period, but also as the first Bishop of Quebec. For it was not until the year 1672 that the important question of erecting the church of Quebec into a titular Bishopric was at last happily decided. The prelate approved the Sister's persevering labors, bestowed the most ample benedictions on herself and her young recruits, and received their first religious consecration to the service of God and the Church. He placed no bounds to his favors, and renewed the general permission given before, to erect schools, and form any other religious establishment in his diocese that they should judge beneficial to the colony. Everything seemed to succeed with this holy woman, and she attributed all her past success, as well as what the future might develop, to the special protection of the Blessed Virgin. Her confidence in her good Mother was boundless, and she considered it an essential duty to depend on her in all things, and inspired her daughters with a similar devotion. She wished it to be perpetuated in the Institute, and desired that the name and livery of Mary might be distinctly traceable in their houses, their furniture, and their personal appearance forever.

Having now obtained all that she desired in France she thought it full time to return to Canada, after a long though unavoidable absence. Before embarking, she felt it was a duty of Christian politeness to call on the distinguished people who had assisted her in procuring the letters patent, and thanking them for their many kindnesses. No person could be more punctilious than she in the duties of social etiquette that charity approved, and religion did not condemn. By a particular dispensation of Providence, her first visit was made to the house of M. Pierre Chevrier, Baron de Faucamp, a priest, and one of the first proprietors of the Isle of Montreal, who then resided at Paris. In the house of this gentleman she received another most singular mark of the Blessed Virgin's love and

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

protection.

M. de Faucamp had in his possession a small miraculous statue of the Mother of God, which he, conjointly with his brother, Louis le Pretre, had taken from among a number of precious relics, in their castle chapel. It had been specially venerated, and carefully preserved for more than a century. Their intention was to send it to Ville-Marie, where they hoped it would be more religiously taken care of than elsewhere, as that city was really the city of Mary, having been built in her honor, and consecrated to her service. While awaiting a favorable opportunity to send the statue to the New World, Sister Bourgeois fortunately presented herself. During the two days that M. Faucamp had it in his house he fell dangerously ill, the sickness proving to be a fatal attack of inflammation of the lungs, and the physicians despaired of his life. In this emergency he made a vow, while praying before the miraculous statue, that if Mary cured him, he would everywhere publish her praises, and do all in his power to build a chapel in her honor, for which he would donate thirty pistoles to commence a fund for the purpose, begging also in his simplicity that she, the Mother of God, would not go to Montreal, and leave one of her most devoted clients sick in France. Scarcely had he pronounced his vow before he was perfectly restored to health. The following day Sister Bourgeois called upon him, and he could not help recognizing the wonderful providence of God in her visit. He immediately gave her the statue and the money, with an authentic certificate of the miracle performed on himself the day before, and Sister was happier in the possession of these treasures, than if she had gained the wealth of the universe. Never, indeed, was human confidence better placed than on this occasion.

They set sail soon after, and arrived safely at Quebec on the 13th of August, the same year. She sent her band of heroines direct to Ville-Marie, for which they had so often sighed during their journeyings, and the very name of which animated their zeal and fervor, but she herself was detained at Quebec for some time. It was necessary to have the letters patent registered by the local authorities so that she would be at liberty to put their contents in execution, when Divine Providence presented an occasion. Her desire was complied with as soon as known, the act of registration taking place on the 17th of October, 1672, after which she set out for Ville-Marie to join her daughters, and labor anew in the service of God. Glorifying in being the custodian of the miraculous statue, she hastened to relate its wonderful history to Messrs. Souart and Perrot, who authorized her to expose it for public veneration. She deposited it in the little wooden shed she had erected after her first return from France, expecting to be able to place it more honorably in the large chapel, that was to be built of stone, and decently ornamented. This chapel was to be a kind of station for the ordinary parish processions, and a place of pilgrimage for those who had a devotion to the most holy Virgin, when they wished to visit the statue in order to obtain spiritual or temporal blessings through Mary's intercession, such being the intention of Messrs. le Pretre and Faucamp, and of many other devout persons who had contributed towards its erection.

Despite the sorrow and humiliations she had already experienced regarding this chapel, she set to work again with renewed energy to effect its completion, but in order to proceed with suitable solemnity, M. Souart ordered a solemn procession to be made to the place, on the 29th of June, 1673, being the Feast of the Apostles SS. Peter and Paul. A great concourse of people attended Vespers after the procession, and M. Souart, the celebrant, put a crucifix in the place destined for the altar, and the next day laid the corner-stone, in the name, and as the agent of M. de Faucamp. Sister Bourgeois labored indefatigably to procure and disburse the necessary funds, a portion of which she had received in France, as we have seen, the remainder being contributed in Ville-Marie. The Sisters themselves assisted generously out of their private funds, and others donated materials or labor which was equivalent. The interior decorations were quite elaborate, and in due course of time the church was finished to the satisfaction of every one. It was the first *stone* church erected in Montreal, and was consecrated under the title of Notre Dame de Bon-Secours. Mass was celebrated in it for the first time on the Feast of the Assumption, 1675, this day of Mary's glorious triumph being selected as its principal Festival. The work being thus happily completed, Sister Bourgeois, in the hope of making it contribute more effectually to the glory of God, requested the cure and church-warden of the parish to accept the new monument of piety for public use, and make it a perpetuity of the parish, in order to promote devotion to the Mother of God. The donation was of course accepted with gratitude, and confirmed by an ordinance of M. de Laval, dated November 6, 1678. Some years afterwards,



## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

by a new arrangement, dated January 17, 1700, La Fabrique gave the Sisters suitable lots for free sepulture, and the unrestricted use of the Chapel of the Infant Jesus, for their private devotional exercises, which act was approved and confirmed by M. de St. Vallier, the second Bishop of Quebec, during one of his pastoral visitations in 1719. This church of Bon-Secours served for many years as a convent chapel to the Hospitalieres of the Hotel-Dieu, when their hospital and convent was burned down in 1734, and when they were obliged to lodge their sick in the houses adjoining the church, until their re-establishment, which did not take place for three or four years.

We learn from a letter of Sister Bourgeois, that these same religieuses had been previously burned out in 1695, but that their hospital escaped the fury of the flames at that time. They sought and found a refuge with the Sisters of the Congregation, after the second burning, issuing forth daily to serve the sick, and returning at night to discharge the reciprocal duties of charity, consequent upon two different communities residing in the same house, and unavoidably crowding each other, yet no violation of charity ever occurred, and long before the day of separation came, an enduring friendship founded on Christ had mutually existed between them. This famous chapel of Bon-Secours was burned, and reduced to ashes in 1754, as was also a portion of the city of Montreal.

The war between France and England occurring about that time, the citizens neglected to rebuild Bon-Secours, and the capture of Ville-Marie by the English, which took place on the Feast of the Nativity of Mary, 1760, was perhaps justly attributed to public disorders and licentiousness (the colonists in many instances having lost their first fervor), and was also considered a just punishment for not having erected anew the once favored shrine of Mary. Canada having exchanged masters, and being under the dominion of the King of England, who was a Protestant ruler, the inhabitants of Montreal did not think the time favorable to rebuild the church, and it remained a ruin until 1771. They repented of their inaction, however, and reproached themselves with cowardice, attributing to their neglect the extraordinary calamities that befell them. The city was scourged by two other general conflagrations, the first occurring on the 18th of May, 1765, when in the short space of four hours, one hundred houses were consumed. The burning was so violent, that the flames leaped beyond the city limits, reaching out to the General Hospital, which was soon a mass of smoking cinders. The second occurred on the 11th of April, 1768, more than eighty of the best public buildings being destroyed, including the chapel and residence of the Sisters of the Congregation, also the chapel of our Lady of Victories, which was built on their grounds in 1711, the repaired ruins of which serve to this day for school purposes.

Much suffering and misery was the result of these calamities, but what struck terror to the hearts of the entire community, more than any other scourge of God, was the insolent demand made by some British officers, for the land on which Bon-Secours, or rather its ruins, stood. They then thought seriously of repairing their fault, and a general assembly of the citizens of Montreal was called in June, 1771, at which it was unanimously decided that they must labor strenuously to rebuild the chapel. They at once appointed persons to draw the plans and superintend the work, and in less than eight days the foundation was dug, and everything was in readiness. On the 30th of the same month they inaugurated the building of the second temple with the same religious ceremonies that a hundred years before had called down the material benedictions of Mary Immaculate on the first cornerstone, or rather on those who laid it. The entire city turned out in procession, with an enthusiasm and splendor worthy the admiration of succeeding ages, the foundation-stones being put in place by the most distinguished men of Montreal. The first was laid directly under the sanctuary, by Etienne Montgolfier, Vicar-General of the diocese, with the following inscription: This church is dedicated to the Great and All-powerful God, and the Blessed Mary of Good Help, with the title of her glorious Assumption. The second was laid under the grand entrance door, by Louis Jollivet, beneath which was placed the following scroll: This church was built nearly a century ago, by the Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois, Foundress of the Congregation Sisters of this city, but having been burnt in 1754, the citizens of Ville-Marie, who have ever been the devoted clients of the Blessed Virgin Mary, on this day, June 30, 1771, place the first stone for its re-establishment, on a much more extensive plan than the original design. The other stones were placed under different parts of the building, by persons of the highest rank, and under each was deposited a leaden plate, on which was engraven the name and rank of the depositor. In the midst of this general enthusiasm, there soon arose

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

the vast and magnificent edifice that we behold to-day. Every one worked for it in some way or other, and believed it was an act of religious reparation to defray the expense. Sister Bourgeois and her daughters had contributed largely the first time, and their descendants would not be outdone in generosity on this occasion. They donated 600 livres to the rebuilding of the temple. The work was pressed forward with all diligence and zeal, and was completely finished in less than two years. On the 30th of June, 1773, it was solemnly blessed amid the acclamations of the entire people and Mass was celebrated in it ever after.

But to return from this long digression. When Sister Bourgeois arrived at Ville-Marie in 1672, she realized the full responsibility of governing and providing for so many young aspirants to religion, and began to think seriously of giving some regular form to the community. Her second batch of postulants had already obtained in Paris the approbation of M. de Laval, who received their primary engagements, and she ardently desired that her first beloved companions should enjoy the same precious advantage, having labored with her faithfully for twelve years at Ville-Marie. She wrote on the subject to M. Bornieres, arch-deacon of Quebec, who represented M. de Laval in his absence, this prelate being still in France. The reply of the distinguished ecclesiastic, dated November 4, 1674, was:

MY DEAR SISTER, I have received the letter in which you ask, 'Is it proper to receive now, *formally*, in your Congregation, the Sisters who first came with you to Canada, or will it be necessary to await the return of the bishop?' Although I am persuaded of the propriety of what you ask, nevertheless, it will be more prudent to await his return, as he has written to me regarding both you and your Congregation, for which he testifies much esteem. It will be best that he regulate everything himself, as he will certainly make his intentions known to you. I trust that all will be arranged satisfactorily, for the glory of God, the salvation of souls, and your own consolation, and shall offer every assistance in my power for the good work. I salute your esteemed daughters, and recommend myself to their prayers and yours.

M. de Laval returned to Canada the following year. The Sisters were all of the same grade, no distinctions having been made; all wore a uniform dress, similar to that ordinarily worn by pious women of the middle class. The color was black, being the same in every respect as Sister Bourgeois herself wore on her first arrival at Ville-Marie, and which the Sisters continue to wear to this day. We will refer again to her Memoirs. She says:

In 1670, I found it necessary to undertake another journey to France, and had long felt inspired to make it. As I was suffering much from mental anxiety, I hoped that an interview with M. de Laval would afford me some solace. He was then only Vicar-Apostolic of Canada, but I had great confidence in his wisdom, and hoped he would impart to me the light necessary for governing our community. I was told that I should bring with me to France the King's letters, and endeavor to procure more postulants. For these purposes, I obtained the consent of the Sisters, and was furnished with many letters of recommendation, from the priests of the Quebec and Montreal Seminaries. I also had one from M. Perrot, Governor of Montreal, and successor of M. de Maisonneuve. The Governor, who was a Parisian, recommended me to his family there. I left Montreal accompanied by M. de Fenelon, who gave me a passage in his boat, to Quebec. He was returning to France on business, and wished to sail in the same ship with me. Father Fremi, a Jesuit, also embarked with us. On arriving at Quebec, I found myself very much indisposed, and was obliged to remain in the hospital a few days, as the ship was to depart when the wind became favorable. I requested M. de Fenelon to permit his servant to take charge of my box, which contained the papers above referred to, and of a little package of clothing, that constituted my entire baggage, and to place them safely on board. The captain politely consented, but his servant entirely forgot both myself and my baggage. Recovering from my indisposition in two or three days, I went on board without further precaution, but alas, found that I was minus the precious box, M. de Fenelon delayed a short time to find it, but all in vain. It was not forthcoming. As the vessel was obliged to sail with the wind, I wrote in haste to M. Dupuis, Major of the garrison of Montreal, who was in Quebec at the time, begging him to search for my box, and if he found it, to forward it to France, by any ship he might find convenient. I particularly requested him to send the papers, and to return the rest to our Sisters in Montreal. He fortunately found the box, and I received it in France shortly after. Behold me, then, embarked without clothing, without provisions, without money, without anything for the

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

voyage. Worse still, I was the only female in the ship, but there were two good priests among the passengers, who gave me great consolation. I arranged a sack and a roll of cordage for my bed, on deck, with an improvised enclosure. This was my *chamber* during my passage; which was not very long, however, as we arrived at La Rochelle in thirty-one days. I had not made a change of underclothing during the voyage, as I had nothing to make it with, except a piece of coarse canvas given me for a mattress. This I converted into a night-dress, but, like all the rest, it was lost. In this unpleasant condition I found myself at La Rochelle, which country was strange to me, and I was one hundred leagues from Paris. It was truly an embarrassing position, and I felt it so. It is true, one of the priests offered me a supply of money, as payment for some work that I and my companions had done for him during our first stay in Quebec, but as I knew I had money in my box when it would arrive, I refused his offer, saying I would be better pleased to receive it in Paris, where I should need it more. It is also true that I had lent 132 livres to a young man in Montreal, who had given a note for it, payable in Paris, and that I had forwarded this note to M. Blondel, who had hitherto transacted our business in France, but he died some time previous to my arrival, and I was left without resource, the note not having been paid, nor could it be found at the time. M. Fenelon was also short of funds, yet he contrived to lend me fifty livres, the greater part of which I used to pay my fare to Paris. With the balance I bought food, and an absolutely necessary change of clothing. The captain and the two priests managed to get me a comfortable seat in the stage, and also a good room at the inn, but I took my meals apart, although they invited me to dine with them.

She at last arrived in the great city, and went directly to the church of Notre Dame, to renew the consecration of herself to God and His holy Mother, then visited the College of Foreign Missions, to receive her Bishop's blessing, and give him an account of her voyage, although she did not reveal her distress to him. The prelate received her with kindness, but as it was late, the visit was necessarily a short one, and she went away, almost dead with hunger and fatigue, to pass the night at the house of a poor woman, in the quarter of St. Sulpice. Next morning very early she went to the church, to perform her usual devotions, and after Mass a priest carried the Blessed Sacrament in procession to a sick person. She followed till they arrived at the door of the Seminary. Here Divine Providence again interposed in her favor, for one of the two priests who stood near the door said to his companion in a loud, distinct voice, I have just received a letter from Canada, in which I am directed to pay one hundred livres to a person I do not know. Her name is Margaret Bourgeois. That is my name, she said, turning quickly, but, if the money is for me, I do not know from whom it comes. The good priest named the person who had written to him, and she instantly recognized the name of a valued friend, one of the priests in the Seminary at Quebec, who, not having funds to pay her before the embarkation, took care that the money should reach her safely in Paris. It was accordingly handed to her, and she went directly to pay the kind captain his fifty livres. Again this favored daughter of God adored His Divine Providence. She now confidently expected to receive her papers, and did receive them a few moments later. On opening the box, she took out her letters of recommendation, and, leaving a few at the Seminary, set out to find the relatives of Messrs. Perrot and de Maisonneuve. She first called at the address given in M. Perrot's letter. As her appearance was not very presentable, after a long, and not over-clean voyage, she met with a very cool reception. However, when her fashionable entertainers read the letter (the contents of which she did, not know), they soon changed contempt into respect, as M. Perrot had requested them to receive her as they would receive himself, assuring them that in Canada she was regarded as a little saint. She was consequently invited to dinner, which she gladly accepted, as she was much in need of it at the moment, but their ceremonious attentions did not agree with her spirit of mortification and humility, and she absolutely refused to remain over-night, although they pressed her quite warmly to do so. She next visited M. de Maisonneuve, arriving at a very late hour, as it was in the suburbs of the city. It is impossible to express the joy that this great servant of God experienced on seeing her again. He actually *ran* to meet her and cordially offered the hospitality of a little house he had just erected in one corner of his garden, telling her that he had it made to look like an Indian cabin, expecting some one from Canada might call who would be pleased to see anything to remind them of home, and her visit fulfilled his presentiment. She gratefully accepted the kind offer, and lodged there during her stay in Paris. This tried and life-long friend then took charge of her affairs, and rendered her the most important services. A few days after, as they were talking about old times in Ville-Marie, he desired to show her some papers, and laying his hand by chance on a shelf of the library, took down a paper, which proved to be the *identical note for 132 livres*, that she had believed lost.

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

After the death of M. Blondel, it had been placed for safe-keeping in the hands of M. de Maisonneuve. She received it very gratefully, of course, but not at all avariciously. Here the memoirs of Sister Bourgeois become irregular, in both dates and events, which were perhaps so crowded that she could not devote time to take note of them in the order of occurrence, so we will content ourselves by relating a few incidents of traditional report before again returning to the authentic manuscripts. At the time of her second return to Montreal, with the six new subjects that M. de Laval received in France, she found it necessary to secure the services of an honest, robust man, who would be willing to work for them, when necessary, during their travels. She accordingly made a contract with a man named Louis Frin, whom she also hoped to employ in teaching a boy's school in Montreal, in place of the young man that died after his arrival in Canada. This Louis Frin became afterwards Brother Charon, and eventually was known as Brother Louis. Her next care was to secure passages for her young charge of eleven girls, three of whom were her nieces. Six of this band were intended for the community, the remainder being destined to become the wives of as many colonists. On this occasion they set out from Paris by way of Normandy, taking a boat on the Seine as far as Rouen. Here they were compelled to remain one month, and as they were not rich, their funds were on the point of being exhausted, the expense of maintaining so many persons being very considerable. Madeline Senecal kept the purse, and found it necessary to warn Sister Bourgeois that she had not sufficient money to meet the current week's expenses. You seem to distrust the Providence of God, my child, replied Sister, in a tone of rebuke, but immediately added in a pleasant manner, Since it is evident that we must have a dinner of *some kind*, fear nothing, God will provide it himself. And God did provide it, for that same week, Louis Frin, who had remained in Paris with M. de Maisonneuve arranging some business matters, arrived at Rouen, bringing to each of the girls a draft for 200 livres, and also the means of purchasing a full supply of provisions, until their arrival at Quebec. Behold how God provides for those who trust in Him. Departing from Rouen, they arrived at Havre-de-Grace, one of the seaports of Normandy, and were obliged to wait fifteen days for the arrival of the ship that was to take them forever from home and country. During these unavoidable delays, Sister Bourgeois occupied both herself and them with the most fervent exercises of piety. Among others, they proposed a pilgrimage to the celebrated shrine of Our Lady of Snows, to procure through *her* intercession the favor of a successful voyage. This shrine was one of the most famous places of devotion to the Blessed Virgin in France. It was decided to make the pilgrimage on foot, and although they set out early in the morning, they did not arrive at the shrine until quite a late hour. Two priests resided here in a kind of monastery, one of whom had just concluded his morning Mass, the other being confined to his room for six weeks by sickness. When Sister told the first Father the object of their pilgrimage, he immediately repaired to his invalid brother priest, whom he found partially dressed and still fasting. Both returned to the church, and heard the confessions of the devoted young pilgrims. The sick Father, who had not been able to walk for a long time without the aid of a crutch, then said Mass without the least inconvenience. All fervently received Holy Communion from his hands, and *he was fully restored to health*. Two days after they set sail for Canada, Father Jean Baptiste le Fevre, who was destined for the Montreal Seminary, accompanying them on the voyage. The anchor was weighed, while all on deck with uncovered heads, implored the protection of Mary, Star of the Sea. The heroic young postulants, with Sister Bourgeois, formed a sort of travelling community, of which she was the head, and during the passage performed regular devotional exercises before the statue of Our Lady of Good Help. They were indeed under the protection of God and His holy Mother, for, although England and France were then at war, they carried in the ship no other, artillery than brave hearts and arms. When the voyage was about half made, the captain, who was constantly on the look-out, descried four English ships, which he calculated contained at least twenty-six pieces of cannon. They were making, as it seemed, direct head-way for them, and as he was totally unprepared for such an emergency, he called out to Sister Bourgeois, in accents of unfeigned terror: We are lost, we are lost; betake yourselves to prayer, at once, you and your companions. But before his entreaty was ended, one-half of her companions had fainted. Strange to say, all on board, including the strongest men, turned to Sister Bourgeois for protection, feeling persuaded that her prayers only could save them from becoming the prey of the dreaded English. But her brave and holy spirit knew no fear. She was looking intently at the white statue of Notre Dame de Bon-Secours, and said, smiling, If they do take us prisoners they will lead us to England or to Holland, and we shall find God there as well as here, and is not God everywhere? Her wonderful tranquillity restored immediate confidence, and all knelt quietly in prayer. It being Sunday, Father le Fevre prepared calmly to celebrate Mass, although the English ships approached rapidly, and, wonderful to relate, in less than two hours,

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

the foe had disappeared completely, so that the Holy Sacrifice was followed by the glorious *Te Deum*. Every one on board believed that this remarkable deliverance was the work of *Notre Dame de Bon-Secours*. They arrived without further accident at Quebec on the 13th of August, having been at sea just one month and eleven days. She had scarcely set foot on land, when an imprudent person informed her that the community in Montreal were in a state of starvation, and that their house was in a ruinous condition, to which she replied simply God's holy will be done even if it falls to the ground, he can raise it again, when it pleases Him. She found the report unhappily verified, however, on arriving at Montreal, as the Sisters were absolutely destitute, yet she entertained no fears. Her confidence in God being unshaken, she could always look calmly and hopefully at the vicissitudes of this changeful passing life. The poor Sisters were exceedingly pained to have nothing better than *bread and lard* to offer her for dinner, but she assured them it was very acceptable to a hungry person, and directed Sister Genevieve, the cook, to prepare a good supper for the community. What shall I prepare it with? said the simple Sister, *we have nothing in the house*. Never distrust the Providence of God, was the answer, go to your kitchen, and you will find food. In fact, that very afternoon several persons came to visit them, bringing abundance of all kinds of provisions, so that the Sisters were lost in astonishment, and silently adored the providence of that God, who never abandons those that trust in Him.

### CHAPTER IX. THE RULES OF THE CONGREGATION, AND ESTABLISHMENT OF MISSIONS.

After having formed and established her community at Ville-Marie, as we have seen, and provided suitable buildings and funds to sustain them in the exercise of their duties in a newly-settled country; having also secured and registered the letters patent that confirmed their right, as a legally authorized Congregation, she next turned her attention to three things, still necessary to the perfection of her Institute, namely, to procure a sufficient number of subjects, to provide for them approved rules, and to establish missions. At first it was not difficult to procure subjects, as they presented themselves from all parts, being attracted, not by temporal interests, or any selfish motive, but simply by the odor of the virtues of Sister Bourgeois and her first saintly companions. But she did not receive indifferently all that presented themselves. She was quite insensible to such advantages as high birth, riches, and the brilliancy of natural or acquired talents, which are sometimes more dangerous than useful, preferring that those she received should have good common sense, an unblemished character, and solid virtue, without which qualifications she received no one. If she did not exact from her subjects the most sublime perfection, she required at least that they should have a desire to acquire it in proportion as God was pleased to bestow it on them. Let us hear her own words on the subject, as found in a letter, in which with simplicity she first addresses the ever Blessed Virgin: My good Mother, I ask from you neither wealth, nor honor, nor the pleasures of this life for our community. I only beg of you to obtain for me, that God may be well served in it, and that we may never receive proud or presumptuous subjects, who keep the world and its maxims in their hearts, who are scoffers and untruthful, and who do not study to reduce to practice the maxims of your Divine Son, maxims which He taught us from the pulpit of the Cross, and which you have observed with so much exactness. Then, addressing those who presented themselves for admission, she adds: Yes, all who wish to be received into this community, must resolve to renounce not only the principles and maxims of the world, but must also resolve to renounce *themselves*, and overcome their bad habits and inclinations. They must try to sever the natural ties that bind them to friends and relatives, as *merely* human attachments uselessly preoccupy the mind. I warn them that they will be employed in lowly occupations, which are painful to nature; that they will be sent on missions with a Sister who will be charged to contradict them in many things, and treat them like little children in one word, to humble and mortify them on every occasion. I desire that they learn to obey promptly any one who may be appointed their superior; that they be poor in spirit; that their words, gestures, and whole deportment be neither frivolous nor dissipated, but that they act under all circumstances with modesty, reserve, and devotion; that they mortify their senses; avoid unnecessary conversation, and always endeavor to keep themselves in the presence of God. Such were the first lessons she gave her postulants, and she rigorously exacted the execution of them. Yet, notwithstanding these requirements, from which she never departed, she soon assembled a numerous community, that came up to her standard. We behold entering into the Congregation, from its very commencement, young

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

girls of every state and condition of life, noble and simple, rich and poor, daughters of private citizens, merchants, mechanics, and even the savages, charity and humility making all *equal*, and as such they were received without distinction. It was truly a school of virtue and sanctity. Many members of the families of Lemoine and St. Ange entered; also the celebrated Marie Barbier of the Assumption and Sisters Dennis, Bourbo, Jousset, etc., more than forty being received in less than two years. We should also add the name of Jeanne Leber, who became afterwards the famous recluse, of whom more anon, with many others quite remarkable for sanctity from the beginning. Nor must we forget to mention Marie Theresa Gannensagouach, an Iroquois, who, after having held the office of school teacher at the mountain for thirteen years, died in the odor of sanctity, November 25, 1695, on that mission, where her epitaph may be seen to-day. Gannensagouach was not the only person of her tribe who became remarkable for virtue in the Sisters' school, and on whom the illustrious Foundress lavished care, labor, and money. Her particular desire was always the conversion of the Indians. This was the chief motive that induced her to bring young persons from France to Canada, representing to them the glory and merit of converting the Indians to the true Faith, for which sublime end they ought to sacrifice their lives, if necessary. She appointed two of her first faithful band to the Mission of the Mountain, near Ville-Marie, which was exclusively an Indian mission. At that time, it was a rather difficult task to go from the city to the mountain, as they had to pass through thick forests interspersed with marshes and wild savannahs, through which there was neither road nor track.

A priest from the seminary devoted himself to the instruction of the savages, and the two missionary Sisters were obliged to lodge in bark cabins for a long time, as the Indians erected no better dwellings, until the time of M. Belmont, who had stone houses put up for them at his own expense. He also built the Fort that still exists, but the orchard and gardens were added at a later period. In 1692, the Sisters lodged in a little tower to the right of the entrance of the Fort, the tower at the left serving for a school and a bakery. The savages of this mission, after the death of Sister Bourgeois, were transported to Sault-au-Recollet, in 1731, and again in 1732 to the lake of the two mountains. These Indian missions, to which the Sisters were always devoted, and to this day continue to be devoted, have contributed largely to the spread of our holy Faith among the Indians along the St. Lawrence, and have produced much spiritual good. The holy Foundress supported at this mission several Iroquois girls, free of charge, forming them to habits of virtue, and inducing them to inspire their companions with similar sentiments. She also kept a certain number of these children of the forest among the boarders at Ville-Marie, one or two of whom afterwards became members of the Congregation, and were most useful on the mission schools. It was in compensation for these benefits to the state and to religion, and to refund in part the expense sustained by Sister Bourgeois and her community, that the King of France, in 1676, ordered an appropriation to be made by the Canadian Government, to give annually to the Sisters the sum of two or three thousand livres. The pension was punctually paid until the year 1756, at which time it was withdrawn, as Canada had passed under British rule, after an heroic but unsuccessful struggle against the English in 1670. However, the change of royal masters, and the suppression of many Catholic charities consequent upon it, did not lessen the love of the Sisters for the poor Indians. These daughters and followers of Christ continued to support the Indian missions at their *own expense*, as they do at the present day in many instances.

Although the community was already quite numerous, and continued steadily to increase, yet the sainted woman at its head had not procured either rules or constitutions for its government. It is true, that she was a living rule, and model of the most sublime perfection, and that her fervent daughters made it a sacred duty to obey and imitate her; yet she felt even this was not sufficient. Though united in the practice of the most holy observances, they were still in a state of probation as they made no vows, nor were they bound by solemn engagements. They lived, notwithstanding, in the strictest bonds of charity, laboring zealously for the glory of God, and their own spiritual perfection, each by the advice of her confessor making such private vows as her particular devotion inspired. But the Foundress saw plainly, that without written rules and customs, changes and innovations must gradually creep in, and eventually disturb or destroy the end of the Institute, so she set to work with her accustomed zeal to procure rules and constitutions, canonically authorized, for the security and perpetuity of the Congregation. Filled with these ideas, which were undoubtedly inspired by heaven, she went to Quebec to confer with M. de Laval. He approved of her design, and counselled her to return to France, and learn from personal observation the practices of the most fervent communities, selecting the rules of such as seemed conformable to the spirit of her Institute.

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

Being thus advised by her Bishop, nothing could deter her from making the voyage. Indeed, she seemed insensible to pain, labor, or privation, on such occasions. Having acquainted her Sisters with his Lordship's decision, and given them directions and advice for their good government during her absence, she courageously embarked the third time, and was absent one whole year. She employed herself like the great St. Anthony, in collecting and selecting the holy rules that were given by persons eminent for piety and wisdom. She was specially attracted by the writings of St. Augustine, as they contained maxims and regulations replete with prudence and discretion. This saint quotes largely from the instructions left by St. Ambrose and other Fathers of the Church, addressed to the first Christian virgins, instructing them how to reduce to practice the evangelical counsels and maxims, and enlightening them on the observance of the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. These writings recommend pre-eminently a love of silence and retreat from the world, charity among the Sisters, assiduity at work, pious reading, prayer, and the frequentation of the Sacraments, under the guidance of ecclesiastical superiors, with whom they were to share the glory and merit of instructing and edifying the faithful. Such was the spirit of the rule that Sister Bourgeois brought with her from France, to place in the hands of her Bishop and obtain his approbation of it. But during her absence, the spiritual government of Canada had been seriously changed. There was no longer a Bishop in the country, as M. de Laval, shortly before her return, became despondent under bodily infirmities, which were frequently so painful as to prevent his discharging the duties of his ministry as successfully as he desired; therefore he returned to France, for the purpose of tendering his resignation to the proper authorities, and demanding a successor. His solicitations for release from episcopal functions were very urgent, so that although he was highly esteemed in Paris for his many virtues and acknowledged ability and merit, his resignation was accepted, the King immediately appointing M. Jean Lacroix de St. Vallier his successor, who consequently became the second Bishop of Quebec. On Sister Bourgeois' arrival, therefore, she found no bishop to whom she could confide her rules, and took the resolution of putting them in execution *provisionally*, until a Bishop should be appointed for Canada, which appointment was not carried into effect for three years after, although M. de St. Vallier had been formally nominated by royal authority, as has been related. We find in her Memoirs of this voyage, the following In 1680, Mme. Perrot, wife of the Governor of Montreal, determined to return to France, for the benefit of her health, which was much impaired. Knowing her intention, and having obtained the consent of our Sisters, I offered to accompany her as travelling companion, and was accepted. My real desire, however, was to obtain rules for our Congregation. On arriving at la Rochelle I left Mme. Perrot, and went direct to Paris, as I felt quite sick after the voyage. The following day Brother Louis, who also chanced to be in Paris, invited me to his house, where I took a much needed rest for a few days, but another friend, M. de Turmenie, being informed of my illness, sent a sedan, carried by two stout men, to take me to his house, where I remained during an illness of fifteen days, being treated with as much kindness as if I had been his sister. When my health was reestablished I went to lodge with the 'Daughters of the Cross,' in the Rue St. Antoine. In this community I received light in many things relating to our holy rules and constitutions. Understanding from these good religieuses, that M. de St. Vallier was staying at the College of Foreign Missions, I went there to ask his blessing, as I felt in duty bound. But his Lordship did not approve of my proceedings, and told me quite curtly that I should not have made the voyage, nor seek rules for the community either, and he absolutely forbade me to take any new subjects from France on my return. However, as he was not very explicit in his speech regarding the rules, and as Sister Bourgeois was already furnished with two different formulas (one being received from M. Jandret, the other from the Daughters of the Cross), she did not in the least resent the humiliation, but quietly set to work to find other means of perfecting what was then in her possession. On leaving M. de St. Vallier, she went to the Convent of the Community of Miramion, so named from Mme. de Miramion, their Foundress, who was still living. Sister wished to confer with this illustrious woman on the subject of her rules, and to add or retrench, as the holy religieuse might suggest. But Mme. de Miramion, having been informed that M. de St. Vallier wished to give rules to the Congregation himself, in order not to displease the Bishop, she refused to take any part in the affair. While Sister Bourgeois patiently awaited the moment when her rules should be approved, she had a very heavy cross to bear. Almighty God appeared until then to have visibly protected all her enterprises. But now she was to pass through severe trials in order to perfect her virtue, trials which conduced more to her sanctification than all the voluntary pains and mortifications she inflicted on herself. Besides the sorrow she endured at being so unexpectedly repelled in the attempt to have her rules approved (a cross she endured for many years), she had, on her return to Montreal, to suffer the cruel anguish of seeing the fruit of all her past labors perish before her eyes in

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

a few moments. The beloved home of her community took fire on the night of the 6th of December, 1683, and quicker than can be told, not only the house, but its poor furniture, and everything else it contained was consumed. The fire was so sudden and violent, that the Sisters were enveloped by smoke and flames in an instant, two of her best subjects being burned to death. These were Sister Genevieve, the assistant, and Sister Margaret Soumillard, a niece of the Foundress. The rest barely escaped with, their lives. Sister Bourgeois felt, more than any one else, the horrors of the accident, and a spirit less strong, and a heart less brave than hers, would have naturally yielded to despair. She sincerely regretted the death of her dearly loved Sisters, more for the loss the community must sustain for their untimely end, than because her own niece was one of the victims, and her tears were all the more bitter, as she judged herself to be the cause of the calamity.

It is a just punishment from heaven for my weakness, she said, in having so far departed from the spirit of poverty, humility, and mortification in which I should always have lived, as to consent to the building of that great house. It were better to have continued living in the stable that was given us, and with which we should have been contented. It was her love of virtue, however, that made her speak thus, as the house was very far from being either great or magnificent. It was only a wooden edifice, and was too small and inconvenient for the many good works to which the Sisters applied themselves unceasingly. She soon perceived, notwithstanding all her sentiments of humility, that the building must go up again for the greater glory of God. Although then deprived of every temporal resource, with the blessing of God, and under the protection of His holy Mother, nothing seemed difficult. Obstacles only strengthened her faith and aroused her courage. She hoped against hope, and determined on the spot to put her hand to the work again, placing more confidence than ever in Jesus and *Mary*, to whom, as to a good mother, she always had recourse. Nor had she long to await the result of her confidence. Divine Providence stirred up the sympathies of the charitably-disposed, who gave her abundant means to build a large stone edifice, more solid and architectural than the former one. This second house remained intact until the great fire of 1763; and of the buildings afterwards added we shall soon have occasion to speak more fully. Sister was still laboring for the erection of the building, when M. de St. Vallier, having been consecrated in Paris, January, 1686, by M. de Laval, his predecessor, returned to Canada, accompanied by the latter prelate, who came back to end his days in the practice of the most sublime virtues of private life in the Seminary of Foreign Missions at Quebec. He always honored and esteemed Sister Bourgeois, and watched over her with singular interest. He died, as he had lived, a Saint, May 6, 1708. M. de St. Vallier devoted himself to the affairs of his diocese without intermission, and it was in the hands of this new prelate that Sister placed the copy of her rules and constitutions. He esteemed the heroic woman and her community; he noticed and admired the constancy and courage with which they endured the inconveniences resulting from their recent calamity, and he gave them many marks of confidence and esteem but regarding the *institute* and *rules* of the Foundress, he then entertained views different from hers. Judging of things by the light of human prudence, he thought the community could never raise itself again to the position it occupied before the fire, and wishing to prevent a multiplicity of institutions in his diocese, he formed the design of uniting the *rising community* to the *Ursulines* at Quebec. These ladies had already taken steps to establish themselves at Ville-Marie, and there are still extant a few letters written on the subject. But M. d'Olier, superior of the Seminary, who knew better than any one, the merits of Sister Bourgeois, did not give them much hope of establishing a new mission. He received their request rather ungraciously, and took the liberty of making humble but strong representations to the Bishop on the subject. Sister Bourgeois also represented to him, firmly and respectfully, that the good she hoped to effect in the diocese, with the assistance of her daughters, was not at all compatible with the rules of another institute, especially of a cloistered one; that such a step would entirely destroy the views by which she felt herself inspired, and which she believed came directly from God; that she already had the approval of legitimate superiors, and that the ever Blessed Virgin, to whom she and her entire community were especially consecrated, had given them unequivocal marks that the establishment was agreeable to her. That besides their general intention of instructing children, they had bound themselves to labor unceasingly for the spiritual perfection of *poor* girls who desired to consecrate themselves to God, but who from lack of fortune could not do so, as the *cloistered* orders invariably required their subjects to bring a moderate fortune for their maintenance. That one of her chief desires was to open the doors of the Congregation to persons of this description, and that, making no account of riches, she would rather receive *portionless* a Sister who could not buy the necessary clothing, if she had a *true vocation* and a *good will*, than a rich one who had not these



## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

qualifications. It was certainly her intention to receive the Congregation Sisters *free*, although the French King subsequently directed her to exact a dowry of at least 2000 livres. However, she was permitted to relax somewhat in this matter, either in whole or in part, according to the dictates of prudence and the circumstances of the person. All these reasons seemed to make an impression on the mind of M. de St. Vallier, but he had other business on hand just then, being occupied with the founding of a General Hospital at Quebec, and an Ursuline establishment at Three Rivers. He was therefore not in a hurry to approve the constitutions of Sister Bourgeois, preferring to take time to examine them, and make the changes he thought necessary. Sister herself had a strong interior presentiment that never deceived her. She felt that God approved of her work, and therefore awaited, in patient silence, the moment marked by Divine Providence, for giving the approval she so earnestly desired. This moment came at last, after long years of painful suspense, and just two years before her happy death. She had then the consolation to see approved, and solemnly established forever in her institute, all that she had constantly and faithfully practised, by way of trial, since her last return from France. The solemn approbation was given by M. de St. Vallier, June 24, 1698, during his episcopal visitation at Ville-Marie, Sister Assumption being then superior. The holy Foundress had resigned her office of superior in 1693, desiring to be the first to set an example of profound humility, in obedience to the rules that she had spent a lifetime in bringing to perfection. But before her withdrawal from office, she had formed a great number of establishments in the diocese. We have already spoken of the Mission of the Mountain, which was the first, but not the only one made in the commencement. There were also those of la Chine, and Pointe-aux-Trembles at Montreal. As the population slowly and steadily increased, the suburbs enlarged, two new parishes being erected in 1670. Sister Bourgeois knew full well that these parishes could not afford even the necessary means of *subsistence* for missionary Sisters, but she saw that much good could be accomplished, by sending Sisters there, and she sent them. In those days she made no provisional contracts for the Sisters who went on missions, but trusting entirely to the Providence of God, left their support in his hands. Very frequently the early missions were temporary arrangements, the Sisters going for a time to effect good, wherever good might be accomplished. In the missions established after her resignation and death, the Sisters who succeeded her were animated by the same spirit, and closely followed the same plan. Nothing is more admirable or edifying than the advice she gave the Sisters before sending them on missions. Think, my child, she would say, that you are going to collect the drops of blood that Jesus lost during his passion. Oh, how contented a Sister sent on the mission would be, if she realized that God himself *sent* her and *accompanied* her. If she reflected that she might and ought to testify the deepest gratitude to Him from whom she has received all, then she would find nothing difficult, and nothing tedious; she would, on the contrary, despise the world, suffer all kinds of torment, and even endure a shameful death, rather than neglect her charge. In fact, Sister Bourgeois set no bounds to her zeal for the spiritual welfare of Montreal. It was ever her uppermost thought. During her life, and before her constitutions were solemnly approved, her daughters were to be found in, every part of the diocese, laboring for the salvation of souls. Shortly after the arrival of M. de St. Vallier, he received a communication from Father Lamy who was then pastor of the isle of Orleans asking for a mission of the Sisters of the Congregation for his parish, and stating that he was not a stranger to the good they had effected in Montreal. The zealous prelate immediately wrote to Sister Bourgeois for two Sisters to found the mission. She was at the time laboring hard to re-establish her institute after the losses it sustained by the fire, and it did not seem prudent at such a time to undertake a new foundation, yet she did not hesitate a moment, Sisters Anne and Assumption being sent to make a trial, in the beginning of winter.

They had unheard-of hardships to endure, but they persevered in the work, being protected by Divine Providence in a very singular manner, and finally the mission was established, and grew more prosperous day by day. In the following spring the Bishop formed another project, viz., an establishment in which he intended to educate and support a number of poor girls he had assembled from different parts of the colony, intending that said establishment should be maintained partly by charity, and partly by the labor of the inmates. He wished to confide the work to the care of the Congregation Sisters, as he saw daily proofs of their zeal in the Mission of the Holy Family, in the isle of Orleans. Sister Bourgeois accepted the duty with *reluctance*, as it did not appear to coincide with the spirit of her institute. However, rather than disoblige the Bishop, she sent Sister Assumption to Quebec, having sent Sister St. Ange to take her place. This Sister worked wonders in her new position, yet the ultimate success of the enterprise was doubtful and slow, so slow that it was suppressed the following year. The Bishop

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

divided its labors between two communities, which division eventually gave birth to the General Hospital and the Congregation Mission at Quebec. His Lordship thought seriously of conferring with the sainted Foundress, about rules she brought from France, and wrote to her on the subject, requesting an early interview. She no sooner understood that her superior required her at Quebec, than she took the road, on *foot*, in the very depth of winter, being often obliged to go forward on her knees, now in the snow, now on the ice, and occasionally through tracts covered with water. This was her customary mode of travelling through Canada. Having at last arrived at her destination, after incredible suffering and dangers, we next find her carrying on her shoulders the different articles of furniture and utensils necessary for housekeeping, that were needed by Sister Assumption in the House of Providence, already described. Here was truly a mortified, humble, and penitential spirit, such as this fallen world seldom sees. We have before remarked that the House of Providence lasted but one year, after which it was changed into a mission. It was at first situated in the upper town, between the Hotel-Dieu and the Cathedral. But another trial awaited the foundation.

The Sisters had hoped to be able to retain *peaceable* possession of the ground purchased for the house, as the owners had come to an amicable arrangement, and they, the Sisters, were already in possession. But just then an individual appeared, who asserted that she had an old and valid lease of the property, which she was not disposed to set aside, and so the Sisters were compelled to leave the premises, and go once more to reside in an old stable. Writing of this event, the Foundress uses the following language: I am rejoiced to hear that you again live in a stable, but at the same time I am pained to learn that your friends have testified displeasure at the occurrence. I have a great desire to live in charity with all the world, because God commands us to love our neighbor, and it is this desire that at present prevents me from contesting our claim. Nevertheless, she was obliged to attend to the matter in a *charitable* way. The property was fairly purchased, and she had the title-deed in her possession, but perceiving that other interested parties also murmured about the sale, far from defending her rights, according to the letter of the law, she left the whole matter at the discretion of the *adverse* party, saying pleasantly that she wished, at any cost, to preserve charity with her neighbor, and she also wished her neighbor to feel charitably disposed towards her. Her own words on the occasion are: I am convinced this proceeding is an unjust one, but, as I understand, the contending party still objects. She will never forgive us for the supposed wrong we have done her. I cannot endure that we become even the *innocent* cause of such angry resentment. So, intending to renounce all claim to the property, I went to cast myself at the feet of Mary, my mother, and on leaving the church, a person, to whom I had *not revealed our embarrassment*, met me and offered a sum of money equal to what the dissatisfied parties claim, and now the matter is quietly settled, and we are the owners. In 1692 this site was exchanged for a much more extensive one in the lower town, which the community still occupies. It was purchased from Francis Hazur, a merchant of Quebec, and a devout Christian. In order to testify his esteem for the Foundress, and the confidence he had in her prayers and those of her community, he made a considerable reduction in the price of the property, preferring prayers for himself and his descendants to a paltry earthly advantage. He would not have been so considerate, however, if the sale had been made to other parties. Notwithstanding this visit of the heroic woman to Quebec, she did not succeed in receiving the approbation of her rules, and the matter still remained in suspense. Her next labor of Christian love was to erect a House of Providence in Montreal on the model of the one in Quebec. The Sisters took charge of it, and it lasted longer than the first. But in 1694, when she was no longer superior, the community resolved to abandon the establishment, as it had no other support than the scanty charity of the people, and even that was given coldly. Besides, the object proposed was not in accordance with the spirit of their society, and it could not be sustained without a miracle. Although it is quite certain that Sister Bourgeois established, many other *successful* missions, it is impossible to give the dates of their foundation with accuracy, nor is this to be wondered at, when we consider the perilous condition of Canada during her life, whether we remember the bloody atrocities of the savages on the often defenceless colonists, or the fiercely contested wars between the French and English that demoralized the whole state of society north of the St. Lawrence, or the tremendously destructive fires that swept away whole cities in whirlwinds of flame, or the pestilences that filled so many wayside graves, and *not always with the dead*. She was an eye-witness of these woes, and what wonder is it if her memoirs at times lack regularity.

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

We cannot close this chapter, however, without referring to the celebrated recluse, Jane Leber. This illustrious solitary had no sooner known Sister Bourgeois and her community, than she became devotedly attached to them, not only by a conformity of virtues, but also by their mutual devotion to the ever Blessed Mother of God. Yet she did not become a member of the Congregation, the Lord wishing to attach her to Himself in another way for His own glory. While awaiting some manifestation of the divine will, this holy girl avoided all exterior communication with the world, her only visits being those she made to the Sisters, by whose singular virtues she was much edified. Sister Bourgeois always received her with pleasure, in order to inspire her with a desire of greater perfection. During their interviews, these two children of grace conceived a lasting esteem and friendship for each other, from which Almighty God afterwards received great glory, and the Congregation *great advantage*, as we shall relate.

Jane Leber had renounced even the most innocent amusements after the death of a beloved friend, Marie Charly, who died in Montreal. The pious girl was so sincerely attached to the holy deceased, that the world had then no more charms for her, and she thought only of imitating the virtues of her friend, or of surpassing them if she could. Accordingly she devoted herself to prayer, and the contemplation of the attributes of God, so perfectly that she renounced all intercourse with the world, with her nearest relations, and even with the immediate members of her family, and took the extraordinary resolution of condemning herself to *perpetual solitude*, which she had already observed for a long time in her father's house, and which was only to terminate *with her life* in the house of the Congregation. This, indeed, was one of the wonderful effects of the Holy Spirit, which it is not permitted man to fathom.

We have seen that in the Sisters' residence at Ville-Marie, there was no domestic church, and that Sister Bourgeois' limited means did not permit her to build one, a circumstance she sincerely regretted. In 1692, however, she thought seriously of taking the necessary steps to procure such a chapel, and the project was soon executed. It even paved the way for the erection of schools, and brought with it several other advantages to the Congregation. Jane Leber no sooner heard that the Sisters intended to build a chapel in honor of the Blessed Virgin, than she determined to fix her abode for life in their house. She was very rich, and proposed to pay nearly all the expenses of the edifice, on condition that they would reserve for her use a room near the sanctuary, where she might end her days, with the Blessed Sacrament always in view, which request was graciously acceded to, Sister Bourgeois being the first who made the concession, and afterwards signed the contract, dated August 4th, 1695, during the superiority of Sister Assumption. It was the holy Foundress who secured this acquisition, and who retained, in spite of herself, the greatest influence in the government of the Congregation. It was during Jane's total seclusion, and also during the life of Sister Bourgeois, that the pious recluse issued written orders for the decoration of the church, for the procuring of costly vases and other sacred ornaments, and it was owing to her great liberality that all things were in readiness for the celebration of holy Mass, on the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, September 8th, 1695. This extraordinary woman rejoiced in the beauty and glory of the house of God, and only closed her eyes in death to the light of the earthly tabernacle, to open them in the better land, on the splendors of the new Jerusalem, described so wonderfully by St. John in the Apocalypse. On the day following the ceremony that inaugurated her seclusion for life, she gave directions for founding the perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, as it is still observed in the Congregation, and after the death of the Foundress she donated the necessary funds for rebuilding the boarding-schools according to the plan that Sister Bourgeois had explained to her. She also *endowed* the new institution with royal munificence, and founded in perpetuity the *Community-Mass*, which has never ceased to be annually celebrated since her time. In one word, she unceasingly bestowed benefits on the community of her love. It may not be out of place here to enumerate a few of the many missions established by the holy Foundress. In her earlier archives we find the following names: The Holy Family, in the isle of Orleans, Quebec, Chateau-richer, Pointe-aux-Trembles, l'Isle Royal, Champlain, La Prairie, and Boucherville.

## CHAPTER X. THE PRIVATE AND SOCIAL VIRTUES OF SISTER BOURGEOIS.

After what has been already related, it might appear that the labors of Sister Bourgeois were happily ended by the establishment of her Congregation. She had a flourishing institute at Montreal, and a fervent and numerous community, that was well prepared to meet the future exigencies of the diocese, and to supply new missions (when such were needed) with holy and capable subjects. It is true there was still no properly authorized or approved rule, but she had the necessary formulas, which were strictly observed, while expecting the time appointed by Divine Providence for ecclesiastical approbation, and she felt *interiorly* assured that this would come. She had given her daughters an example of the most heroic virtues, most of her actions being really of the heroic order, and such as might have been expected from a daughter of predestination. In every sense of the word, she had a truly great soul. In the routine of daily life, she was to her Sisters a perfect model. She gave them frequently instructions suitable to their strength, and proper to excite their zeal and fervor in the duty of a *community life* to which they aspired. We will now see, or rather admire, her extraordinary love of suffering, which very few could imitate.

The Lord gives a cross to every one of us. He spares none of His servants, and she had crosses of all sorts to endure, interiorly and exteriorly suffering the most intense pain of body and mind. The former she often inflicted on herself, the latter was appointed by Divine Providence, and of each she had a larger share than falls to the common lot. Without referring again to the long and painful voyages she undertook for the glory of God, or to the penitential and mortified life of which she made profession, it is well known that, like the Apostle, she constantly endured in soul and body the sufferings of Jesus Christ. Her food was always of the coarsest kind, and she selected invariably for herself whatever was disagreeable to the taste. In the matter of *eating* she absolutely destroyed sensuality, either by using her food too hot or too cold, or spoiling its flavor by pouring water on it, or mixing it with ashes, or a certain bitter powder, with which she always kept herself supplied. She ate little, and drank less, using water but once a day, and never in sufficient quantity to allay her thirst, even in the hottest weather. She even managed to sit at her meals in a painful and mortified position, being careful to pass every moment of her life in the practice of mortification. She usually prayed prostrate on the ground. Her ordinary bed was the floor, with a block of wood for her pillow. She regarded it as a criminal indulgence, if sickness obliged her to use a mattress or *straw* pillow. Her sleep was short and broken, as she rose usually about midnight to pray for at least two hours, and during the intense cold of the most severe Canadian winters she never omitted this practice. She seemed to be *insensible* to the biting frost, as she never approached the fire in the cold season, and endured the inconveniences of the other seasons with the same indifference to bodily comfort. She scourged her body with rude disciplines, and one cannot describe without a sensation of horror, the cap, bristling with sharp points, that she wore secretly on, her head night and day. The Sisters once accidentally saw this instrument of torture, and begged her to discontinue its use, but she smilingly told them, it caused her no more pain than a feather pillow should.

On another occasion, having been implored by the Sisters to moderate the rigor of her austerities, in order to prolong her life for the sake of the community, she answered them by an instruction on the Christian's obligation of leading an austere and penitential life, and so pathetic were her words that the Sisters burned with a desire to imitate her example.

At last her confessor was obliged to forbid such excessive austerities, and she submitted, so far as *exterior* mortification went, but she practised *interior* mortification more ardently than before. That is, she kept a stricter guard over her senses, thwarted more frequently her natural inclinations, and endeavored by every means in her power to keep herself always in the presence of God. But as if her divine Master made light of these penitential exercises, He sent her a more terrible trial than any she had yet endured.

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

In the year 1689, the devil, jealous of the tranquillity with which she submitted to the decrees of Divine Providence, in the midst of crosses that seemed to multiply daily around her, gave her to understand by the pretended visions of another, that she was in a state of damnation, and at enmity with God. These awful words, or rather this frightful idea, made such an impression on her, that during four years she was not able to banish it from her imagination, being, however, less troubled at the apprehension of the pains of hell, than at the idea of being hated by God, whom she loved with her whole heart. During the long continuance of the temptation she multiplied her prayers, though prayer no longer consoled her, and her penances, though she felt a secret horror for them. Yet she blindly submitted to the guidance of her director, for whom, however, she felt more *aversion* than *confidence*. Nothing consoled her. She had to be compelled to receive Holy Communion, of which she believed herself unworthy, and from which she abstained for a considerable time. Only those who have passed through a similar ordeal can judge of her state of mind at that time, or form any idea of what she suffered. But in order to be more explanatory, it will again be necessary to refer to the Memoirs.

As has been already stated, on her second return from France she found herself surrounded by more than forty aspirants to the religious state, who led most humble and penitential lives yet though all were very *fervent*, all were not equally *strong*, either in body or mind, and the health of many among them visibly declined, so that it became necessary to set bounds to their austerities, especially as they were not yet under the guidance of an approved rule, which of its own nature would have prevented indiscreet excesses. A mitigation of penitential practices was therefore openly and undisguisedly advocated but Sister Bourgeois, all charitable and submissive as she was, did not relish these suggestions fearing that a door would be opened to relaxation. She had already reproached herself bitterly for the consent reluctantly given to the building of the first *large* house for the community, and, notwithstanding the lapse of years, she still regarded its erection as contrary to the spirit of poverty, humility, and mortification they would have preserved in the stable which had been the cradle of the Congregation.

The grand building brought in its train, she said, drapery and mattresses delicate food and fine furniture and so many other fine things that there was no room left for holy poverty.

Her apprehensions for the future were a species of martyrdom to her, and a difference of opinion was the commencement of all her mental anguish, as after that period we find her Memoirs filled with painful reflections. In 1677 a young person presented herself for admission, who was unfit for any duties except out-door employment, and Sister Bourgeois refused to receive her. The refusal, however, was contrary to the desire of any of the Sisters, although it was approved of by ecclesiastical superiors. The Foundress, writing of the circumstance, says: From that time I think the Sisters lost confidence in me, and I lost the liberty of speaking of such matters to them.

This was a sad position for a superior who believed God's work would suffer by a real or supposed lack of confidence. It will be remembered she was engaged for two entire years in the task of procuring new subjects, together with the *letters patent* for the institute, and during that time the signal favors she received from both God and man gave her much consolation. But no sooner had she returned to Ville-Marie than she was replunged into sorrowful embarrassments, as she noticed that what *seemed to her* to be relaxations had crept in. She attributed the fire of 1683, and the deaths of her two best subjects on that occasion, to her own sins, and overwhelmed with these ideas, her life became a sad and pensive one.

She was also firmly persuaded (in her deep humility) that she was unworthy and incapable of governing the rising Congregation. So persuaded was she of it, that she frequently asked the Sisters to accept her resignation, but as they justly attributed her request to an over-scrupulous conscience, they refused to acquiesce. She then reproached herself with infidelity to her vocation in seeking to be released from the burden of superiority, as she had often promised Almighty God that, come what would, she should never abandon His work. Sometimes pride whispered that she was quite useful in the position she occupied. At other times she felt convinced that others could discharge the duty better. Always disquieted, always agitated, she knew not what to do. In this state of

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

desolation, she lost confidence in her directors, who she supposed, did not understand her. The only consolation she experienced was an absolute submission to the orders of Divine Providence, and a firm confidence that God would at last arrange all things well for His greater glory. And so things were arranged, indeed, but in such a manner that this spouse of the Crucified had to drink to the dregs the saving chalice of affliction, and taste in her inmost soul all its bitterness.

She had now labored for a quarter of a century in the exercise of all sorts of good works. Her body was lacerated by the rudest austerities. She was a martyr to mental anxiety, and had but one beacon-light during her long spiritual darkness, viz., the certainty that she loved God and was loved by Him. Nevertheless her chalice was not yet full. In 1689, on the night of November 3d, one of the Sisters remained up long after the others had retired to rest. Suddenly a Sister who had died about sixteen months before stood before her (as she affirmed), and said slowly and distinctly, I am sent by God to warn the superior of this Congregation that she is in mortal sin, naming at the same time the person who was the cause of her guilt. The astonished listener related the apparition to Sister Bourgeois, who regarded it as the wanderings of a diseased imagination. But two months after, January 3d, 1690, the deceased again appearing to the same Sister, said, The superior has not done what she ought to do; it is the last warning I can give her, for I am now going to Paradise, and so saying, disappeared. The visionary (for as such, only should she be regarded) went again to inform the Foundress of what had transpired, and at this second blow the poor superior succumbed, appearing to be indeed stricken by the anger of God. It seems strange that her strong mind could be deceived, even for a season. Perhaps her great age made her more susceptible to the influence of an asserted vision, than she would have been at an earlier period of life. To declare that she was at enmity with God, was to inflict a grievous wound on her heart, and this warning reduced her almost to a state of despair. She felt that she was a reproach among her Sisters. She dared not speak to them, and hardly raised her eyes before them. The Sacraments she regarded with extreme repugnance, believing that they had hitherto been useless to her, and that her receiving them now would be profanation. It happened, however, by the dispensation of God, that her director was a wise and skilful ascetic, who narrowly watched the operations of grace in her soul, and treated her accordingly, and as she blindly followed his directions during the time of trial, she daily sanctified herself more and more.

It was at this precise period that M. de St. Vallier came to Montreal for the first time, and the humble Sister frankly acquainted him with her state of mind and its consequences, asking him very earnestly to appoint another Sister in her place, in order that things might work well and confidence be restored. However, the Bishop did not consent to her resignation then, hoping that her pain of mind would soon disappear. But on his return to Montreal, in 1693, he found matters still in the same state, and consented to a first election in the Congregation, presiding on the occasion himself. Sister Marie Barbier of the Assumption was elected superior, to the satisfaction of the whole community, and above all of Sister Bourgeois herself, who, being at last relieved of the responsibilities of superior, hoped soon to regain her long-lost peace of mind, and so it happened. For in January of the next year, 1694, being just four years from the time she was first warned of her eternal damnation, she felt a distinct conviction in her soul that she was fully reconciled with God. And all her pain of mind disappeared. This interior light, however, only determined her to labor still more earnestly for the glory of God and the maintenance of regular observances. She was a member of the council of the new superior, but the honor of the position caused her much disquiet, as she never ceased to assert that it was on account of her sins the former austerities of the house had partly fallen into disuse. The change of superiors had not in the least diminished the esteem of the Sisters for *her*, who had been so long their faithful mother in God, and they omitted no opportunity of testifying their esteem, which affectionate attention was doubtless agreeable to her kind heart. In order to tranquilize her mind, and on account of her great age, they judged it expedient to dispense her from attending at the public exercises of the community, leaving the infirmary entirely at her disposal, where she might occupy herself with some light work, as much for recreation as employment. She obeyed without reply, and it may not be uninteresting to hear what she thought of her *exile*, as she called it. The Memoir says:

Although charged, conjointly with my Sisters, to watch over the welfare of the house, I knew nothing of what passed in it. For four years I occupied myself with a little sewing, remaining all the time in the infirmary. I slept

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

there, took my meals there, on account of my great age, they said, and that I might be a companion for Sister Crolo, who could no longer go to the refectory. I held no conversation with the Sisters, very rarely went to our chapel, as we of the infirmary could easily hear Mass from our apartment, it being so constructed as to open directly fronting the altar. Yet my former disquiet returned, and I knew not what to determine on, because I could not divest myself of the idea that God required greater perfection from the community than I saw practised in it. It is true they tried to console me by asserting that all was well, and that I might set my mind at rest. I answered them nothing, but I could not conceal from myself that relaxation existed, and that I was the cause of it. I suffered more in this perplexity of mind than I can ever explain. She sighed sadly during her stay in the infirmary, until it pleased God to let peace again dawn upon her soul, by imparting to her a spirit of sensible and tender devotion, and by permitting her to return to the ordinary way in living in her institute during the few remaining years of her life. On the night of July 5th, 1697, as she was meditating on the means of repairing the faults of which she believed herself guilty, a *thought*, as distinct as a *voice*, told her she was the Jonas of the Congregation, and that like him, she deserved to be cast into the sea. To this interior voice she could only reply that she was willing to do all in her power to contribute to the glory of God, and do his will. Then the strange inspiration ceased, but on the following night it returned more strongly and vividly than at first, making her understand, like Samuel in the temple, that *God had spoken*; that it was time to renounce the ideal perfection which tormented her, and that a blind obedience to her directors was her only remedy. She therefore opened her heart to the confessor of the community, M. de Valens, and also to M. Caillen, pastor of Ville-Marie, who decided on sending her to her superior, there to disclose all the anxious thoughts that agitated her soul, and speak of whatever she conceived to be for the welfare of the Congregation. The docile Sister did as directed, and in order to give her useful and practical occupation, the superior told her to write what the Holy Spirit would inspire for the guidance of the institute she had so happily founded. These precious manuscripts are replete with lessons of divine wisdom, and it is from their pages her children still select the beautiful instructions and maxims that keep her spirit alive among them. Her heart being thus freed from its silent agony, she found herself at last completely delivered from the torture she had so long endured, her only desire, for the three remaining years of her life being to exhibit a model of the social and community virtues she had taught to others for more than 50 years. Nor was it only at this late period of her life she had resolved to resign the office of superior, for in 1680, before making her third voyage to France to procure rules for her institute, she had earnestly and tearfully asked the Sisters to elect another in her place, alleging her unfitness and unworthiness. What must have been her astonishment, to hear all exclaim as with one voice and without a moment's hesitation, that they had chosen *the Mother of God for their superior*, and *Foundress*; that they should ever regard *her* as their *first* Mother in time and in eternity, but begged Sister Bourgeois to continue her government under the protection of their common Mother, to whose love and service she and they were alike pledged. In consequence of this unanimous choice, the holy Foundress, prostrating herself with the whole community before the statue of the Blessed Virgin, addressed to her impromptu, the following prayer:

O holy Virgin, behold this little band of your servants, who have consecrated themselves to the service of God under your protection, who wish to follow your example, as good children follow their earthly mother's, and who regard you as their cherished Foundress, and first Superior. We hope that the good God agrees with our election, and gives you the absolute government of this Congregation, which is your work. We have nothing to present to God, but we hope through your means, to obtain all the graces necessary for our salvation and the perfection of our state, *You* know best what is necessary for us, and what we now ask is, that you will never refuse us your assistance. Help us by your all powerful intercession to receive the light of the Holy Spirit, that we may be enabled to labor efficaciously for the education and religious instruction of our pupils, according to our profession. But above all things we ask, dear Lady and Mother, that our successors and those who contribute to their spiritual advancement, may be of the number of the elect, so that in your glorious society we may all praise our good God during a happy eternity. It was therefore the Blessed Virgin who was elected first Superior of the Congregation. What a grand motive of Faith this afforded to the succeeding superiors, who, believing that they held the place of Mary herself, were all the more strictly bound to advance the spiritual perfection of their subjects, especially in the practice of holy obedience. It was only on *this condition* that Sister Bourgeois consented to the desire of her daughters, that she should continue to govern them as assistant, their and her

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

principal superior being the queen of Heaven. However, when she returned from France in 1684, as before stated, she again solicited the Sisters to elect a new superior, and so eager was her desire that the Community held one chapter for the purpose, in which nothing was decided, the suffrages being equally divided between two candidates, who were each remarkable for the most sublime virtue. That same night, while the matter was still pending, the fire broke out, and both Sisters perished in the flames. Seven years later, the Foundress brought up the matter again, as there was an excellent subject on the mission at Quebec, who was well calculated to discharge the duties of Superior. This was Sister Anne Verand, one of the first members, and the same who had ten years before commenced the mission of The Holy Family with Sister Assumption. All eyes were turned upon her as the new superior, but as she was then ill at Quebec, the community directed her to return home, hoping that her health would soon be re-established, and that she would then fill the position intended for her. She returned promptly, although in a dying condition, and went to receive the reward of her obedience and pious labors a few days after. By her unexpected death, all her plans were a second time upset. If these occurrences may not be reckoned among the marvellous or supernatural, they are at least very singular. For the next two years, the Sisters carefully abstained from commenting on these strange events before Sister Bourgeois, but she had no idea of desisting from her importunities, and in September, 1693, again assembled the community on the all-important subject of an election. Having previously obtained the consent of M. de St. Vallier, she publicly resigned her office in the manner required by the constitutions, although they were not yet canonically approved, and read with a strong clear voice, the following written declaration:

There is no longer any doubt that I am a great sinner, who has not been faithful to the sacred duty so lovingly confided to me. I deserve the pain of mind I suffer, because my criminal relaxations have extended even to you. I humbly ask your pardon, and beg the succor of your prayers. Remedy this state of things now, as much as may be, by changing the superior, and let her, whoever she may be, see that even the least rules are carefully observed, otherwise the members of the community will be no better than seculars leading Christian lives. Renew, then, in yourselves the spirit that you ought to have, that is, poverty, humility, obedience, and an entire abandonment of yourselves into the hands of God. It has been related already that Sister Assumption was elected superior in her stead. So it will not be necessary to revert again to the fact. It was by direction of this superior the Foundress wrote the beautiful instructions and maxims that have always been regarded as the richest inheritance of her spiritual children. Yet some of her instructions were not suited to every grade of intellect, the perfection they inculcated being so sublime that a few were frightened, and as timid and indiscreet souls are to be found everywhere, there was one in the young Congregation, who dared to say to Sister Bourgeois, that it was useless for her to try to establish such extraordinary perfection among the the Sisters as was suited to herself alone, and that being no longer superior, she was not answerable before God for the pretended relaxations of which she complained. This remark was stinging, and to the point.

Yet the holy Foundress was not at all offended by it. It was for her a message sent from heaven, and she received it with unfeigned humility, determining to write nothing in future that could displease the lowliest of the Sisters. We quote from her manuscript on the occasion:

The members of our Congregation should live in the most perfect union, in imitation of the early Christians, under the direction of the Blessed Virgin. We should have but one heart and one soul in God, as without this concord we would not be truly a community. The Holy Spirit that animates us is a spirit of simplicity, poverty, disengagement from all things, and the most entire abandonment to God.

### **CHAPTER XI. SISTER BOURGEOIS' HAPPY DEATH, AND THE WONDERS THAT FOLLOWED IT.**

The earthly mission of this sainted woman was now drawing to a close, and there only remained for her the task of procuring ecclesiastical confirmation of the rules of her institute. It will be remembered that she brought with her from France a formula of the rules drawn up by M. Jandret, and also those given her by the Daughters of the



## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

Cross, but she had never arranged them systematically, so as to be able to present them in proper form to M. de St. Vallier, and to speak frankly, he did not appear to be in a hurry to approve of them, as *his* views regarding the Congregation were for many years unsettled and wavering. But at last, the great Arbiter of all things solved the question, and his Lordship began to feel a strong inclination, or rather inspiration, to inquire more particularly into the nature of the rules, and judge for himself if they were suited to the community. He accordingly examined the formulas very carefully, and submitted them to the judgment of other enlightened persons who were in his confidence. It appeared to each of the distinguished examiners that the *compilations* and *memoirs* of the revered Foundress, as also the *practices* and *usages* of the Congregation as it then stood, were the real foundations of the rule under discussion. Therefore the worthy Bishop, in order to have it more in accordance with *his* ideas, proposed to change it in nearly every particular. In fact, he proposed for their observance the rule of St. Augustine.

The Sisters were panic-stricken, because if this proposition were carried into effect they would be transformed into cloistered religieuses, while they desired to be missionary Sisters, who could attend to the out-door needs of their respective parishes, according to their original designs and to the spiritual welfare of the people, under the direction of the pastors. This was a *fixed point*, and the distinctive characteristic of the Congregation as founded by Sister Bourgeois. It was next proposed by M. de St. Vallier, that the Sisters should make only simple vows. But as they had not made any vows in joining the community, the term, *simple vows*, of which some did not understand either the nature or the force, was another stumbling-block, and intimidated a few. It appears there were many unsatisfactory and protracted disputes on the subject, although the Sisters more than once made very humble remonstrances to the Bishop, and finding that the matter did not meet the prompt attention they thought it deserved, the Foundress determined to write a clear explanation to M. Troncon, Superior of St. Sulpice in Paris. Not that she intended or meant to set aside the authority of her Bishop, for whom she and her daughters entertained the highest esteem, but to receive from the distinguished Sulpician advice as to how she should act under such peculiar circumstances. M. Troncon was at the time performing the duties of an angel of peace, by the King's direction, and at the solicitations of the clergy of France, by amicably arranging the difficulties that had arisen between the celebrated M. de Bossuet, Bishop of Meaux, and M. de Fenelon, Archbishop of Cambrai. He answered the communication of Sister Bourgeois with such sweetness and charity that the hearts of the Sisters were completely gained, and their minds enlightened, by the care and minuteness with which he explained the disputed points that caused them so much disquiet. They now clearly understood the nature of the engagements proposed to them, and no longer experienced unwillingness to enter into the views of their Bishop, who undertook a journey to Montreal, in June, 1698, for the express purpose of giving his episcopal sanction to the long-disputed rule. He admired the fervor of the new community, and was exceedingly edified when he found nothing to reform except a mitigation of austerities which were still rigorously practised by a great number. It was during this visit that he witnessed (for the first time) the extraordinary virtues of the famous recluse, Jane Leber. On the 24th of the month he called a general assembly of the Congregation, and proposed to them, with a few modifications, the same rules that were till then faithfully observed, and which Sister Bourgeois had the honor to place in his hands more than ten years before. The Sisters received their cherished rules and constitutions with enthusiasm, being now formally authorized by their Bishop, and these rules are still observed without the slightest alteration in the form in which they were that day presented to them, producing ever-increasing fruit and edification in the community.

The formula of acceptance was as follows: We accept with all possible respect and submission, the rules which have been given us by Monsigneur, the illustrious and Right Reverend Bishop of Quebec. After having diligently read and examined them, we judge them to be proper for the welfare of our community, and resolve to practice them with all possible exactness. In virtue of which acceptance we hereunto affix our names, on this 24th day of June, 1698. Then follow the signatures of Sister Assumption, superior, Sister St. Ange, assistant, Sister Lemoine, mistress of novices, Margaret Bourgeois, and others then assembled, to the number of twenty-five persons. It may not be inappropriate to say a few words in explanation of the austerities that were mitigated by the wise prelate, the *observance* of which he and others considered too severe, and the *non-observance* of which the mortified and penitential Foundress regarded as a relaxation. The Sisters, including the saintly woman who

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

founded them, had accustomed themselves to sleep on straw mattresses, with *pillows* of the same material, to wear none but low shoes; to make their simple dress without plaits, and as scant as convenience for working would allow; not to be ashamed of patches, no matter how numerous or inelegant; to eat only broken bread; in short to live in every respect like the poorest classes of society. These, and innumerable other practices of mortification, were constantly observed by the greater part of the community from the beginning. But in a severe climate like Canada, such rigors became *impossibilities* after a time, and the Sisters were *obliged* to mitigate them, in order to preserve health, without which they could not discharge the arduous functions of their institute. It was this *unavoidable* relaxation that Sister Bourgeois regarded as a falling away from their first fervor. She had so long lived on the heights of Calvary that she could not endure to breathe a less crucified atmosphere; but in her Congregation, allowance had eventually to be made for less gifted souls. To return again to the rule. The act of profession of the simple vows was made with all possible solemnity, on the 25th of June, 1698, and was followed by a most touching exhortation from Monseigneur, exhorting them to persevere in the glorious work they had undertaken for the benefit of religion, and the salvation of souls. On the 1st of July following, the Sisters, in the presence of the Right Reverend Bishop, made their solemn vows for life, with as much more solemnity as the latter vows exceeded the former. All the ceremonies and authenticated acts, with the illustrious signatures attached to them, are carefully preserved in the archives of the community, and the flight of nearly two hundred years has only rendered them more sacred in the eyes of the ever young and vigorous Congregation that to-day fills the place of the glorious dead. Sister Bourgeois was overwhelmed with spiritual joy during the touching ceremonials at Montreal, that gave perpetuity and security to her institute. With the holy old man, Simeon, she might truly exclaim, Now, Lord, let thy servant depart in peace, because mine eyes have seen the fulfilment of my earthly desires, viz., the solemn approbation of her rules. She blessed God in her inmost soul, and humbly prostrating herself at the Bishop's feet, in presence of the Sisters, besought him with tears to grant her one more favor, which was to permit her to pass the few remaining days of her life in holy obedience, entirely depending on her Sisters, and that she might be in future exempted from *voting* at the community elections, as also from offices of authority. They acceded *unwillingly* to this *last* request of her unsurpassed humility, but on account of past labors, and her great age (she was seventy-eight years old), and out of respect for her extraordinary virtues, all her desires were complied with.

Being thus freed at last from earthly cares, she became a model of regular observance. She told her director that for a long time she had asked God to send her nothing but humiliations and sufferings; that in His wrath He exempted her from these marks of His love, because, she said, when the occasion presents itself, I am *proud and immortalized*, and I tremble at the inevitable approach of eternity.

She seemed to be in pretty good health until the close of the year 1699, but on New Year's eve a change came, which proved to be the warning of the Angel of death. Sister St. Ange, having been confined to the infirmary for some time, had just received the last Sacraments, and appeared to be in her agony. The attendants ran to arouse the community, that they might assist the dying religieuse by their prayers, and have the consolation to witness the death of the just. A messenger came to Sister Bourgeois' room also, to apprise her of the expected death of her old and loved companion. She had ever loved all her children in God, with more than a mother's love, and cried out, My God, why do you not take me, who am old and useless, rather than this dear Sister, who may yet render you great service. The victim had offered herself, and her sacrifice was accepted. The Sister in her agony recovered, and the venerated Foundress fell into a burning fever from which she *did not recover*.

The previous year also she had a very severe attack of illness, from which she recovered as if by miracle. During her convalescence, she complained in a loving manner to the Sisters, that by their attentions and prayers they were prolonging the days of her exile, assuring them that she longed to be dissolved and be with Christ. Whether sick or well, she was a constant model of the most heroic and simple virtues. The great Apostle says: That virtue is made perfect in infirmity. And if the Foundress of the Congregation did not entirely overcome the weakness of human nature, she constantly advanced in the holy paths of mortification, obedience, sacrifice of self, and submission to the will of God. She suffered the most intense bodily pains, which were at times so sharp and violent that she cried out in agony, but she never uttered a murmur or complaint. The attendant physician

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

prescribed according to his skill, and she took his medicines regularly, although she felt convinced that neither human science, nor the affectionate care of the Sisters would be of any avail. She had a distinct presentiment that the hour of her dissolution was at hand, and oh, what exultant joy that knowledge gave her. She blessed God unceasingly in the greatest pain, and sang triumphant canticles on her death-bed, requesting the Sisters to sing them with her, and telling them that the divine harmonies of the city of God were audible to her at last. She literally burned with desire to go there, and be at rest forever, and the last twelve days she spent on earth in a seemingly unbroken agony, were the most jubilant of her life. The dark clouds of life were disappearing, and the silver lining of the other side was brightening the death-chamber of the dying saint. Yes, Margaret Bourgeois, the great and the lowly, the victor and the victim, literally thrilled with joy at the summons of the Eternal, and answered, I come.

On the morning of the twelfth day of her last illness, she received the holy Viaticum with unspeakable devotion, and immediately fell into a gentle agony, which lasted exactly three hours, corresponding to her Divine Redeemer's agony on the cross, then having modestly folded her hands on her bosom, she calmly surrendered her beautiful soul into the hands of its Creator, in the eightieth year of her age, January 12, 1700.

She had no sooner breathed her last sigh, than her face, which had long appeared care-worn and harrowed, as much by the mental sorrows she so long and bravely endured, as by the excessive pains of her last illness, began to beam with a celestial brightness, which undoubtedly announced the beatitude her soul was enjoying. Sister St. Ange, for whom the Foundress had offered her life, and who was then in perfect health, on witnessing the extraordinary prodigy, took the name of Sister of the Blessed Sacrament, which had been the community appellation of Sister Bourgeois during life.

The bereaved Sisters desired to have the portrait of their dear deceased mother taken, before the tomb received her mortal remains. She looked very beautiful in death, so strangely beautiful that they resolved on having the likeness of the glorified deceased ever before their eyes. The work was confided to Pierre Leber, who was, however, but an indifferent artist, and was father of the celebrated recluse Jane Leber. He feared very much to undertake the painting, but nevertheless went to the convent and prepared himself by receiving Holy Communion in the Sisters' chapel. Almighty God was pleased to glorify His servant by a *second* prodigy on this occasion, for the painter had no sooner taken his brush in hand, than he was seized with an excruciating vertigo and was compelled to desist. Nor would it have been possible for him to resume, but that he felt inspired to apply to his head a small portion of the hair of the deceased, upon doing which he was instantly cured, and completed the picture, which is to be seen still in a good state of preservation in the convent chapel.

The news of her death had no sooner become public, than people flocked from all quarters to see the remains of the extraordinary woman, whom not only the voice of the common people, but also that of the highest authorities in Montreal, had ranked as a public benefactress. They were only prevented from invoking her as a saint by respect for the authority and voice of the Church, which had not yet spoken. An immense concourse of people, from city and country, came to procure some relics of her. They asked for scraps of her clothing, or of anything she had used in life, and as it was impossible to satisfy the demands of all, they applied to her sacred body medals, rosaries, scapulars, and such like articles of devotion. Several miraculous cures are related to have been worked by the use of these articles, and though we will not enter into a detail of them here, it requires no great effort of faith to believe them. We need only remember the fervor of her sanctity during life, and how often she was herself favored by miraculous proofs of the love of God.

The hour appointed for the burial at last drew near, and the sacred body of this *child of peace*, became a subject of *contention* between the Fathers of the seminary, and the Sisters of the Congregation, each declaring that they were the legitimate custodians of her precious remains. The Sisters desired naturally that the interment should take place in their own chapel. While the Fathers of the seminary declared that, living or dead, she belonged to the city of Montreal. and that they could not permit the Ville-Marie of her love to be deprived of such a treasure. However, M. de Olier, Grand Vicar of the diocese, decided the dispute, by ordaining that the *body* should be

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

interred in the parish church, but that the *heart of Margaret Bourgeois* should be deposited in the Sisters' sanctuary, that its silent presence might preserve in their hearts the odor of her virtues, and it appears that with the reception of the sacred relic, the Lord bestowed on the community the spirit of their mother, which has never departed from them.

The heart of the Foundress of the Congregation, that heart that had throbbled with a thousand hopes and fears for the glory of God, and the salvation of his redeemed children, lies enshrined in a silver reliquary in the convent chapel, awaiting the resurrection morning, when its life-pulses shall again return to waft it to its appointed place before the Sacred Heart of Jesus, for whom alone it lived, loved, and labored, during life. This sort of divided burial was not infrequent in Montreal. For, in 1693, on the death of Jean Mance, the pious Foundress of the Hotel-Dieu, a similar disposition of her remains took place, her body being interred under the parish church, while her heart was deposited with the religieuses of the hospital where it was consumed in the fire in 1695. Also in 1708, after the decease of Pierre Leber, one of the first benefactors of the general hospital of Montreal, *his body* was interred in the hospital cemetery, and his *heart* was taken to the Church of the Congregation Sisters, where his own sister, Jane Leber, the recluse, was still living. In consequence of the decision of M. de Olier, the body of the venerable Sister Bourgeois was buried beneath the parish church, the day following her decease, with such religious ceremonial and solemnity as Ville-Marie had never witnessed until that day.

There was an immense funeral cortege, among the pall-bearers being Chevalier de Callieres, Governor-General of Canada, and Chevalier de Vaudreuil, Governor of Montreal, who, with other persons of rank and distinction thought it a religious duty to assist at the ceremony. All the priests and religieuses of the colony were present in the church of Montreal, and M. de Olier, himself an octogenarian, officiated. The body was interred under the entrance of the chapel of the Infant Jesus, commonly called the Sisters' chapel, the mother in life becoming the mother also in death, as her sepulture was truly a taking possession of the future burial-place of the Congregation, a deed of it being given to them three days after, dated January 17th, 1700. On the coffin-lid was placed the following inscription: Here lies Venerable Sister Bourgeois, Foundress and first Superior of the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame, established in Montreal for the instruction of young girls; who departed this life on the 12th of January, 1700. *Requiescat in pace.*

The heart of Sister Bourgeois was carefully embalmed, and respectfully enclosed in a leaden box heart-shaped having been purposely prepared to receive the sacred relic. It remained publicly exposed in the convent chapel for one month, during which time the people continued to come in crowds to apply objects of devotion to it, and also to obtain small pieces of the linen cloths ensanguined by the blood of the deceased at the time of taking the heart from the body. But these were distributed with much reserve. At the end of the month it was resolved to place the precious deposit in the niche prepared for it, this second ceremony being quite as solemn and imposing as the first. M. de Belmont officiated on the occasion, and during the requiem Mass the heart of the deceased was exposed on a catafalque in the middle aisle of the church, being covered by a soft white veil, the emblem of virginity. At the conclusion of the Holy Sacrifice, the prayers of the dead were solemnly chanted, while the celebrant carried the cherished relic in his own hands to its final resting place, which was a kind of niche, cut in stone, and placed it in the middle of the long oriental panel of the choir, where the Sisters usually assembled to perform their religious exercises.

There the heart of one of earth's noblest and purest daughters was deposited, with aspergins and incense, after which the opening was securely closed with a plate of lead, on which were engraven the following words:

The heart that is covered by this stone  
Renounced the earth to live for God alone,  
It had no other treasure than the band  
Of Christian virgins, who at the command  
Left home and country for a foreign land.

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

[Footnote: The above is a free translation of the original French rhyme.]

There the precious relic rested secure until the night of April 11th, 1768, when both the chapel and house of the Sisters were consumed by fire, the devoted daughters of the Foundress finding it impossible to save their mother's heart. But who can judge of their astonishment on the following day, when, having come to search for it among the debris, they found the crisped heart in the hollow of the stone, and saw drops of *fresh blood* trickling down the wall. It will be remembered that almost seventy years had then elapsed since the inhumation.

The Sisters being amazed at what they had reason to regard as miraculous, sent at once for one of the seminary Fathers. M. Havard, who was confessor to the community, answered the call and bore witness to the fact. He respectfully gathered the sacred ashes, and its wonderfully preserved blood, enclosed both in a silver reliquary, and so it remains to this day, an indisputable evidence of the wonderful providence with which God watches over the children of his election. Several remarkable cures are attributed to the relics of Sister Bourgeois. Among others it is recorded that the porter of the Sulpician seminary was attacked with inflammation of the lungs, so suddenly that his life was despaired of, and death seemed inevitable. He had applied a rosary to the body of the venerable religieuse on the day of the interment, and now laid the rosary on his breast. The application produced instant recovery, and robust health. A lady of Ville-Marie, who for many years had suffered excruciating internal pains, without being able to obtain relief from the most skilful physicians, was perfectly cured on the application of a piece of linen saturated with the blood of Sister Bourgeois' heart, on the day of the embalming. But it will not be necessary to enter more fully into these details here, than to state that numerous and undeniable wonders have been effected by praying at her grave, as well as by the use of her relics. Although these facts have not as yet been rigorously examined, or juridically proved, yet her beautiful life is a monumental miracle, and the Congregation she so wondrously founded is still young, fresh, and strong after two centennials that have seen in their flight, fire, storm, and opposition, yet leave unscathed (as indestructible) the enduring labors of her saintly life. If she has not been solemnly canonized by the Church, whose judgment is respectfully awaited, she has been proclaimed Blessed by the unanimous voice of people of all grades of society, among whom she lived and labored. Therefore, while awaiting the hour in which it shall please God to manifest her glory, let us confine ourselves within the just bounds of religion, and suspending judgment, listen to a few short extracts from the eulogies that were universally paid to her memory by the most distinguished persons, then living in Canada, who were remarkable for high social position, and eminent piety, and were in some cases intimately acquainted with her.

Perhaps no one knew her worth or extraordinary merit better than M. de Laval, who permitted her to found and spread her Institute in the diocese of Montreal, of which he was the first Bishop. At the time of her decease he was leading a humble, holy, *private* life in the seminary of Quebec, and on hearing of her death, wrote to the Sisters in the following terms: Sister Bourgeois was indeed a precious fruit, ripe for heaven. She was a model of edification during life, and in death serves for an example. She was very humble, and God conferred great graces upon her, which leads us to hope that she will soon enjoy the beatitude of the saints, and will, by her intercession, procure great graces for her community.

M. de St. Vallier, on the occasion of her death, wrote: We cannot help believing that God treated Sister Bourgeois as one of His dearest and most faithful servants, as she was replenished with a lively faith and ardent charity during life, both for God and her neighbor. I do not doubt that she is now enjoying the glory of the Blessed. But what has made the deepest impresson on me regarding her, is the hidden and humble life she led after her retirement from the office of superior.

M. de Maizerets, superior of the seminary at Quebec, renders her the following tribute: I have always recognized Sister Bourgeois as a true servant of God, being filled with His spirit, and excelling in the virtues of humility, meekness, obedience to her superiors, and an entire abandonment to Divine Providence. She had a generous heart, capable of great enterprises, and I do not doubt that she has left to you, her daughters, her *mind* as well as her *heart*. We have prayed here for the eternal repose of her soul, and I have also asked *her* to pray for *me*.

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

Rev. Father Bovart, superior of the Jesuits at Quebec, writes thus: I do not think that Sister Bourgeois has need of our prayers. I have always felt the greatest veneration for her, and request you send me one of her relics. I do not ever remember to have met so holy a woman, as she possessed in an eminent degree the virtues of faith, hope, devotion, zeal, humility, and mortification. I esteem her happy in having died full of days and merit.

The Mother of the Sacred Heart, superioress of the Hotel-Dieu at Quebec, in response to a letter of the Congregation Sisters, wrote: We have not failed to pray for your dear and cherished mother, lately deceased, although I am persuaded she does not need our prayers.

The Mother of the Incarnation, superioress of the general hospital says in a letter: Sister Bourgeois was ripe for heaven, and earth has lost a great treasure in losing her. I pray you to obtain for us, from her Divine Spouse, her love of humility, poverty, abjection, and abandonment to the decrees of Providence, virtues that I particularly remarked in her.

Mme. de Champigni, wife of the Governor of Quebec, bore testimony to the virtues of the deceased as follows: Perhaps no one feels so afflicted as I, at the death of Sister Bourgeois. For you, her daughters, your consolation must be great indeed, knowing that you have a saint praying for your community, in heaven. I shall keep with religious respect the three beads of her rosary you were good enough to send me.

But the renown of her virtues was not confined to Canada alone. There were in France also many distinguished persons who knew her merit, among others M. Gabriel Souart, who, as we have seen, was sent to Canada in 1657, by M. Olier, and who returned to France in 1680, on account of failing health. This gentleman was an eye-witness of the labors of the illustrious dead, during the first struggling years of Montreal, and often spoke of the wonders she accomplished to M. de Turmenie the King's minister. Once, during the war between France and England, that raged so fiercely in the year 1688, these two gentlemen were conversing on the probable result of the bloody struggle. M. de Turmenie expressed his well-grounded fear that Canada would eventually fall into the hands of the English. M. Souart, on the contrary, said he did not fear the issue, as he had unbounded confidence in God, and the prayers of Sister Bourgeois, whom he familiarly styled the little St. Genevieve of Canada, and hoped through the efficacy of her prayers, that no evil would befall either the country or the Church. Canada was miraculously preserved at this time from the bristling guns of a formidable English fleet, as we read in history. M. de Turmenie wrote this conversation to the holy Foundress in a letter dated Paris, March 20th, 1691, and concluded with the following remark: Your friend pronounced these words at my house a few days before his death. I do not relate them to you in order to excite your vanity, from which may God preserve you, but to let you know by his last words, the esteem and affection that holy man had for you.

Nothing could be more glorious for the deceased than the eulogy of such a man as M. Souart, who was a holy priest, and singularly enlightened in the ways of God. Having been her director for a long time, he bore ocular testimony to her truly heroic life. Sister Bourgeois preserved the letter, because a portion of it related to the affairs of the community, of which the royal counsellor took special charge in Paris. But she took the precaution to efface the portion relating to herself, yet not so perfectly as to prevent its being deciphered. Such were the opinions entertained of her in France during her *life*, and as soon as intelligence of her *death* reached the wise and holy persons who knew her at Troyes, Paris, and elsewhere, the most edifying and instructive letters were sent to her bereaved daughters, by the first vessel bound for Canada. Among other writers' names we find that of Mother Mary Paul de Blaigni, superioress of the Congregation at Troyes, which was really the cradle of Sister Bourgeois' sublime virtues.

## CHAPTER XII. THE EXCELLENCE OF HER INSTITUTE, HER MAXIMS, INSTRUCTIONS, ETC.

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

It does not seem sufficient in recording the life of this remarkable woman, to speak only of her public and exterior actions, leaving her interior dispositions and the religious perfection of her institute in the shade. The actions hitherto related are beyond the power of the greater number either to perform or imitate, as they would also be out of their sphere of usefulness. Therefore, without entering into her *spirit*, they would only serve as sterile or fruitless objects of admiration. Accordingly we see that not only did God ordain her to be the mother of a numerous posterity of Christian virgins, but also their *teacher* and their *model*. It may be said of Sister Bourgeois, as of the Spouse in the Canticles, that she spread abroad the odor of her virtues, in order to leave a sure route of salvation and perfection to those who would follow in her train. Yet, all the glory of the king's daughter was within. There are many principles by which we may judge of the excellence and perfection of an institute or congregation. We may consider it in itself, as seen by the rules that govern it, and the sanctity and merits of its Foundress. We may compare it with other holy institutes to which it may bear resemblance. We may regard the end proposed in its establishment, and the means by which to attain that end, or the model on which its members must be formed. Finally, we may examine the qualities and dispositions exacted from those who aspire to perfection in it, and by the application of such tests we can easily judge of the excellence of the Congregation of Notre Dame. A careful perusal of the rules compiled by the Foundress will convince any one that prudence, charity, zeal, and the spirit of God dictated them. But to meditate on them with care, and reduce them to constant practice, is the precious stone mentioned in the gospel, for the purchase of which it is necessary to *sell* all and *leave* all. However, it must be confessed that, as perfect as the rule is, it does not reflect all the holy sentiments with which Sister Bourgeois was animated, as she always practised more than she prescribed for others. When, by a prudent and just condescension to the weakness of her children, the greater number of whom, despite their good will, *were not able* to practise the austerities her zeal recommended, it was found necessary to soften this rigor the rejection of the old practices and penances was one of the most severe trials of her life. It was this condescension, as well as the consciousness of her unworthiness, that made her sigh to be discharged from the office of superior, and it was only her zeal for the glory of God that supported her under the trial. Her own words are: It seems to me that God has made me sufficiently understand, by the thousand accidents that happened from time to time, as also by the interior warnings of divine grace, that he is not satisfied with us, and I confess that, through cowardice, I have departed from the path marked out for me, by Mary, our dear Mother, who has been the ever present, though invisible superior of this house. I do not wish to abuse the patience of God any longer, and shall endeavor that His will be accomplished, no matter what is the cost of my submission. It must not be forgotten that she regarded herself as the *assistant* of the community. She never lost sight of the fact that the establishment of the Congregation was not her work, and that she was only a vile instrument in the hands of God. She believed firmly that the interior government of it would always be under the direction of the Blessed Virgin. Neither had she forgotten the divine favors she received in youth, which were, foreshadowings of what God required from her in after-life for His glory. She had always present to her mind the wonderful chain of circumstances that led her to Canada, there to establish devotion to the Queen of Heaven, and form young hearts on that exalted model. She frequently called to mind the promise of protection the Blessed Virgin gave her before coming to the New World, of the fulfilment of which she had frequent and sensible proofs. It is quite remarkable that, in the writings left by this humble and admirable woman, she does not make use of a single word that could lead one to believe she had *personally* anything to do with the establishment of the Congregation, desiring, no doubt, that it should be directly attributed to the Queen of Angels, whom she wished to be recognized as its Foundress and first Mother. She was often heard to declare that her highest earthly ambition was to induce the Mother of God to conduct her community on the same plan that she conducted the rising Church, after the passion of the Redeemer, when she became the common Mother, refuge, and consolation of the afflicted disciples and their followers. On making a comparison between her institute and other religious orders, she expresses herself as follows:

The ever Blessed Virgin in prophetic spirit knew, from the very dawn of Christianity, that God would eventually establish communities in His Church, to engage the faithful to practise more perfectly, not only the commandments, but the evangelical counsels. It appears that this good Mother has manifested her designs, and extended her protection in a very special manner, in favor of the smallest and *least* of all religious communities, viz., that established in Ville-Marie, which, in order to maintain the excellence of its origin, has gathered from other religious institutes their most perfect maxims.

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

Acting on this principle the holy Foundress borrowed from the Chartreuse a love of solitude and silence, from St. Francis of Assisi the virtue of poverty, from St. Francis of Paul the love of humility, from the Carmelites the practise of penances and austerities, from St Francis de Sales the exercise of sweetness and charity as exemplified in the houses of the Visitation, from the Hospitalieres devotion to the poor and sick, and from the noble order of the Jesuits zeal for the salvation of souls. Her institute is remarkable for the charity and zeal by which its members are animated, their zeal being in a certain sense the spirit of the priesthood, which is *par excellence* the order of Jesus Christ himself, who was the High Priest of the New Law. The Sisters of the Congregation are bound to co-operate with the pastors of the Church in the discharge of such duties of charity as come within the spirit of their rule, making, however, a specialty of instructing youth, to which Sister Bourgeois devoted all her energies from girlhood. Her zeal was indeed a consuming fire, for she had no sooner learned that there were pagan tribes to instruct and convert in the New World, than she sought means to go there to assist in their conversion.

A thousand obstacles did not dishearten her. When there were no priests on board during the early voyages, she supplied their places as far as woman could, with the zeal of a St. Ambrose, frequently in her peculiar circumstances praying, with the dying and for the dead by land and sea. Christian or heathen, French or Indian, were alike to her; she assisted *all*, her modesty forming a beautiful rampart around her, that rendered her person sacred in positions where less divinely gifted women might fear to stand. Such were the particular and general views of this Christian heroine in the establishment of her Congregation, and such was the peculiar character of her institute. We give an extract from her writings on the subject: As the devil is very careful to take a stand, and be on the look-out, at the beginning of all good works, knowing well that a fervent community is capable of effecting much good, sometimes even of arresting the anger of God, armed against sinners, let us fear that this arch-enemy, by his cunning and subtlety, may not seek to destroy our institute. Let us be careful that he does not withdraw from it the spirit of piety, simplicity, poverty, recollection, and mortification, interior and exterior, in order to introduce, under specious pretexts, the inevitable ruin of a soft, relaxed life.

To avoid so dreadful a misfortune, behold the means of defence this good mother presents to her daughters:

The Blessed Virgin desired to continue the work of God upon earth, and we are pledged to assist her by laboring for the education of youth. The Blessed Virgin prayed for the accomplishment of the prophecies, and the deliverance of the holy souls, who in limbo awaited the coming of the Just One, and we are bound to make fervent prayer for the conversion of sinners, and the souls in purgatory. The Blessed Virgin entered the temple, at the age of three years, to perfect herself in that school of virtue; the daughters of the Congregation, in imitation of that act, consider themselves pupils of Mary during their novitiate. The Blessed Virgin was abstemious and mortified in her food, and in all the other necessaries of life; the Sisters should follow her example and mortify themselves in eating, drinking, sleeping, speaking, and clothing, using nothing but what is absolutely necessary, each one at the same time consulting her strength and constitution. The angel of God saluted Mary while she was at prayer; the Sisters should pray fervently for the graces necessary to enable them to discharge their duties properly, and that among their pupils Almighty God may sometimes select His spouses.

When the Blessed Virgin had given her consent to the angel, and had really become the Mother of God by the power of the Holy Spirit, she testified her gratitude to the Eternal Father, by promptly corresponding to the designs of His grace, and went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, that she might be an instrument in the sanctification of the precursor, and carry grace and salvation to the house of Zachary; it is necessary that on the missions the Sisters propose to themselves the sanctification of little children, and give edification to all classes of persons that they may be recognized as the true daughters of Mary.

When the days were accomplished that she should bring forth her Divine Child, the angels announced that blessed birth to lowly shepherds, as well as to high-born kings, and the Blessed Virgin received with equal affection the honors paid her Divine Son by the humble herdsman and the Oriental sages; so should the Sisters have an equal regard for the poor as well as for the rich, treating all alike, as the children of Mary.



## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

The Blessed Virgin continued to dwell in her poor house at Nazareth in privacy and silence, until the calling of the Apostles, to whom she was a sort of mistress of novices by the charm of her virtues; the Sisters, before applying themselves to the instruction of externs, or the duties of the schools, should prepare for it, by the exercise of prayer, pious reading, mortification of the senses, and all other virtues proper to their state. The Blessed Virgin followed her Divine Son to the foot of the cross, like a good mother who *could not* lose sight of him; the Sisters should always keep themselves as much as possible in the presence of God, in imitation of their glorious model.

Although the rules of religious institutes are not intended for general reading, yet the following extracts are so simple and practical that we think their translation excusable:

*How we must bear with the defects of our neighbor.* I am bound to believe that my faults and imperfections are greater than those of others, and that they have to do violence to themselves in order to bear with my shortcomings; therefore it is my duty to be patient with them, in imitation of God, who is patient with all, who supports all, and endures all, notwithstanding our many defects, and the disproportion that exists between us and Him.

*On fidelity in little things.* Our good God is contented with little virtues, if they are the result of our love for Him, and he knows how to increase them in our souls if they are performed with purity of intention. It is necessary, then, that I try to do everything for His love, and for *that alone*.

*On death,* 'It is appointed for man once to die, and after that the judgment.' This thought should oblige me to live always in the state in which I wish to be found when the last moment shall arrive. Then, death may come suddenly, but not *unprovidedly*. My resignation will be much easier, the thought of the last hour sweeter, and the inevitable consequences less to be feared.

*On Raillery.* We sometimes wish to make our conversation appear witty, and we succeed, *perhaps at the expense of charity*, by using expressions of raillery, jest, or mockery, without perceiving that we give pain to our neighbor. A person addicted to this vice receives as much prejudice from it as the one who is the object of it, and a frequent use of unkind raillery stains the brilliancy of the baptismal robe, which we are bound to bring unspotted before the judgment-seat of God, and loosens the bonds of charity that should hold together all Christian communities.

*On respect in the House of God.* A church where the Blessed Sacrament is preserved, is the place where God most readily receives our prayers, and where he has promised to answer them. But that promise is a *contract* between our Father in heaven and ourselves, for the due performance of which He exacts certain conditions on our part. These are chiefly respect and devotion. Without these conditions we pray in vain, as God will not hear us. We lack respect for the presence of God when we act with levity in church, or use indecent postures, and we lack devotion when we pray with precipitation, without attention, or in a manner that indicates we have only attended through a meaningless formality.

*On Christian humility.* It is good for us at times to reflect on the *greatness* and the *lowliness* of the Virgin Mother of God. She was by her privileges and virtues infinitely exalted above all creatures, yet far from preferring herself to others, she regarded herself as the last of all. 'The Lord hath regarded the humility of His handmaid.' We would be both blind and culpable if we preferred ourselves to any one, either for talent, science, personal attraction, or any other cause whatever, because self-love often blinds us, and we do not see ourselves as others see us.

The *omitted* portions of her rule are filled with similar beautiful sentiments. But, as an instance of her peculiar spirit of confidence, we quote the following prayer:

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

O eternal and all powerful God, I have not the humility that I ought to have, but my extreme misery constrains me to acknowledge that I am the most abject of all your creatures, because being tainted by *original* sin I am, in a certain sense, lower than the brute creation, and on account of my *actual* sins, I deserve to be cast into hell. The confidence I desire to have in prayer, but do not possess, I expect from your bounty and mercy, because you have given your only Son to redeem us by His precious blood, and I would rather lose a thousand lives than fail to believe the truth of His words. Grant me this grace, my God; it is my strength and my confidence. As to the perseverance I should have in prayer, the consideration of the many graces I have received from you oblige me to testify my gratitude to the last hour of my life, and on through eternity. For, if I have the happiness of being admitted after death into the company of the blessed, I shall persevere in prayer, if you so permit, and unceasingly implore your mercy for the community. I ask neither wealth, nor honors, nor pleasures of this life; I only ask that your holy will may be fully accomplished, and that we may follow the road you have pointed out to us, and which the Blessed Virgin herself has so faithfully trodden. I earnestly beg that every member of our community, and those who shall succeed them, as also those who contribute to their spiritual advancement, may be of the number of the predestined. I believe, dear Lord, that my demand is just, and I make it in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, of Mary, His holy mother, of her glorious spouse, St. Joseph, and of all the blessed inhabitants of the celestial court.

We will conclude this chapter by giving an outline of the funeral oration pronounced by M. de Belmont, Superior of the Montreal seminary, at the sepulture of Sister Bourgeois' heart. The orator took for his text the words of St. Paul, Be ye imitators of me, as I also am of Jesus Christ, and then reminded the Sisters, that although nature exacts many tears for the death of those we love, tears which religion does not condemn, provided they are kept within reasonable bounds, and sanctified by prayer and sacrifice, yet it was fitting, at the inhumation of the heart of their Foundress, to terminate the duties both of nature and piety regarding her they all equally mourned.

You have lost her visible presence, he said, yet, being the custodians of her heart, you should revive within you her spirit, by reproducing in your lives the virtues of which she has given so many examples. It is for this special purpose God has permitted the division of her mortal remains, because He wills that both her *heart* and *spirit* shall be *your treasure*, and she was never more truly your superior and model, than when during life she strove to imitate Jesus Christ.

He made an ingenious allusion to her love of the cross, by comparing the virtues for which she was most remarkable with the emblem of man's redemption. Her humility, he said, was the *foot* of the cross, which had a deep foundation in the earth, and solidified her other virtues, while poverty and mortification were the *arms* of the cross, and embraced a great number of holy and pious practices. He then felicitated the Sisters on the glory of their mother, and promised they should partake of it, according to the words of our Lord addressed to His apostles before his passion; You who have remained with me in my temptations, etc. Even so does your venerable mother address you from heaven my dear Sisters, he said, 'you who have been faithful to humiliations, and sufferings, which is the only heritage I leave you on earth, be faithful to the end, and you shall partake of my present glory.' And she further addresses you in the words of the Gospel, 'I have begotten you in Jesus Christ.' 'It is I,' your departed mother continues to say, 'who have assembled you as a company of Christian Amazons, ready to battle with the enemy of your salvation, not only in the cloister, but amid the tumult of the world.' Labor faithfully, therefore, in your glorious vocation, because you are the children of a saint. Do honor to your mother, walk in her footsteps, and perpetuate her earthly labors. This is an assured means by which to please your celestial Spouse, and participate with her in the glory and merit of the apostolic ministry.

It was not difficult for him to eulogize the courage of Sister Bourgeois, which had certainly been marvellous, and far above what is common to her sex, the two wings that carried her onward and upward being *faith* and *confidence* in God. He said her faith resembled that of Abraham, because like him, she heard the voice of God saying, Leave thy country and thy kindred, and I will make thee the mother of a numerous posterity, and of a chosen nation. Imitating the patriarch she did not hesitate a moment, but came to the New World, poor and unprotected well knowing that He who inspired the design was powerful enough to give success to the

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

undertaking. You, my dear Sisters, are the children of Mary's faithful client, continued the speaker, you are the first fruits of the new people of God, of whom she was the spiritual mother. He concluded his discourse, as he had commenced it, by commending his auditors to the care of their good mother, praying that she would obtain for them by her intercession, a love of the Holy Cross, a great zeal for the salvation of souls, and an unbounded confidence in God, which is the source of all true courage.

Every time you assemble in this place, he said, to perform your religious exercises, raise your eyes to her heart, the sanctuary of so many virtues, and formerly the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit. Imagine you hear her addressing to you these last words of the Apostle:

My children, my joy, and my crown, persevere in the spirit of fervor, take care to advance in perfection, and procure the sanctification of all confided to your care, so that, having been on earth united by the bonds of charity, and the other virtues proper to our state, we may not be separated in Heaven.

Such, as we have given them in this chapter, are a few of the pious maxims and admonitions by which Sister Bourgeois endeavored to lead her spiritual daughters in the paths of perfection, always proposing to them the example of Mary and inspiring them with the most sublime views of faith, in order to keep them constantly in the presence of God. But we refrain from multiplying extracts, as her spiritual writings, maxims, and reflections would require a separate volume to do them justice, and we earnestly hope that such a volume may be forthcoming at no distant day, as it would prove a lasting benefit to any religious community, so practical, so simple, and yet so sublime are the workings of Sister Bourgeois' mind, having been directed and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

### **CHAPTER XIII. A RECAPITULATION OF THE PRINCIPAL EVENTS OF THE LIFE OF SISTER BOURGEOIS.**

On reading this life, one cannot help being struck with wonder and admiration, at the great work Sister Bourgeois undertook and accomplished. We behold a simple country girl forming the then astonishing project of going to Canada, in the hope of founding a city bearing the name of Mary, there to teach religion and morality to persons of her own sex. What seemingly insurmountable obstacles presented themselves to her view. She must undertake a voyage of many thousand leagues, must traverse immense and unknown seas, must expect to live in the wilds of primeval forests, exposed to the fury of cruel savages, who unceasingly attacked the weak ramparts of Ville-Marie. And what means did she possess to surmount these difficulties? Had she credit? Had she any available human support? Was she high-born or powerful? Had she wealth at her disposal? To all these questions we must answer, no. Her hopes of success centered only in an unbounded confidence in the providence of God. Young Margaret possessed the strength of soul and resolution necessary for great designs, the noble intrepidity that rises superior to danger, the firmness that obstacles cannot shake, the fertile and ingenious mind always equal to the occasion, and a sublime spirit of piety and devotion that was useful everywhere. While she felt herself in a manner pushed towards Canada, she prayed unceasingly, consulted spiritual directors, listened respectfully to the voice of her superiors, and listened *interiorly* to the voice of heaven. Nothing could arrest or retard her progress, and she fearlessly set out for the new New World that claimed her zeal. At the age of ten she gathered around her little children to form them to virtues. At a later period she was to establish a religious Congregation in the Church, whose members should aspire to the highest sanctity. Scarcely had the vessel on which she embarked set sail, than her zeal was called into active service. She induced the entire ship's crew to unite in daily prayer and pious reading. Several soldiers falling sick, she nursed them with sisterly charity, eight of them dying in her arms. Arriving at her destination, she finds no home ready to receive her, and takes up her dwelling in a *stable*, which is for her a happy omen, as it resembles the stable of Bethlehem. There she opens school; from thence she daily departs to perform innumerable good works. But the harvest ripens quickly, and the laborers are few. Overflowing with zeal she again traverses the broad sea in search of help, and leads back many generous volunteers. Again she returns to procure letters patent for the consolidation of her establishment. In the court of a king, in the centre of a

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

camp, she solicits the favor and obtains it. On returning to the city of her love, she resolves on securing ecclesiastical approbation for the rules of her institute, and for this purpose travels on foot through blinding snowstorms. A hundred times would she have crossed the continent rather than fail to accomplish the will of God, and her courageous zeal was eventually blessed by heaven, a crowd of devoted young girls ranging themselves under her standard.

The capital and provinces were alike eager to obtain a foundation of her Sisters, and in a few years all Canada experienced the happy effects of her institute, which for nearly two centuries has not ceased to spread about the odor of sanctity and the knowledge of our holy religion. Being at all times desirous to do good, she established temporarily a House of Providence, for virtuous poor girls, where they might be saved from the snares of a treacherous world. Placing her confidence in God more than in man, she undertook to build a plain, substantial house, to serve the triple purpose of convent, boarding and day-school, and though at the start she had neither money nor credit, the building was completed. At another time she was inspired to build a church, and the church was built. Travelling in Paris she was reduced to extreme poverty, and heaven sent a man from the depth of a Canadian forest to pay her an almost forgotten debt. An establishment of her daughters was demanded for Quebec, and she permitted them to go and live; in a stable *pro tem.*, until better accommodations were offered. The intended property at Quebec having been unjustly contested, she relinquished her rights, and an unknown hand gave her sufficient money to make a clear purchase. But not only was her *confidence in God* most remarkable; she possessed all other virtues in an eminent degree. In youth she made a vow of chastity, and preserved that beautiful virtue amidst many dangerous occasions, compelling a regiment of soldiers to respect her, although she was frequently the only woman on board. Yet of all her personal virtues none was more extraordinary than her spirit of mortification. She seemed to live for the express purpose of afflicting her body, using her food always too hot or too cold, mixing ashes with her drink, sitting at meals in a painful position, sleeping on the bare earth with a wooden plank for her pillow, and taking little sleep at that. She never approached the fire in winter, and frequently made use of disciplines, hair-shirts, and a frightful crown of thorns, that she concealed on her head. How truly she hated her flesh such severe penances as these prove. When summoned to Quebec by her bishop, she made the journey on foot, through ice and snow, often wading across Canadian swamps. When she undertook a foundation she carried the furniture on her own shoulders, saying with Solomon: I do not ask for the community either wealth, honors, or the pleasures of this life. Of her holy resignation also we have many striking instances. When all was ready to build the church of Bon Secours, knowing that nothing could be more useful to the young colony than such a work, and that unnecessary delays would ruin the material, yet when ecclesiastical superiors forbade her to continue, she instantly obeyed, without murmur or reply. The Bishop refusing for many years to approve her rule, which was nevertheless an epitome of divine wisdom, she ceased importuning, and silently awaited the time appointed by Divine Providence. In one short hour she lost by fire her convent, and everything it contained, the bodies of two dear Sisters being consumed in the flames. Yet her resignation triumphed over fire and death. For several years she experienced the most frightful interior desolation, neither prayers, reflections, communions, nor spiritual advice affording her the least relief. Yet in silent submission she drank the chalice to the dregs, without one atom of human consolation.

What afflicted her most during this ordeal was not the fear of hell, to which she believed herself condemned; no, it was lest she should be reduced to the horrible alternative of hating God, whom she wished to love in *time*, if she could not in *eternity*. Humility was another of her characteristic virtues, for, after she had solidly established her institute, and formed the Sisters in her spirit, her chief desire was to be exempted from all honorable functions in the community, to become the last and least in the holy obedience. They complied reluctantly with her desires in such matters during the remaining years of her saintly life, but all respected her, and remembered with gratitude how much they owed her. She herself recalled only her sins and infidelities. Such shining virtues were the result of her extraordinary devotion to the Mother of God, to whose service she had consecrated herself from childhood, and to whose glorified earthly actions she had united her own. Believing that Magdalen and Martha were the great models of religious life, she regarded Mary Immaculate as *their Mistress*, and loved to represent her instructing young virgins, and assisting to form the Church of Jesus Christ. She came to Canada for the express purpose of living in a city named after Mary Ville-Marie. She called her Congregation Notre Dame Our Lady and wished

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

that everything connected with it should bear the name of *Mary*. But the Queen of Heaven did not allow herself to be outdone in generosity. The statue shone with celestial light before the eyes of young Margaret at Troyes. On the Feast of the Assumption this privileged soul saw in the Holy Host an infant a thousand times more beautiful than the children of men, looking love into her eyes. In a dream she saw as distinctly as in life one of Mary's most devoted clients, M. de Maisonneuve, and finally the Blessed Virgin assured her *personally* of protection by the solemn words, Go to Canada. I will never abandon you. If charity is the queen of virtues, Sister Bourgeois practised it to heroism. In girlhood she courageously put on her father's burial-shroud with her own hands, which charitable office for the poor became afterward a favorite duty of her life. Being informed that a few reckless libertines were leading off a young girl to make her the victim of their debaucheries, she followed them with a crucifix in her hands, and despite their menaces to kill her, heroically snatched from them their prey. A soldier once being benumbed with cold, she gave him her only mattress; another received her bed, and two other unfortunates her comforters, her own couch in consequence being the cold ground. A Sister having fallen into her agony, the holy Foundress, who was far advanced in years, cried out to God: Take *me*, O Lord, I am old and *useless*. This young Sister may yet render you great service. The noble sacrifice was accepted, the Sister in her agony recovering, while the Foundress was stricken unto death a victim of the most heroic charity. We need not be astonished at the extraordinary brightness of her face after death, nor at the wonderful cures effected by touching her body, nor at the red blood that trickled from the burned relic of her heart. All is possible, all is easy to *charity*.

This rapid glance at the life of Sister Bourgeois proves that the name of so uncommon a woman deserves to be better known in the history of the Church, because she has been one of its most beautiful ornaments. Such names as those of Montcalm, and of Montgomery, are of less value in the sight of God, than the Christian heroine's title of The St. Genevieve of Canada. And we may well say of her with the prophet, The Lord is admirable in his saints. *Mirabilis Deus in sanctis suis*.

### CONCLUSION

Besides what has been related in the preceding chapters, Sister Bourgeois wrote of several other events, both public and private, that occurred some before and some after her arrival in Canada. We will relate a few, in order to give a more correct idea of the state of things in the isle of Montreal, when she undertook to establish her community there. She says, it was then a vast, impenetrable forest, inhabited only by a great number of savages, who unceasingly attacked the French colonists, to prevent their establishment in the country, and as the settlers were then few in number, many of them fell beneath the bloody tomahawks of the relentless Iroquois. In fact it was extremely difficult to induce any one to leave the mother country for the New World, knowing what their fate would be when they reached Ville-Marie, if some measures were not taken to secure life and property. The general depression was so great that matters remained unchanged for *several years*, during which time the colonists were literally at the mercy of wild savages, to whom mercy was unknown. They lay treacherously concealed in the woods, and sallied forth with hatchet and tomahawk on their murderous rampage, when least expected, to pillage and burn the houses and then massacre the inhabitants. In those days it was impossible to labor singly in the fields. The tillers of the soil were obliged to work in groups, with a gun in one hand, and a scythe or spade in the other, often at the peril of their lives. These intrepid French Catholics had left peaceful, happy homes, and the blessings of a Christian government, for no other purpose than to convert wild Indians, who were absolutely under the dominion of the devil, and to spread abroad the glorious Faith over the prairies, and by the lakeshores of this vast continent. Most assuredly their names are emblazoned on the martyr-roll of heaven. It matters little if ungrateful men have forgotten *them*, and lauded the makers of mowing-machines, the inventors of steam-boats, the patented proprietors of the telegraph, the torpedo, the needle-gun, the steam engine, the sewing-machine, etc. All these things being of the earth earthy, shall pass away; nay, may become the civilized (?) instruments of driving the enlightened nations of the nineteenth century back into degraded barbarism. Have we not an undeniable proof of this in the uprising of the masses today (July, 1877) in their might and wrath, who, believing they have been in many instances, and for long years, the unrequited starving tools of unprincipled *un-Christ-like Christian* masters, have stood before the fiery breath of the steam-engine and said: Thus far

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

shalt thou go, and no farther; have torn up the iron railroad tracks of a proud commercial country, and startled the world by the verification of Gamaliel's warning: If these things be not of God, they will perish,

The truth is that the toil, devotion and blood of the early French settlers of Canada have produced an imperishable work in the propagation of the Faith, and the conversion of the Indians. In Canada these poor people become Christian, peaceful, and civilized; at least there exist very few exceptions in the country north of the Great Lakes. And this living, indestructible monument of the martyr's love is the work of Catholic France, and her noble sons and daughters. It became, therefore a matter of necessity at the time either to *abandon* the young colony, or to *save it at all hazards*. M de Maisonneuve determined on the *latter* course for the glory of God, the salvation of souls, the honor of France, and the *love of the Virgin Mary*. In 1652 he returned to his native land for soldiers to garrison and protect Ville-Marie, feeling confident that if a sufficient number could be induced to volunteer, the safety and prosperity of Canada would be secured. This gentleman had himself frequently escaped the fury of the savages miraculously. On one occasion, he was seized by a party of Iroquois, who were in the act of choking him to death, but having by a violent effort disengaged himself momentarily from their grasp, he blew out the brains of the chief with a pistol he fortunately had in his possession. The sight of their mutilated fallen leader, and the *smell of gunpowder*, scattered the balance of the red men, and set the Governor free. Shortly after his departure, a band of nearly two hundred Iroquois presented themselves before the little fort of Ville-Marie, in order to lay siege to it. They knew beforehand that French arms and gunpowder were rather formidable opponents, especially if they should happen to meet another de Maisonneuve, and, as usual, had recourse to concealment. They formed their ambuscade in a ditch which they dug on the very ground that now forms the garden of the Congregation convent. There they lay hid, reconnoitering the strength of the place, and having matured their plans, commenced hurling stones and shooting poisoned arrows against the fort, which contained only the small number of sixteen or seventeen men capable of bearing arms. This little troop, commanded by M. Closse, sustained the siege with undaunted bravery. The combat lasted an entire day, and one after another the savages sunk in death, pierced by a French bullet. The survivors went off at night, full of rage and shame, having succeeded in inflicting no other injury than the firing of an out-house belonging to M. d'Ailbout. During the long combat, M. Closse lost only one man, who was killed by an accidental discharge of a cannon.

M. Brisac, an officer of the French army, was not so fortunate, however. He had determined to draw off and attack a second body of savages who had come to the assistance of the first party, but the wily Indians met stratagem by stratagem, and succeeded in deceiving him on the route. Seeing that they *must* perish, as their enemies were ten times as numerous as they, the French resolved to sell their lives as dearly as possible. They erected a circular barricade of stones, and entrenched themselves within it, firing at random on the furious savages, who howled for their blood. The Iroquois fought like incarnate demons, and every stone they flung with unerring precision shattered a white man's skull. Like the Spartan three hundred, this brave French band determined not to be *taken alive*, so the living supplied the places of their fallen comrades until only five or six men remained. But the Indians at last effected an entrance within the barricade, and killed the survivors with the most | horrible cruelties. M. Brisac, the brave commander, was reserved by the savages to die last, that they might torture him at their ease, yet while he was able to speak, he never ceased exhorting his men to die like Christians. The constancy of the devoted band astonished the Iroquois, who could not refrain from expressing their admiration of the white man's constancy. The death of such heroic Christians is as much to be admired as that of the early martyrs, because like them they combatted and suffered for religion and the glory of God. Sister Bourgeois relates that during the first eight or nine years of the existence of the colony, they could not succeed in raising healthy children, all of them dying at a very tender age, as much on account of the rigorous climate, as of the privations and sufferings which were endured by their mothers, who, being all natives of sunny France, had enjoyed, at least in a moderate way, the good things of this life. In Canada, during these early days, they lacked nearly everything, except good will and an undying love of the Catholic Faith, bequeathed to them by their sainted forefathers. It may be also, that Almighty God wished to take to Himself these precious children, as the first fruits of the New World. The first girl that arrived at maturity in the country was Jane Loisel. She became a pupil of Sister Bourgeois, to whose care she was confided at the age of four, and remained in the Sister's school to her eighteenth year, when she married John Beauchamp. It appears that theirs was the first Canadian marriage in

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

Montreal. The first boy who escaped an early grave was John Desroches, and the first native of Montreal who consecrated herself to God in the Congregation was Marie Barbier, who became Superior after Sister Bourgeois' resignation. She was a very holy religieuse, and imbibed the spirit of her Foundress, subjecting herself to such frightful penances that a dangerous cancer formed in her body, of which, after years of intense suffering, she was miraculously cured. The venerable Foundress also leaves the following record of a few of the Indian girls she took under her protection:

In 1656, a young Iroquois mother had a little girl about nine months old, which she neglected shamefully, and treated with brutal violence. I endeavored to get the poor little sufferer from her, in order to raise it a Christian, M. Souard assisting me to secure it. So after giving the savage mother many presents, she at last consented to place the child in my care. But as I was on the eve of my first voyage back to France, I gave it in charge to Margaret Picard during my absence. As soon as I set sail the mother retracted, and tried in every possible way to get the child back without our knowledge. Once, while the little one and her vigilant nurse were out taking exercise, the Iroquois woman suddenly appeared, and endeavored with violence to snatch away the terrified infant. But she was disappointed; the child clung convulsively to her French mother, as she called her, and the savage departed, vowing to seize her another time, and then take revenge for the child's preference. In order to prevent a catastrophe, the Sisters hid the child, and the Iroquois eventually gave up the search. This little Indian was baptized and named Mary when she attained her fourth year, M. de Maisonneuve and Mlle. Closse being her sponsors. She was the first Iroquois baptized in the colony, and died two years after. I also raised a little Algonquin girl, and an infant Illinois, but both died at the age of nine. We received at a later period, another Algonquin, aged nineteen, who expressed an ardent desire to live with our Sisters. She was admitted on trial, and for a long time was faithful to all the practices of piety in use among us, however contrary they were to her inclinations, or to her Indian proclivities. She died shortly after her baptism, having given great edification to the Sisters. One of the first Canadian members of the Institute, was an Iroquois who had been educated at the Mission of the Mountain. She was received into the community as soon as she arrived at the proper age, and died happily, after laboring twelve years in the mission school where she was instrumental in effecting much good among her own people.

As Sister Bourgeois took a singular pleasure in recounting these Indian conquests, we do not consider it out of place to revert to them here, and might add many others, but will conclude by relating a remarkable event that occurred in her time. The father of Mary Teresa Gannensagouach, who had been admitted a member of the Congregation, as was mentioned in the fourth chapter, became a Christian, and worshipped the true God with all the ardor of his poetic Indian nature. Many a time did the forests of the island re-echo with his recitations of the holy rosary, and he had the happiness to see his son also follow his example, by receiving the saving waters of Baptism. The graceless son, however, soon forgot his baptismal vows, and returned to his former licentious mode of life. Falling in with a depraved party of his tribe, who had taken the war-path against the peaceful Christian Indians, he assisted in a murderous attack on his native village. The fiends were unhappily successful in their carnival of blood, and each reeking warrior selected his wretched victim among the few survivors to lead him off to a distant encampment and there torture him slowly to death. Young Gannensagouach dragged *his* captive through forest and swamp with brutal violence; but at last growing tired of listening to the sufferer's groans, commanded him to kneel for his death-blow. He did so, and for the first time since his capture, raised his eyes to the face of the would-be murderer. Both were paralyzed with horror for he gazed upon his apostate son. Father, forgive him, he knows not what he does, cried the agonized parent, and his prayer was heard. The arm that held the uplifted tomahawk fell powerless by the young man's side, and from that hour the *apostate* became a *penitent*. The good old Indian died a peaceful Christian death, a few years later, and to this day, a rude stone cross with an appropriate epitaph, marks his last resting-place.

May my soul also die the death of the just.

\* \* \* \* \*

## The Life of Venerable Sister Margaret Bourgeois

NOTE.

Happily, during the interval that elapsed between the writing and the publication of this book, the process of canonizing Venerable Sister Bourgeois has been commenced, and splendid ecclesiastical services were held in the spring of 1879 in the city of Montreal, in unison with the canonical proceedings. The canonization of this saintly woman will give to the church in America, a *second* acknowledged *intercessor* in heaven, St. Rose of Lima being the *first*, and will procure new triumphs for the Faith in the land of the West, where such triumphs are numerous and marvellous. THE AUTHORESS.

[Transcriber's Note: The title of Chapter IX in the original reads:

THE RULES OF THE CONGREGATION, AND ESTAB-

MENT OF MISSIONS. The missing characters have been restored in this text.]