

**Three Hundred Years in Quebec
1639 -1941**

BY

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Human history is all of a piece. Its pattern lies before God, Who sees our past, our present and our future. It is ever our privilege, as students of history, to grapple with the problem of that pattern, to learn to read it, at least in some of its sections, with a feeling for its continuity. In all cases, we must make our chief study from books which give us details of biographical, social and political history. Sometimes we have the joy of illuminating dark spots, exploring dull caverns, verifying happy conclusions, by contacts with museum pieces, old manuscripts, statues, or pictures, by visiting monuments, historic sites and ancient buildings where traces of the interesting past may be found written legibly for sympathetic readers.

Our Canadian history has been graven on the rock at Quebec ever since Champlain raised his rude fort there in 1608. Laval, the magnificent and, austere first bishop, Talon, the mighty colonizer, Frontenac, the fighting governor, each left his own personal stamp on that New France which was the foundation of OUR CANADA: but Mother Mary of the Incarnation, Ursuline of Tours, mother of women missionaries in the church, left a woman's mighty impress on the young colony, an impress of perpetuity which comes to a nation only through the quality of its homes.

As I stood on the rock of Cape Diamond on August 1, 1939, for a dignified and fervent celebration of three Ursuline centuries in Quebec in the one building the first school in North America found for girls by the first cloistered missionary nun sent by the European church to another continent – I understood more about Canada than I have ever been taught from text books. Here, I found, was a woman's will projected across three hundred Canadian years right before my wondering eyes.

Catching that thought, I easily caught a greater. Mother Mary, kissing the earth at Quebec in 1639, brought with her a magnificent tradition, the tradition of Catholic education of youth. I see it in that Quebec monastery – the tradition of ST. ANGELA MERICI, her mother and mine, the saint of women's education, who, in 1535, had launched a crusade for CHRISTIAN HOMES under the banner of a BRITISH PRINCESS, calling her maidens the Company of St. Ursula. With the tradition of St. Angela and St. Ursula, Mother Mary brought the tradition of St. Augustine. (His mitred, gold-leafed statue is opposite that of St. Ursula on the main altar at Quebec.) His rule was given to Ursulines by St. Charles Borromeo who drew the Company of St. Ursula from Brescia into a convent at Milan. That tradition of St. Angela, St. Ursula, St. Charles, St. Augustine, has its excellence here and its guarantee of authenticity in Christ's Own order to apostolic men and

women of every age - "Go and teach all nations." That commission is the explanation, the only adequate explanation, of the wonder of Mother Mary of the Incarnation's work. God Himself sent her to America with that command - "Go and teach."

Going was very difficult. Permission so unusual, strange, courageous preparation, gathering of inspired companions, three painful dangerous months on the Atlantic (five days now by boat in peacetime, a few hours by clipper plane!), bad drinking water, illness, storm, a fleet of icebergs, miraculous escape, but, at last, THERE was Quebec with its waiting children, dirty, pagan, little Indian girls, speaking two or three different tongues. However, Mother Mary, who had been given Latin and knowledge of Holy Scripture by swift infusion in the early days of her religious life, now grappled with Indian dialects and wrote dictionaries and catechisms in Algonquin and Huron, Montagnais and Iroquois, to help later instructors. Father Paul Prudhomme, Jesuit missionary in the north Michigan peninsula today, uses an Indian dictionary (I saw him use it), which owes something, at least, to the toils of a nun at Quebec in the seventeenth century. There, for the first two years, in a shack near the dock which was merrily dubbed the "Louvre," Mother Mary and her three companions - Mother St. Joseph, Charlotte Barre, who later received the habit, Madame de la Peltrie - were happy teaching, clothing the naked, caring for smallpox patients, struggling with many difficulties, recorded and unrecorded. The place of that "Louvre" is now marked by a bronze plate on the side of a wretched looking hotel in the square of Louis Quatorze - "On this site stood in 1639 a house belonging to Noel Juchereau des Chatelets which was the first residence of the Venerable Mother Marie de l'Incarnation and of the Ursuline nuns in Quebec." There was the tradition - St. Angela, St. Charles, the Apostolic commission - at the place of action. Mother Mary, says Dom Albert Jamet, "opened a new epoch in colonial history and also in the history of the church; she began the era of the modern apostolate."

THE MODERN APOSTOLATE. That is my emphasis. My knowledge of this great Ursuline of the seventeenth century rays out to the past as I have briefly sketched it, and to the future, our own present. She is at a point of exquisite importance in church history. She brought the tradition of France, Italy, Judea, to a new continent in a woman's way, for fusion into homes of a new tradition. Here we are, children of that tradition. We are non-European. Our ancestors in Ireland, Scotland, England, France, never knew an Algonquin. That makes a difference. For all their barbarisms, and ignorance, and vices, those redskins who came into the seminary at Quebec or who stood outside the cloister grille had their qualities of courage and perseverance and generosity and racial fixedness which have made contributions to the character of civilization in this new world. Once some Iroquois chiefs, amazed at the skills and graces of the little Indian pupils at the Ursuline school, asked, "How long does it take to make a little French girl out of an Indian?" They were deceived. It was not done. No one knew it better than Mother Mary. One does not, even if one be the best of missionaries, make a French girl out of an Indian. Our Holy Father Pope Pius XII accents a Catholic mission principle which Mother Mary followed, "All that in their usages and customs is not inseparably bound up

with religious errors will always be subject to kind consideration, and where it is found possible will be sponsored and developed." Little Charles and Pigarouich and Agnes and Teresa, Huron or Iroquois, received teaching and grace and habits of domestic neatness in the convent garden; they gave Mother Mary and her Ursulines (as pupils always give to good teachers) ideas and knowledge, which have been stamped on Canadian teaching. No Ursuline in Quebec could teach quite as does an Ursuline in Paris. The Quebec Ursuline cannot but remember Mary of the Incarnation, her mission mother. The Quebec Ursuline is Canadian; and we who are Canadian should appreciate better our amalgamated heritage. We are the children of a transplanting, it is true, but in that transplanting, Europeans have not suffered loss; they have been enriched.

Some of the particular richness of our Canadian inheritance may be traced in the corridors and kitchens and chapels of the Ursuline monastery at Quebec. It was my delight in the form and spirit of the old monastery which I regarded as a NATIONAL TREASURE that encouraged me to accept the honour of a paper for this association. As a Canadian, as an Ursuline, as a Catholic, I wish to share with you my happiness as I attended the celebration in 1939 – THREE HUNDRED YEARS IN ONE HOUSE IN CANADA. I do this the more willingly as I know that my privilege was unique. Because I was an Ursuline, allowed to live within the cloister, I was able to see things which could not be shared by any secular or even religious visitor who might be granted the rare grace of entry beyond that doublelocked front door on some special occasion. It might be remarked here that after 1612 the King of France, because he guaranteed protection for Ursuline cloister, kept for himself the right of entry. After 1763 the privilege in Canada belonged to the King of England. William IV, Edward VII, George V, Edward VIII and Mary the Queen Mother, have exercised it. Last month the Duke of Kent and the Princess Alice granted holiday at the request of a little seven-year old who prettily remembered to answer "Your Royal Highness". No one but the Pope's representative, the Cardinal, or the King's representative, the Governor-general, may grant admission. Even visiting Ursulines must secure specific authorization. I had that authorization. I lived in the monastery for a few days. I tried to keep my Ontario eyes wide open and my twentieth century heart warmly receptive. I bring you the results and a chart of the monastery drawn from memory as I wish to locate roughly points of special inspiration.

Two old large keys unlocked the door by which we entered the cloister. To the left we passed a hall with large French windows opening out on the fifty yard quadrangle with its three fine maples and four elms which seem so strange in such a complete enclosure. At the end of the hall is the precious oratory of the Sacred Heart built on the actual foundation of the chapel of 1641, restored after the fire of 1650, and again after the fire of 1686. What a bad insurance risk was an Ursuline convent in that inflammable century!) I touched the very flagstones worn by Mother Mary's zealous feet. Here she attended masses said by the martyrs Brebeuf and the beloved Jogues; here, no doubt, she sang the promised "Te Deum" when the news of their martyrdom came to her; here Jeanne le Ber (later recluse of Montreal) as a pupil, received holy communion; here Madame d'Youville, foundress of the Grey Nuns, another pupil, got early

impressions of sanctity; here Madame Cadillac, as a child, was guided towards her graciousness as the "Lady of Detroit"; here Bishop Laval celebrated mass daily for two years while he lived in the seminary section waiting a house of his own. What a concentration of history that was – Laval the Bishop, Mother Mary the Missionary – mind sharpening mind for two years, soul lighting soul. History has yet much to do for this Canada of ours. And while it must deal with that great Bishop and that ecstatic mission nun, it must deal also with the colourful, charming, enthusiastic, rich young widow who made possible this monastery on the rock. Madeleine de Chauvigny, Madame de la Peltrie, of Norman Alonçon, gave her vigorous life and her money and her entire devoted service for thirty-two years to this foundation for the souls of savages and little French girls. History must not forget either that dear, witty, cheerful Mother St. Joseph who played the viol. She was buried still young in a garden plot where there is now a wall shrine of St. Joseph. In that little oratory of the Sacred Heart, seventeen by eighteen feet, so small, because, says Mother Mary, "the great cold does not permit to have larger rooms", the bones of the three foundresses are confused and united in one walnut case. This union is embarrassing to the officials of the beatification process, but very fitting in the eyes of historians who find those three together in death who were so magnificently united in life. One woman could not have done it all. These other two are her coadjutors in the rooting of a nation.

But Mother Mary, the organizer, administrator, builder, craftsman, mystic, was best fitted by strange experience to lay roots firm and healthfully. This building along one side of the quadrangle is of her 17th century. After the disaster of 1650, caused by a pan of coals left under a wooden tub of dough on a bitter cold New Year's Eve, Mother Mary himself got out with the workmen and actually cleared debris and did mason work. Years before in the great transport establishment of her brother-in-law Buisson, an artillery officer, who was also commissary for the whole of France, she had had a practical novitiate for such desperate needs in a new land. She was caretaker of fifty horses and carts, overseer of a hundred rough drivers and boatmen on the quay at Tours; she was cook, dishwasher, nurse, admonisher, bookkeeper of huge accounts – and all that for more ten years while she was a young widow who watched the growth of her son to the point where he did not need her mothering. In Canada that hard-earned skill and knowledge were put to the service of a pioneer colony which needed practical encouragement and the spirit of faith. This strong building on which I lay my hand with reverence was hers. Her strong courage built it. Her faith against all severities of fire and cold, of danger and poverty, saved it. She would not return to France. Her confidence in Our Lady drew the Queen of Heaven to her side. "I felt her presence continually," Mother Mary writes, "and, without seeing her, I was conscious that she accompanied me everywhere in the building. From the demolishing of the ruins to the completion of the work I spoke to her as I went to and for.") Mother Mary's burning zeal and some of her ten thousand amazing letters – written mostly at night, for the days were too distracted, and the whole day was only twenty-four hours long! – drew the funds necessary, the entire 24000 livres which seemed so impossible of collection. Her mystic union with the Sacred Heart of Jesus never faltered.

Loaves multiplied in her hands to feed nuns and children and work-men, so mysteriously does God give material attention to the faith of His holy ones.

Mother Mary's mystic journey, her visions of the Precious Blood, her tenderness towards the Passion of Christ, her heroic practices of penance, her raptures before the Sacred Heart which encased her heart, her illuminations on the Mystery of the Incarnation, the Trinity, the Divine attributes, her mystic marriage, and her transforming union with the Word Incarnate, her desires for the spread of the Kingdom of Christ, her ecstatic recognition that God had substituted His Will for hers, her prophetic visions of the apostolic mission to Canada, her companionship with Our Lady, her vow to do always the most perfect thing, all her contemplative gifts, seem like properties of a recluse, not of a pioneer missionary who had to rough it in a wilderness. Once again in the world's history they are proof that great houses are not build with hands but with blows of the spirit. "Unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it." Mother Mary did not labour in vain. She knew, what Our Holy Father knew as he wrote just two years ago, "Forces that are to renew the face of the earth should proceed from within, from the spirit." Mother Mary conserved the spirit during those laborious days when her hands were so busy "with a thousand little cares plucking at her sleeve." She was revealing much when she wrote, "Monsignor of Geneva said that there are birds who take their food as they fly. I am LIKE THAT with regard to the life of the spirit, for in the work to which I must attend I take solid and continual nourishment." Wonderful Mother Mary – holiness on the fly!

Work in Mother Mary's monastery is simplified now. Large kitchens, well equipped with electric and gas ranges and all modern helps enable the staff to serve the noon meal to nearly 600 every day during the school year. A basement kitchen opens out gaily on the garden because of the slope in the foundation. Behind that kitchen, cut right out of the rock, is a windowless room which contains the convent spring – Mother's Mar's own well. In a wall niche there is a double door, less than a yard across and just more than a yard high. I opened and looked in. There was the shaft of a bucket well, I dropped a bit of plaster and found that water was ten or fifteen feet down. The well is not used now; but in the next room there is a hand pump and a few steps away there is a set of shiny modern faucets. That progression – bucket, pump, tap, is typical of the Quebec monastery, typical of Mother Mary, of St. Angela, of the Catholic church. Reverence for the past, hold on tradition, are Catholic traits. They are Ursuline traits. St. Angela was a modern feminist in many ways, a shock to her times by her dynamic fearless Christianity, a social service worker at Brescia who did her work according to careful formulas. The OLD WAY she called it and THE NEW LIFE. The old way of prayer, labour, solid philosophy, which is as old as the heart of man and as new as the latest little girl in our kindergarden. The new life of – first individual perfection and then of religious teaching given to children by uncloistered nuns. That was in 1535. Here in Canada a hundred years later is her spiritual daughter, the first woman missionary in the entire world bringing her teaching project to America WITH THE CLOISTER; but it seems to have only concentrated her work, not to have hampered it. St. Angela would have understood. THE

OLD WAY and THE NEW LIFE. A bucket well, a pump, a spring faucet to serve the newest need.

Near that pump there is a brick bake oven. Its iron door opens into the kitchen. The ten foot oven is filled with wood which is kindled to a roaring fire. When this has burned to ash the coals are raked out by a long handled scraper. The oven is then hot for baking for 24 hours. Pans of buns or cakes are pushed in on a shovel. (Not bread now - because 100 years ago this September - bread from a bakery was introduced into the monastery. Fancy baking for 500 people every day!) From this efficient oven I turned towards the garden door and I found before me a huge electric kitchen-aid with a mixer-pail like a bushel basket. There it is again, that startling juxtaposition of the old and the new - ancient oven and the latest hydro service. In the laundry, well and modernly furnished, I was attracted by a fine and useful iron from the Canadian Laundry Machine company, Toronto, which is a yard and a half long and a half yard wide. It does an Ursuline linen guimpe with one press of the foot treadle. Fascinating utility and speed. Yet, near it is another anachronism - a tenfoot plank worn pulpy with the beating of woollens by a ping-pong-batlike paddle. Old ways sometimes die hard. The nuns' cells in the ancient building have had electricity only since 1936. Their low narrow doors which open by a latch have a shelf over each where the nuns used to put their lanterns with tallow or paraffin candles which shone, into the corridor and into the rooms. Today those lanterns are not needed even in chapel on dark mornings. A small electric bulb surmounts each choir stall for personal use if the central clusters are not enough. Mother Mary, whose eyes were weakened with smoke and candlelight, would approve. She would also approve the great Panet clock which rings the quarters to replace the old sandglasses which are now all in the museum except for the one on the superior's table in the refectory, still used to time the reader at meals. Mother Mary's brown eyes would have twinkled with appreciation for one bit of sweet novelty in Ursuline dinner service presented for the third centenary. After the singing of "Tu Autem" which announced the luxury of conversation, a small table was rolled up the centre of the refectory on which there was a thirty inch model of the good sailing ship "ST. JOSEPH", with Captain Bontemps, Father Vimont, and the nuns, all made in sugar and cake, set on a river of blue with toffee Indians in sweet canoes. It was charming tribute from a skilled confectioner among the Hotel Dieu nuns to their good friends the Ursulines, unique history out of a bake shop.

But history does not have to be imported to this monastery. It is written in every wall. The community room, large, airy, bright with French windows on each side, was used as a military headquarters after 1759. The present plank floor, scrubbed white and rippled by generations of hardy efficient nuns, was laid at the order of General Murray after 1763. A section of the monastery had been carefully marked off so that the cloister was well protected during that difficult time. A guard patrolled the narrow corridor downstairs to see that no annoyance came to the sisters. A green young guardsman, full of curiosity, was so unlucky as to peek through a half open door when he knew a bell would ring. The sister bell-ringer came hurriedly to her charge, saw the big eyes of the soldier, and - of course - screamed. There was commotion on both sides of that heavy door. The

guard was reported to Murray who was furious and ordered a courtmartial. It was going hard for the indiscreet youth when the Mother Superior, true heir to Mother Mary's tact and humility, sent for General Murray and begged pardon for the offender. The gallant general said, "Yes, at your request, I pardon the scamp and break my strict military rule; but now, at my request, you must break your strict Ursuline rule. I learn that your term of office as superior here is nearly up. Get that changed. I want you in charge for another year." Mother Mary of the Nativity served another year. Such little stories of the friendly English acquaintance with Ursulines in those first years of the conquest, when the terms of peace were being arranged and the government of occupation planned, mark an influence which helped Canada under British rule. Long before liberty of religion was enjoyed in England, it was given here. Catholic laws and customs were respected. The "Quebec Act" became a startling reality. General Murray, who liked the French-Canadian Ursulines, was a good counsellor for those who took advice from the man on the spot. I can fancy his Scotch gruffness and his heavy military emphasis and the kindly flash of his wise eyes as he signed his name to important documents and sprinkled sand to blot it. There is the rude round table; there is the sand box! Peace to the memory of a generous British officer at a critical time in Canada's history.

General Murray has some interesting association with the great double chapel of the monastery which is a delight to visitors. The brilliant ornate main altar, the valuable sacristy doors, the reliquaries, many sent by Mother Mary's zealous son, Dom Claude Martin, Benedictine Prior of Marmoutier in Tours, the altar of the Sacred Heart, treasured Canadian souvenir of revelations of mystic love, forty years before those to St. Margaret Mary, the richly carved pulpit with a slender angel trumpeter above, which recalls days of reciprocity after 1759 when it was used by Protestant and Catholic chaplains alike, the marble slabs to honour Montcalm, the large rare pictures which were brought from France after the revolution by a devoted chaplain – all these glorify the outer chapel. The inner has a splendid pipe organ, large galleries, handsome vaulted ceiling with a well of light in its centre, a superb cloister grilled which rises in three arches of delicately wrought iron, an altar of the Child Jesus, the Incarnate Word, between the entry doors, and the famous altar of Our Lady of Great Power. This is famous to us because of the silver lamp of de Repentigny which still hangs before it. That interesting lamp with its trimming of rosary beads of dark mottled blue lapis lazuli was put there by the honoured old family in the 18th century and restored by a descendent in recent years. Madeleine de Repentigny was a real Ursuline, a good nun, Sister Sainte Agathe (not any fictional halfworld, halfcloister, sort of creature), whose very real signature, dated 1719, may still be seen on her act of profession. She suffered an agony of some unnamed kind – in spite of Kirby's wild romantic story – and, kneeling before Our Lady of Great Power, whose gilded sceptre is still outstretched, she begged relief. The relief came. The lamp hangs there in thanksgiving.

Kirby's "Golden Dog" was not so unfortunate in its treatment of a mission house as is Doctor Cronin's recently published "Keys of the Kingdom". At least, we can test Kirby's fiction by appeal to facts. Doctor Cronin seems to evade that test by setting his mission in China. However,

an Ursuline from Swatow, China, was in Quebec for our celebration. Doctor Cronin might have found good modern priests, quite as honest and kind and self-forgetful as his Father Francis, who were in repute with sympathetic bishops, and whose sound expression of orthodox doctrine, did not impair their social compassion or efficient service. He might have used the authentic story of Father Damien among his lepers or of Father Stephen Eckert among his negroes; but, at least, he might have found out something about mission nuns before he dared picture them. A little study of the life of the first woman missionary to America would have enlightened him. "To enter into the spirit of a missionary" says Mother Mary "one must die to all created things." She warned sentimental, wishful thinkers in France to stay at home. A mission nun, family-proud, narrow, intolerant, nationalistic, is impossible in any age. Even the Cronin imprimatur cannot authenticate her. Thus can history rise up against a novelist. Thus may Mother Mary's life be used as touch-stone for missionaries, real and fictional.

We who in 1939 tried to learn more and more about this "Mother of Canada", this "Teresa of Old and New France", as Bossuet called her, enjoyed a pageant on the grounds in which over 200 children took part. There were choruses and folk dances, hearty Canadian habitant songs, historical and symbolic pantomimes, all threaded together by a series of scenes which told the story of Mother Mary. A microphone announced the significance of each picture – little Marie Guyart at seven when Christ asked her, "Will you be Mine?" – her marriage at seventeen to Claude Martin, silk-maker – her widowhood at twenty with an infant of six months – her entry to the monastery at Tours when Claude was twelve – visions of the mission to Canada – the coming of the "St. Joseph" (which must have been the children's delight as it creaked along on wheels!) In the end there were symbols of Three Rivers, Roberval, Gaspé, Stanstead, Waterville, Rimouski, China, Japan. Mother Mary reaches far today. "I do not regard the present but the future," she once wrote, "and I am happy to be employed in the foundation of so great an edifice for the French as well as for the savages, since the souls of both are equally dear to the Son of God." It was a great future she built. And we who look on it, ever so lovingly, cannot gauge all its greatness.

One chapter of the story has never been enough explored and appreciated. That is the chapter of 1660. Adam Daulac and sixteen young heroes – Bibert, Josselin, Boisseau, Martin, Lecombe, Grenet, and the rest – several names on record in Ursuline pupil lists – died at the Long Sault, while Mother Mary, sleepless, untiring, wise, unconquerable, gave bread and cheese and gun-powder to the garrison which the governor had stationed in the Ursuline monastery in Quebec during five weeks. Those seventeen found the colony worth saving by their sacrificial deaths because men could make homes here, because young women were ready to marry them and to bring up good families. Mother Mary had been preparing mothers of homes for 21 years before Daulac and his band received Communion and went out to die. THERE is a key to that heroism of 1660 like the key to Thermopylæ and to the "Jervis Bay". Greeks fought for their homes. Captain Fogarty Fegin fought and died for free Christian homes in a free land, please God. A train of thought may now be clear – secures

homes with good wives – Daulac dead – the colony safe – otherwise – New France abandoned – New England Puritanism and its intolerance swinging to the St. Lawrence – Blue Laws – no “Quebec Act” – no freedom of religion for many a year. We who are so free and happy should consider affectionately our debt to those seventeen heroes of the Long Sault and to the domestic-spiritual inspiration behind their heroism.

Mother Mary's devotion to the Algonquins in her early mission days bears remarkable fruit today. A Christian Algonquin maiden was carried off in a Mohawk raid. A savage chief married her and a girl was born of the union in 1656. Four years after, when smallpox swept the Mohawk villages around the present city of Albany, the mother and the father were buried, the child was left pockpitted and weakeyed for life; but that good Christian mother who had prayed for her child's baptism, had left a mark on the little one which preserved her through twenty dangerous years, pure and lovely-souled among the vileness and demon-infested cabins of an Iroquois village. At twenty Catherine was baptized by a passing Jesuit. Shortly after, to escape the evil pressure of her Iroquois uncle, Catherine was able to reach Cagnawauga, near Ville Marie, where a colony of Christian Indians lived in great fervour. At twenty-four, in 1680, CATHERINE TEKAKWITHA, lily of the Mohawks, was dead, holy in the eyes of French and Indians. Last year the cause of her beatification was presented at Rome.

Mother Mary rejoices in that process, though her own is retarded for some mysterious cause. Her child – for Catherine belongs to her spiritually, as she does to Jogues and Brébeuf and Lalement – her child glorified God. The glory of the child is a glory also to the great woman whose mother arms were outstretched to a whole continent and whose mother heart gave warmth to the homes of early Canada by giving to them good mothers. We of the CANADIAN CATHOLIC HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION may well pray for ourselves when we pray for her who earned the glory in those thirty-three hard years of the Canadian seed-time – O GOD GLORIFY THY SERVANT MOTHER MARY OF THE INCARNATION WE BEG OF THEE THROUGH THE MOST SACRED HEART OF JESUS! Miracles are needed for her canonization. Mother Mary has the power. Faith should not be lacking in us, her beloved Canadian children.

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