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Continuation of the Annals of the Society of the
Holy Child Jesus

in

America

1883-1903

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Chapter I

SHARON, 1883

expansion

"-- in spirit walk with and follow everywhere Christ--"
S.H.C.J. Rule 201

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New Year's Day, 1883, was a memorable day in the history of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus in America.

The Christmas triduum, directed by Father Di Augustini, S.J., was finished. It had been very stimulating, and had been a fine preparation for the *important deliberations* which were pending. *momentous*

Silently the nuns all left the chapel and went to breakfast. Reverend Mother Mary Walburga graciously accompanied the priest as he went to his. She sent word to the *by some* community refectory to have "Deo gratias". A few minutes later she joined her Sisters.

There was a respectful hush as she said her grace and then, before the recreation was resumed, Reverend Mother made a startling announcement. *momentous deliberations had been pending for some time and now*

significant She held a cable in her hand. Obviously, it was from Reverend Mother General (Mother Angelica Croft). Two words were written on the little yellow sheet. Two words freighted with opportunity and challenge.

"Lincoln accepted," Reverend Mother read; and the expansion of the S.H.C.J. in America began.

"Lincoln accepted!"

God's Will accepted.

God's work embraced.

What a change those two little words *was bound to* would make!

How much *How much* *it disturb the* *2*
 Would the tranquility of the last few years be very much disturbed?

The nearness and dearness that ^{brought together} united the three American communities
 had made a strong and beautiful bond. They were completely united in
 a happy spiritual family. *Pg. 6 of M. St. P's notes -*

The nuns in each house were sturdy souls, "endeavouring always to
 advance in the way of the Divine Service." (212) *2-18* They clung lovingly *especially during the
adjoining days also*

Together they had prayed and suffered through the uncertain and agonizing years of indecision which accompanied the unhappy legislation concerning the Rule. Together they had loyally safeguarded the spirit of the Society and had planted its roots firmly and surely in America.

The nuns in each house were sturdy souls, "endeavouring always to advance in the way of the Divine Service." (R.212)²¹⁸ They clung faithfully and devotedly to the strong, sound spirituality which Mother Cornelia Connelly had instilled deeply into their very fiber. Only four years ago God had taken her to Himself but she still seemed very close to them.

Those who lived at the Assumption liked to dwell on the fact that they were within easy reach of the haunts of her earliest years. Only ten old cobblestoned squares away, she had lived, and romped, and grown to girlhood.

Nearer still, in historic Christ Church, she had been married to Pierce Connelly, right under the beautiful stained-glass window which prophetically pictured the sweetness of Bethlehem.

The St. Leonard's community, too, cherished memories of Mother Connelly. The more sentimental liked to think that it was probably her hand, on the once rickety porcelain doorknob, that had first opened "3833" to the S.H.C.J. when she purchased the house. 1867

Sharon, the dearly loved, almost venerated motherhouse of the vicariate completed the trio and cloistered the Sisters during those quiet, happy, formative years of religious life, lived so prayerfully, fervently, unitedly. Was all this peace and serenity now to be disturbed?

Mother Connelly, herself, would have been the first to encourage the disturbance, knowing well that untried tranquility in religious life can easily deteriorate into attachment and sentiment. Therefore, "Lincoln accepted" - "Avoca accepted". Each was a clarion call which summoned to a splendid apostolate and the Sisters of the Holy Child were sincerely ready

"to go wherever the greater service of God and the good of souls may be looked for." (R.199) 205

Actually then, the news was anticipated. For several months, the opening of the houses in the West had been discussed. In August, Dr. Ireland, Bishop of Minnesota, had first asked for Holy Child nuns to do pioneer work in his vast diocese. In September, Reverend Mother General had approved a reconnoitering visit to Avoca, Murray County, in the far southwestern corner of the state. Reverend Mother Walburga with the two superiors from the city houses, had made the trip and had realized the apostolic work that was greatly needed in that area.

Then, in November, the Right Reverend Dr. James O'Connor, Bishop of Omaha, had come a-begging for nuns for his diocese which covered the entire state of Nebraska. He had even decided upon Lincoln as the site of the first mission.

Consequently, Reverend Mother's reading of the cable on that New Year's day, was not wholly unexpected though it was definitely exciting! Who would go where? When would they go? And what rearrangements would be made at Sharon?

2.

For a few months there was no change. Life at Sharon continued happily and smoothly. Mother Mary Aloysia (Hughes), the prefect of the school, was dearly loved by both the staff and the student body. Sister Realino was spoiling the children in their refectory; Sister Agnes was baking all the faster. Sister Hilda was following the spoiling in her tiny dispensary, where she usually greeted her patients with, "Now take every drop. It's too heavy to carry away." or "Dearie me! Shall we call the priest at once?" and the ensuing laugh was always the best part of the cure.

As the news of the proposed expansion spread, gifts began to pour in for the convents in the West. Because Avoca had been approved by the

General Council in early December of 1882, that mission was showered richly at Christmastide.

The children presented a beautiful ciborium to Mother Mary Aloysia for Avoca, little thinking that their beloved prefect might carry it there herself. They also gave a sanctuary bell which, the journal tells us, was "sweet to the ear, not pretty to the eye."

A Mr. Sullivan, Sharon's carpenter, donated a lovely walnut reliquary for Avoca and we wonder if, perhaps, he might have fashioned it himself.

Isabel Shea, an alumna, and the daughter of the eminent historian, Gilmary Shea, also gave a reliquary.

Mrs. Charles Wheaton, mother of the future Mother St. Ignatius, presented a handsome sanctuary lamp to Sharon, and the Sharon lamp was immediately labelled for Avoca.

Meantime, urgent letters were periodically arriving from Bishop Ireland. On January 3, and as soon as possible after the triduum, he sent Reverend ^{m. who had been at the Assumption} W.J. Keul to visit Sharon. This good Father from St. Rose of Lima mission, and later parish, assured Reverend Mother Walburga that fifteen pupils were already waiting for the nuns in Avoca. He added that the Bishop had refused permission to the Sisters of St. Joseph to beg there for their hospital, insisting that they go into northern Minnesota and leave the southern part of the state to the S.H.C.J. *

While Father Keul was kindling the already keen enthusiasm for the interests of the Montana Bishop, distressing news reached Sharon that Pennsylvania's dearly-loved Bishop Wood was dying. The Sisters prayed earnestly and gratefully for their great benefactor, remembering that it was this good bishop who had brought the Society into America, and had been a loyal and generous father and friend.

By the feast of the Epiphany His Grace was slightly better. When

* In St. Martin's biog. of M. Blandina

Sister Marian Stack and Sister Cecily Kelly made their Final Vows that day, they prayed specially for his recovery.

The feast was celebrated as usual and in the evening, Mother Ignatius and the Y.P.'s presented a rollicking program impersonating the future Avoca community en route. Sheets, towels, pillowcases worn surreptitiously under skirts and capes in order to prevent excess baggage, had many ridiculous mishaps which caused much merriment. It was all very simple and childlike; someone said that it was even naive.

Be that as it may. Simplicity and childlikeness were certainly deep and strong in the hearts of the nuns of those early days. At the same time, solid, mature prayerfulness sustained those valiant apostles in the pioneering field to which the Holy Child had called them.

Snow fell during that Epiphany. The stillness that always accompanies a heavy snowfall hovered peacefully over Sharon and ~~the~~ the sleepy neighborhood. The days and nights were cold. The quaint old coal stoves were lighted and they rattled away as the last of the Christmas holidays were spent preparing lessons, enjoying a little more time for prayer, and laughing over a "ten for a seven".

Then classes were resumed. The Sisters who taught at Kellyville went off in a sleigh; the Sisters who taught at home went off to Sister Hilda to offer their assistance, for when the Sharon children returned they promptly developed an epidemic of colds.

By the end of the month, routine was well established. The journalist ^{one} made only ^{one} entry of any note. This recorded the arrival of Mary Harper to "get the hood". This young postulant had overcome many difficulties which almost wrecked her vocation but, eventually, as Mother Mary Gonzaga, she served Our Lord well, even to jubilee years, and often in positions of responsibility both in the East and West.

Shrove Tuesday of 1883 also had its little diversion. Sister Barbara made

"mountains" of pancakes in which she ingeniously concealed the traditional ring, medal, and thimble. Much teasing and homey nonsense resulted in a gay "Deo gratias" at supper, until Reverend Mother told the nuns that the silly little ring reminded her of a letter she had received that very morning. It had come from a stranger who declared himself to be "Spanish, forty years old, a gentleman of fortune and position". He had heard much of the charm and loveliness of the young ladies who had been educated by the esteemed Sisters of the Holy Child. Would the good and respected Mother Superior, out of the abundance of her wisdom and discretion, kindly select for him a suitable wife, "Holy Child educated, personally attractive, and with a reasonable fortune of her own."

The nuns laughed heartily. The journalist stopped abruptly, right there.

However, the hopeful groom was quite correct. There were indeed many outstandingly lovely children in the school that year, and so true and so alive was the spiritual life of Sharon, it is not too surprising to note that from among those registered during the seven short years from 1883 ^{to} and 1890, fifteen entered the Society after the completion of their studies.

Looking over the splendid record we find among those children the future Mother Mary Mildred Grant, Mother Mary Agnese Troy, Mother Mary Emmanuel (Angele) Magee; her sister, Mother Mary [?] Emmanuel (Daisy) Magee, Mother Mary Magdalen Weston, Mother Mary Evangelista Larned, Mother Mary Basil Wheaton, the only one who did not persevere; Mother Mary Dolores Brady, Mother Mary Columba Rowan, Mother Mary Gertrude Parker, Mother St. Jerome Farrelly, Mother Mary Catherine Brady, Mother Mary Paul Sacchi, Mother Marie Aloysia Annette, Mother Mary Josefa Roberts. Only a year or so later, Mother Maria del Carmen Finlay, Mother Mary Theophila Troy, Mother Mary Gabriel Sheehan, Mother St. Thomas Kernan, Mother Christina Murphy, Mother Mary Aquin O'Reilly, Mother Mary St. Luke Lynch, and Mother St. Walburga Burnside.

(duplicates 6)
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Looking over the splendid record, we find that among those children were the future Sister Mary Mildred Grant, Mother Mary Emmanuel (Angele Magee), her sister, Mother Mary Emmanuel (Daisie Magee), Mother Mary Magdalen Weston, Mother Mary Evangelista, M.M. Basil Wheaton, the only one who defected, Mother Mary Dolores Brady, Mother Mary Columba Rowan, M.M. Gertrude Parker, M.St. Jerome Farrelly, M.M. Aloysia Annette, Mother Mary Josepha Roberts, and only a year or so later: M.M. del Carmen, Mother Mary Theophila Troy, M.M. Gabriel Sheehan, Mary Kate Farrelly who went to Carmell, M.St. Thomas Kernan, M. Christina Murphy, Madeleine Jondreau who is a Sister of Mercy, M.M. Aquin O'Reilly, and M.St. Walburga Burnside.

Many, too, from among those same children who were registered between 1883 and the early years of the new century, have been outstanding Catholic women in the world. They have taken sorrow and joy in stride and, in several instances have reached out loyally and generously to a few old schoolmates who could not face life so sturdily.

Their Sharon days had been happy and fruitful. Little they knew of the problems, big and trivial, that the nuns were solving quietly, and with balanced judgment, beyond the cloister curtain.

Little problems there were in abundance but they usually afforded great amusement rather than unwarranted anxiety. For instance, the journal tells us that on Washington's birthday a little calf was born in the old red barn, replaced now by the more elegant St. Philip's maintenance building.

The day was bitterly cold and the poor little thing could not seem to get a grip on life. At a propitious moment, Sister Berchmans Bracken wrapped the calf in a shawl and quietly brought it into the laundry, now St. Joseph's building, where she hopefully administered St. Ignatius water.

In her Irish heart, she bravely made a half promise that if that calf lived, she would go all-American and name it Lady Washington.

Next morning, bright and early, the calf received the title but decided, that night, to shun honors and be itself.

It seems that Sr. Marian Stack, whose love for animals was well-known until she died, years later, at Suffern, ^{sarricaded} fenced the little calf in with chairs to prevent its going too near the stove during the night. We hope that there was also some thought of prevention in favor of any clothes that might still have been in the laundry. Be that as it may, at midnight there was a great commotion in the midst of the improvised fence. Sr. Marian heard in her cell at the top of the convent,-- and feared to the limits of her wildest imagination! She called Maggie, the postulant, and they stole down to the laundry by eerie candlelight.

There they found Lady Washington kicking frantically at one end, while vainly trying to extricate her head at the other where it was wedged between the rungs of one of the chairs. So exhausted was the young captive when released that Sr. Marian decided ^{that} ~~upon some~~ sustenance ^{was needed} to recruit its strength. Accordingly, she and the postulant carried the calf back to the barn in the dead of night - it was nearly one A.M.-- and ^a stealthily placed the pampered creature beside its mother cow.

They waited in awful silence, knowing that the slightest sound would set off a general alarm from cows, chickens, horses, men. Sr. Marian even went so far as to paralyze Maggie with the thought that if the men heard any noise they might think it was burglars and shoot!

They ^{looked} ~~glanced~~ at the calf. To their utter disgust and chagrin, Lady Washington cast one drowsy glance at the homeland and promptly fell fast asleep.

There was, of course, much teasing when the news leaked out. Even ^{that} Father O'Neill who came for confessions, seems to have heard about it.

This good priest from Paschalville was as faithful to his chaplaincy as circumstances would permit. There were many days when he

wildest imagination! She called Maggie, the postulant, and they stole out and down to the laundry by eerie candlelight.

They found Lady Washington kicking frantically while trying in vain to extricate her head from between the rungs of a chair where it had become firmly wedged. So exhausted was the young captive when released that Sister Marian decided some sustenance was needed to recruit its strength. Accordingly, she and the postulant carried the calf back to the barn in the dead of night, - it was nearly one A.M. - and stealthily placed the pampered creature beside its mother-cow.

They waited in awful silence, knowing that the slightest sound would set off a general alarm from cows, chickens, peacock, horses, men. Sister Marian even went so far as to paralyze Maggie with the thought that if the men heard any noise they might think there were burglars and shoot!

They looked at the calf. To their utter disgust and chagrin, Lady Washington cast one drowsy glance over the homeland and promptly fell fast asleep.

3.

There was, of course, much teasing when the news leaked out. Even Father Thomas O'Neil who came for confessions, seems to have heard about it.

This good priest from Paschalville was as faithful to his chaplaincy as circumstances would permit. There were many days when he could not come for the community Mass because of immediate duties at St. Clement's where he was pastor. Although this was a great anxiety to Mother Walburga, she knew that Father O'Neil was doing the best he could and his record is a good one. Horse cars or horse and carriage brought him with fair regularity to Sharon.

During the year, Reverend Mother had several appeals from priests and bishops for nuns, nuns, and more nuns. It was hard to have to refuse a foundation in the neglected El Paso diocese in Texas. Thank God, the Ursulines were able to accept it.

Later, an opening in Canton, Mass., had to be declined even though Reverend Mother liked the possibilities when she visited the proposed site. There simply were not enough Sisters to make the required staff. Lincoln and Avoca were not only straining a point but points even now. A letter from Père Ramot, Superior of the Mission Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, promising prayers for the western missions, was certainly timely and encouraging.

A proposed school in St. Edward's parish, Philadelphia, however, was given more hopeful consideration. It had great promise and the staff could be supplemented by postulants from Sharon.

While all these decisions were pending, came a Father S. Brandi, S.J., professor of metaphysics, for the children's retreat. He it was who first said that the S.H.C.J. had stolen the S.J. Rule. Father Brandi remained for Holy Week and departed after the Easter Mass, March 25, taking with him, to his great delight, a beautiful altar cloth for Woodstock.

Spring brought busy days of packing for the West. Reverend Mother, herself, filled many a box, not only with necessities but also with many extras which her motherly heart had suggested.

She announced that Mother St. Anthony Maloney would be superior at Avoca, and Mother Mary Aloysius Hughes her assistant. Mother Agatha Deacy would be Lincoln's superior, assisted by Mother St. Michael Dunn.

Sister Francis Regis, recently professed at St. Leonard's, Mother St. Augustine, and Sister Hilda would complete the Avoca community for the present.

Mother St. Paul Cantrell, Sister Mary Cecilia Coleman, the distinguished musician, Sister Clare, and later Sister Joseph, were to go to Lincoln. Sister Clare had once made a remark that if she ever left Sharon she would need gloves. She had not had any in seventeen years. One morning, she found a pair neatly placed on her pillow,-- and she knew that they meant "Lincoln accepted" for her.

April 18, found the chapel draped in mourning and a High Requiem

Mass was sung, "because," the journalist lovingly reported, "it was our Mother's anniversary." In return for this devoted remembrance, it was, undoubtedly, Mother Connelly who inspired Bishop Ireland to defray all baggage expenses for the Avoca staff, from Chicago to the end of the journey.

It was quite possibly through her intercession, too, that a Mr. Fitzgerald (about whom we shall hear a great deal later) secured railroad passes for those going to Lincoln; and that a Mother Michael of the Sisters of St. Joseph, had successfully purchased beds and mattresses at a reasonable price in St. Paul. Reverend Mother had asked her to try to secure some for the nuns.

Shortly before the departures, there was to be a Glorification. Mary Harper and Margaret Heary (Maggie of the calf episode) were all ready on May 5, to be received into the novitiate after Mass. The Vicar General, Very Reverend Maurice A. Walsh, was to officiate; other priests were present as guests. Seven, eight, nine o'clock came and went, bringing no celebrant. The brides were very unhappy. This was to be a precious Holy Communion day for them as well as their reception day. The delay was a great cross. They begged to be allowed to continue their fast but when noon arrived they obediently went to dinner.

Father O'Neil graciously offered to investigate and was driven to the city in the convent carriage. He learned that there had been a misunderstanding about dates. However, he returned to Sharon with the Vicar General for a late afternoon ceremony. The postulants became Sister Mary Gonzaga and Sister Monica, N.S.H.C.J.

Their places as postulants were soon filled by Kathleen Rowan, later Mother Mary Bernardine, and Nan White, an "old Assumption child", who took advantage of her dissenting father's absence on May 19, and literally fled to Sharon. As Mother Mary Xavier she served the Holy Child loyally and devotedly for sixty-eight years.

Visitors crowded Sharon during those May days. Farewells were in the air and gifts were in the packing. A complete list of the benefactions would be impossible here but they were many and various. They ranged from beautiful gifts for the chapel and house, through practical presents for kitchen and laundry, to a last amazing contribution from one, Michael Boyle, who had promoted himself from an obscure convent gardener to a prominent Darby saloon keeper!!

Mr. Boyle arrived at the convent one balmy day and ceremoniously bade farewell to the westerners. Fervently he begged God to bless the good Sisters. Then, pulling himself to full height, with pompous dignity he handed to Reverend Mother a quart bottle of the finest brandy. This done, Mr. Boyle solemnly withdrew to attend to the duties of his flourishing business.

Finally the day of departure for Avoca dawned. That twenty-first of May was a clear, lovely day. Better still, it was a day of general Communion, its unique dearness so easy to realize. How spoiled we are in twentieth century days of frequent, even daily receiving of Our Lord!

The nuns all knelt together for the last time at Sharon that morning, and made their sacrifice ardently and unreservedly. They prayed for the safety of the "missioners". They begged Our Lady to help them bring her Son to mountain, and prairie, and valley. Yes, the great moment had come and none were found wanting. Those valiant pioneer Sisters had studied well "not to neglect any part of the perfection which by the help of God we may acquire" (R. 195) ²⁰² and they were ready and eager to fulfill what at that moment the Society especially required of them. So they left Sharon that afternoon with tears in their eyes and smiles on their lips. The wrench cost heartache but love paid the full price.

Though she was very ill at the time, Reverend Mother Walburga ventured out with the little band and remained with them in Avoca, and

and later with the Lincoln community, sharing their trials until September when she returned to Sharon, satisfied that God's work was well begun in the West.

May 30, June 27, and August 29, were the departure dates for the members of the Lincoln band. Not all could leave their school assignments in May.

Before the second set had gone, word was received that Archbishop Wood had been anointed. On June 20 he died very peacefully.

The Sharon chapel was draped in black; the distribution of prizes at Sharon and Kellyville were reduced to private affairs with no concerts. Nuns and children prayed together for the repose of the soul of the good archbishop who had served God so well.

Besides his tireless efforts to help in the establishment of the S.H.C.J. in the United States, Archbishop Wood had accomplished great things for the diocese of Philadelphia. Between 1860 and 1883, His Grace had erected many parishes in order to meet apostolically the increasing Irish immigration. He it was who, in spite of opposition, placed the new seminary of Saint Charles Borromeo in Overbrook, then so far removed from the city that the project was ridiculed as "Wood's Folly". In later years the seminary historian wrote of this brave venture that it was "conceived in Bishop Wood's vision and wisdom to plan beyond the present".

The Sees of Harrisburg and Scranton were created by him and "By a papal brief dated February 12, 1875, Pope Pius IX raised Philadelphia to a Metropolitan See and appointed Bishop Wood the first archbishop".

During his administration the cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul was completed and Philadelphia became the third largest diocese in the United States. Now the archdiocese in general and the S.H.C.J. in particular had lost friend and father.

Four Sisters represented the Society at the funeral and many Masses were offered for the repose of the Society's great benefactor. The few

misunderstandings of earlier years were buried in the past.

5.

Soon the summer schedule was in order, broken by occasional feasts when, we read, meals were enjoyed alfresco under the majestic chestnut tree (there were only fourteen not very old nuns in the community in those days!) and croquet seems to have rivalled bezique as a festive pastime.

In August the renewal of Vows was made after the retreat. It must be remembered that the Constitutions had not yet been approved so that the present Rule 22 was not effective, prescribing that the feast of the Epiphany should be the occasion of the renovation. Nor was Sharon, in 1883, a canonically erected motherhouse, which accounts for the fact that the ceremonies of Clothing and Professions frequently occurred at St. Leonard's.

However, the novices lived at Sharon and received their training there. We find them leaving the leisurely life and Victorian comfort of 19th century homes, or the simpler atmosphere of the farm or honest service, to give themselves to Our Lord. Together at Sharon, they grew in the spirit of the Society, learning the value of prayer and the interior life and how to make them the basis of their spiritual perfection.

With the professed, the novices welcomed Reverend Mother Walburga when she returned from the West. She arrived shortly after the opening of the schools and soon resumed her visits to them when she examined the work done, presided at the formidable oral examinations which were then in vogue, and unconsciously won the hearts of the children everywhere. Even the tiniest tots looked forward to reciting for the dearly loved "Mother Umberga" which was their best rendition of her Saxon name.

School life at Sharon was temporarily disturbed by a little girl, Maddie O'Brien, who took advantage of the morning Mass time to run away. There were no telephones then to help the anxious prefect in her search. She hurried to the station where she learned that the child had already boarded a train. Recourse was had to the fairly new telegraph. A message

was dispatched to her father in Conshocken. It reached him a few minutes before his daughter arrived in a mood of bitter resentment about being sent away from home. Mortified, and determined that their child should obey, Mr. and Mrs. O'Brien returned the little runaway to Sharon the next day, but her continued defiance of school regulations won her battle and soon she had to be withdrawn from the school. With real understanding and consideration, Mother Walburga kept the older, co-operative sister in her class, and never regretted her decision.

If little girls were running away from Sharon, young ladies were hurrying to it. The record tells that, in September, about the time of Maddie O'Brien's escapade, Margaret Milligan, later Mother Mary Perpetua, and Margaret Cahill, the future Sister Imelda, received the hood.

Advent brought the sorrow of one defection in the community, a lay Sister under first vows; and the necessity, for the first time, of placing another at Mount Hope for mental therapy.

Joy returned with Our Lady's beautiful feast in December. It was the occasion of a happy reunion of "old girls", when memories were refreshed and the treasured friendships of Sharon days were renewed or strengthened.

On the 18th, Miss Mingle, an eminent artist and a convert, ^{joined} entered ^{community} the Society. She later became Mother Mary Philip, whose superb work in every line of art and artistry brought distinction to the S.H.C.J. as well as to herself. ^{society}

Then came late December when within the quaint little grey convent all was alive with Christmas. Garlands of holly and laurel were hung everywhere to lend festive atmosphere. Hours of prayerful and eager anticipation were deepened everywhere. The real, the subtle beauty of Old Sharon was reaching out again to find its ultimate meaning in the dear little chapel where Father Francis Siegfried, spiritual director and professor of phil-

-osophy at the seminary, was ready for the midnight Mass. So fervent was the good priest that Christmas Eve, and so pervaded with holiness were the hearts of all at Sharon, that the chronicler felt urged to make a happy and grateful note of it.

Surely the thoughts and prayers of the Holy Child Sisters, east and west, met in the Bethlehem of the Mass that night, and just as surely were they one in the spiritual joy of their complete renunciations which had made memorable that year of 1883.

Chapter II
CHAPTER II

AVOCA
AVOCA

"That we may do all things
"That we may do all things to Thy greater glory,
Holy Child Jesus, grant us Thy grace."

Little Office of the Holy Child.

1.

Reverend Mother Walburga was writing thoughtfully. The little exercise book before her did not seem particularly significant but she was certainly weighing prayerfully every word that she put into it.

"After almost 21 years of residence in the diocese of Philadelphia," she wrote, "the Society is called by God to labour in the Far West. May we bravely and prayerfully work for the greater glory of God in the field of education which the Church has confided to us."

She put down her pen. The Journal of the S.H.C.J. in Avoca, Minnesota, had received its first entry.

2.

The venturesome 1883 train jogged along, puffing vigorously through its clumsy smoke-stack until it reached Chicago on the morning of May 22. Reverend Mother Walburga, Reverend Mother St. Anthony, Mother St. Augustine Nearn, Mother Francis Regis O'Neill, and Sister Hilda Lynch, burdened by many bundles, walked into the bustling station. Mother Mary Aloysia Hughes would follow them later, when the Sharon school could be closed.

A most sedate and genial gentleman approached the little band and introduced himself as Mr. William J. Onahan, an admiring friend of James McMaster of New York (Mother St. John's father) who had asked him to take care of the travelers while they were in Chicago.

Mr. Onahan was a well-known Catholic who spent himself zealously in the interests of the Church. So outstanding was his loyalty that the Holy Father was eventually to confer upon him the honor, very rarely given, of Cameriere Segreto di Spada e Cappa di Sua Santita.

This distinguished gentleman drove the Sisters to the convent of the

Sacred Heart on West Taylor Street, where they were warmly welcomed by Mother Hamilton, the holy religious who had been the close and devoted companion of Mother Philippine Duchesne in missionary days along the Mississippi River. In the evening, Mother Hamilton sat in the tiny convent garden with the Sisters of the Holy Child, generously sharing with them all the experience of her own pioneering. She encouraged them in their brave undertaking but frankly warned them of coming trials which were, in those days, among the problems of the West. With sisterly kindness she gave to each of her guests a precious little relic of Mother Duchesne.

Early next morning the second part of the journey began. By evening, the noisy little train had chugged safely over a perilous trestle bridge which spanned the Mississippi, and had stretched itself full length in Minnesota. For about a quarter of an hour it stopped, as if to catch its breath after such a bold enterprise. The nuns took advantage of the pause and left their stuffy car, glad of a bit of fresh air. As they stood on the shaky platform, Mother Walburga said a fervent Gloria in thanksgiving for their safe arrival in the State to which the Holy Child had called them.

Then on again until 3 A.M., at which unearthly hour all passengers had to alight at Kasota for a change of cars. According to arrangements made by Bishop Ireland, the Sisters went immediately and wearily to a hotel, if such it may be called, and rested until in the late morning they ventured on the last lap of the tedious trip. Finally, at half past five, when thoughts of Adoration at home were uppermost, and hearts were silently reaching out to Our Lord in all His Holy Child tabernacles, Avoca loomed in sight.

Would anybody meet the tired travelers? Would anyone tell them in what direction they should go? Was there to be any little welcome at all to make them feel at home?

These wistful questions were quickly answered when suddenly, with the now familiar sounds of rattling wheels and creaking brakes, could be heard the

sharp crack of a cannon, the ringing of church bells, and the cheers of many people. The Sisters of the Holy Child had arrived in Minnesota, the "land of the sky-blue water."

When this welcome had run the gamut from exhilaration to exhaustion, Father M.J. Keul escorted the nuns to the little church. The welcome there must remain forever the treasured secret of each brave soul, though perhaps even now we can catch the broken echoes of the loving reminders poured into the Heart of the Eternal Spouse.... "moved by the desire of serving Thee".... "confiding in Thy infinite pity and mercy".... "engrave this dear Name in our hearts".... "that we may feed upon Thy sweetness".... "and burn with Thy Love".

Strengthened and encouraged, the nuns followed Father Keul across a railroad track and through a meadow to the old "hotel" which was to be their convent home. A Mrs. O'Leary, whom Dickens never should have missed, was in charge. Although her comfortable days in the "hotel" were at an end, she stifled her reluctance and welcomed the intruders with a good supper, spiced with suggestive instructions and subtle advice.

Litanies followed "out on the piazza facing great stretches of wild, lovely country".

"That Thou wouldst vouchsafe to confirm and preserve
us in Thy service;
That Thou wouldst lift up our minds to heavenly things,
We beseech Thee, hear us, O Lord."

As the quiet, prayerful voices drifted out over Avoca, the evening scent of sweet clover and prairie hay, the sibilant whisper of the trees, the serene loveliness and the intangible spirit of the place suddenly became filled with God. There was a living stillness. God's Presence was everywhere; around, above, within. Come what may, the Sisters of the Holy Child had taken the little prairie hamlet to their hearts.

Next morning, May 25, the Holy Child's Own day, Father Keul blessed the house. As soon as possible, the boxes and cases were unpacked. All the fine

gifts were put in place except Mr. Patrick Farrelly's beautiful Stations and Mr. James Lynch's lovely statues of Our Lady and St. Joseph which would go into the chapel as soon as it was ready.

From the midst of the treasures, Reverend Mother Walburga extracted a crucifix, a picture of the Holy Face, and a large photograph of "our Mother", Cornelia Connelly, which she immediately hung "where we could see them conveniently and pay them our acts of reverence and respect."

Then she took an active, even vigorous share of the heavy and necessary cleaning. Curious and casual visitors were amazed at the amount of work that the nuns accomplished. Besides thoroughly scrubbing every nook and corner, they painted, they wall-papered, they swept, they aired. Above all they hoped that they were setting an example and giving their sometimes approving, sometimes pessimistic callers confidence in their preparations for the school.

Community hours were observed as closely as possible. One very sensible dispensation, however, was granted. Reverend Mother decided upon recreation while working until the labor became less arduous. The Journal constantly refers to "a good laugh at the inconveniences" and "a bright recreation while papering the walls".

In the evenings, the little community strolled to the pretty lake which skirted the convent grounds. The peaceful hush of the prairie twilight was a perfect setting for reading letters from Sharon, discussing the daysnew encounters, singing hymns, and preparing the morrow's meditation. Reverend Mother suggested on that first evening in Avoca that they should all make the same meditation. So, for those who wished to do so, and they all did, she turned to the pages of the well-worn book by Médaille. It was the Friday following the First Sunday after Pentecost and on that occasion Médaille offers thoughts on the Blessed Sacrament.

"Our Blessed Lord, through His adorable Sacrament, becomes the companion of our pilgrimage," Reverend Mother read. "He unites us to Himself and transforms us into Himself"

Next morning, the Sisters prayed that meditation deeply into their souls.

4.

A few weeks later, the Right Reverend Bishop Ireland came south from St. Paul to visit the convent. Not only was His Excellency very heartening, but, to assure the Sisters of his satisfaction, he elected to be the celebrant of the first Mass in the pretty little chapel which was ready on June 20. Father Keul and a Father Jenkins assisted the good bishop as he brought Our Lord to the tiny convent altar, lovingly decorated for Him with wild roses and prairie flowers. It was a happy day, "because," wrote the journalist, "we all went to Holy Communion and thanked Our Lord for His goodness in coming to remain with us again."

With His coming, many benefactions began to pour in. An entry for the day following that first Mass tells of "Special blessings:- an old lady brought the Sisters 5 lbs. of fresh butter, some new milk, and eggs. A man brought a sack of potatoes, some buns, and pork. Mr. McMullen sent a new gong for the door; and the first pupil for music was settled, thank God."

On the 30th, Mother Mary Aloysia and Mother de Borgia arrived with letters, and boxes, and messages from Sharon. With them came also Marie Laine, a Sharon Child of Mary who later became Mrs. Santa Maria. Her mother had arranged with Mother Walburga not to send this dear child home to Cuba during the worst tropical season, but to let her travel for a few weeks. So, west Marie Laine went to Avoca for a brief visit until going to a schoolmate's home in Chicago.

Sixty years later, when recalling this "adventure", Mrs. Santa Maria wrote,

"In the annals of the S.H.C.J., Avoca must go down for all time as a living testimony of the tremendous courage, fortitude, and self-abnegation of the little band who 'carried on' until they could no more."

In July, the bishop returned with the Articles of Corporation to be signed in the presence of Mr. O'Leary, the notary public, and also a Dickensonian.

Towards the end of the month, violent storms gave the Sisters a taste of western hurricane weather. They spent one entire night praying for protection against the elements. When the fury finally abated a few days later, it was time

for Reverend Mother Walburga to leave for Lincoln and then return to Sharon. She arranged a carte blanche day before her departure and the little community treasured every last minute with the dear Mother who had so completely shared their first pioneering trials. With her they fervently recited the Suscipe, and then accompanied her to the tottering, so-called station where a noisy, sputtering little train carried her out of sight.

First Communion classes filled the ensuing August days. They were unique in their motley personnel. The pupils ranged from little children to grown young men and women. Certainly there was much apostolic work to be done in Avoca.

September brought hopeful questioning about the school. The improvised parish classes opened with 21 children but the academy prospects were poor. Alice Killian, the first child registered, was ten years old and a Protestant. Minnie Aldrich, aged seventeen, was also a non-Catholic; and Lucy and Nellie Pope were entered "as a trial". Soon, however, five others arrived, three to board, and some sort of curriculum was adapted to the varying ages and mentalities of the too scant student body.

When classes were in order and the days were running smoothly, a great commotion was made one day by the retired Mrs. O'Leary, who in tones of no uncertainty, demanded the immediate return of her two old rain barrels! Following her departure arrived the bishop to inspect the school, examine the text books, and see the room arrangements. His Excellency found the staff of the young ladies' academy tucked up and grubbing in the potato patch, but he was delighted with everything to such an extent that he paid the insurance, ordered some coal, and installed eight stoves which, though he never knew it, had such poor flues that they choked the house with thick smoke.

By this time, funds were very low. Staunchly, the nuns resolved not to worry or appeal to Mother Walburga, especially as they were anticipating the few tuition payments which were due and which would carry them through a few more weeks. There was no meat in the house and none could be bought. Every cent had

to be used for absolute for absolute necessities and meat was not --- oh, well, there was an abundance of potatoes and plenty of cornbread. "All in excellent health," wrote the high-hearted chronicler.

Then came Mr. Pope with the good news that he intended to satisfy his obligations with regard to the tuition for his two little girls. It included board and lodging. Reverend Mother St. Anthony was immediately interested and hopeful. Mr. Pope invited her into the garden where they could talk. There, to her surprise and dismay, Reverend Mother saw a cow and forty turkeys! Mr. Pope was paying the tuition for Lucy and Nellie in live stock!

Disaster followed. Dogs broke into the yard where they promptly killed three turkeys and injured two others. Severely cold weather arrived, necessitating a shelter for the cow and the remaining turkeys. The first wistful note in the Journal tells us that "we must save our poor turkeys as the supply of meat we obtain from them is all we have to live on. But we are all well and each Sister, together with Reverend Mother, is most edifying in her self-sacrificing spirit, shown on every occasion."

Then bad prairie fires raged through many days and nights, their fury increased by a wild gale tearing across the country, and leaving in its wake such stinging cold that Sister Hilda watched the water freeze on the floor as she scrubbed her little kitchen. Cruets burst open because both water and wine had frozen, and one Sister not named, but probably the chronicler herself, temporarily lost the use of her right hand.

Sister Joseph came from the East, via Lincoln, and began gathering snow for laundry purposes as no water was available anywhere. The temperature dropped to 46° below zero; food jars burst; turkeys and new chickens died; no supply train could come through the deep snow drifts.

What promised to be a dismal Christmas dawned. There was no possibility of a Midnight Mass. The tired, lonely little group forced its way silently through the resisting snowbanks early that morning to the church, and celebrated

Christmas, each in her own heart, alone with Our Lord Himself.

On the Epiphany He blessed their trust and confidence, their loyal and devoted perseverance. Holy Mass was offered in the chapel by the new pastor, Reverend John Conway, who had come to Avoca in desperately poor health. Christmas mail reached the convent shortly after the frugal Epiphany breakfast. Later in the day, a great box arrived from Sharon with warm clothes and some staple foods. Several teen-age girls applied for lessons in music, art, and languages. But the registration in the school continued poor.

With time and an apostolic spirit of the finest caliber, the nuns took turns visiting the sick, the prisoners, the farmers. Everywhere they went they left a rich spiritual newness that endeared them to rich and poor, old and young. Interest in the nuns increased; small gifts of money, food, and live-stock trickled in,- but still the registration in the school seemed doomed.

The bishop called often, examined the few children, and expressed pleased amazement at the progress they had made. But each visit assured His Excellency that something had to be done if only to keep the nuns alive. He understood perfectly the misfortune that had ruined his earnest, eager plans for Avoca. He blamed no one. The migration of 1883-1884 had swung north where the prairies were seas of good grain, where miners found ore in the rich red earth, where trappers sought pelts in the lively woods.

The Holy Child Sisters had come seeking souls, but in a land of few homes and those too far apart.

So, in March, 1884, the anxious bishop made a startling announcement. He had sent an application "to the Indian Bureau for a certain number of Indian girls, wards of the United States government, who would be instructed in the rudiments of English, and taught the ordinary manners and customs of civilized life as well as the truths and practices of the Catholic religion."

The Bureau had now made a contract with the good bishop for the reception and education of fifty girls. All formalities had been fulfilled; papers had

been signed and the Sisters would receive \$85 per Indian, per annum.

On September 4, 1884, an advance group of thirteen Sioux girls arrived at the convent, docile, bewildered, confused.

CHAPTER III

INDIANS

-6-----

"- they will constantly strive to see Jesus in each of the children whom they have to train." Rule 7

Indians of any age are inherently cautious and conservative about "offering the peace pipe" and accepting the white man as a friend.. No one understood this characteristic better than the Right Reverend Martin Marty, O.S.B., who personally conducted his little Sioux charges from the Rosebud Agency in Brule, Dakota, to the Holy Child Academy in Avoca, Minnesota, on the brisk September day in 1884.

This good bishop, Vicar Apostolic of Yankton, Dakota, watched keenly as the Indian girls were welcomed by the Sisters. Beautiful Istasapawin Black Eyes, Ptesanwayankapi Saw-the-White-Buffalo, and Matoyiwin Yellow Bear, with their companions took one long searching look into the eyes of their new superiors, and found there a disarming and appealing motherliness that won them immediately. Bishop Marty was both relieved and delighted.

He told the Sisters that the little red-skins whom he was entrusting to them, had all been baptised but two; that fairly regular instructions had been given to them by Father J.A. Bushman at the Agency, but that only two or three spoke any English.

Added to this handicap, groups of Chippewa and Crow Indian girls ^{arrived} from time to time and from other areas, ~~and~~ considerably complicated matters by furtively vitalizing and continuing an age-long inter-tribal feud.

Rev. Mother St. Anthony and Mother Mary Aloysia soon realized ~~the~~ its insidious underground influence, and with "a gentle and persuasive zeal which draws hearts to God" (108) they gradually led their dear children of the forest into the peace and joy of loving and imitating the virtues of the Holy Child.

In her brilliant life of St. Teresa, Marcelle Auclair reminds us that

"one cannot live with a saint without coming closer to sanctity." The six Holy Child Sisters on the staff in Avoca when the last of the Indian girls arrived, were all religious of true spirituality and heroic self-sacrifice. Their lives, filled with Christ, were bound to radiate a love and sanctity that would solve --- or dissolve --- the bitterest youthful feud.

So, it is not surprising to learn, from journals and letters, that in the course of time, the Holy Child Academy resumed a civilized school life of earnest, happy endeavor. The student body of devoted young Indians soon gloried in all the lovely traditions that Cornelia Connelly had established for her children.

Little Weeping-Weazle belied her name when she and her classmates were received into the sodality of the Holy Innocents. A picnic supper by the lake and the singing of hymns over the water at twilight celebrated the first reception of Children of Mary. In one of her richly rewarding letters, Mother Blandina wrote of the high ideals of this privileged sodality group, and of the tender devotion to Our Lady which burned fervently in the hearts of the Indian girls.

With this good spirit finally and firmly established in the school, the nuns prayerfully prepared and put into action an experimental program of studies, which seemed best adapted to the Indians' particular state of life. It would meet the wants of the age and lead the children to true piety and solid virtue.

This program offered not only the basic instruction in doctrine, reading, writing and so on, but also included practical lessons in Catholic home-making and the application of religious principles.

There is something most appealing in reading that when Archbishop Ireland next visited the school, he was entertained by a demonstration of cooking, sewing, laundering, all made rich and lovely by frequent little acts of the presence of God.

So pleased was His Excellency with the amazing progress of a few months, that he awarded rosaries and medals to the best pie-maker, to the neatest stitcher, and to the ruddy little girl who most perfectly ironed the pastor's alb. Older girls cooked and served dinner for the good archbishop who had so often, as honor guest, experienced the amenities of formal state banquets.

When Rev. Mother Walburga arrived for her vicariate visitation, a similar demonstration was presented. By that time, Mother Blandina had recognized the unusual and distinctive quality of the Indian voice and a delightful concert also gave great pleasure and satisfaction to Reverend Mother during her visit.

We wonder if she smiled when she read the program. It included many lovely songs of hills and dales, skylarks and the chase, all native to the performers. Then, rather unexpectedly, it announced the rendition of "Nellie Gray" and "Erin Is My Home":

An address to "Ina Tanka", the Great Mother, expressed in literal translation of the Sioux language, that "with hearts all happy, we, for your goodness and kindness to us all, you thank."

The convent was decorated in her honor in true American Indian style. The American flag, a squaw's blanket, a pipe of peace and a tomahawk were "all arranged properly in symbolic order". In the evening, the children donned their native costumes and exhausted themselves while entertaining the nuns with their intricate and swiftly-moving tribal dances. As the moon rose in the heavens, giving the signal for the end of play, Sisters and children sang the Salve Regina, and silently went to the chapel to thank God for another happy day.

2.

If ordered freedom is really the proper environment of education, it is no wonder that there was a true and total development of human personality in the Holy Child's Avoca ~~Memorial~~, soon known as St. Xavier's School. Not only were the dear brown girls experiencing an inward change, mentally and culturally, but were also developing a most uncompromising and complete Catholicity which was soon to be tested.

To be copied from
other book!!

qnljng pbbll scrooy qals in vlocw.

To the distress of the nuns, positive symptoms of rapid consumption soon became epidemic in the school. Months of a less roving life close to Nature to the Dakota youth were in abeyance of occasional flights of observation, and began to take toll among the Indians and six deaths are recorded in alarmingly quick succession. The journalist pays most touching and sisterly tribute to

Mother Mary Aloysia, the children's prefect, who personally nursed her charges by night and day, prepared them for death, and had the consolation of seeing them go to Our Lord with "a longing and a love that anyone could envy."

One child developed a repulsive scrofula, but her devoted prefect, helped by Sister Hilda, gently bathed the poor inflamed joints and the scabby body, tirelessly trying to ease the pitiful sufferer as much as possible until her "saintly death".

Those who knew Mother Mary Aloysia in later years noted the patience with which she endured a constantly bandaged sore on her arm, "a relic of the dear Indian days in Avoca".

As months passed, routine was broken by many anxieties but by more joys. The Sioux children, whose mentalities were more alert than those of the Crow and Chippewa tribes, made rapid strides. Some of them acquired responsibility and knowledge to the extent that they were able to help the nuns who taught in

the Sunday schools of Fulda and Currie.

Often the St. Xavier Choir from the Holy Child school sang at Masses and at the various ceremonies in the little churches beyond Avoca. The young members of this choir, now known by their Christian names, were constantly commended for their reverence and for their eagerness to serve the interests of Holy Mother Church wherever and whenever they could.

Eventually, a few of them who had grown in age as well as grace, returned to the Dakota land where, in spite of occasional tribal opposition, they bravely carried on the civilised Catholic life that they had taken so to heart during happy and richly blessed school days in Avoca.

To the distress of the nuns, positive symptoms of rapid consumption soon

Those who remained at the convent became more and more deeply influenced by the nuns whom they had learned to love, gratefully and devotedly.

Occasionally, visitors arrived from the East and were warmly welcomed. Sisters going to, or coming from Lincoln and Cheyenne oftened detoured to Avoca and brought treasured messages from the convents there, or from Sharon, St. Leonard's or the Assumption.

The journal also notes a visit from Isabel Shea, a Sharon alumna and daughter of the prominent historian, John Gilmary Shea.

Mr. and Mrs. James McNamara stopped at the convent while touring the then fascinating but not too tourable West on their wedding trip. In 1954, their daughter, Mother Mary Cornelia, wrote:

"My mother and father often spoke of meeting the nuns (in Avoca) and were in admiration of the work that they were doing among the Indians. They first met 'a lovely rosy-cheeked young nun' -- Mother Mary Aloysia, who often told me, years later, that she knew my father and mother before I did!

When we were children and a bit frisky, my mother would never permit a remark about 'wild Indians'. She said that the Indians she had seen with the nuns were better behaved than we!"

Many priests visited the nuns and frequently were in a position to report the gratifying and encouraging remarks that they had heard in public and private from the lips of His Excellency, Archbishop Ireland, about the work being accomplished in Avoca. This great prelate and statesman was truly a friend and father to the Sisters of the Holy Child during all the years in which they were in his vast archdiocese.

3.

Some of that vastness was covered, in 1888, by Rev. Mother St. Anthony and Mother Blandina when they were obliged to go to the Rosebud Agency with some of the Sioux children whose chieftain fathers wished to see them after four years away from their tribe. In a letter to Reverend Mother Angelica Croft, Superior General at the time, Mother Blandina gives a graphic account of the trip.

She said that the first of August saw the start of "a most hazardous trip." From the end of the railroad line at Valentine, the thirty miles to Rosebud Agency had to be crossed in wagons and acriages drawn by three teams of horses. After bumping over sandy, tufted prairie land, fording streams, climbing hills or going down dales at full gallop most of the time, the vehicles finally reached a great stretch of open terrain -- a sort of no-man's land -- with eighteen miles between it and the Agency.

When the horses had been briefly rested, the trek over this wide and unpopulated area began. The halfway mark was reached when suddenly a most terrifying storm broke over them with thunder, lightning, wind and hail stones so threatening that even the horses became frantic. They plunged and reared until the wagon pole and harness were broken. The drivers leaped from their places into the storm and covered the horses' eyes while holding their heads to give them some sense of security.

Mother Blandina wrote that even the Indians were frightened. Old superstitions about the elements sneaked back into their memories and unnerved a few of them completely. "It was a ghastly trip."

By evening a building was reached. Investigation proved that it was a Jesuit Mission. Rev. Florian Dignan and his eight companions graciously offered to find hospitality for the exhausted travelers. The Franciscan Sisters who had a mission convent within walking distance were "angels of mercy and kindness."

The various accounts of this unscheduled visit include highest praise of the splendid work being done by the Jesuit Fathers and Brothers at this mission. "They are selfless, holy men of God" we read.

Father Dignan preached in Sioux next morning at Mass to a reverent if motley congregation of painted and unpainted Indian men, squaws decorated with strings of shells, ribbons, feathers, rags, anything colorful. An occasional papoose was firmly strapped onto a board and swung on his mother's strong back.

Later that day the Agency was reached. The children met their parents and it was learned that some of the girls at the Holy Child school were daughters of Indian women who had been instructed by Ven. Mother Dushesne at Florissant.

The Agency seemed to be well organized and doing much for the Indian while holding him in resented control. Apparently friendly contacts were made by the nuns with the government officials, who gave the impression of being very much interested in the Avoca school. Several gratifying remarks were made about the irreproachable lives of those Indians who had been taught by the nuns; and it was consolingly obvious that the Holy Child children, wives and mothers now, were not only living a Catholic homelife but were also apostles among their people.

In 1889 Rev. Mother St. Anthony went to England for the General Chapter. When she returned she had decisive news for her community... and for the archbishop.

"During the deliberations of the Chapter of 1889 it was decided that as Avoca, after six years trial, offered no prospect of affording other work to the Society of the Holy Child Jesus than that to be done in the Indian and parochial schools, and that consequently, the community, if it remained must continue its present small number (7) and as the position of the place is isolated to a degree, and the Sisters are needed elsewhere, it would be more for the glory of God to dispose of the property and transfer the work to other hands."

There was also decisive news which the archbishop had to tell Mother St. Anthony. He felt that the deliberations of the Chapter were timely for he planned to close the Indian school as soon as the government contract expired. It would be better for the Holy Child Sisters to be established elsewhere as soon as possible. Two St. Joseph Sisters from St. Paul, where his own sister was superior, would come at once and finish the term.

Although these abrupt decisions seem casually businesslike, there was really an undertone of fatherly protectiveness in the arrangements. Archbishop Ireland was not only a great prelate; he was also a great statesman with his ear well on the political ground. In 1889 and 1890 he was very much on the alert.

There does not seem to have been any awareness among the nuns of what was happening in political America at that time. But Archbishop Ireland knew, as even the casual student of history now knows, that in 1890 Benjamin Harrison made one of the biggest blunders of his career. He let himself be influenced by the fiercely anti-Catholic General Morgan into closing all contracts made with Catholic organizations to which the government had entrusted the education of Indian children. Supported by the strength of his membership in the infamous A.P.A. (American Protective Association) Morgan steered himself and his Baptist bigotry into official authority over Indian affairs.

The bishops, spurred on by Archbishops Ireland and Spaulding protested. The embryo Catholic Press valiantly crusaded for the cause. Benjamin Harrison ignored the representations made so openly and democratically, and continued blithely campaigning for his own re-election to the presidency. He had not reckoned on the strength of the increasing Catholic suffrage in the United States. He lost the election to Grover Cleveland but the insidious work of his unscrupulous henchman went forward in the Indian Bureau.

Did the Holy Child Sisters know who and what General Morgan was when, in February, 1890, he ordered them to send to his office pictures of the school, of the children, and of the "teachers"?

Again, did they realise that they were probably being checked for patriotism when a Washington's Birthday program was demanded? It was sent promptly. Better still, it was illuminated. A fine patriotic concert had been the feature of the day at St. Xavier's, and the girls had made several beautiful programs for the nuns. There were even enough to send to the Catholic Bureau. Yes; the Holy Child Indian school had most certainly celebrated Washington's Birthday.

On August 18, two Sisters of St. Joseph, Sister Clare and Sister Ligouri, arrived from St. Paul.

On the 23rd, the Holy Child Sisters deeded their entire property ⁱⁿ Murray County ~~property~~ to His Excellency, Archbishop John Ireland.

On August 25th, the Holy Child's day, as it had been when they arrived in 1883, the Sisters of the Holy Child were ready to leave Avoca. Some returned to the East, others went to Cheyenne and Lincoln. The great test of their endurance had proved that they were dedicated beyond recall to the work of God in souls.

The journal for that day reads:

"August 25, 1890. A day which will never be forgotten by those concerned.... The grief of the poor Indians when the Sisters of the Holy Child left them cannot be described. It was heartrending goodbye; felt also deeply by those whose lives had been lovingly and cheerfully spent with these precious souls, so dear to Our Lord and so faithful to Him.

On this day the Holy Child school in Avoca was closed."

Chapter IV..

LINCOLN

"That in all our labours we may seek Thee alone,
Sweet Holy Child Jesus, grant us Thy grace."
Little Office of the Holy Child.

There had been sincere general rejoicing on that New Year's Day when the cable from Reverend Mother General reached Sharon with its two heavily burdened words, "Lincoln accepted." That was all it had said; but not even the most zealously mission-minded could have guessed what actually was to be accepted by the valiant religious who would make the Lincoln community from 1883 to 1907.

Bishop James O'Connor, one-time rector of St. Charles Seminary at Overbrook, Pennsylvania, had been insistent when he urged Rev. Mother Walburga to send Holy Child Sisters to teach in his vast Omaha diocese. He had selected Lincoln, in Lancaster County, Nebraska, as the most promising site for two reasons: it had recently been made the capital of the young and sprawling state; and the Honorable Mr. John Fitzgerald had magnanimously offered property in or near Lincoln for a Catholic school for girls.

This distinguished gentleman and his lovely wife were wealthy Irish Catholics, recognized as the most prominent and influential residents of Lincoln. They lived graciously on a beautiful estate known as Mount Emerald. It was there that Mother Agatha Deacy, Mother St. Paul Cantrell, and Sister Clare were guests until a house could be put at their disposal for both convent and school.

Mr. Fitzgerald was quite sure of the house. Some years earlier a large frame building had been erected by an enterprising person to serve as a moderately inexpensive dormitory for students of the recently established Lincoln State University.

There were then no campus accommodations, so that anyone providing residence for the students, or even for the faculty, was fairly sure of financial success. However, financial failure had closed the building instead, and it had stood unoccupied for some time. Mr. Fitzgerald had persuaded the bishop that this house would be excellent for the proposed school, and he had purchased it for that purpose.

When the three pioneer Sisters arrived on June 1, 1883, they were immediately and most kindly received at Mount Emerald. After dinner, they went to Saint Teresa's church to thank God for forty-eight hours of safe travel and "to beg Him to take care of us in this wild part of the country whither obedience has sent us." Then they drove with Mrs. Fitzgerald to the big, rambling, empty house destined to be convent and school. It had been vacated several months earlier by men and boys whose casual housekeeping had left its mark everywhere.

Mother Agataha's account of this visit and of first impressions is eloquently and candidly revealing.

"The building on the outside," she wrote, "looked very well, needing only a little paint to give it an imposing appearance; but the inside was enough to make one's heart faint and sick, it was in such a state of dirt! The rooms were very small, the largest only about 22 x 14 feet. However, there were forty-two of them... and 120 windows (but not a shutter to even one!) The only paint ever bestowed upon the interior, perhaps some three or four years ago, had been white, but was now almost black with dirt, flies, spiders, etc., ETC.! Walls had been papered and multitudes of the etc., etc. thereby imprisoned but by no means destroyed, as we found to our cost when the paper was afterwards removed. We did not know what to say anymore than that it was a good large house, well built and with plenty of room for school purposes, but that it needed many alterations."

This very conservative remark encouraged Mrs. Fitzgerald to summon an architect who indicated the walls that could be safely removed, and the best places for partitions to be erected.

The situation, however, was extremely delicate. The nuns did not know to whom the house belonged and hesitated to make too many suggestions about necessary renovations. Had Mr. Fitzgerald deeded the property to the bishop?

To Father Kennedy, the pastor? Was he holding the title deed himself? Or was it to be transferred to the Society?

To strain matters further, Mrs. Fitzgerald told the nuns that her husband was "a very deliberate man". Then she added that "He likes you or dislikes you at once and never changes his first opinion". Some prayerful diplomacy was quite evidently needed, and God, Himself, supplied an immediate occasion for testing it.

Mr. Fitzgerald was involved in a trying lawsuit in Denver. He told Mother Agatha to remain at Mount Emerald while he was in the Denver Court. She not only thanked him sincerely for his hospitality but assured him that the nuns would pray very earnestly for his case.

Mr. Fitzgerald won the suit with more complete finality than he had dared hope, and was convinced that the good prayers of the Sisters had procured the victory. God had lovingly directed matters at the auspicious moment. The good gentleman liked the nuns at once.

Shortly after this incident, Mother Agatha decided to have a frank talk with Mr. Fitzgerald and so learn exactly what the situation was with regard to the house. She offered a down-payment and promised regular installments in small amounts until the property could belong to the Society.

Mr. Fitzgerald became evasive in a kindly way, saying that he would discuss terms on some future day. Meantime the Sisters should go ahead with plans and prepare the place for school.

The nuns labored to accomplish this, and "labored" is the accurate and appropriate word. Water for scrubbing had to be carried from a pump several yards from the house. Because of the filth of the rooms, many tiring trips up the stairs, past the workmen and over piles of plaster, became weary routine. The three nuns were physically exhausted when the house was finally habitable. "But," wrote a valiant chronicler, "it is now a more respectable Bethlehem for Our Lord."

In her brief memoirs of Lincoln, Mother St. Peter Lansdowne wrote that "the devil seemed to resent the coming of the Holy Child to this new home in the West". Certainly much happened that could have discouraged any but valiant souls. But the Lincoln community kept the inner vision clear and strong. Spurred on by the prospect of bringing Christ to souls and souls to Christ in Lincoln, they met the challenges with a peaceful and serene dignity, - the outpouring of a brave love.

When the altar finally arrived it was too big for the doorways. The canopy had to be cut, which did not improve the artistic harmony of the finished chapel appointments. However, it did assure the erection of an altar which meant everything to the nuns.

Then the date set for the first Mass had to be postponed because there was no altar stone. The young priest who was to have brought it from the bishop in Omaha, forgot it! The altar linens, it was learned, were not rubrically marked with crosses. The devil did indeed seem to be trying to prevent the Holy Child from having His home in Lincoln.

When everything was finally ready, a hail storm broke seventy large panes of glass and - "We were obliged to wait for the homecoming of Our Lord a whole month while the damage was being repaired".

On June 22, Mother St. Michael Dunn and Sister Joseph Thall arrived. They greatly heartened the three lonely but zealously fervent pioneers, whose first weekes at Lincoln had given them ample opportunity to make "continual progress in self-abnegation and mortification in all things." (Rule 216)

At last the first Holy Mass was offered in the chapel on July 24. Mr. and Mrs. Fitzgerald were guests at this Mass which was celebrated by Father Kennedy, the pastor.

Bishop O'Connor called shortly after this treasured event and was most

gracious in his welcome to his diocese. However, he evaded a direct promise about a chaplain for the convent which caused much anxiety.

Mrs. Fitzgerald visited the nuns frequently during those first challenging days. She was a keen observer and soon began to use the wealth at her disposal to provide carpets, furniture, kitchen utensils, many badly needed articles which only a woman's gracious intuition would suggest. Both she and Mr. Fitzgerald became the Society's greatest benefactors in Lincoln.

On one clear, crisp day she arrived at the convent in her carriage to take Rev. Mother Walburga who was visiting, and any of the nuns, for a drive. She wished them "to see the beauty spots in Lincoln and the fine buildings in the city". The community later learned, to their amusement, that the superiors had been driven to the prison and the Lincoln Lunatic Asylum.

In August, Mother St. Rita Hughes, Mother Annunziata Leveque, Sister Mary Cecelia Colman, Sister Agnes McGaedy joined the pioneers and the Lincoln community was complete.

School opened on September 3, with seventy-four children, boys and girls; many too poor to pay; some very rough; others, who, like the Fitzgerald boys, were well trained at home and consequently acted as good leaven.

Discouragingly, the bishop insisted that no boarders be accepted. He had promised the Sacred Heart nuns in Omaha that they should have all until their debt was paid.

However, a number of ladies applied for art lessons, among them Mrs. Fitzgerald herself, who became touchingly devoted to Mother Annunziata who taught the art. In fact, so attached was she that when Mother Annunziata was later sent to Cheyenne, Mrs. Fitzgerald took the change as a personal injury and ceased all benefactions until Mother Annunziata returned a year later.

It was then that Mrs. Fitzgerald found Sister Joseph "ringing" the Angelus by striking a dishpan with a poker. What might almost have been

a tower bell was quickly installed.

As months passed no solution was reached about a chaplain. The bishop continually promised but never seemed able to fulfil his promise. The nuns had to go out in every kind of weather; and, in spite of permission for Benedictions, seldom enjoyed their privilege. But they constantly recommended themselves "to the protection of the Most Holy Mother of God, entreating this Immaculate Virgin to watch over all and each." (Rule 39)

Soon, Father Pantanella, S.J., of Denver, who directed their first retreats, realised their situation and came often to Lincoln, staying at Mount Emerald and offering Mass in the convent. These were glorious occasions. A wistfully brave note in the Journal for Christmas says:

"We had no Mass in the house and had to go to church as the shepherds went to Bethlehem. We came home against a fine northwest gale but our hearts were warm for we had received Our Lord."

Shortly before that difficult Christmas, Mr. Fitzgerald had "made assurance doubly sure" by giving Rev. Mother the deed to the house and the insurance policy. This was a great relief to all and was received with grateful hearts.

The few Christmas gifts bestowed by the Lincoln neighbors were most revealing. Already the people had learned to love the Holy Child Sisters and, lacking wealth, gave bravely of their little all. To one Sister was brought a faded funeral floral cross with a box of letter paper. Maggie, who helped with the cleaning and cooking, sacrificed her pet ducks and a chicken. Farmers sent food from their storage. A turkey found on the porch, was intended for the Sisters at the hospital; but the delivery man said, "Sure, you Sisters are nearer and ye are just as good as they are." (Journal)

The Fitzgeralds fenced in the property as their Christmas gift, and supplied a sumptuous dinner! Mrs. Fitzgerald added woolen wristlets for each Sister.

In 1887 the Diocese of Omaha was divided and Bishop ^N/_B Monacum came to

reside in Lincoln, the seat of the new See. He kindly allowed the nuns to receive boarders in the Holy Child school. At the same time, however, he introduced a community of Sisters of Charity of Our Lady and established them in a house near the cathedral.

Their boarding school in Dubuque, Iowa, had already earned an enviable reputation in the West and they were well known. The bishop now encouraged them to canvass through Lincoln for pupils. During this campaigning period, which dishearteningly reduced the numbers in the Holy Child school, a sudden and serious defection in the community caused great suffering to the nuns.

Rev. Mother Walburga came to Lincoln as soon as possible and remained for some time. Eventually, Mother St. Anthony Maloney was appointed Superior, and everything went on peacefully and prayerfully.

Then came a happy day. Sister M. Winifred Murray made her Final Vows in the little chapel. Shortly after this Profession, on Easter Day, the Journal notes that

"Reverend Mother, three Sisters and four children, went to the penitentiary to prepare for Mass and to help with the singing. Father McShane celebrated the Mass and preached a very good sermon for the convicts."

Catholic Action was really active in the Holy Child's Lincoln home in 1891.

The Journal continues:

"Our Sisters were occasionally called upon to perform these acts of charity. Doing them was always a consolation and were an evident ~~to~~ pleasure to the convicts. Even the roughest men were glad to get a little gift such as a medal or picture, and were grateful for a kind word."

In the spring of 1891 the children presented Fabiola for the bishops, priests and parents. Other guests were charged twenty-five cents and the pitiful sum of forty dollars was realised.

During that summer, Mother St. Anthony became very ill but she bravely continued for a year. Finally, after making every effort to cure her, the doctor insisted that she be relieved of all responsibility. She was moved to Sharon and died a very holy death in 1893.

Mother St. John McMaster succeeded Mother St. Anthony in August and entered into the interests and needs of the Lincoln convent with her characteristic vim and vigor.

Within two weeks she visited the County Superintendent of Schools; established friendly relations with his department, and made application for state recognition of the diploma given by the Holy Child school. She realised that times were hard; that the children paid only a dollar a month tuition, and that money was as scarce as good spirits were abundant; but she was ready to risk expense and to add activities, if the work for the Society could be improved or advanced.

Her application was refused but, undaunted, Mother St. John quietly changed her tactics and applied elsewhere.

Mother Mary Xavier White, who was in the community at the time, wrote:

"In Lincoln we had some very clever high school pupils who hoped to go to college. Mother St. John visited the President of the University and asked for recognition. Next week he sent one of the most brilliant of his professors to the convent ---a historian, I believe; and a real atheist, too, I believe.

He gave a wonderful but very long lecture on history and covered the whole of Europe. On leaving, he asked for two papers to be written on the same subject and to be handed in within a week. Needless to say, he got the papers from both Rev. Mother St. John and her assistant. They were so fine, the faculty decided at once to give the school credits and to honor the school diploma."

One wonders what the Superintendent thought about it all.

Mother St. John could never do things by halves. Hers was the love that spurs the practical, administrative decisions. Soon she put the Sisters to study at the University. Evening classes went into session at the convent and resulted in beautiful art work done by Mother Mary Wenceslaus and Mother St. Lucy. The primary school teachers, too, were helped by a course in kindergarten methods. Music was improved. The Palmer Method of writing was at that time budding. So Mother St. John wrote to Mr. Palmer asking for a teacher. He came, himself.

The "Over, over. Up, down." echoed through the house at every free minute and won many Palmer diplomas.

To return to Mother Mary Xavier's memoirs:

"This was a 'step lively' period. Reverend Mother was very active, though not very well. She taught three hours a day in the school, herself. In time, the reputation of the school soared."

In quick succession, the community enjoyed classes in Latin, French, German, Mathematics, and science which resulted in a new stimulation and energy in the school. The standard reached a high level and the university professors gladly welcomed Holy Child graduates into their college courses. In 1956, Mother Mary Grace McLaughlin, a Lincoln alumna, recalled gratefully that her Holy Child diploma gave her immediate acceptance at both the University of Lincoln and the Lincoln College of Commerce.

With her concern for the curriculum, Mother St. John zealously added an active interest in the Lincoln alumnae. Many of these dear young women were, as she knew, in straightened circumstances financially, and she made supreme efforts to have them placed in remunerative occupations. In one or two instances she even postponed payment or cancelled debts owed to the school. One alumna, who later made several remittances, soon received a receipt in full before the debt was completely paid. These most understanding, Christlike benefactions brought great blessings on the work being done.

One of the happiest was the number of converts among the children and alumnae: Etta Zeh, the future artist; Irene Cullen who later finished her education at Sharon; Ruth Loomis Skeen, who was the twenty-ninth, were among these. In 1941, after a visit to the nuns in Pasadena, Ruth wrote to Mother Mary Mildred Easby-Smith

"It was my good fortune to know best and to be closely associated with Rev. Mother St. John who instructed me for my reception into the Church. --- I recapture the memory of her kind strong face. That memory is still an inspiration to me."

Ruth continues: "When I visited the Pasadena school after forty-five years, and saw once more the dear remembered habit of my very own Sisters, who had done so much for me, I felt it to be a sort of benediction; for I am an old woman now and the ones I loved then are no more with us; - but I saw the same spirit, the same soul that I knew at Lincoln was active here in Pasadena also, for it is deathless and will go on to the end of time, claiming other souls as it had reclaimed mine. So, for the time I was a little child again with my spiritual Mothers." (Hollywood, Nov. 21, 1942)

Again Ruth wrote that "the Lincoln convent was what is known, to use a cliché, ^{regular} as a fire-trap. It must have been a great anxiety to the nuns but we loved it."

The fire-trap was not the only anxiety at that time. There was difficulty in the diocese between the priests and the bishop which, again, often left the convent without Mass or Confessions for many days. Then Mr. Fitzgerald died after a painful illness during which the nuns took turns praying beside their great benefactor, and offering him many little services. His death was a real loss to the Society. Mr. Fitzgerald had always staunchly supported the community in its many anxieties and had made possible many visits of well-known priests by giving them prolonged hospitality at Mount Emerald.

Recently he had helped Mother St. John in a proposed plan to acquire other property and relocate the school but the necessary transactions were not fulfilled. Actually, and in spite of a rumor that the bishop intended to close the Holy Child Academy, the Society itself was seriously considering a farewell to Lincoln. The Journal notes for October 4, 1906:

"Reverend Mother visited the bishop today and spoke of our dissatisfaction at the lack of help from the priests in securing Catholic boarders."

And on October 6: "As the bishop was expected today, Rev. Mother General (visiting the U.S. Houses at that time) and the Mothers talked over Lincoln and decided to let His Lordship know that we mean to give up the Lincoln house. The present building has become too old-fashioned for a first-class boarding school and needs so many repairs (from \$25000 to \$3000), so that something must soon be done."

Five excellent reasons for closing the school are then listed in a fine business-like way.

1. We got no vocations. - Three in 23 years. (Note: Mother St. Agnes McGerr, Mother St. Leo Duffy and Mother Mary Grace McLaughlin.)
2. We do not support ourselves sufficiently.
3. The bishop, priests, and Catholics have never given us enough support to warrant our putting up an expensive building at 27th and A.
4. We are not shirking our duty. In Omaha are the Sacred Heart nuns and Sisters of Mercy; in Council Bluffs, the Sisters of Charity B.V.M.
5. Two-thirds of the boarders are non-Catholics and we have no prospects for Catholics.

Gradually the news of the closing of the school drifted among the people of Lincoln, Nebraska. Reactions were interesting.

Mrs. Fitzgerald, who had been told of the intended departure, was sincerely saddened and distressed.

Bishop Bonacum said he was sorry and "objected mildly".

Mr. Harbison, the indispensable handyman, was so upset that he made immediate arrangements to go to Cheyenne to work for the Holy Child Sisters there. The children and the "old girls" were earnest in their pleas that their "beloved school" should not be closed and that "our dear Holy Child Sisters will stay with us for many years to come."

Then came the last Christmas in Lincoln. The journal tells us that "Mary Duffy (Mother St. Leo), the Reitters and M. Hill sang the Mass very sweetly".

At the June graduation, Lincoln's last, "Maud Brown and Mary McLaughlin (Mother Mary Grace) received their medals of excellence and university diplomas."

In August, there was general distress when Mount Emerald burnt to the ground, leaving the aging Mrs. Fitzgerald homeless. It was impossible under the existing conditions for the nuns to do a great deal for her, but they reached out to her as much as they could, glad to make some return for the extraordinary interest she had taken in them all through the "Lincoln years".

She and Mr. Fitzgerald had practically kept the community alive during very anxious days and must always be remembered as Lincoln's true friends and generous benefactors. Mrs. Fitzgerald lived in considerable seclusion after the death of her husband and the loss of everything she owned and loved. She kept in close touch with the nuns, however, and found great consolation in their gratitude and understanding.

Meantime, they, too, had heavy crosses to accept. The bishop, who had been the first to be told of the decision to leave Lincoln, and who had accepted the announcement understandingly but casually, suddenly declared that he knew nothing about the proposed closing of the school and the pending departure of the nuns. He forbade the plans to go forward and was so insistent that it became necessary to have recourse to Reverend Mother General.

Fortunately, she had at her disposal the correspondence between the bishop and the Society, which assured him that he had known of the decision to withdraw from Lincoln. This reminder produced only the declaration that the bishop did not think that the Sisters really meant what they had said.

The discussion came to an abrupt end, however, and with strained and unhappy relations. Mother St. John did all in her power to relieve the tension but it persisted and the Sisters could only pray and strive more than ever to imitate and sustain the sweetness and unchanging meekness of Our Lord.

Soon ther began the disposal of all the house furnishings. Sister Casimir was elated over her sale of kitchen chairs and tables and a few chickens. Two hens were kept but Sister felt that they were lonely so she cooked them!

Pictures and priedieux went to the orphanage conducted by the Grey Nuns.

Father Dunphy from Sutton came with the trustees of his church to look at the boiler. It seems to have been a rather bulky affair but one trustee with a discerning eye declared that "We are fools if we don't take it". So take it they did at a fair price, and Father Dunphy said he was "delighted

to have the Holy Child's boiler for my church at Sutton".

Later, a cow was sold; the big 900 pound bell, donated in the early days by Bishop O'Connor, was sent to a little church in South Dakota, and gradually the house was stripped bare.

The saddest day was the 27th of September when Our Lord, Himself, left His Holy Child home in Nebraska. His altar went to the Sisters of Mercy on O'Connor along with the Stations, confessional, and Sacred Heart statue, all of which they bought. The statue of the Holy Child of Prague was included as a gift.

Distressed Children of Mary came to the empty house one evening for a last sodality meeting with the nuns they so dearly loved.

Mrs. Duffy sent tasty things during those last days to help the Sisters' larder; Mrs. McLaughlin made generous contributions; Mrs. Sutton provided the last lunch, a real benefaction, on the day of departure, October 9, 1907. At half past one the nuns were ready to leave for their various destinations, east and west. The actual time for the closing of the house had purposely not been made public, but many dear friends were at the station, tearfully prepared to say goodbye. Mother Ignatius, the last chronicler, wrote,

"It was a terrible ordeal. --And just before the train moved, Father O'Brien arrived breathless. He had been sent by the bishop to know if we had given up all the papers and the deed belonging to the convent property."

An undated and untitled newspaper article, attached to the last page of the Lincoln House Journal, gives first a beautiful tribute to the nuns and then answers the bishop's question. It gives evidence that a promise made to Mr. Fitzgerald when he gave the property to the nuns, had been kept. The article concludes:

"Under the terms of John Fitzgerald's original grant to the nuns the ground and building vacated by them now reverts to the Fitzgerald estate. The old building, ugly at all times, looks gloomy and lonesome, and something like a soul has gone out of the north side of Lincoln since the good Sisters have departed. All who knew them loved them, and their absence leaves a void that will not soon be filled."