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Sisters of Charity of Montreal, “Grey Nuns”

Archives & Collections:

Fonds L007 Orphelinat St-Patrick, Montréal

Foundation of St. Patrick’s Asylum

Preliminary- 1847

Foundation- 1849

According to the notes of Sr. Marie (Christin), St. John of the cross and others.

Reviewed, corrected and added to by Sr. Fauteux, Del Vecchio and others.

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On the 9th of December 1846, only 5 days after the first meeting of the sisters of charity, Sr. Hurley, helped by Ms. Thomas McGrath, found a property for the orphans. She obtained the property from her husband, a former contractor and since then chief of police. He gave them one of his properties on Murray Street, in the suburbs of Saint Anne.

It took several days to clean and ready the house. Two sisters went each morning and returned each evening, exhausted, but with happy hearts from preparing a new sanctuary for the poor of our good God. After an evening of rain, the roads were impassable and they could count themselves lucky to complete the considerable journey back to the Mother House in a hay cart.

This shelter took in widows, cripples and children. Sr. Hurley went there every morning, catering to those in most need, by means of her daily collections and the help she received from the daughters of charity, in particular Ms. McGrath. There were more than fifty children of both sexes here; between twelve and fifteen elderly people and some under-nurses. They came to seek shelter when they had nowhere to go and the good Sr. Hurley took charge of finding them a place.

The good we are trying hard to do in this little sanctuary of charity has not escaped the attention of the people. One person appealed to the sympathies of the readers of the *True Witness* as follows: “We direct attention to this charitable institution, and hope it will receive an increase of

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public support. Those who first suggested the undertaking and then generously devoted a commodious building for the institution are rewarded in witnessing its daily benefits”. (St. Patrick’s Asylum, Murray Street, St. Anne’s Suburbs. February 4th 1847).

Eager to provide the children gathered in this temporary shelter with permanent asylum, the citizens planned to construct it close to St. Patrick’s church which is under construction. This generous inspiration could not, however, be immediately acted upon: the continuing work on the church is absorbing all the funds. March 17th, the temple was finished and Monsignor Prince, administrator of the diocese in the absence of Monsignor Bourget while he is in

Europe, gave a solemn blessing in the presence of a large gathering of citizens. There was a very moving sermon given by Mr. Connolly. Many of the little orphans of St Patrick's Asylum had the privilege of attending the festival. When the ceremony finished, they were taken to the Mother House to have dinner with the other orphans. This thoughtfulness was greatly appreciated by the Irish population.

Meanwhile the six months agreed for the McGrath house were nearing their end. It was necessary to think about transporting its inhabitants elsewhere. Faced with this fresh concern, Mrs. McDonnell offered them her own home. From the month of May, the small colony settled to stay there for the months of June and July. Thence, they took refuge in a house on Bleury street where they remained for four months to be transferred to the Rocheblave house, named after the Rocheblave family

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who lived there previously.

It was the month of October 1847. Believing they could base their work permanently in the Rocheblave residence, Mother McMullen sent three workers there: sisters Hughes, Denis-St Joseph and Blondin. One hundred and nineteen children in our care who had not been claimed by their parents were gathered with the orphans in this house.

At the request of Ms. Billaudèle, superior, and by the decree of the council, the Sisters began sleeping in Saint Patrick's Asylum on the 20th of October. Until then they went there every day early in the morning to spend the day.

The men of the seminary helped greatly towards the maintenance of this house, and the spiritual leadership had been entrusted to Mr. Pinsonnault, who later became Bishop of London. Meanwhile the small colony could not enjoy its new resting place for long. As the incumbent priests of St. Patrick's church had no presbytery, it became necessary to give it up to them. From the 21st of May 1848, twelve children from the Rocheblave refuge were transferred to the Mother House. The others were evacuated on the 13th of July, and were placed in good families or trusted to the care of Father Dowd, a young Sulpician who arrived in Montreal on the 21st of June previous, and after three weeks was named chaplain of the poor Irish. Four months beforehand, in a pastoral letter dated 9th of March, Monsignor Bourget made this appeal to his diocesans on behalf of the children housed in shelters:

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“Let us do good, our dear brothers, while we have time (Gal. 6, 10). Let us do this with everyone in mind but especially those in the family of faith. It is this view which gives us apostles, and this is particularly relevant under the current circumstances. I am sure you have not forgotten that which we told you in our pastoral letter on the 24th of June [1847] last, regarding the frightful mortality which decimated the immigrant population at this time, and created a multitude of orphans. These poor children no longer have fathers to feed them nor mothers to love them and hold them to their bosoms; religion imposes a sacred obligation upon us to take these children into our special care. They are indeed too wretched not to deserve all our compassion. So, therefore we love them as we always love children of pain.

Our first action, for these innocent victims of this devastating scourge, was to give them a voice in order to paint you a picture of their unspeakable suffering; or rather the plaintive wailing voices of several hundred orphans, who, through us, made themselves heard to your always sensitive hearts, and spoke to you of their pain: All you who pass these places consecrated by the suffering of our fathers and mothers, or where their graves have been sadly erected, see if it is a pain similar to our pain...Do for us, poor little orphans, that which you would like others to do for your own children, if like us, they had the misfortune of losing you in a distant land; if like us, they had been exposed to the horrors of the misery which follows an orphan!

Then we entered your consciousness, and did for these foreign children that which you would surely expect that any Bishop would do for yours, if, by some misfortune of time, they became orphans, in some far off land where you were forced to seek refuge, to escape a terrible scourge which threatened to decimate your homeland. So, we opened an asylum before taking in the orphaned emigrants, and we placed them under the protection of Saint Jerome-Émilien, because this great saint dedicated his life to the care of orphans. We hoped his powerful influence with God would contribute to the success of such an important venture. Our trust was merited for more than what we saw with our own eyes, while we were in Rome; these marvellous fruits produced and are still producing the zeal and charity of this father of orphans. Our intention was to take care of these poor orphans, and afterwards to place them in good families where they would care for them as if they were their own children. Because it seemed

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that it would have been extremely imprudent on our part to threaten the public's health when placing the children, almost all with contagion, among the people of this diocese. As a result, we entrusted them to the charity of the good religious who received them with open arms, and risked their lives in order to care for the most severely affected and most repugnant to nature.

His Majesty's government would like to create a similar establishment; and despite the significant expense caused by emigration, it gave generously. It was the 11th of July [1847] last that Montreal saw the birth of this new work, and we had the consolation of going to fetch these vulnerable children in the Point Saint Charles fever

sheds. We must tell you here, our dear brothers, with the sincerity of our souls, that one of the most tender moments of our lives was when, at the head of this numerous family of orphans, we walked the streets of this town, to lead them by the hand to the hospice which had been prepared for them. The sight of hundreds of these children ravaged by hunger, clothed in rags and suffering from the terrible disease which deprived them of their parents was too harrowing to ever forget.

Since the Saint Jerome Émilien asylum was founded, we have received six hundred and fifty (650) orphans here, of whom one hundred and eighty eight (188) have been placed or reclaimed, and three hundred and thirty two (332) have died. Therefore, one hundred and thirty (130) remain. Moreover, in the Point Saint Charles fever sheds

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there are ninety nine (99) others who could not be placed in said asylum. This is the brief history of the foundation of Saint Jerome's asylum, whose purpose is to gather and care for the Irish children, while waiting to place them in honest and charitable homes. This building of charity rises slowly, amidst pain and suffering; but it has borne too much blood and sweat not to be blessed by God and man.....

Full of the confidence which your previous charity inspires within us, we appeal today to your kindness to which we are now accustomed, and we implore you to imagine the effect that this would have on these poor orphans who are so dear to your hearts. We have the authority to order you in the name of Jesus Christ, to be charitable. However, we prefer to use motives of love, which are always more powerful to affectionate and generous hearts.

The prayers that we say are for these children who have suffered from pain of the terrible epidemic which deprived them of the only support they had in this world. We entrust them to your charitable care; receive them as objects of our most tender compassion.

Yes, my dear brothers, receive them without considering them to be of a foreign land; as they are united in faith with Jesus Christ, they are one and the same as us.

Receive them also without considering that they may cost you; as you know well, in order for charity to be praiseworthy, it should be given freely, and for the love of Jesus Christ.

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Besides, with God nothing is lost, and all in this world is rewarded a hundredfold, with the promise of eternal life in the next. Of this we are striking proof, as by giving thanks to Onesimus, this great apostle extended all the riches of his eloquence, by plumbing the depths of his charity, he had the good fortune to make a faithful companion of St. Paul, a zealous bishop and glorious martyr of Jesus Christ.

It will be the same for all of us, our dear brothers: and, we must hope, by adopting these poor children that we will make companions of our faith, good priests, fervent sisters and kind fellow citizens who, raised among us, have a common cause with us.

Come ministers of the Lord, adopt those of the children to whom the Divine Providence has been lost; and hope that through the generous sacrifices you make to procure a good education for them, they will one day become an adornment of the sanctuary, and your worthy colleagues in the work of the holy ministry.

Come seminaries and colleges, adopt some of these tender children whom nature and grace have adorned with rich talents, purposely, it seems, to reward you for your charity, by developing their good qualities and rendering them capable to help you to carry out the good work given to you by the divine providence.

Come communities dedicated to teaching or charity,

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adopt these poor orphans who are reaching towards you with their small, imploring hands. Without doubt by rewarding their faithful hearts with religious care and education, you will create worthy followers of Jesus Christ, who will work with you to bless your holy institutions wherever you go, by multiplying the righteous work which you carry out for the greater glory of God.

Come pious and charitable laity, adopt these vulnerable children with the joyful warmth which characterises true charity. Show them all the tenderness that you would like to see in those who would receive your own children if they had the misfortune of losing you, and if consigned to a foreign land without family or friends, they were also subjected to such abject misery. If ever there was a time to fulfill the word of the Lord, this is it: "Do to others as you would have them do to you." (Luke, 6, 31)

Filled with these sentiments, you will welcome these children, you will raise them with care, you will correct them with kindness and you will love them affectionately. Oh how interesting and lovable these children would seem to you if you knew how strongly they feel the good we do for them; how grateful they are to those who take care of them, how they pray in faith to the Father of mercy for those who help them, how joyful they are, when they meet someone having thought them to be dead; how they are upset, when they are forced to leave one another and to never see each other again; how they cry when we remind them of a memory of their dear parents or some

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charitable person whose life was sacrificed to care for them in their suffering; how they look with tenderness upon those who come to adopt, in the hope they will be fortunate enough to be chosen; how they are firm and determined, when they must reject the flattering offers from those whom they know to be enemies of their faith; how sincerely they weep, when it comes to saying goodbye to their caring mothers which religion prepared for them in their time of need".

This urgent appeal from the Bishop was heard. Of the two hundred and twenty nine (229) who were still being housed in the asylum, ninety two (92) were placed in good families, or reunited with their parents if they were in a suitable condition to provide for their subsistence. Five (5) of these children were adopted by Mr Désautels, then an Aylmer missionary, who later became Monsignor Désautels. Mr. Charland, curate of Beauharnois adopted Michael who later became a distinguished lawyer; and judge Lafontaine, an orphan who became Madame Barthelot. Forty eight (48) found refuge at the Grey Nuns' hospital, the others were collected by the Sisters of Providence.

It was not long before fresh attempts were made to reopen an asylum for these children. That autumn, on the 11th of November 1848, Mr. Billaudèle wrote to Sister McMullen:

“Your dear community was willing, at my request, to take charge of St Patrick’s Asylum. This asylum which has been suspended, not abolished, is about to reopen in another locality.

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I trust that your good sisters are willing to continue to run it as they did last year.

I ask for the continuation of this support by the holy hearts of Jesus and Mary, in union with which I am, my reverend Mother, to you and your community.

Your humble and obedient servant.

F. Billaudèle, sup.

During this period of inactivity, our sisters nevertheless continued to visit the homes of the Irish families. They discovered large numbers of unfortunates “in refuge in sheds or warehouses, without heat, without bread, who could not access their families, due to a lack of money, or more often due to the fact that, still recovering from typhus, they inspired fear of the contagion.”

Moved by the fate of these destitute individuals, Sister Reid proposed to Father Dowd and Pinsonneault that they rent a vast house situated on Colborne Street near the Lachine canal to house them. This house, occupied by Mr. Franklin Vincelet, caretaker of the Côte Saint Paul lock, was already home to ten or so orphans he had brought from the infirmary. When Franklin and his wife, young and brave couple that they were, found themselves surrounded by this troubled colony, and anxious to care for them, they primed themselves to go and

consult Father Dowd, who told them: “You are exactly the people I am looking for, your house will receive my needy and you will watch over them.” Soon the poor widows and their children settled in, and fathers

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of families without means who were waiting until they recovered to full health to go back to work; lastly whole families came to seek refuge. Those who could paid a small amount, the others were housed free of charge.¹

It was not enough to provide shelter for these unfortunates, it was also necessary to provide for their subsistence. While the alms of the charitable covered part of the expense, it was far from enough to cover it all. Sister Reid had the idea of going to Saint Anne’s to beg on their behalf. Well received, she committed to going every day. As soon as she arrived, along with her wheelbarrow, led by one of those in her care, the butchers and shopkeepers did not wait for her to ask, they presented themselves, and the cart was filled with provisions.

To help the other needy of the town, the gentlemen of Saint Sulpice opened a depot at the Grey Nuns’ building which was provided largely at the expense of the seminary. Here, we distributed bread, meat and soup to the healthiest. The sick also received small provisions of tea, sugar, rice and butter. According to the distributors, ninety (90) gallons of soup was barely sufficient for distribution each day. This was carried out regularly. There is nothing more touching than seeing women and young children rushing in with their containers at designated times. One of these children was distinguishable by his

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open, intelligent manner while being reserved at the same time. To the questions he was asked, he answered in a few thoughtful words, before disappearing into the crowd. Thirty (30) years later, this child, who became one of the most respectable citizens in Montreal, met Sister Reid in one of our houses in the town. “Do you recognise me?” he asked her as he reached out to shake her hand – “Why, no,” said Sister Reid stunned- “I was one of the children from 1847. Every day, I came to your sisters looking for soup, with my container in

¹ The sisters responsible for visiting the poor had a register which contained the name and place of residence of each unfortunate being assisted. The chaplain came once a week with wood and whatever was necessary for the soup and the various needs to protect them. (footnote in text)

hand, in my trousers with holes in the knee. What a miserable time and how good you were to us! ... Seeing you again, is like seeing my own mother.”

This victim of 1847 was the honourable M. B. Tansay² who was well thought of in Montreal due to his honourable conduct and in particular for his incomparable charity to unfortunates. For forty (40) years, that is to say, since the Providence favoured him for certain affluences, he never stopped cooperating with the charity work being done in the town: patronage of the poor, orphanages. Saint Patrick’s asylum honours him as one of its main benefactors.

As for the Franklin house, almost every day new children were knocking on the door. When there was fifty (50) children there, we realised we faced a new task; that of instructing and catechising them; and the sisters who were already overwhelmed by their multiple tasks, were too few and too unfamiliar with the English language to respond to this new need. So

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Father Du Merle, a Jesuit and also chaplain of the infirmaries, was compelled to search the town for charitable people willing to devote themselves. Providence did not delay in crossing his path with this good willing soul. Very recently, an excellent widow named Suzanne Brown arrived in the country.³ Born in Ireland to an affluent family, who were stripped of their assets by misfortune, she was widowed with her three (3) children: Georges (Jacques), Brigitte and Rose, and the courageous woman left her homeland to seek fortune abroad. She was travelling to Quebec with a group of Irish immigrants when she was struck down at sea by the contagion.⁴ From Quebec, she could nevertheless be transported to Montreal, but on her arrival she became so sick that as it was unlikely she would recover and she seemed unconscious, we entrusted her son Jacques to Mr. Louis-Misael Archambault, curate of Saint

² His father, who came to the country in 1847, with three (3) children, had to leave his wife in Ireland with the rest of the family: the boat was too full and they were unable to board. The following year, however, he could bring his wife with his daughter and three other sons, and live the family life he so deeply resented being deprived of. (This note was donated by Mr. Tansay himself) (in-text footnote)

³ Her husband’s name was Jeremy (Michael) Brown. (in-text footnote)

⁴ One of her compatriots said of her: “If I dare to speak to Mrs. Brown today, it is because we are abroad. If I stayed in my country, I would not have dared, as she knew too much about my situation.” In this way, misfortune was a great leveller of circumstance. (in-text footnote)

Hugues,⁵ her eldest daughter Brigitte to the Grey Nuns, and Rose, her youngest, was adopted by a courageous Irishwoman whose name we unfortunately did not retain.

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Having returned to health against all odds, Mrs. Brown was delighted to see her son in the parish priest of Saint Hugue's home and her eldest daughter with the Grey Nuns. But where to find her little Rose? Days and weeks passed with no clues to enlighten her. It was under these circumstances full of anguish that Father Du Merle met this brave woman. Touched by the courage which she showed amidst so many trials and hardships, and moreover, seeing she was educated, pious and was ready and willing to devote herself, he proposed that she take care of the children in the refuge on Colburn street, to spend the night with them and catechise them....

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Mrs. Brown, delighted to add her resources to this beautiful work, eagerly accepted the Reverend Father's request. A lower level of the house was transformed into a school, and was used as such, until 1849. When she found herself surrounded by the orphans who absorbed her teachings like thirsty earth absorbs the dew, she thought of her little Rose: "If I had her here with me, she said, I would teach her with all the others." With this weighing on her mind, one March evening, she attended a Lenten prayer service or a benediction of the Holy Sacrament in St Patrick's church. In the silence of the ceremony, she was disturbed from her contemplation by the sound of a marble rolling on the floor which came to rest in the folds of her clothes. She had barely raised her eyes when she saw a little girl aged three (3) or four (4) running to collect it. "Is this not my little Rose," she said trembling with emotion. Indeed, it was this child who she mourned and thought she had lost forever, now returned to her at this moment by our Lord, and by instinct, she reached out. However, her adoptive mother who had missed nothing of what happened, intervened and protested. Before the ceremony had even finished both women went to the sacristy to submit the case to Father Dowd. He did not delay in resolving the issue, and that very evening, Madame Brown triumphed, coming back

⁵ Seeing how full of talent little Jacques was, Mr. Archambault instructed him, and had the consolation of seeing him achieve ecclesiastical status. Ordained a priest, Father Jacques Brown would later replace his benefactor and new father in the parish of Saint Hugues. Brigitte did not leave the Grey Nuns until she went to establish herself in the world.

to the refuge with little Rose. From the Franklin house, Rose would soon follow her mother to the Perreault⁶ refuge, where Sister Hughes had just opened an asylum for poor widows and girls with no homes. Drawn for a long time

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towards protective work such as this, the charitable sister finally succeeded in finding a zealous young priest who was willing to lend his support to her. It was the young Sulpician, Father Dowd who arrived from France on the 21st June 1848, and was almost immediately appointed chaplain for the poor Irish. Through his intervention, she obtained a house from Mr. Augustin Perreault, a rich Montreal citizen, situated on the corner of Craig and Côté Street,⁷ on condition that the poor who were received there would attend his service. This condition was faithfully fulfilled, when on the 27th of August 1859, this benefactor died an octogenarian: not only did the poor and the orphans attend his funeral, but the Grey Nuns also attended in great numbers. Also remember about this man of faith that after the carers and the poor left, he remained living in the house he had so obligingly made available to them and, when he fell ill, he requested that his bed be placed where the Holy Sacrifice had been offered during the religious holiday.

It was agreed that the shelter would be opened at the beginning of October. However, it was first necessary to make habitable a residence that tenants had left in an indescribable state of dirtiness. This was the task of the young Sisters: Henriette Blondin and Elizabeth Christin, both appointed as aides to the good Sister Hughes. To carry out this cleaning, the two sisters came every morning accompanied by a poor, almost blind girl and were provided their dinner. The first day, a shovel

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was needed to remove the dirt which had accumulated on the downstairs floor. Everywhere was in complete destitution. There were no chairs or tables; an old bench served as a chair and an upside down bucket was the table where they ate their frugal meal at lunchtime. One day, the sisters, carelessly left their meagre dinner on one of the windowsills and found

⁶ Mr. Augustin Perreault, who was the proprietor, was the uncle of Sister Gaudry. (in-text footnote)

⁷ The house still exists today. (in-text footnote)

nothing but crumbs left at mealtime; the rest had been consumed by the rats, who were the masters of this house.

Many incidents of this nature occurred to both cheer up and test the patience of the valiant carers during the three weeks dedicated to this work. Finally, everything was prepared and acceptable to receive the maids and widows that Sister Hughes had in mind to take in, and it was agreed to fix the opening for Friday the 17th of November. It was not surprising, that day, to see that the first to arrive were fifty (50) children, barefoot and dressed in rags, led by this woman Mrs. Brown whom we spoke about previously. It was the entire young colony from the Franklin house that was sent there by Father Dowd, on the suggestion of the good Sister Reid. What had happened and what conclusions can we draw from such a change?

The Franklin house, as we remember, was not only open to orphans, but also received servants, widows and entire families. This mixture of children and diverse groups of adults was for Sister Reid, who was charged with maintaining order, a matter of concern. Influenced by these concerns, she closely and quietly followed the preparations being undertaken

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in the house allocated by Mr. Perreault to Sister Hughes, her rival charity worker. From time to time she even visited the two young Sisters in charge of the preparations, encouraging them but without them suspecting her intention.

At the time the refuge opened, Sister Reid put to Father Dowd the inconveniences of keeping the orphans in the Franklin house: according to her, these children have much more to complain about than the girls and widows in the care of Sister Hughes. Father Dowd considered her claims, he agreed, and ordered that the orphans be brought to the Perreault house, until they could be accommodated in Saint Patrick's Asylum, then under construction.

Imagine the amazement of Sister Hughes on the arrival of this unexpected swarm. However, listening only to her big heart, in her desire to do good for all, she tried to make them as welcome as possible. It is impossible to describe the awkwardness of the first weeks. No beds for them, no tables, just a tiny stove which barely sufficed for making tea; the young children are obliged to sit on the ground, and great is the distress of the carers to be able to distribute only one portion of bread as a first meal for each one. But the good Providence did not delay in directing alms from some charitable individuals to the new refuge. Mr. Perreault procured a good provision of straw for them; the sisters used this to fill cotton sacks, sewn in a hurry,

which they placed on the floor of the loft, and the boy's dormitory was ready. They did the same for the little girls' dormitory, which they opened on the first floor, except for a tiny room which was destined to serve as a chapel.

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Most problematic was getting the children to the church on Sundays; most of them had no shoes and were barely clothed. The first Saturday, there was some deliberation amongst the carers. Sister Blondin presumed that the inadequacy of their washing facilities was a dispensation from mass for these children. Of an opposite opinion, Sister Marie does not want to assume such responsibility. But should they be brought to the church in similar clothing? An agreement was reached that the children would attend the low mass, which was said every Sunday morning in Notre Dame at five (5) am., the next morning. The next day, the orphaned boys and girls formed two lines and set out, at this early hour, to the church some distance away. Sr. Blondin starts the journey with laughter; less hardened than her companion, Sr. Marie finishes in tears, at least a little moved by the remarks which she hears being directed at those in her care, as they continue on their journey. "What a procession!" some say. "Where have they come from?" say the others.

When they get back, Sr. Blondin recounts the morning's incidents to Father Dowd and the upset of Sr. Marie. The charitable chaplain strives to console the young carer by promising her that the children will have footwear for the following Sunday. He kept his word: the shoes arrived early in the week. It remained to dress these fifty (50) children similarly: that is to say to clothe some in new clothes and mend the others. The sewing machines were unfamiliar then, the days were not long enough for the task; it took extended and prolonged vigils long into the night.

Seeing the carers on the verge of succumbing, the charitable

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Mother Coullée assigned Sr. Lepailleur to them, another young volunteer, full of ardour and zeal. Not content with solely helping these Sisters with the sewing and stitching, she also wanted to help them guarantee food for their piety and to get them a small chapel. This was a realisation of dearest wishes. How often, in fact, the carers said to themselves: "If we were to be blessed by our Lord, we would have nothing else to desire." Also, as soon as the modest altar, made from rough boards, was erected and decorated with care, Father Dowd acquiesced

happily to the desire of the brides of Christ and came to celebrate holy mass. He obtained a Holy Sacrament from Monsignor Bourget to be kept there. "From that moment," wrote Sr. Marie, "nothing was difficult, a quarter of an hour of intimacy with our good Saviour quickly helps us forget the troubles of the day; and the next day, what a consolation to return on refreshed feet for more work, with provisions of energy."

One day, however, this enjoyment was almost lost. One winter night around two (2) in the morning, a house on Craig Street, which was not far from the asylum, caught fire. In less than one hour, the flames surrounded it on all sides. Friends rushed in a hurry to remove bedding and furniture. At the first blast of the alarm, the devoted Father Dowd was at the scene of the disaster, helping to transport belongings to the Champ de Mars, rather than appealing to friends so that the baggage would be safe. He felt assured in the firm belief that this children's asylum would be fire proof, consolidated by so many sacrifices, so much charity and trust

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in God. Furthermore the Blessed Sacrament is there, it will be the faithful protector. To the offers made to him to transport the Holy Gifts of consecrated bread and wine elsewhere, he responds with an imperturbable firmness: "If our Lord wishes to abandon the asylum, he will leave last." In the glow of the fire, we saw the brave Sulpician moving around the house, then genuflecting at length at the foot of the tabernacle. Trembling from seeing him in such great danger, Sisters and children outside multiplied their prayers. When the fire reached the small picket fence which circled the asylum, the terror reached its peak. Nothing so far could convince the devoted Father to abandon his post of devotion and honour. His faith took reason from danger. When all seemed lost, the wind suddenly changed direction, and the flames consumed a soap factory on the opposite side of the asylum leaving it intact as well as the adjoining house belonging to Mr. Perreault.

However, the smoke which surrounded the asylum had rendered the entrance inaccessible. Mrs. Green moved to pity by the sight of this troupe of half clothed children shivering with the cold, got carers to lead them to her house to spend the rest of the night. "Friends took care of our baggage, recalls Sr. Marie, and we followed Mrs. Green. Arriving at her vast home, seeing our children falling from fatigue and sleepiness, the good woman opened her large living room for them and urges them to rest on the soft carpet". It was not yet six (6) in the

morning and Sisters and children were up, and having thanked their host profusely, on the road back to the asylum. A mild consolation awaited them.

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The wonderful Father Dowd, who did not want to leave the asylum in the time of danger, offered to say a mass of thanksgiving in the chapel which had been preserved by a miracle. It is impossible to describe the gratitude with which this proposition was accepted. Preparations are hurriedly carried out and the holy mass begins, and continues in the midst of tears of emotion and gratitude. After the mass a fervent Te Deum again shows the gratitude of the entire family. The rest of the morning was spent receiving neighbours and charitable friends who rushed over, some laden with provisions, others with clothes, each to offer their services; help arrived like this in abundance.

For God's purpose, this test had the double advantage of making known the good work that was taking place in this orphanage, and the poverty which was impeding its development. Two (2) years had still not passed during which time Father Dowd had become actively involved in the construction of the Saint Patrick's orphanage which began on Dorchester Street only a stone's throw from the church of the same name. Without waiting for the completion of the work, and in order to accelerate the process, Father Dowd resolved to have the asylum blessed in the autumn of 1851. The ceremony was fixed for the 21st of November. Despite the heavy snow which fell on this day, Sisters and children of the Perreault refuge arrived there early in the morning. Mr. Billaudèle, superior in the seminary, presided over the ceremony, assisted by Father Dowd, in the presence of several members of the clergy, and

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a large number of Sisters of Charity gathered to encourage the fledgling venture. With the ceremony finished, it was necessary to bring the orphans back to the old house to wait until the total completion of the new one; but we had not taken into account the storm which continued to rage, and how to tackle the cold and the muddy streets with such feeble children. It was, therefore, decided that the small horde would definitively take possession of the asylum this day, and Father Dowd himself appealed at lunch to his associates to sacrifice theirs, which was accepted with kind hearts. The women, witnesses to the noble action of these men, did not want to pass over their generosity; returning to the house, they sent to the asylum, coffee, bread, butter and enough provisions for several days.

It was, therefore, the 21st of November, under the auspices of Mary..., that the asylum was blessed and opened to the Irish orphans. It had already been entrusted several months ago to Sr. Reid, recently named as a superior, Sr. Marie Christin, whose work we have already admired, who had been permanently assigned to Sisters Adèle Robin (Sainte Croix) and Elizabeth Dupuis, both whom were only professed two months previously. The young founders launched their ministry with a good school; poverty and deprivation united them to base their careers on their devotion and to brighten their faith in Providence.

One day, despite their industry and the contribution

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from the large number of Sisters of Charity there to assist the fledgling work, misery was complete. It was almost time for dinner and there was not a single piece of bread in the house. Without becoming disconcerted, Sr. Reid hurried to the rooms and set the children praying. All at once, they fall on their knees, hands joined, eyes lifted to the sky, begging the eternal Father to send them bread. Their trusting prayer quickly reached the heart of God. From the second Our Father, the superior was called to the parlour by a child of about ten (10) years of age who gave her a five (5) dollar bill. “My father is sending you this money for your orphans,” he said simply, and withdrew hurriedly without wishing to disclose his name. What a godsend! We had said, recalls the narrator, that the provisions purchased with this money would never run out.

Meanwhile, the numbers here grew every day. From the following 12th of January, the little asylum contained a hundred or so;⁸ in addition to the young orphans, some sick adults had also sought refuge, and the kind Superior did not believe in harping on the scarcity of resources when receiving those sent by Providence. Her trust, often put to the test, was not disappointed however. One Friday, the house was bare of provisions, which was perplexing to the Superior. “It is already nine (9) o’clock, she said, and the dinner is still not being cooked.” At which point, she began the task with the usual recital of evocations to the Divine Providence. The prayer was not finished when a car laden with

⁸ Letter from Mother Coullée to Mr. Faillon. (in text footnote)

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vegetables and fish stopped outside the door. It was a generous farmer from the country who came to say to the superior. "Take these provisions, my Sister, I was inspired to bring them for your orphans."

This fact was told to Father Dowd who... could not refrain from expressing his sorrow to the Superior that they were experiencing such great discomfort. He emptied the contents of his wallet on the table, and the following Sunday, made a pressing appeal to the Irish congregation on behalf of the poor house. Abundant aid reached him soon after and since; the Asylum of Saint Patrick has continued to receive clergy and parishioners as evidence of generous devotion.

Mr. Faillon who, from France, followed the beginnings of the fledgling institution with interest wrote: "I praise God for the success of the work of Father Dowd for his asylum, and I congratulate the Sisters who lead this new institution for being chosen to bring the spirit of our Holy Mother of Youville there."⁹ "The good Father Dowd has undergone incredible sacrifice to build this house, attests Mother Coutlée. It is a beautiful building, constructed with taste and solidity. From one of the slopes of Mount Royal, she sees the village spread out below her feet and become more beautiful with every day of new constructions." Sr. Reid who had displayed enough zeal to spark the charity of the venerable founder of this home, was not to enjoy a long break. In the

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elections of 1853, she was appointed to the bursar's office of the Mother house and the management of the administration of Saint Patrick's Asylum was entrusted to the former supervisor of novices, Sr. Forbes, who remained in charge for twenty (20) years.

⁹ Letter from the 1st of March 1852. (in text footnote)