The Great Canadian
Catholic Hospital History Project

Documenting the legacy and contribution of the
Congregations of Religious Women in Canada,
their mission in health care, and the founding and operation of Catholic hospitals.

Projet de la Grande Histoire
des hôpitaux catholiques au Canada

Retracer l'héritage et la contribution des
congrégations de religieuses au Canada, leur mission en matière
de soins de santéainsi que la fondation et l'exploitation des hôpitaux catholiques.

Mother Gamelin
A Woman of Compassion

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A Woman of Compassion

1984

Translated from the French
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Introduction

Years of research and study have produced volumes of documents on Emilie Tavernier who, in 1823 became Mrs. Jean-Baptiste Gamelin and in 1843, a few years later, came to be known as Mother Gamelin, foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters of Providence. All of this data is now preserved in the files of the Emilie Gamelin Centre in Montreal.

This volume introduces a new study on this woman from "back home," a nineteenth-century Montrealer (1800-1851) who left an imprint on the Church and society of her day by her predilection for the poor and the most needy. She became all things to all people in a spirit of gratuity, sharing, compassion and fidelity, thus revealing the image of God's Providence to the world about her. This woman with a heart attuned, compassionate and true, who lived in a difficult and troubled time has a message loud and clear for our contemporary society and for people in all walks of life.

The first part of the study is concerned with the historical setting wherein Mrs. Gamelin lived, the Montreal environment which must be considered in terms of the Canadian scene as a colony of the British Empire. A second part enlightens our vision of this woman of stature and her work, her personality, her characteristic traits, and her physical and moral sufferings. A third dimension looks at her true portrait, while the fourth offers an opportunity to appreciate the heroic degree to which she practised the virtues which build the strong, and which place her among the servants of God whose Cause of Beatification is currently underway.

Chronology

Birth of Emilie Tavernier	February 19 1800
Baptism	February 20 1800
First Communion	May 10 1810
Confirmation	August 28 1810
Married to Jean-Baptiste Gamelin	June 4 1823
Births and deaths of her three infant children	1824-1828
Death of her spouse	October 1 1827
Beginning of her charitable work	December 1827
Opening of her first shelter	March 4 1830
Serious illness	March 2 1838
Official incorporation of her charitable organization	September 18 1841
Private vow to serve the poor	February 2 1842
Admission of the first novices, in her home	March 25 1843
Mrs. Gamelin receives the Holy Habit	October 8 1843
Religious profession	March 29 1844
Death of Mother Gamelin	September 23 1851

I

Emilie Tavernier-Gamelin's living environment

On a tidal wave of poverty

Emilie Tavernier was born at the turn of the 19th century, a time of industrial revolution and economic free enterprise. Canada, having been conquered by the British, was subject to the designs of the mother country. Its exports included furs, construction lumber, wheat and other products. Great Britain, rapidly becoming an industrial country, would send its manufactured products to the colony. This was its market place, and should not be allowed to compete. Consequently, the industrialization of Montreal was delayed.

Population increase led to a growing poverty. This increase was due to a population overflow from rural areas, which themselves were impoverished, debt-laden, stricken by natural disasters resulting from poor management in the field of transportation and lack of political development. Young people without property nor funds, due to crop failure, women and orphans left penniless, these added to the urban population growth. But there was another cause for this growing poverty. Industrialization of the British Isles, inhuman agricultural policies, successive crop failures, massive unemployment of untrained workers were among the causes of a general state of destitution, particularly in

Scotland and Ireland. The state of famine resulted in an acute problem. The British government responded by sending emigrants to Canada, thus ridding itself of its unwanted dangerous population. A large number came to Montreal. Sailing conditions were abominable. Crowded in the ships, without sufficient supplies to last the trip, with poor hygienic conditions and lack of water fit to drink, suffering from seasickness, these unfortunate people became a source of contamination. The poor quarantine conditions on their arrival made of these unfortunate survivors a source of spreading contagious diseases around them, with the result that epidemics became rampant in Montreal in 1832, 1834, 1847 and 1849. Those who outlived the disease were frequently children, and they added to the number of the poor who survived the plague. The majority of them were Irish Catholics, to whom religious institutions would provide help and compassion. Among them also were a few protestants who later became Catholics, in a spirit of gratitude.

On the other hand, Montreal was still an old-style city, a centre for handicrafts and business for the surrounding countryside. Industry was slow setting in during the years between 1840 and 1860. The city lost its fur trade, which had been its greatest source of prosperity since the French regime. As an internal seaport, the construction of its important port facilities did not begin until 1830. The development of the Lachine Canal as a source of energy and internal transportation was not completed until 1848. At the time to which we are referring it was difficult to find employment in a city whose population had increased six-fold from 1800 to 1852. A seaport during the summer months, it was simply a major agricultural area during the rest of the year. Population influx had caused the historical square to burst at the seams after its fortifications had been torn down. A row of comfortable homes banked Saint Antoine Street, running West. Population increase was

quickly moving East and South, developing into what was known as suburbs: the Quebec suburb along the Saint Lawrence river, the Saint Lawrence suburb on the main North exit. The residents survived on scanty salaries, as employees of craftsmen and tradesmen. Without a garden and a few animals and chickens, it was impossible to ensure sufficient food. The danger of natural calamities was ever-present. There was no protection against winter thaw for the lower city, when the ice break-up caused ground floor floods. Wooden homes were a constant fire hazard. There was little protection against this misfortune prior to 1841. Montreal suffered two of these major conflagrations, in 1850 and 1852. Water reservoirs were insufficient, the only supply being the river.

An over-abundance of manpower during the summer months kept salaries at an all-time low. In winter, unemployment was common, while salaries decreased to half their normal value. The destitute were hard up for shelter. A whole family could live in one or two rooms, with nothing but straw mats for beds. Others lived in unfurnished basements without light, on hard soil. Houses were small, unpainted, uncared for, visibly poor. They were poorly heated, and the unhealthy atmosphere was stifling. A metal stove was a luxury at the time. An open hearth scattered the heat to the outdoors, and kept the smoke indoors. This would serve both for heating and for cooking. Too often, firewood was scarce or unavailable. The poor did not have sufficient funds for its purchase, even when prices were reasonable. They had to buy it when prices were high. During the harsh winters, prices were prohibitive and the stock in woodpiles did not last through the season. People went without light, due to lack of funds. In cases of flood, people moved to upper storeys, or moved in with relatives or friends, obliged to bring with them any useful animal or allow them to perish in their humid, filthy, unhealthy homes; this resulted in a

state of destitution. Fires were numerous and families left out on the pavement. Promiscuity, malnutrition, unhealthy conditions were a breeding ground for illness, evil, despondency. Should the head of the family be an invalid, the distress of the whole family was even more acute. Should he turn to drink to forget his troubles, the result was despair. The average life span was short. Infant mortality was appalling. Medical care was primitive and inefficient. Few children survived childhood diseases, such as smallpox, scarlet fever, measles, croup or diphtheria. But the epidemics of cholera and typhus which had been brought in because of inhuman policies were most at home among the destitute. One can well imagine the human suffering which arose out of a combination of social, physical and moral conditions of degradation in a city unprepared for this eventuality.

One need but mention a few to realize how widespread these misfortunes were: some were unemployed, without any prospect of work; some were disabled, left to their own devices; there were also the insane, the deaf, the blind, those with all kinds of handicaps; widows with small children to look after; orphan boys and girls; young girls with no protection against exploitation; the elderly, the disabled and abandoned, especially elderly women, alone and without resources; the sick were without care; the dying, without help and a general condition prevailed where children were left without any kind of educational facilities.

Dispatchers of charity

And yet, Montreal had a long tradition of charity. We need not go into the details of its history. However, we will take a brief look at the history of persons dedicated to meet the needs brought on by these unfortunate changing conditions in the area. The Servant of God was one of them, and

she worked with them, in whatever way she could, to handle the most pressing needs, as they arose.

The Sulpicians in the forefront

The Sulpicians had lorded over the island of Montreal since 1663 and had been pastors to the people of Ville-Marie since 1657, serving the city parishes. Their spiritual authority had been split somewhat with the Montreal appointment in 1821 of an auxiliary bishop to the bishop of Quebec, and even more so after the establishment of the diocese of Montreal in 1836; however, the traditional orientation of their works of charity had remained unchanged. They generously dedicated part of the income from their land according to the intentions of their founders.

Three particular groups of needy persons were the main recipients of their kindness: the "shameful poor," the acknowledged poor, and the specialized institutions of charity. The "shameful poor" were those families with a fine reputation, which had been left penniless due to unfortunate circumstances and who were too proud to publicly acknowledge their needs. Help had to be provided in a discrete, uncompromising fashion. The acknowledged poor, on the other hand, did not demand these precautions. And the help given to the poor through special care institutions had the advantage of providing an equitable distribution of services through responsible and specialized institutions.

The superior of the Sulpicians had a special budget set aside for the "shameful poor." The financial account books have kept an entry for the individual donations granted to this category of persons. The portion attributed to the acknowledged poor was greatly increased during the 19th century, due to the circumstances. With the Irish immigration, the Sulpicians added a new category to that of the Canadians

– that is, to the French-speaking poor – which they were already helping. We will see later what the Sulpicians were able to do with the help of other organizations.

The Bishop is aware of the current needs

After the Sulpicians, one should take a look at the position of the Bishop of Montreal, since he came after them, and because his position of authority destined him to take over from them. Bishop Jean-Jacques Lartigue was appointed on January 21, 1821. As auxiliary to the bishop of Quebec, he lived in Montreal and carried out his episcopal duties there. He was an outstanding church prelate and had to start afresh in his church. His successor, Bishop Bourget would not have been able to carry on such incredible activity, had his predecessor not established these foundations on sound principles. Bishop Lartigue became bishop of Montreal on May 13, 1836. But he died on April 19, 1840. And so, the first steps having been taken, his former coadjutor, Bishop Bourget began putting together the structure which, for the most part, was made possible with the help of the Servant of God.

Bishop Lartigue, when he was yet a Sulpician, was known for his dedication to the poor of the Montreal suburbs. Even prior to his appointment as bishop, he had thought of establishing an association of Ladies of Charity, but had not been able to do so. The many serious problems which confronted him as a bishop, coupled with his poor state of health prevented him from establishing charitable organizations. But he knew the Servant of God and guided her first steps in the practise of public charity, and this prompted Bishop Bourget to write of him as follows:

> Through his prayers, advice and example, he guided Mother Gamelin at the outset of her work, and gave her the opportunity to progress, with God's help and the watchful guidance of this first Pastor. He was outstanding in his great charity. As there were no Sisters to visit the poor in the area, he did so himself. And we could not help but be touched in seeing him carry a humble bucket of soup to the poor whom he protected: and he would also carry, hidden under his clothing, shoes for the sick whom he had admitted to the hospital. In a word, he would himself beg, in order to bring help to the poor; this was his favorite occupation.

And he did even more, for the April 18, 1843 issue of the *Mélanges religieux* attribute to him the establishment of the Asile of Providence and that of the Association of Ladies of Charity, which both began during his term as bishop. When he died on April 19, 1840 Mrs. Gamelin's work had already been underway for six years.

We need not elaborate any further on the work of Bishop Bourget, although he was one of the most important instigators of organizations of charity. What we are about to see concerning the career of the Servant of God will be sufficient to illustrate his indispensable position and her primary role as an instrument of Charity at the time. However, we would be remiss, were we not to mention his influence on the secular associations of charity. He established two of these during his term as bishop. The last to be recorded was that of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society for men, which began in 1848. The one with the longest history is of particular interest to us, since it was established in 1842, and Mrs. Gamelin was one of its members. This is what the bishop expected of her: to see that the poor did not solicit help in any other area beyond that in which they were known, in order to avoid abuse; and to protect young country girls when they came to the city of Montreal looking for work. A similar type of help was offered to young men from the country who came to Montreal. The Ladies of Charity were requested to give work to the poor, to protect

them from idleness and especially to help them in becoming self-sufficient. This association was of great help to the bishop, since one of its additional duties was to visit the poor, especially the sick and do what would be considered today as a type of social work.

Religious communities already involved

The "Hôpital Général de Montréal" was founded by Jean-François Charron, who had been baptized in Quebec on September 7, 1654. In 1694, he began a community of Brothers for its administration. The hospital lasted until 1745. This is when Marguerite d'Youville (now "Blessed" took it over, with her companions, who were later known as the Grey Nuns. The "Hôpital Général" admitted and took care of all the unfortunate who had been neglected by society. From the outset, the Sulpicians of Montreal had provided most of the services to the poor, with the assistance of the Grey Nuns. Theirs was an established Community with a secular tradition, and they were not insensitive to the setbacks endured by the Montreal society during the 19th century. The Sisters had become accustomed to the direction of the Sulpicians, and they felt somewhat disturbed by the initiatives of the bishops, especially those of Bishop Bourget. They complied nonetheless, in some respects, such as in generously accepting the care of the Irish immigrants stricken by the typhus in 1847. At that time also, they had moved on to Bytown and to the missions of the North-West. However, the recent needs encountered by Bishop Bourget in his diocese were not always in tune with the habits and the spirituality of a Community which had been founded during the 18th century, under a French regime. The Grey Nuns nonetheless were open-minded enough to recognize and to encourage the initiatives begun by the Servant of God under the guidance of the Bishop.

The traditional religious communities were not indifferent to social needs. None of them missed any opportunity to help the poor in particular. The "Hotel Dieu of Montreal," founded for missionary purposes, intended for the care of the sick was, due to circumstances, called upon to serve the Montreal colony. The Hospitalers of Saint Joseph (of the Hôtel Dieu) were cloistered nuns. But this did not prevent them from going out to care for victims of the typhus. It is easy to understand however, that they were intended to provide care in a hospital setting. The situation demanded more of the Servant of God. The Congregation of Notre Dame was intended for the education of children in the parishes. Theirs was more a work of charity than a social service in the 17th century. And so it was also in the 19th century. But it is easy to understand that the demands were beyond the specialized concern of this almost 200-year-old institute. The two Communities, furthermore, were pleased to see the beginning of the works of the Servant of God. The Hospitalers passed on some of their customs to the institute of Mother Gamelin's Daughters. The Congregation of Notre Dame contributed alms to help the Providence Asile.

Lay persons responding to the many needs

We now come back to the topic of the Ladies of Charity mentioned previously as one of the initiatives of Bishop Bourget. The idea originated with Saint Vincent de Paul. Bishop Lartigue, prior to his appointment as bishop had, in 1819 a project which had not been carried out. The poverty encountered during the winter of 1827-28 made it necessary to revive the French model of Ladies of Charity in Montreal. Mrs. Angelique Cotté, a widow, assembled several ladies to inform them of her charitable intentions. Together, they formed an association. Mr. Phelan, a Sulpician, was appointed as their chaplain. The baroness of Longueuil was elected

president on December 18, 1827. Three committees were set up: the executive, to conduct the society; another, to collect alms and to solicit subscriptions; and a third for home visits to the poor. The Servant of God belonged to the latter. This is when she became aware of the predicament of disabled elderly women without resources. Some of these, she took into her home. And the association also took care of some of them. During the 1832 cholera epidemic, the association lost half of their "protégées," and entrusted the remaining four to the Servant of God, that she might care for them, along with those already under her care, since the organization was dedicated to the care of the orphans.

The Servant of God was assisted in her work by an "Anonymous Association" of relatives and friends who worked with her. Twelve persons from this group were later to become members of the Corporation for the elderly and disabled women which was established on September 18, 1842. The Corporation, all members of the laity at the time, supported the work financially. In 1844, when the community was founded, the Sisters were also admitted as members. This Corporation was still active when the Servant of God died, and continued to be so for many years thereafter.

Besides the "Anonymous Association" mentioned previously, Bishop Bourget established a diocesan association of Ladies of Charity whose members were distributed throughout the parishes. From this, several charitable works originated. Mr. Billaudèle, a Sulpician, also established one in 1846, which was primarily associated with the works of the Grey Nuns, but there was not the same kind of intimacy as that which existed between the Servant of God and the Ladies associated with her. Also, as far back as 1828, Bishop Lartigue had begun an Association of Charity for the education of girls attending the Saint James School (école S. Jacques). The Servant of God was interested in this work

and later, on August 28, 1847 the school was entrusted to her Sisters.

In the past, European societies would let the Church take care of the needy, including their education, as works of spiritual mercy. But because Christians have a personal obligation to help their sisters/brothers and because local communities developed into municipalities, they became aware of their responsibility to help their own members in need, when there was no one else to do so. This is the origin of a local government's duty toward the needy. But let it be mentioned that the local governments do not intervene unless there be no one else to do so.

Begging is undoubtedly a phenomenon of all times. Communities of the past attempted many forms of legislation against it. General hospitals were established in France, in an effort to suppress this habit. There is a case on record in Montreal of a permission being granted to Mr. Augustin Allary to beg in the city and suburbs for an eight-day period. On August 31, 1822 a law was passed against begging. In 1824, the law was reiterated and authority given to print special cards issued to the poor who were authorized to do so. It was evidently a measure to prevent persons from other communities besides Montreal from taking advantage of Montrealers.

The intrusion of the foreign poor, especially the Irish, changed the begging practise somewhat. Foreign beggars were much more daring and cunning than the natives. The situation in Montreal seemed to be out of hand in 1835. There seems no evidence of change in this respect.

As mentioned previously, wood was a scarce, costly and precious commodity in winter. During the 1849 economic crisis, plundering of wood became a major problem. The municipality had to appoint watchmen to the lumberyards. A

number of measures were adopted to control the rising cost of lumber for the poor. A recommendation by the City to purchase a stock of lumber at a low price for sale to the poor at cost price was defeated on January 12, 1852. Other recommendations of the same nature followed later.

One of the municipal enterprises was that of granting charitable institutions exemption from taxes. This came from a long-standing concept of the role of organizations which took on, at their own risk or peril, the major part of social responsibility and public order. The Servant of God obtained the necessary exemptions for the Asile. The Grey Nuns also enjoyed the same privileges. But the British attitude progressively became more influencial in the administration, and tax exemption was refused to one of Mr. Berthelet's establishments for the poor, to some of the recently established religious institutions, such as the Maternity Hospital, the Shelter for the "Filles Repenties" and the "Catholic House of Reformation."

The state's priorities directed elsewhere

The British government after the Cromwell revolution could not be expected to be inclined to admit their responsibility for social groups, communities, or individuals. There was but one duty for the state: that of creating conditions conducive to economic success for those who were able to manage on their own, leaving others to fend for themselves, regardless of the outcome. Such a state, run by the well-to-do who do not recognize any kind of social obligation in return for their own well-being, offers no hope to needy individuals or organizations. Its philosophy is clearly outlined in this excerpt from the 45th volume of the October 27, 1835 Legislative Assembly:

> Your Committee, having seriously studied the question, is of the opinion that one should not accept the principle that strictly local institutions, whose objectives are concerned with a particular interest, should be supported by Public Tax Funds deducted from the general population. According to these considerations, your Committee is of the opinion that these various Institutions and Associations to which it is willing to address the praise they deserve, should be informed that they should not depend on Government Grants in the future, but that they should restrict their charity and expenditures to the funds they receive from voluntary contributions and the generosity of individuals.

This declaration however, was not intended as an absolute refusal, but as an excuse for cutting down on the assistance it had agreed to give to British immigrants in 1832 and 1834. This illogical sequence was at least an acknowledgment that bad policy can lead to intolerable human suffering. The principle was to be enforced, and it was used to justify later repeated government refusals for social assistance to private initiatives.

As a conclusion to this section on charitable efforts, one cannot omit mentioning the charitable spirit prevalent among the Montreal population. This was a bottomless reservoir from which Bishop Bourget and Mother Gamelin drew the means to carry on their works. This spirit had already been evident in the generous cooperation of the Ladies in organizing various ways of supporting the specific efforts of Mother Gamelin, the Grey Nuns, or the bishop in the diocese or in the city. It would be impossible to draw a complete list of the benefactors whom the Bishop could solicit with the assurance of being favorably heard. Olivier Berthelet and his sister helped many different enterprises and provided opportunities for others to start off. Mr. Paul Joseph Lacroix was a generous benefactor to the Providence Asile. Several relatives of Mother Gamelin spared nothing, in order to help her. The Montreal well-to-do were always ready to contribute to the works of their Bishop. But this spirit was not only present

among the elite. It was also prevalent in the general population, although it would be difficult to assess its output in terms of goods, services and support to charitable enterprises. A clear, visible demonstration of this general spirit is seen in the astonishing success of the Saint Vincent de Paul Conferences, which were established from 1848 on. For although these organizations were ordinarily conducted by well-known citizens, its members were mainly workers who had scarcely little more than those who received their help. No strata of the Montreal society was a stranger to the charitable atmosphere which the presence of the Bishop had truly revived in the heart of Ville-Marie.

Charitable organizations in a state of transition

From a system of lordship to that of a diocese, from a parish to an episcopal city, this was the transition demanded of the Montreal charitable organizations of the time. The Servant of God was at the centre of this movement; moreover, she was the prime mover in the transition.

As permanent parish priests historically ensured of a considerable stipend the Sulpicians had not been stingy in dedicating all their resources to the advantage of their pastoral duty. Their solicitude for the poor had never waned. They had generously and satisfactorily served the needs. But their main outlet had always been the Grey Nuns' "Hôpital Général" although they did not, for that matter, neglect the care of the sick at the Hotel-Dieu, nor the children attending the schools of the Congregation of Notre-Dame. They had themselves founded and supported the College of Montreal and had not neglected to set up small schools in the parishes they served. During the 19th century, the schools were still a type of charitable organization.

Their organization, which was a model for its day, was to suffer a major stroke when a bishop was appointed to Montreal. The views and perspectives of a bishop are different from those of a parish priest. The adjustment would be difficult. And it would particularly be so for the charitable organizations. The Servant of God began her work with a Ladies' association directed by a Sulpician. In short time, her dedicated charity led her to establish a specific work, that of the Asile for the elderly and disabled women. She was also attentive to the rising needs which were not being met in the traditional framework, that is, the prisoners, home visits to the poor, and home care for the sick. The support of the bishop was indispensable to these works of charity. At first, this came from Bishop Lartigue. Then came Bishop Bourget. He conceived of a broad campaign on behalf of the poor. The Asile for the elderly and disabled women, in his view, was the hub and stepping-stone for this. The Servant of God had become indispensable. The Bishop could foresee his plans in the same perspective that had prompted this many-talented benefactress of the poor. We need not deny the fact that the Sulpicians felt a certain discomfort at the achievements of the Servant of God, who was guided, stimulated and even encouraged by the Bishop. In order to understand this, let us analyze some of the essential components of this new situation.

New needs require new approaches

Without going into the biography of the Servant of God we can say that, on the whole, she was concerned with finding new and original ways of meeting the rising needs of the poor. The traditional parish organization, in its preestablished institutions, was no less sensitive than she to the needs of the time; but, for them it was more difficult to instantly adopt efficient kinds of methods. Moreover, two

competitive systems were in operation: that which was carried out by the Sulpicians, and that which was encouraged by the Bishop. Both were equally inspired by good intentions; but, whereas one was held back because of its connections, the other was free to be creative. Needs which the institutions were unable to meet were growing at an incredible rate.

There were the needs of the poor battling with their daily means of survival. They clamored for help which hitherto had been less demanding. Let us take a closer look at what this meant: there were widows or widowers without resources to look after their children, and families whose sole provider was either disabled or alcoholic. The number of these poor persons, as stated previously, was increasing at a fast rate at the time.

Home visits a priority

One of the first services one might offer was that of a home visit. The Sulpicians had for a long time been making home visits as part of their priestly duty. In 1826 they had instituted a Public Welfare confraternity to help the destitute. In 1841 they opened a more efficiently organized office for the same purpose. The Servant of God had also given this kind of service for several years. This was one of the main reasons for the charitable program she had established with the foundation of her new community in 1844. Bishop Bourget hoped to establish harmony among all services offered in his episcopal city. Finally, in 1846 he was able to obtain agreement with the Sulpicians to divide the city of Montreal into two areas: the east of the city was to be the responsibility of the Sisters of Providence, while the west was that of the Grey Nuns. These two organizations were similar and had some kind of stability, thus ensuring uniformity of operation. An association of Irish women was also established, to serve their compatriots. And in 1848 the Saint

Vincent de Paul conferences also added to the efficiency of this reorganization.

A service station for the poor

The service counter for the poor also evolved in the same way. It was intended to meet the physical needs of the poor who were unable to work, the widows, the elderly, that is to provide for their lodging, board, heating, etc. The Sulpicians provided funds for this. The Public Welfare confraternity conducted this service at first, then it was transferred to the Charity Office in 1841. As early as 1834, the Seminary had entrusted to the Servant of God the distribution of its alms in kind in the Saint Louis square area. The overall responsibility was conducted by a Sulpician. The trust enjoyed by the Servant of God gave her a great deal of autonomy in carrying out this work, to which she added the result of her own collection of alms, under the guidance of Bishop Bourget, who also helped in the distribution. There was a time of crisis in 1843 when the Sulpicians withdrew their contribution to the service counter. The dynamic intervention of the Bishop helped straighten things out. The counter was included in the 1846 reorganization when the administration was handed over to the two communities responsible at the time for visiting the poor, that is, the Grey Nuns and the Sisters of Providence.

The "soup kitchen"

The "soup kitchen" evolved in a similar fashion. This, however, was an initiative with a fairly long history. It consisted in the distribution of nourishing soup to elderly and disabled persons, to the seasonally or occasionally employed, to beggars. We know that the Ladies of Charity, of

whom the Servant of God was a member, had been doing this since 1827. Well-to-do citizens such as Olivier Berthelet, Paul-Joseph Lacroix and the Ladies themselves supported it financially. The practise was suspended in April 1830. But the Servant of God continued the tradition of the Ladies of Charity at the "Yellow House," and later transferred it to the Asile of Providence immediately after its construction. The Grey Nuns offered a similar service at the "Hôpital Général." As soon as the service counter for the poor was established, the soup kitchen seemed to have been attached thereto. The records indicate that one hundred seventeen (117) poor persons were fed in 1843; six hundred (600) in 1851 and fifteen hundred (1 500) in 1852. In 1846, the soup kitchen was involved in the same changes as the preceding services. It was continued and administered by the Sisters of Providence in the eastern part of Montreal, and by the Grey Nuns in the west.

This is how the Servant of God became an indispensable associate to Bishop Bourget in the charitable works of the diocese. Attentive to every need, free, without ties preventing her from reaching out to those needs, she was generous and obedient, taking on any task, opening the way for the bishop to organize services which, in his opinion, he considered necessary, and this, in a contested field. Mother Gamelin's works proved so efficient that they were eventually accepted as a model for the organization of charitable institutions in Montreal.

II

A woman of stature

Family ancestry

The Servant of God, Emilie Tavernier, later commonly known as Mother Emilie Gamelin was a descendant of a French immigrant, Julien Tavernier dit Sanspitié, who was born in the parish of Saint Jacques, in the city of Amiens, Picardy, son of François Tavernier and Marie Marchand. As hinted in his nickname, Julien Tavernier was a soldier in the De La Corne Company and he landed in New France prior to 1749. The same year on May 19, 1749, he married Marie-Anne Girouard in Montreal. One of their three children, Antoine, was Mother Gamelin's father. On her mother's side, Marie-Josephte Maurice, the Servant of God was a descendant of Claude Maurice dit Lafantaisie, a soldier in the De La Grois Company who was from Beteville in the Rouen diocese. Claude Maurice married Madeleine Dumouchel in Montreal on May 18, 1699. The Maurice family lived on through Joseph, who married Angelique Chevalier in Montreal in 1726, and through Jean-François who married Marie-Josephte Corbeil in Montreal in 1754; they were the parents of Marie-Josephte Maurice, Mother Gamelin's mother. She was of the third generation of Taverniers and the fifth of the Maurices.

Antoine Tavernier and Marie-Josephte Maurice were married in Montreal on August 25, 1777. They were members of the French-Canadian well-to-do families of Montreal, whose modest fortune had been patiently earned through hard work. They were related to a number of families well-

known in Montreal during the 19th century. The husband was a relative of the Girouards on his mother's side; his brother-in-law was a Perrault. The Fabres, the Cuvilliers, the Nowlans were relatives of the Perraults, who took in the Servant of God as a child. The Tavernier couple had fifteen children between 1778 and 1800. Nine of these died before reaching adulthood; the survivors were Antoine, Josephte, Joseph, Julien, François and Emilie, the Servant of God. She was the youngest in the family, born on February 19, 1800. The baptismal registry spells her name as given above. As a young girl, however, she signed her name Amélie, later reverting to the original spelling.

Awakening to life, and to compassion

At the time of her birth, Emilie Tavernier's parents farmed a plot of land called Providence, which had been rented from the Hospitalers of Saint Joseph on a thirty-year lease from November 7, 1791. The land, according to current land surveys, covered the area from Sherbrooke to Bernard Streets, between Saint Urbain Street and Park Avenue (avenue du Parc). Later, the Hôtel-Dieu would be built on the same property, on the corner of Mont-Royal and Jeanne-Mance. It was open country at the time. The family lived in a highly Christian atmosphere, as was the case in old pioneer families of Montreal. Emilie's mother introduced her daughter at an early age to acts of compassion toward the poor. We often hear a story of her early childhood disappointment at not being able to fill the immense void in an elderly beggar's pouch with the fruit and delicacies from her own basket. She then recalled that she had a box filled with haws she had picked in the mountain. She led her "protégé" to the box, which she emptied into his bag.

The Servant of God was acquainted with hardship at an early age. She was only four years old when her mother died

Monument to Mother Gamelin
installed on the Mother House grounds
May 10, 1968
5655 de Salaberry Street
Montreal

on February 11, 1804. Her father had to leave his youngest daughter in the care of his sister, Mrs. Joseph Perrault. Emilie would have the advantage of a good education and good example. Mrs. Perrault was a woman of deep faith, and was associated with the works of charity carried out by the ladies of Montreal. Another death, that of Emilie's eldest brother and godfather, Antoine, who was only twenty-eight, came as a blow to the Tavernier family. A second brother Joseph died in 1811, when he was twenty-six. And her father died at sixty, in 1814. Her sister Josephte, thirty-five year old widow of Joseph Guilbeau passed away in 1815. And her cousin, Agathe Perrault, lost her husband, lieutenant Maurice Nowlan at the battle of Sackett's Harbour in 1813. These repeated deaths occurring during Emilie's youth served as a source of strength to her, without causing any bitterness of heart.

Her education was not neglected, although much of it was primarily received from relatives. For, at that time, academic studies for girls concentrated on the preparation for first communion. But we know that Emilie was sent by her aunt to a boarding school conducted by the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame. We are not sure of the exact date, nor length of time she spent there. She received her first communion on May 10, 1810; she was confirmed by Bishop Joseph-Octave Plessis on August 28, the same year. The writings of the Servant of God reveal an average academic training for well-to-do girls of that time. Her excellent up-bringing enhanced any opportunity derived from the academic institutions of the time. This enabled her to occupy a position of respect among young girls in the fine French-Canadian society whose affluence was mediocre, but whose moral standing was excellent.

The financial endowment of the orphan, entrusted to the kindness of her aunt, was far from being outstanding. From

her parents' possessions, there was nothing other than a small sum of approximately sixty-eight dollars left from her mother's dowry. Her brother François was her guardian, and kept this sum until she was of age. Youth however, did not prevent her from sharing the family trials. Her brother François' wife died in 1818. Emilie, then eighteen, went to keep house for him for a period of six months. At this time, she found many occasions to practise her charism of compassion toward the needy. She used her freedom and authority in her temporary charge to visit the sick and bring them provisions and comfort. When she returned to her aunt's home after her brother François had remarried, her desire to help never left her. Among the rare documents available the recorded instances shed light on this young woman when she was about twenty or twenty-one. On two different occasions she spent some time with a second cousin, Julie Perrault, wife of Joseph Leblond, who lived in Quebec city. Thirteen letters written by the Servant of God to her cousin, Mrs. Nowlan who represented her adopted mother, her aunt Perrault who was ill at the time, have been preserved. Five additional letters to the same person are also available.

They are written by a serious, well-balanced, attentive, dedicated, docile, sensitive and open-minded young woman of twenty or twenty-two. She was totally dedicated to the service of her second cousin, a young mother of fragile health; she kept vigil night and day by an infant's crib, surrounding the child with affection, managed the house-keeping and tended her cousin's garden during her absence. Self-forgetful, Emilie Tavernier assumed the cares, worries and concerns of those persons she served benevolently. She listened to and sought advice, suffered the inquisitiveness of over-zealous relatives without hard feelings, in a spirit of self-effacement, fully aware of her circumstances, and not unduly attached to her own judgment. Perfectly normal in

every way, she participated with interest and delight in the social life, without being carried away by passion, maintaining a sound judgment concerning persons and events. She was pious, never neglected her religious duties, sought guidance from wise priests, among them Bishop Jean-Jacques Lartigue at the time of his consecration as bishop. Emilie was still undecided but open-minded regarding her vocation. In her opinion, married life seemed the normal vocation for a young woman, but this caused her neither concern nor anxiety. This period ended in an inspiration to join the Grey Nuns, whom she had known more intimately when one of her friends entered that community. There was nothing out of the ordinary in the well-balanced life of this young Christian woman, who peacefully waited for a clearer call from God.

A short married life

The thought of religious life fleetingly crossed her mind as it so frequently did to young women reared in religious practises. On April 5, 1822, she lost her adopted mother, Mrs. Joseph Perrault, to whom she was indebted for so many examples of charity. The latter's daughter, the widow Nowlan, continued to be her support and model. The twenty-three year old orphan woman, however, attracted the attention of an excellent bachelor twenty-seven years her senior who owned an apple orchard and trade. His name was Jean-Baptiste Gamelin, a landed proprietor and a man who, like her, was inspired with a great love for the poor. The wedding took place on June 4, 1823 in Notre-Dame Church in Montreal. The couple went to live in a house belonging to the husband on Côte St. Antoine, which was the most fashionable area in Montreal at the time. Theirs was a happy and harmonious household. Their first child, Jean-Baptiste Pierre was baptized on May 12, 1824. He died on August 15th. Their second son, Jean-Baptiste Antoine was baptized

on June 3, 1825. He also died the year of his birth, on September 24th. A third baptism, that of Toussaint François Arthur occurred on October 31, 1826. The following spring, Emilie's husband, Mr. Tavernier was struck with a painful illness which took him to the grave within seven months, in spite of the loyal and skillful care given by his wife. He died on October 1, 1827. Not content simply with leaving his wife an example of irreproachable Christian and charitable life, he also bequeathed to her the care of a mentally retarded boy, Dodais, whom he had adopted a few years prior to his death. Mrs. Gamelin cared for the boy and his mother until they died. Widowed, with only one child left, shattered by so many bereavements, Emilie suffered a final loss in the July 28, 1828 death of her only surviving son, now twenty-one months old. At the height of her great suffering, however, she had a revelation, thanks to her director Mr. Bréguier dit Saint-Pierre, who gave her a framed picture of our Mother of Sorrows. This model of suffering and compassion was to be a great help to her throughout her life.

The road seems clearer

She acquired a deeper understanding of the mystery of redeeming death which helped free her to devote her entire life relieving all types of misfortune. She participated in all the pious and charitable parish organizations. And what is more, she increasingly became a source of inspiration and the mainspring of the society of Ladies of Charity. This organization had been established on December 18, 1827. It was prompted by the destitution resulting from lack of food for many poor persons in the Montreal area. This organization had approximately fifty members at the outset, most of whom were recruits from the "Sainte Famille" confraternity. The baroness of Longueuil was its first president, and Mrs. Gamelin one of its members, soon to become its most active

and inspiring associate. She was already very involved when Dodais died. In a moment of clear-mindedness, he was able to thank her for her loving care.

One of the characteristics of the Servant of God was her ability to identity the most pressing needs, and to relieve them without delay. The phenomenon of a restricted family circle, which was more noticeable and more acute with the advent of the capitalist system, especially in cities engrossed in improving business and industry, confined the elderly, lonely women to a state of hopeless neglect. This social phenomenon was not rare in Montreal at the time. Mrs. Gamelin was the first to become aware of the problem.

As early as March 1830, with the approval of her director, Mr. Saint-Pierre, assisted by the women associates, she opened a shelter for elderly and disabled women on the ground floor of a house on Saint Laurent Street which had been made available by the parish priest of Montreal. She took in needy women, visited them, provided spiritual and material help, and drew up a simple program as a "way of life" for them. She moved from her house on Saint Antoine Street to live with her cousin Nowlan, close to the shelter. To support the work, she sold some of her property, she solicited alms and became a servant to her "protégées," heedless of the mockery, opposition and contradictions encountered daily in such type of dedication. About that time, she turned down a marriage proposal which, had she accepted, might have taken her away from the poor. Henceforth, she was to dedicate her whole life to serving them, strengthened by the approval and esteem shown her by the auxiliary bishop of Quebec in Montreal, Bishop Jean-Jacques Lartigue. The house on Saint Laurent Street, having become too crowded, the household was moved in 1831 or 1832 into two houses on Saint Philippe Street, houses rented by Mrs. Gamelin, who moved in with her "protégées."

She shared with them her devotion to our Mother of Sorrows, a devotion that was to be the inspiration of all her works.

Help at an opportune moment

Living with her "protégées," Mrs. Gamelin gradually became more involved in caring for elderly women. When they were still at Saint Laurent Street, she met a widow, Mrs. Ouellet, who agreed to direct and help her "protégées" on a voluntary basis. This lady was replaced in 1832 by an invalid woman still capable of giving care. Mrs. Gamelin's responsibilities and occupations increased. At this time, a number of ladies of charity formed an association to help the shelter. To this group was reserved the care of women in need. In 1832 Mrs. Gamelin accepted four additional women for care.

Other needs were being felt also. That same year, a cholera epidemic spread throughout Montreal. The protector of elderly women joined the forces which had been pulled together to relieve victims of the disease. She took six orphan children into the shelter alfter their stricken families had died. To help meet the growing needs, she organized a production of candles among her elderly women. Her reputation grew, and the Sulpicians entrusted her with the distribution of their annual alms. In 1835, with her associates, the Ladies of the "Asile," Mrs. Gamelin organized a series of bazaars which proved very helpful. At that time, there were twenty women residing at the shelter. The house was visited regularly by a Sulpician. In August 1835, Madeleine Durand, the future Sister Vincent, came to work at the shelter, accepting the most humble and most varied tasks. The institution was known and appreciated. Noted well-to-do men of Montreal became interested. But the alms were not sufficient to meet the needs, and the foundress had to draw on her deep trust in Providence, not without result.

In March 1836, Olivier Berthelet donated to Mr. St-Pierre a house he owned in the eastern area of the city. Mrs. Gamelin had furnishings moved in on May 3rd, and transferred Madeleine Durand and the elderly women to Saint Philippe Street. This was known as the "yellow house." In her foresight, knowing this would not be sufficient, she purchased the adjacent lot from Mr. Paul Joseph Lacroix. She then lived in the Saint Louis suburb. The acquisition of these properties had been made possible, not from the funds of the Servant of God, but thanks to the generosity and admiration of her benefactors. The work at the "yellow house" continued to be supported not only by collections, but also by the organized efforts of her twenty-four elderly women. From all over the city came a shower of praise, sympathy, and visits. But the costs were high. Mrs. Gamelin sold one of her properties.

In the interval, the 1837-38 rebellion broke out. Prisons overflowed with suspects, frequently well-known men, who were confined to the jail conditions of the time. Mrs. Gamelin's charity could not be restrained. She was foremost among the few ladies who were allowed to visit the prisoners and help them, for the jail-keepers were very severe. These prisoners and their families had been humiliated, and during the painful weeks they spent there, this was their only ray of kindness. For many years later, they would fondly reiterate their gratitude to their outstanding benefactress.

In the midst of her occupations, Mrs. Gamelin was struck with typhoid fever, and was at death's door. It was then, on March 21, 1838, that she wrote her will. Her primary concern was for the elderly women, and she ensured that the shelter be handed over to Mr. St. Pierre, her director, so that the work might carry on. From her husband's inheritance, distributed to her nearest relatives, brothers and nephews, she set aside an additional hundred pounds (400 dollars) for

the above-mentioned director, to be used in favor of her "protégées." She provided also for the welfare of Madeleine Durand, and left her books and most of her clothing to the shelter. But her health improved, a grace she attributed to the intercession of the Mother of Sorrows.

An increasing number of "protégées"

Mrs. Gamelin's shelter, which was still a private work of charity, grew to a point where the total number of boarders rose to thirty prior to 1839. That year, or perhaps in the early part of the following year, Bishop Lartigue granted her permission to have Mass in the small oratory of the "yellow house." This house was appropriately called "Providence House." This was its popular name, a name most admirably suited to the spirit of its foundress and to the economic system which ruled there. Besides this, it was, to Emilie Tavernier, an opportune reminder of the name given to the land and home where she was born. As her health improved, the widow whose name was so frequently quoted in the newspapers did not restrict her activities to caring for her elderly women. She continued to visit prisoners pining away in the Montreal jails. She participated in the charitable efforts of pious confraternities. That of "Sainte Famille" had given her the charge of visiting the poor in the Saint Louis suburb. She had been associated with other women of the Saint James Cathedral parish in opening a sewing school for the benefit of young poor girls. Mrs. Gamelin's name was on everyone's lips.

When Bishop Lartigue died on April 19, 1840, she lost a patron and adviser. But she immediately acquired in the new bishop, Bishop Ignace Bourget, a leader and unrivaled father who was to consider her as his instrument of preference – this is no exaggeration – for the social works during his lengthy term as bishop. And he would himself spend his

failing years in the care of the daughters of Mrs. Gamelin, as one of the most humble "protégées" of the Servant of God.

In 1840 the "yellow house" lodged thirty-two elderly ladies. It was supported by the unfailing efforts of its foundress who day by day invented new ways of feeding her household, without interrupting the help she gave to prisoners. She herself would beg from house to house, in order to feed and clothe her "protégées." She played a very active role in the Saint James ladies' association and in the Holy Family confraternity, which re-elected her as visitor in the Saint Louis suburb. Newspapers praised her charity. Benevolent souls were interested in her works, and favored her with bequests. The new bishop was not among the least to appreciate the charitable endeavors of the widow. Foreseeing a trip to Europe, he planned to bring her a painting of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, her counterpart. He was thinking of establishing a lasting institution, to ensure the continuity of Mrs. Gamelin's work. She simply acquiesced, without reticence, to the plans of the bishop. Her concern was to establish the shelter on a firm legal footing. She was associated by contract with the ladies who had supported her thus far in establishing a civil corporation. She requested formal recognition from the Canadian government, and this was granted to her on September 18, 1841, with the legal incorporation of the Asile for elderly and disabled women. The bishop was not to be outdone, for he published a pastoral decree on November 6, 1841, establishing the association of Ladies of Charity as a diocesan institution.

The work progresses

Official recognition granting separate status and autonomy to Mrs. Gamelin's work did not reduce her devotedness in any way but added a new thrust to her charitable efforts.

On November 6, 1841, on behalf of the corporation, she purchased a 150-foot lot on Saint Catherine Street adjacent to the bishopric. This was the future site for the Asile. On February 16, 1842, she transferred to the corporation the land she had purchased from Mr. Lacroix, for the use of the shelter. Her example was an encouragement to private donations. The plans of the new corporation expanded with the growing needs. The old "yellow house" was now overcrowded. It became necessary to build on the new property. Mrs. Gamelin "buckled down" to the task. The ladies divided themselves in groups to handle different areas of the city, leaving to the director the hillside areas surrounding "Côte Saint-Luc" and "Saint-Antoine;" they would collect in all areas themselves. Assisted by these ladies, Mrs. Gamelin organized bazaars. The newspapers of the time were filled with enthusiastic accounts and admiration for the accomplishments of this woman. The bishop encouraged this by granting permission to have daily Mass at the shelter, and soon thereafter, to have the Eucharistic presence on a full-time basis. He begged himself from his flock on behalf of the Asile.

The construction was soon ready to begin. The first stone was laid on May 10, 1842 by Bishop Michael Power, recently consecrated bishop of Toronto. Mrs. Gamelin made a personal contribution. On May 18, 1843 the staff was transferred to the new building. Only the central part of the building, 96 feet by 60 feet, rose to a three-storey height. It contained a chapel where the May devotions to Mary were held in 1843, and later blessed on August 21, the same year, by another newly-consecrated bishop, Bishop Patrick Phelan, coadjutor of Kingston.

A French community enters the scene

The physical construction was not the only thing to progress. The work of the past had not been forgotten.

Montreal was taken up with affection for the Providence institution, where the noblest of all christian virtues was practised. Bishop Bourget had in no way concealed his intention of calling upon the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul to conduct it. In all humility, fully aware of this fact, Mrs. Gamelin and her associates dedicated themselves to the realization of the bishop's plans. Father P. Timon, superior of the community of Saint Lazare in France came to visit the Asile and soon noticed a second Mademoiselle Legras in the person of the excellent widow, who was spreading in Canada the true spirit of humility and charity of St. Vincent.

Nonetheless, while a house was being built for them, to which they had seemingly agreed to come and live, the Daughters of Charity were confronted with another opportunity of practising their mission. They had someone inform the Bishop that they would not be available for Montreal.

Bishop Bourget took some time in being convinced that he had solicited uselessly. It was the spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul that he wanted to impress on the outstanding institution delivered unto him by a widow without a trace of conceit or self-interest. And so came the idea of establishing his own Daughters of Charity in the diocese, to be affiliated, if possible, with those of Saint Vincent de Paul, and in any case, fully imbued with his spirit.

Mrs. Gamelin, on the other hand, had shown no inclination toward religious life. This, I think, was a critical turning point in her career. Did not this woman, whom one can easily say had given all her life to relieving the misfortunes of the needy, who had so generously volunteered all her time over a span of fifteen years to set up an organization which had won her the applause and admiration of an entire city, fear, lest all her privations, hard work and toil slip away from

her? Indeed, persons, even those who are steeped in selflessness, feel naturally some attachment to their good works. Her spirit of independence, her maturity as a woman of action, her education, her preferences and her habits seemed to preclude against her being integrated into the community which was to replace her, nor could she expect to be given credit for her role in this charitable establishment. What woman would not be concerned, would not have wondered what was to become of her while she was still in her prime of life, and furthermore, what would happen to her work, when taken over by strangers?

Although fully aware of the bishop's intentions, she showed no signs of concern for herself, nor any self-interested doubts over the future of her organization. Quite simply, - innocently one might say, had she not been known to be intelligent, well-informed and wise - she allowed herself to be blindly taken in, without questioning, by the enthusiasm of the bishop. She was satisfied with the understanding that this step would be advantageous to the poor, and would reach a greater number of needy persons, whom she had yet been unable to help. Would there be any good resulting from self-concern? She had already fallen in line with the bishop's plans by obtaining legal incorporation, and by simply and wholeheartedly donating all that she possessed on behalf of the Asile. She personally begged for funds to build a house which was intended for an unknown, foreign community. She humbly solicited public subsidies without success, donated $200 from her personal funds, worked untiringly, organized and gave rules to her elderly ladies for their domestic affairs as well as religious discipline. Could she be accused of being uninterested? In her own uncertainty she made a private vow on February 2, 1842 to serve the poor for the rest of her life. It would be interesting to reproduce this document here. However, due to lack of space, we will simply indicate its basic components.

The Servant of God commits herself to the following promises: 1° to practise perfect chastity for the rest of her life; 2° to serve the poor, inasmuch as her strength would allow: 3° to be watchful over her conversations; and 4° to refrain from any luxury in her clothing and personal appearance. "I wish to dedicate myself to God; that He may do with me as he wills. I accept His will with resignation." This reveals the inner strength of Mrs. Gamelin at a critical moment in her life.

The Lord's plans differ

And she allowed herself to be tossed about by any wind of inspiration still stirring in the bishop's plans. The latter is advised that the Daughters of Charity would not be coming from France. Determined, he went on with his project. On March 25, 1843, he called seven young women together to set up a novitiate in Mrs. Gamelin's home. He appointed Mr. Jean-Charles Prince, his vicar general, as director and novice master to handle all their business, even that of appointing them to various household duties. Mrs. Gamelin's only duty would be to guide them in their work. She lived in separate quarters, was called "Mrs." or privately referred to as "the Secular woman," almost as a stranger. However, she participated in their prayers, in their exercises, even in their open admission of personal shortcomings, to the great dismay of the intimidated novices. Had this great lady pondered over the fact that these young women would soon take over the responsibility which hitherto had been hers, and that she, the foundress, would be an encumbrance in her own home and a fifth wheel in the charitable organization she had begun?

There is much hustle and bustle nowadays over the "entrepreneurs" who inconsiderately bulldoze their way through any obstruction to their preconceived plans. But

Mrs. Gamelin's noble soul was of a different order. Her work had been founded on faith. And God would clear the way. Neither the fidelity of the foundress nor the expectations of Bishop Bourget, who saw in her the cornerstone of the Asile, was frustrated. A God who is faithful responds in kind to the faithfulness of his people. In the opinion of Mr. Prince, one of the novices, Miss Paiement did not seem to have the required dispositions. She left the premises on July 8, 1843. Mrs. Gamelin offered to replace her. The decision was made, after prayer and reflexion. But before making the decision known publicly, Bishop Bourget requested that the Servant of God make a trip to the United States to visit the establishment of the Daughters of Charity, but particularly to obtain from them a copy of the Rules of Saint Vincent de Paul, which could not be had from France. The trip took place between September 11 and October 6, 1843. It was a complete success. On October 8, Mrs. Gamelin received the novices' habit and became one of them.

No bargaining here!

The forty-four year old novice, confined to the same status as her companions much younger than herself, under the strict ruling of Mr. Prince was, unknowingly and without claim, a model for them. It was not the first time when, on October 8, 1843 she accepted the title *servant of the poor;* for this was the title given by Bishop Bourget to the Ladies of Charity as early as 1841 in the regulations drawn up for them: "They will have no other title besides that of *Servant of the Poor*, and will pride themselves in using it." It was a reference to the poor of whom Christ had said, "Be merciful, as your Father is merciful." Mrs. Gamelin had for some time learned to refuse nothing to these beloved of the Father. For them she would accept any burden, even though it be beyond the duties of her Asile. She extended her solicitude

not only to the elderly women, but also to the orphans, the prisoners, the dying, the disabled priests. Her Asile was not an enclosure to her, and in 1841, she opened its doors to a service counter for the poor of the eastern area of the city.

She put into effect the program stipulated by Bishop Bourget in 1842: "to wipe the tears of the downhearted, to teach the ignorant, to offer one's effort and work on behalf of the unfortunate, without being disturbed by the unjustified complaints of the poor and the unjust criticism of some of the rich: this is what is called heroic charity." It was a case of open-handed charity, whose greatness is best expressed in the following statement on the situation of Mrs. Gamelin's organization prior to her entrance in the novitiate:

> The works of the house consist in providing lodging, food and clothing to disabled elderly women, orphan girls and other persons at the Asile; in home visits to the poor and the sick, in keeping night vigil with the sick, in visiting prisoners and comforting the suffering, finally, in performing any type of work of charity. Our works and services are not restricted to the city limits; they should be extended to the country, when deemed advisable by our Superior.

And this attention to her "superiors," as well as her scrupulous obedience to the guidance of the bishop, makes of Mrs. Gamelin not only a servant of the poor, but also a servant of the Church and a true foundress of the Sisters of Providence, without having dreamed of calling them together, nor of writing their constitutions, but simply because she was the first Sister of Providence and the model for all others.

Providence, a reality

"Sister of Providence," this title was fortunately coined by popular consensus, and corresponded to a situation which was both new and strange. It seems worthy of brief

consideration. The thinking of the time did not deem it wise to set up even a spiritual organization without foundation, that is, unless it be considered a profitable investment, or one with sufficient funds to ensure at least a minimum yearly income to cover maintenance of the persons involved on the one hand, and to cover at least the costs for basic services on the other. Mrs. Gamelin had not relied on her own funds to limit her undertakings. She had considered them in terms of their emergency, with the confidence that God's Providence would supply the means. This is the economic foundation on which was established the budding community and the many-branched undertakings of this woman whose efforts were universal. The future would be in God's hands; He would see to providing bread for the bread bin, butter for the larder, linen for the departments, thanks to the alms deposited at the door, or collected on begging tours. As for services, these were assured by the staff, the sisters as well as the inmates, inasmuch as their strength would allow them.

> And, so it is written in the chronicles, the hard work began, along with the services required by approximately forty persons lodging in the Asile. The laundry from the bishopric was done, in order to add to the meagre income; the sisters and a few of the inmates took care of this. In the spring, the novices bustled around and housecleaned the Asile, as well as a rented house belonging to Mrs. Gamelin, in order to take in a better rental fee; then, another nearby house belonging to the corporation of the Asile; and finally, the new convent. Outsiders looking on at the novices at work in so many houses, asked if they would hire themselves out to clean their houses. They would be happy, so they said, to hire them. As to the food, the Sisters had the same fare as was served to the elderly women, that is the leftovers given them by a hotel. Their tea also was made from the leftovers offered by the Sisters of the Congregation, which were brought in to them in large buckets. Supper consisted in oatmeal porridge sweetened with molasses. Those who were unable to eat a full meal of porridge and molasse were given a small amount of butter, which they used sparingly.

This was their daily frugal fare, and the only guaranty was that Providence would provide. But this did not dispense anyone from serving God and the poor without reservation, not depending on any other public or social aid, acknowledging their own responsibility in the matter.

On October 8, 1843, Mrs. Gamelin was the fourteenth to enter the novitiate. There remained thirteen novices the day before the first profession. This event occurred on March 29, 1844, the feast of Our Mother of Sorrows, patron of the new institute. With only six months of novitiate, Sister Gamelin was accepted for profession, with the six seniors: these seven would be considered as foundresses. Sister Gamelin's shortened novitiate was to raise some scruples for Mr. Prince, prior to his consecration as bishop. Bishop Bourget, in a brief note, attempted to ease his conscience, but his arguments have not been recorded. Nonetheless, the bishop, recognized by the sisters as their founder, clearly manifested by his behavior the degree to which, in his opinion, he considered Sister Gamelin to be the foundation stone of the newly-established institute. The profession ceremony began with a reading of Bishop Bourget's pastoral letter, dated that day, establishing the institute of the Sisters of Charity. Then Mrs. Gamelin was the first to come forth and make her profession of vows in the presence of the bishop. The six others followed, according to age. Mr. Prince, a Sulpician, was appointed ecclesiastical superior of the community and confessor for the sisters.

That same day, Sister Gamelin, the first professed, signed the register of the deliberations of the community council and of the admission of novices, thus making the records official. At the first meeting of the community council the following day, the seven professed sisters elected Sister

Gamelin as superior and assigned the additional offices for each one. From this moment on she would be known as Mother Gamelin. However, that was only a provisional election, since the customs book of the Hospitalers of Saint Joseph which had been received with the rules of Saint Vincent de Paul stipulated that the election be held on the frist Tuesday of October, for a seven-year term of office. For this reason, the election was repeated on October 1, 1844, with the same result. Mother Gamelin did not quite complete her first term, since she died on September 23, 1851.

Looking ahead

Placing his stakes in Providence, Bishop Bourget had an instrument available to him to ensure the perpetuation of the charitable works he had in mind for his diocese. In the pastoral letter of institution of the Sisters of Charity, he stipulated that Providence House would be the centre of the diocesan association of charity which he had established on January 25, 1842. The sisters became the administrators of the Montreal Asile for elderly and disabled women, and were also called *Servants of the Poor*, a beautiful title they shared with the women of the association. From this moment on, the sisters and the women shared a common clear vision and purpose. While the ladies were concerned with providing funds and materials for their charity, the sisters were personally involved in "visiting the poor, in caring for the sick in their homes and in performing other works of charity, according to the inspiration of God."

Mother Gamelin, a newly professed sister despite her age, remained under the careful supervision of the ecclesiastical superior, Mr. Prince. The custom of keeping for sometime the newly-professed sisters with the novices in order to pursue their spiritual formation was established. Consequently, Mr. Prince lost no opportunity to test the superior.

She had left the paintings of her husband and herself on the wall of the Asile parlor, as reminders of a happy and virtuous married life. The superior severely reprimanded her for this. The paintings disappeared, never to be seen again. One day, Mother Gamelin took a handkerchief from her pocket. It was a silk handkerchief. Offended, the Canon stated curtly: "Henceforth, you will use cotton."

The range of Mother Gamelin's works contined to expand. Prior to the profession, Mr. Prince had suggested that orphan girls be taken in. An unfinished hall was prepared for them at the Asile. On May 1, 1844, ten of them were admitted. Several ladies promised to pay a monthly board stipend of $2.00 for each child; the house provided for one of them. This step was an answer to a real need, for a year later already fifty were being cared for. They were trained, given academic instruction, and taught the appropriate household duties required to honestly fend for themselves later.

In the Fall of 1844, women and young ladies who wished to live in a peaceful and prayerful atmosphere were taken in as boarders. The revenue from their board was considered an opportunity to help with the needs of the other charitable works. However, these boarders, while sharing the poverty of the living conditions in the house, also helped with the household duties. The sisters spared nothing, that they might be treated with care and consideration. The Chronicles record the great consideration given to Miss McCord, a protestant convert, boarder and benefactress, at the time of her death. Mother Gamelin had formerly taken in a priest who was paralyzed and without income. In 1844 she reserved one side of a wing of the novitiate house, to admit other priests. Four of them lived there and were always called upon in cases of emergency. That year also, the community lost its ecclesiastical superior, Mr. Prince, who

was appointed by Rome as auxiliary to Bishop Bourget. The latter took on the direction of the sisters and appointed Mr. Alexis-Frederic Truteau as chaplain of the Asile.

Mother Gamelin instructed the young sisters and novices in the work she had been doing for so many years: visiting the poor, providing for their needs, caring the sick, keeping night vigils with the dying, burying the dead. She also accustomed them to beg from the well-to-do families in their behalf. The Chronicles recorded that several hundreds of persons were helped in this way every week. Each time a new service required a particular skill, efforts were made to answer the need. Some sisters were sent to the Hotel Dieu to learn how to care for the sick.

Where Providence is involved

Together the Asile and the community grew, but in an atmosphere of privation and poverty. In 1845, forty elderly women and more than fifty orphan girls lived there. There were ten professed sisters. Space was lacking, and consequently it was decided to build one of the two wings which had been part of the original plan. Construction began in May and was completed in October. The cost exceeded one thousand louis (approximately $400). In July 1845, Mother Gamelin purchased a house adjacent to the garden of the Asile for the priests who had formerly been kept in the large building. This residence was called the Saint Joseph Home. A professed sister handled the nursing care, assisted by one of the elderly women.

The novitiate was rapidly growing. In September 1845, there were six novices and seventeen postulants, besides three junior professed sisters. The twenty-six, with the novice director and her assistant, were crowded in a fifteen by twelve-foot room. The air was unhealthy, and the young

women all suffered some kind of ill-health. Their living quarters had to be transferred. The elderly women were moved to the fourth floor of the new wing and the fifty-eight orphan girls to the area formerly reserved for the elderly women. There was too much work. Nine sisters were laid up, because of illness; the others were over-burdened. The rule had to be tempered. The time for community rising was changed to five in the morning. Bishop Prince was again appointed superior, and Mr. Augustin Magloire Blanchet replaced Mr. Truteau as chaplain.

Other needs too clamored for Mother Gamelin's attention. There was no institution in Montreal to care for the mentally ill. When persons had to be committed for care, they were sent to Quebec. In October 1845 a request was made to place three of these persons in Mother Gamelin's care. For them she reserved the house adjacent to the garden, previously occupied by the first priest admitted for care. The house was repaired and one man, Mr. Antoine Vinet, and two women named Martell and Castell were admitted. Sister Brady was appointed to care for them.

Migration first began in May 1846. Land and a house at Longue Pointe had been offered, to serve as a shelter, provided education be made available for the children. These responsibilities were accepted. Since there was no water available at the Asile, other than that which was carted from the river by the one and only domestic, the Longue Point house was used as a laundry for the linen from the Asile and the bishopric. Once a month, two sisters travelled there in a cart loaded with the laundry bags, washed the linen, spreading it on the shore to dry.

Shortly after this house at Longue Pointe had been opened, the sisters were invited to open a shelter for the elderly at Laprairie, whose parish priest was a Jesuit. They moved there in May 1846. Unfortunately, in July, fire destroyed

the village. Mother Gamelin quickly arrived on the scene, where she found the two sisters on the dock with the poor. Taking the invalids in her boat to transfer them to the Asile, she lodged the sisters at the convent of the Sisters of the Congregation until their house, partly destroyed by fire, had been repaired. Mother Gamelin purchased the house, had it repaired, and the sisters and their charges reinstalled.

The year of the major calamity

Bishop Bourget had left for Europe in 1846, after having visited the community, to which he had strongly emphasized the virtue of simplicity. He returned on May 27, 1847. This was the year of the major calamity. Early in the summer, several ships had unloaded thousands of Irish immigrants on the shores of Montreal before any thought had being given to stopping them for quarantine on the "Grosse Ile." Typhus was raging among them. They were crowded into a cave at Point Saint Charles. To provide accommodation, thirteen warehouses known as the "Sheds" were built. Cots covered with straw mats were installed and frequently occupied by four or five persons at a time, huddled alongside each other. Several had to remain outdoors, for lack of shelter. The dead were removed for burial. The Grey Nuns were the first to offer to care for them, since the General Hospital was nearby. But after several weeks had passed, a number of sisters were overcome by the plague, and some of them died.

On June 18, the Bishop asked the Sisters of Providence, then numbering fifty-two members, including novices and postulants, to help the Grey Nuns. All of them volunteered. But at the outset, the doctor selected only twelve among the strongest. Bishop Bourget did not allow Mother Gamelin to join them. The Hospitalers of the Hotel Dieu were also invited, and released from their cloister by Bishop Bourget;

they went to care for the sick the following July 2nd. But soon both the Grey Nuns and the Hospitalers had to withdraw, and Mother Gamelin's daughters were the only ones to remain at the Sheds. Without any other help they would raise the sick, put them to bed, bathe them and change their bed linen. Death claimed as many as sixty persons a day. Thirty-four Sisters of Providence took care of the sick between June 26 and September 27. In spite of all their precautionary measures to avoid contamination, twenty-seven sisters, novices and postulants were stricken with the epidemic; nine were anointed and three died. Mother Gamelin had to gradually decrease the number of sisters who worked in the Sheds, and eventually withdrew them altogether.

When their parents died, children were left abandoned in this state of pandemonium. The government offered to pay their board to anyone who whould take them in. Upon Bishop Bourget's request, Mother Gamelin accepted the boys. She borrowed Mrs. Nowlan's house. On July 11, six large cartloads brought some one hundred forty to one hundred fifty boys, one of whom was barely a few hours' old, and another only two days. A sister, sitting in front of one of the carts, held four of them in her arms. Mother Gamelin purchased twenty bales of straw to spread on the floor for cots in the house which had no beds, no furnishings, no linen and no utensils. Most of the children were crying; many of them were ill. A great number died. Four sisters, with two or three invalids and four girls took care of them. It became necessary to build a shed, since the house was not large enough. This was soon turned into a regular, well-organized nursing home. The epidemic died down, and when the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, who had taken in the orphan girls, were no longer able to keep them, Bishop Bourget decided to accept seventy-four of the abandoned girls, in addition to the little boys already being cared for by Mother Gamelin. She rented a large house which had been

abandoned by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, and transferred all the children to this shelter, which became known as the Saint Jerome Emilien home. In 1848, the Bishop organized a campaign to find adoptive parents so that, in the month of May, the rented house could be given back to its owners.

If we have dwelt for some time on these tragic events so deeply affecting the community with only three years of experience to its credit, it is because the facts are important. They provide an opportunity to evaluate a personal trial which, in our opinion, is significant in revealing the spiritual stature of the Servant of God. One can readily imagine the impact of all these necessary, charitable improvisations which jostled against one another, a disturbing influence on the daily life of a community living in an over-crowded house, not as yet adapted to the needs of the work, and furthermore, too closely adjacent to the bishopric, and too easily open to the observant eye of a sovereign and demanding master, Bishop Bourget.

The Bishop had an extremely high opinion of religious life, an idea closely akin to idealism at times, at least from the perspective of those who experienced it from within. This idealism resulted in the kind of direction he gave to Mother Gamelin and her daughters, - a direction inspired by a powerful and deep spirituality, albeit, in some instances, accompanied by harshness, a harshness mitigated by the Bishop's deep and constant affection, which lasted till the time of his death. Besides this Bishop Bourget, daring as he was, was nonetheless distressed. Was it in his power to inspire these angels of charity he had dreamt of to help the poor in his diocese, with the spirit he had noted in his readings on the life and works of Saint Vincent de Paul? Placed in a position of interpreting himself, rather than through the immediate followers of this great servant of the

poor, - was he not taking a risk that the message be distorted, to the detriment not only of the women he had involved in this adventure, but also to the prejudice of the reputation of the Church? The demands made by Bishop Bourget on his daughters of predilection stem somewhat from this distress and perhaps sometimes even caused him forget patience, one of the dimensions of faith and charity.

Visits to the "Sheds" had not yet been interrupted when the sisters' retreat began on September 26, 1847. Besides the instructions and recommendations, Bishop Bourget interviewed each of the sisters, listened to them as they expressed their inner feelings, their dissatisfaction and their grievances, and took note of it all. Occasionally, one or another would leave him a written report, listing her observations. There was nothing unusual in the procedure. But there was Sister Vincent! This Sister Vincent was Madeleine Durand, who at age twenty-six in 1835 had joined Mrs. Gamelin in caring for the elderly women. She was a good girl, dedicated, never refusing any task, no matter how lowly or difficult, and her help had been greatly appreciated. She hardly knew how to write having very little formal education. Mrs. Gamelin had however not hesitated to place her in charge of the associates, these fine ladies, when she had transferred all her property to them, in order to conduct the Asile. Madeleine was one of the seven novices under the direction of Mr. Prince in 1843, six months prior to Mrs. Gamelin. Consequently, she was one of the seven first professed sisters. When the elections occurred, she was appointed assistant by her companions. In this position she replaced the superior during her absence, and she also kindly warned her of her shortcomings. When, in 1846, the council sent the director of novices to Longue Pointe, Sister Vincent was assigned to this duty as well. All this attention and responsibility was too much for the good Madeleine. She believed herself to be heiress apparent to Mother Gamelin and she

was to demonstrate this when Mother Caron was elected, going so far as to accuse Bishop Bourget of having excluded her from this possibility by manipulating the votes.

Before and during the retreat, Sister Vincent endlessly carried on her interviews and frequent letters explaining all that went wrong everywhere, what was wrong in the novitiate because of the superior and she added, explained, advised, gave suggestions about what should be done. She even demanded that something be done for God's greater glory alone, not just to sanctify others, meanwhile neglecting to correct her own shortcomings, as suggested by Mr. Prince. The Bishop took home with him the bundle of notes, letters from the sisters, and the repeated missives from Sister Vincent. Putting together a composite of all this data, he wrote a letter to Mother Gamelin on October 13, 1847. The original has been lost, but he had kept the rough draft. It is impossible to reproduce its full content. But the letter begins as follows: "I have been convinced... that you intensely dislike the interviews your sisters have had with me... I think it is wise for me to discontinue dealing with your community. I will hand it over to the exclusive care of the coadjutor bishop..." There followed twenty-two paragraphs of outright reprimands: your sisters live in great discomfort, due to the fear you instill in them... The novices too frequently witness the bitter reprimands you address to the professed sisters... You probe too deeply into the private life of your sisters... People are convinced that you talk too much... You exhibit shocking hostility... The food is never good enough for you... You are still too imbued with a worldly spirit... You lack regularity in observances... You have no personal experience of hard work... You are too frequently absent from the community... The council meetings you conduct leave much to be desired. And this went on, without subtlety, without qualification, without any attempt at understanding, to conclude only as it had begun: "Now I will give to other

communities the time I had so freely and unsparingly given to yours."

Was the bishop tired and depressed that day? During the summer he had used a great deal of his own energy helping in the "Sheds". It was he who had conducted the caravan which drove the young Irish boys to Mother Gamelin. He had himself been infected with the disease, as had also some priests at the bishopric. His vicar-general had died of it.

Mother Gamelin let a day pass after receiving the letter. This gave her time to pray over it, and to feel deeply the bitterness of the reproaches. She answered on October 16. This was the tone of her reply: "I am very grateful to you for the advice you so kindly gave me in writing. My first reaction was one of discouragement, believing it was impossible for me to correct so many faults. After some reflexion, I decided that I must try, come what may, regardless of the great sacrifices, since this is what God asks of me. All I can say is that there has never been any ill will, and it is due to lack of close scrutiny that I have so grievously disedified my daughters. Forget the past; I have resolved, once and for all, to grieve you no longer. Please do not abandon us to our own resources. Do not make the whole community suffer for the sake of one person. It is for my own spiritual welfare, as a father, that you are punishing me." She did not deny, nor apologize; she showed no resentment or despondency, nor did she retaliate in accusations. But, in a spirit of unwavering faith, she added: "This community is in its infancy, and it is imperfect; however, God's designs will be realized, in spite of our unworthiness. As for myself, I recognize how unworthy I am to govern it." The depth of this great soul is obvious; - in spite of her own human frailty - she is definitely centered on God and intent on serving Him without any trace of self-pity.

The storm subsides

Experience teaches us that these moments of crises are creative, that they are fruitful to souls well steeped in faith. Mother Gamelin's reply certainly made a deep impression on the bishop. He would never again inflict such personal grief on her. He would frequently thereafter reprimand the sisters for their faults, but these reproaches would be addressed directly to the community, and not to the superior. The most painful and most sensitive reproach for the sisters would be to have misunderstood their mother, and not having loved and respected her enough. For this reason, he issued a number of humiliating refusals. He would perhaps reproach himself for this hard-heartedness. "I made her suffer deeply," was he to say later. But nothing equalled in his mind the admiration he personally had for Mother Gamelin, and which he demonstrated so frequently on many occasions until her death.

Bishop Bourget did not abandon the community. Mother Gamelin continued her work. The very day she wrote this remarkable letter to the bishop, she opened an orphanage for little girls in Laprairie. As she had done ever since the opening of the Asile, she welcomed the Ladies of Montreal for a retreat. The Saint Jerome Emilien home for Irish orphan boys was still in full operation. Three more orphan girls were taken in, free of charge, in addition to those already in residence at the Asile. Four others were admitted, whose board fees were covered by the Ladies. The most handicapped of the orphan boys at Saint Jerome Emilien, for whom adoptive parents could not be found, were taken over by Mother Gamelin.

A marvelous event was at the root of a new charitable endeavor. This was the healing of an Irish novice, Sister Patrice, who was suddenly cured, on March 17, 1848 of an illness diagnosed by the doctors as cancer. In gratitude,

Bishop Bourget offered the Archbishop of Quebec the services of Mother Gamelin's daughters to care for the Irish immigrants who were still sick at Grosse Ile. There was some correspondence to this effect between the two bishops. The council of the Asile appointed seven sisters for this mission, including Sister Patrice. But the appointment did not materialize, either because the sick did not require further care, or because the government was not concerned enough about doing anything for them.

The relations of the community with the bishop continued to be very friendly. On April 3, 1848 Mother Gamelin requested a pastoral visit, since none had been made for two and a half years on account of the bishop's absence in Europe, and due to the typhus epidemic. Bishop Bourget agreed and the visit was conducted from April 14 through 19. The bishop proceeded as usual, giving advice, interviewing the sisters and taking notes. Sister Conception made a list of remarks concerning discipline. Sister Vincent made renewed efforts to have her own particular viewpoints prevail. In his subsequent pastoral letter on April 19, 1848, the bishop used a very different tone from that of October, the preceding year. He addressed himself to the community. He upheld the authority of the superior and, as specially requested by her, he explained the virtue of simplicity, a virtue he had from the outset stressed as important to the sisters. This regular visit was repeated in 1850; and in 1851, a general visit of the communities was conducted. In the 1850 pastoral letter, Bishop Bourget did not mention discipline but, in order to encourage thanksgiving, he gave a historical presentation of the Asile since its beginning.

Reaching out to additional misfortunes

The last years of the Servant of God centered around two main concerns that she would simply initiate, but which

would eventually become two of the most noteworthy realizations of her daughters: the work with the deaf-mutes and that with the mentally ill.

There had never been any great concern for the needs of the deaf-mutes in our country. Their number was estimated at seven hundred in Lower Canada. For approximately twelve years they had been totally neglected. Some of them were at Saint Jerome Emilien home, the shelter for Irish orphan boys. On November 27, 1848 Father Irénée Lagorce, who was familiar with the methods used in Europe, started teaching them, assisted by a deaf-mute man called Reeves. Mother Gamelin encouraged her sisters to attend the classes. One of the novices, Albine Gadbois took it on as a specialty. In 1851, she herself began to teach three deaf-mute women. The grain of mustard seed soon became a large tree and developed into the Institution for Deaf Women, where 3 800 students would be taught until 1978, when the sisters left.

Mother Gamelin's compassion had shown a special predilection toward the mentally ill. We recall that her husband had bequeathed to her a mentally retarded boy, whom she cared for until he died. Prior to 1833, the mentally ill in Montreal had been segregated in special lodgings at the Montreal General Hospital. When the Grey Nuns were no longer able to keep them, they were transferred to the common jail with the prisoners. This distressed Bishop Bourget. In 1842 there was talk of separating them from the prisoners, but keeping them in the jail. In 1844 a request was made for a special shelter for them in Montreal. But in 1845 it was decided that they be sent to Beauport, near Quebec city. We have already seen how Mother Gamelin had taken some of them into the house which had been built in the Asile garden. Bishop Bourget encouraged her on May 19, 1846 and again on April 19, 1848, to pursue this work,

inviting the sisters to prepare themselves to care for this type of illness.

The following year Mother Gamelin presented a very involved plan to Louis-Hyppolyte Lafontaine. She requested that a shelter for the mentally ill be built, and she be allowed to make a trip to Boston and Baltimore, to study the methods of conducting this type of institution. The government authorities did not reply. However, in 1850 the council of the Asile accepted a house for the mentally ill at l'Industrie and even appointed sisters to manage it. Although this particular project did not materialize, Mother Gamelin set out on a trip to the United States for the purpose of learning on-the-spot how to conduct such an institution, a necessary step in these circumstances. She did not wait for public funds, since she had already cared for thirty-nine mentally ill persons in her many houses. She would not however, see the creation of a special house for them. Her daughters could institute this house at Longue Pointe in 1852, with the admission of seventeen patients. Government funds would not be available to them until 1873.

The foundress, nonetheless, contined to develop her works of charity. In October 1848 she agreed to send sisters to Saint Elizabeth, near Joliette, to conduct a school and a shelter for the elderly. Bishop Augustin-Magloire Blanchet, newly-appointed bishop of Walla Walla, U.S.A. requested that she send sisters to his diocese. In 1850 she accepted a new house at Sorel. She had also been requested to send someone to Arichat, in New Brunswick.

Mother Gamelin did not have a very strong constitution, in spite of her exuberant activity, and perhaps even because of it. Bishop Bourget had refused to allow her to be in contact with the typhus infection in 1847. In July 1848, a supply of spoiled cheese which had carelessly been served by the cook caused food poisoning to three-fourths of the

sisters during their annual retreat. The retreat had to be discontinued, and the superior was one of the two who were most severely affected. People were defenseless against world-wide epidemics spreading with the development of communications.

In 1849, cholera broke out in Montreal. One sister died of it in Laprairie. Mother Gamelin offered her services to care for such patients, but once again the bishop refused. The sisters generously assumed the care they had provided in 1847. Mother Gamelin once more borrowed Mrs. Nowlan's house, which she converted into a hospital called Saint Camille. In three months, one hundred thirty-eight patients were admitted there; more than sixty of them died. There were five hundred twenty-three deaths in the city. And again, the Saint Jerome Emilien orphanage admitted the orphans whose parents had died of the cholera. The illness had seemingly continued to wend its way throughout the population. And indeed, two years after the plague, Mother Gamelin herself died from it.

Mission accomplished

She had just completed her second visit within a year to the sisters in Sorel. She then visited the sisters in Saint Elizabeth from September 10 to 12, 1851. She left them, saying: "Goodbye, my dear daughters. This is the last time I shall see you." At four, in the morning of the 23rd, she awakened feeling ill. She said to the sister-companion who shared her room: "I have the cholera. I am about to die." She then requested to be transferred to the infirmary. The feeling in and around the house was indescribable. Bishop Prince heard her confession. Bishop Bourget gave her Holy Viaticum. After the prayer for the dying, with some effort, she attempted to say a few words to the Bishop: "humility, simplicity, charity. Especially charity." This last word faded away, as she died. This was her last will to her sisters.

Mrs. Emilie Tavernier-Gamelin

Reproduction of an original painting preserved at the Mother House, in the Hall of Souvenirs from the Foundress of the Sisters of Providence.

Original inscription on the back, which proves its genuineness:

"Emilie Tavernier, born on February 19, 1800, widow of Mr. Jean Bte Gamelin. Drawn in Montreal on April 20, 1843 by Vital Des Rochers, Artist. Mrs. Gamelin is the first Foundress of the Asyle for Aged and disabled women of Montreal, opened as early as 1830. This portrait of Mrs. Gamelin was offered to the Community of Ladies of Providence by

Montreal, April 20, 1843"

P. Sos. Lacroix

III

Painting of Mother Gamelin

Her true image

There is but one authentic painting of Mother Gamelin. Those which have gained general approval, especially because of the religious habit, sometimes tended to approach some resemblance, but more frequently they did not, especially those paintings and reproductions of a plump woman with a double chin. Her true image is reproduced in a painting by Vital Desrochers, done on April 20, 1843, on the order of Paul-Joseph Lacroix, a benefactor to the Asile. The novices, having spent a month together in the house, had requested this of him. Mr. Lacroix himself personally signed his name and the authentic details on the back of the painting on April 20, 1843. Mrs. Gamelin sat for this portrait, wearing the style of dress used by women at that time.

She has a serious look expected at the time for solemn occasions such as this. This is the reason her reproduction in the painting has been considered too stern. However, contemporaries who had known the Servant of God were unanimous in declaring that this was the only portrait which actually duplicated her true features. The meticulous care with which the painter reproduced every detail of the clothing adds further proof of his accuracy and his skill. For indeed, a piece of the dress she wore for the sitting that day

has been kept. The detail of the fabric has been reproduced with astonishing accuracy, as was the gossamer texture of her headpiece, the daintiness of the ribbon, and the minute details of the embroidery on her collar.

Mother Gamelin was taller than the average woman in our country. This can be seen in her religious clothing, which has been kept. And this is also revealed in the painting. Extending beyond the headpiece, her black hair, parted in the centre, covers her forehead and temples in smooth bands. Her forehead is neither too high nor too low. There are dark shadows around her eyes, due to fatigue and night vigils. Her nose is straight, quite sharp, and fairly prominent. Her upper lip is thicker than average, with turned down edges, which give an impression of harshness to the lower face. On the other hand, her lower lip and chin are pleasing, while the fullness of the neck is not unusual in a forty-three year old women. The most unusual effect seen in the painting is the lack of symmetry around the mouth, and the contrasting light and shadow from one side to the other. However, if one takes a close look at the upper part of the face, one is struck by the beauty of her eyes, which appear to be brown.

The most vivid impression drawn from this woman with beautiful eyes, is that of dignity. Being dignified was probably both an asset and a disadvantage to her. It was an asset, in that it gave her a certain influence, which she evidently used with persons of her own social status and with church leaders. It won her the affection of her "protégées," in return for the help she gave them, and it even inspired a certain fascination toward her among the young sisters. But it was also a disadvantage. For, in daily life situations, to appear dignified is not always far removed from haughtiness. It is easy to understand why the virtues of humility and simplicity took on such deep meaning for her. They can easily be

disguised, in the name of dignity. Humility can be distorted into empty, shallow protest; and simplicity interpreted as condescension. This paradox is incompatible with charity, which rises above false pretenses and gives greater value to all kind efforts.

Mother Gamelin was a great lady, not because of her academic background, but because of her home training. She always kept her place, never belittling herself. She had natural tact, sedate and pleasant manners, the thoughtfulness and daintiness of a well-bred woman. Many reports confirm her kindness and friendliness, which made people want to be with her, associate with her; she had an affectionate sensitivity, which was attractive to those who were in touch with her; her many friends, and their unanimous affirmations demonstrate this. She was also an inventive woman. Meek, obedient, respectful toward her superiors, she gradually developed into a woman of authority and initiative, once she was entrusted with any responsibility. Throughout her life, she was always able, without effort, to reconcile perfect submissiveness to authority with an incomparable freedom of initiative and productive ingenuity. In a word, she was a woman to be trusted.

1892 impressions of a graphoanalyst

We cannot resist the temptation of quoting from the observations of a graphoanalyst on a few pages of Mother Gamelin's handwriting. These observations agree so closely with what we have found in the historical documents that it would be difficult to state them more clearly:

> A generally practical intelligence coupled with a certain amount of idealism and creative talent.
>
> A remarkably clear mind, quick, naturally given to simplicity and moderation in the expression of ideas.
>
> A sound, firm judgment.

A strong will, but not inflexible; determined, when need be; very persevering; never disheartened, but on the contrary very enterprising and confident.

All-embracing kindness; a remarkable sensitivity. Since there is no evidence of selfishness, this person must have been selflessly dedicated.

As a consequence, affective qualities are highly developed.

There is no evidence of self-pride.

Generosity to a marked degree, even to the point of lavishness.

Total honesty; this person is loyal, open-minded, clear-minded and communicative.

A vivaciousness that must have been highly obvious. A lively, spontaneous nature, admittedly self-restrained and self-disciplined, but whose natural enthusiasm and vivacious impulse are evident.

A remarkable wisdom must have facilitated discipline in a person of such vivacious impulses.

The dominant characteristics found in this handwriting are the following: simplicity, truthfulness to the point of guilelessness, a very responsive sensitivity, dedication, vivaciousness, and above all, a dauntless courage.

Spiritual portrait

In the light of her particular vocation, these qualities could not be without setbacks for Mother Gamelin. One need only consider that this kind widow, at the age of forty-two already demonstrated charity sufficient to inspire anyone with the notion of suggesting her as a model to Christian women. Her charity, perfectly controlled, was outstanding. What better criterion can surpass this virtue, in terms of evaluation? She had reached this point, one might say, in carrying out her duties as a woman of the world, and a Christian like most other baptized Christian women.

Were we now to stress her faults, in order to complete the picture, the imperfections we would discover would be those made obvious by formal religious discipline inherent to religious life, faults which may have passed unnoticed in secular life. And this life, as we know, is the usual condition for Christian women. It was not due to the fact that Sister Vincent was not of the same caliber as Mother Gamelin that her reproaches against her superior were without foundation. The imperfections she noticed, others also have mentioned. And as we have seen, Bishop Bourget did not hide them from her. They must consequently be taken into account, without exaggeration.

The most reliable guide and witness here is Bishop Bourget himself. This man with so many remarkable features, had a very refined idea of spiritual values. He knew full well that persons are saved, thanks to mercy and grace, and not because of their own justice or human accomplishments. He had specifically admonished his favorites, the Sisters of Providence, not to place their deceased sisters on a pedestal, to record not only their bright side, but the shadows in their religious career as well. And so, in order to give them a model, the very day after Mother Gamelin's death, he gave them a description of her, as he had seen her. No one was in a better position than Bishop Bourget, who had seen her in action and who had even been the source of many of Mother Gamelin's deepest sufferings, to admit more truthfully that she had entered religious life without personal inclination, but only in a spirit of faith and charity.

The mere thought of a religious habit made her shudder; yet the Lord seemed to inspire her to adopt it. No matter how insistently her poor human nature reminded her of the ridicule she would draw upon herself in the eyes of her closest friends, she was constantly tormented by a grace beyond herself. Furthermore, a voice from within kept telling her, night and day, that she would not find happiness elsewhere than in this

humble habit, and in the practise of the staunch and hidden virtues that alone do it honor. You know how, in due time, grace triumphed over nature, in this great struggle, which was long and difficult.

Become a religious by way of a faith calling, how could she have stripped herself, in one single act, of all the deep-rooted, permanently ingrained behavior acquired through so many years of independence? Religious life consists in a complex web of attitudes and relations predetermined by traditions, which a young woman or a young man commit themselves to, not without pain, but successfully, when an inclination for this state of life and a passion for the ideal help to allay the suffering entailed. The habits acquired over the years by the foundress were difficult for her younger sisters to accept.

> Accustomed to the praise showered upon her, she suffered agony at seeing herself the butt of constant mutterings against her, of which she was well aware. With a straightforward nature such as hers, she could not get used to the roundabouts and under-handed ways which prevailed in the house. She was always on edge, for she noticed that everything she did was falsely interpreted and mercilessly judged. She deeply felt that she was not loved and trusted by her community. She sincerely believed that she was doing nothing but harm.
>
> Finally, God, in order to purify her virtue, had left her with a strong repugnance for some sacrifices which she always felt were incompatible with the happiness she sought and consequently her religious life was a period of constant trials and of very bitter trials, due to her nature and her habits.

After a lengthy study on Mother Gamelin, we are in a better position to understand the extent to which these words of Bishop Bourget express a deep and awesome suffering, such as is sometimes possible to experience in a spirit of faith. Also, the community chronicler was fully justified in making a footnote on the following comment made

by Bishop Bourget at the death of the foundress: "It is impossible to describe the prostration experienced by the sisters on seeing our dear and venerated Mother so suddenly taken away, after having administered the community for seven years." This is what prompted the Bishop of Montreal to state that "if this dear Mother had seen the general sorrow caused by her death, she would have been disillusioned over the painful thought she had of not having been loved by the community." And, considering the worship this great bishop would have for her during the rest of his long life, she would also have been comforted for the brutal manner in which he had once made her face her faults?

If there was any trace of doubt left concerning the greatness of this woman, it would have vanished at the thought of her sister-companions, who had been directly affected by her influence and her memory. During her seven years as superior, to have generated six very prominent personalities whose influence would cover both of the Americas, was surely no indication of a personality without influence. These women were Mother Emilie Caron, second superior, the one who took in Bishop Bourget when he was elderly and poor, Mother Bernard (Vénérance Morin), emulator of Mother Gamelin and foundress of the Sisters of Charity in Chile, Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart (Esther Pariseau), honored by the U.S. government with a statue at the Capitol in Washington, D.C., Mother Thérèse de Jésus (Cléophée Têtu), foundress of the huge institute of Saint John of God for the mentally ill, Sister Marie de Bonsecours (Albine Gadbois), first teacher and foundress of the Institute for Deaf-Mutes, Sister Marie of the Blessed Sacrament (Adèle Roy) foundress of the Sisters of Providence of Kingston. All these seedlings whose branches have spread throughout the American continent were lovingly nurtured by Mother Gamelin at the Providence Asile, Saint Catherine Street, in Montreal.

IV

To a heroic degree

A woman of compassion

Mother Gamelin shares a common characteristic with other servants of God born in our country. She showed no inclination for spiritual reflexion and speculation on the experience of God. But rather, she allowed herself to be influenced by God in her daily life, accepting his divine will manifested in every detail, in repeated trials and humiliations, in good intentions faithfully and tirelessly renewed, in purifications and generously accepted detachments, in the midst of aridity, ingratitude and fatigue, the burden of a fragile constitution, of misunderstanding by persons around her, and in spite of stern directors. Hers was a highly practical kind of spirituality, a growing unity with God, which is undoubtedly a result of grace, but which could not progress, unless the subject were faithful, to a depth beyond the level of intellect and words, but which becomes evident in daily activity, an ascent resembling more closely that of Calvary than that of Thabor. In a country where history has for so many years stressed the contribution of early settlers, Mother Gamelin stands out as a pioneer in the spiritual field.

She handed down to us one grace, that which inspired her whole life. Let us listen to her expressing this, in her own imperfect terms: "...I recalled a Vision I had during the pangs of a severe illness in 1838, when I saw the place prepared for me in Heaven; the Blessed Virgin showed it to

me, indicating that I would not die of this illness, since the Crown had very few diamonds, and this dear mother sent me back to reform my impatience and anger, to improve in charity and kindness toward my elderly ladies and to be more humble in my behavior. I saw my children, who seemed to beckon me to come to them, and my husband among the Blessed." She had been serving poor, elderly and abandoned women for ten years then, and was living in the "yellow house." It is probably due to this special grace that she did not despair, even in the midst of the many trials and setbacks she experienced during her charitable career.

Mother Gamelin's spirituality was hardly, nor in any direct way, steeped in the lessons taught by the great spiritual masters. It was based fully on catechetical instruction, pastoral exhortations, the daily fare of the faithful and on spiritual direction. Her masters themselves were not doctors in matters pertaining to divine ways, nor were they informed followers of the great mystical leaders. They were pastors, more concerned about leading their flock in the ordinary ways of Christian righteousness. Pastors of that time, that is, occasionally authoritarian, unyielding, sometimes harsh. For, if impatience toward an elderly disabled person is worthy of reproach, harshness with respect to a person of good will is no less excusable. But this, particularly in bishop Bourget, did not affect the insight, the strength, or even the admiring sympathy in his direction. The result of this will be seen later in the behavior of the Servant of God.

Points of reference

Mother Gamelin also was a woman of her time, in terms of her devotions. It was an age when pious practises, special devotions, dedication to holy patrons whose attributes and usefulness were many, confraternities and promotion of particular exercises were considered important and efficient.

Mother Gamelin was no stranger to these practises of her time and milieu. From a distance, and at first hand, we may wonder whether such an encumbrance was not detrimental rather than helpful to devotion. For these matters were only incidental details of divine worhship. This impression is perhaps not completely fair, since very frequently these devout persons, through one or another of these biases, were able to enter into the very core of devotion itself, that is Jesus Christ, manifestation of the Father on earth, operating with the Holy Spirit, in whom He is one with the Father. It is noteworthy, however, that the saints Mother Gamelin was especially fond of, namely Vincent de Paul, Elizabeth of Hungary, Jerome Emilien, John of God, Camillus de Lellis were all related to her special vocation of serving the poor, the little ones, the suffering, the favorites of Jesus.

And our Mother of Sorrows

There is, however, a devotion dear to Mother Gamelin, which ought to be set apart from all others, because it inspired all her work, and because she bequeathed it as an inheritance to her daughters. That is, the devotion to our Mother of Sorrows. This devotion had a decisive influence in her life. Overwhelmed by the deaths of her husband and children, a wife and mother without posterity, she was at one time in her life on the brink of despair when her director, Mr. Breguier dit St. Pierre offered her as gift a picture of the Mother of Sorrows. Contemplating the deep compassion of Mary, who shared intimately in the sufferings of her lost Son and found theirein a source of incomparable motherhood over redeemed sinners, Mother Gamelin understood the meaning of her own suffering. She realized that natural motherhood, the normal fulfillment of womanhood, was not the ultimate in the possibilities of her sex. Her faith and education had prepared her to understand that an infinitely

greater motherhood was yet available to her. This is what prompted her to rise to the occasion, to leave her home as a pilgrim, to offer help, to shelter and embrace in a much broader love, all the persons in her city who were abandoned and helpless. Meditating on the Sorrows of the Virgin from one Passion station to the next, the virtuous widow experienced the infinite value of redemptive suffering. This revelation was henceforth her inspiration. Confidentially informed, Bishop Bourget could do no better than support this life-giving, refreshing inspiration. For it was on the feast of our Mother of Sorrows that he established the Providence community and every year since then, thanksgiving is renewed on the feast of the compassion of Mary. Mother Gamelin's deepest desire was to impress in her daughters that mystery of life and death which had so helped her to use her own suffering as a stepping-stone to personal growth.

Steadfast in action

What is remarkable in Mother Gamelin's life is the consistency of her compassion. Compassionate toward the poor as a child; serviceable and responsible with respect to those around her as a young girl; faithful, affectionate, dedicated as a wife and mother; a kindly, charitable matron, foundress and manager of a shelter for disabled elderly women; instrument for the charitable works of a bishop with many plans; foundation block of a community dedicated to the relief of the greatest destitution, Mother Gamelin thrived like a beautiful plant, seemingly without effort or unfortunate incident. But this is simply what appears on the surface. One can readily guess, from an over-all perspective, the heroic effort entailed in such consistency. Serving the underprivileged is an area abounding with obstacles, opposition, disgust, disappointment, misunderstanding and failure, at

least partial or apparent, which cannot be overcome except by faith. For charity implies self-sacrifice and self-giving whose final outcome is death, senseless and pointless death to one who has no faith; redemptive and life-giving to anyone whose attention is focussed on God.

A closer, more careful observation soon reveals the wounds sustained by this spirited woman on the battle field of charity, as well as the heroism with which she carried on without despondency or bitterness, never faltering, not even for a moment. No matter how deeply the wounds cut into her heart, she never ceased to respect and honor with a deep and filial love the one who inflicted them upon her, namely, Bishop Bourget.

Despite the steady help of the Ladies who were her associates, Mrs. Gamelin had every right to consider the Asile for elderly and disabled ladies as her own undertaking. To this she had donated part of her wealth; she lived there with her "protégées;" she personally looked after their needs on a daily basis. The Bishop himself admitted this, praising the "virtuous woman who donated all of her modest inheritance in carrying out the attraction the Lord had given her for relieving the elderly disabled women." Mrs. Gamelin, for that matter, had not waited for the bishop's request to practise her selflessness. While Bishop Bourget was in Europe and unaware of what was happening, she agreed to proceed with the incorporation of the Ladies of Charity, which deprived her of any ownership rights she might still claim in the Asile. It was after his return, in November 1841, that the bishop disclosed his intentions. He had seen St. Vincent de Paul's Sisters of the Poor at work. He had invited them to come to his diocese. They had accepted. Upon his arrival the Bishop was pleased with the incorporation of the association. He confirmed it as a diocesan work of charity on November 6, 1841. He decided that the French Sisters

would become the administrators of the Asile. It was also decided that an appropriate house be built for them, a decision the Ladies of Charity accepted without hesitation, in a spirit of cooperation with the Bishop.

Standing and faithful

But, what would become of Mrs. Gamelin in all this? As an anonymous associate among all the other Ladies, she actively cooperated in the plans of the Bishop. But was she not being evicted from the institution itself? A foreign community, not yet adapted to the country, with traditions dating back two hundred years in the practise of charity could in no way endure that the foundress retain the position she occupied at the Asile. What is more, the Bishop himself would abdicate his direct control over the work. For it had been agreed that the Lazarists, the canonical superiors of the Sisters of Charity, would come to Montreal with them. And it is unfounded to think that the kind widow ever had a vague desire at the time to become a Sister of Saint Vincent de Paul, which would have confined her to a position of submission, a demotion from the position she occupied. For Bishop Bourget had made this point very clear: she did not, at the time, have any inclination, attraction, nor had she ever given any thought to becoming a religious. The Bishop himself, during the whole time this institution had developed, had pretended not to take special notice of her among the group of Ladies of Charity involved in carrying out his plans. This was the cup from which Mrs. Gamelin would humbly drink, without protest, and to its last drop!

Furthermore, in this obscurity, this dark night of the soul comparable to that of the great mystics, Mrs. Gamelin offered to God a vow of permanent chastity, and that of service to the poor, inasmuch as her strength would endure; of watchfulness over her conversations and avoidance of any

luxury in her clothing: "I wish to dedicate my life to God; that he might do with me as He wills." This, I believe, is what one might justifiably call heroism. God would take her at her word.

His divine sign would not be long in coming. It was, at the earliest, at the end of 1842, or more probably at the outset of 1843 that Bishop Bourget was informed that the Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul would not be coming. The house which was being prepared for them was already well on its way to completion. It would be ready for occupancy in the spring. The 1843 May devotions would be held there, even before the admission of the elderly ladies. Bishop Bourget was also a man of faith. His plan that it be conducted by a community was necessary. He did not see fit to give up or abandon his plans for any human obstacle. It would be up to him to bring this community into being. Consequently, he assembled seven young women in the "yellow house" which was still managed by Mrs. Gamelin. But what woman would be entrusted with this new religious family? This is where Bishop Bourget would really have needed Mrs. Gamelin. But she had, as yet, shown no inclination for religious life. This was a matter for the Holy Spirit. And not even a Bishop has command over the Holy Spirit! The admirable bishop honestly described this situation; much as it was worrisome to him, so also was it humiliating to the Servant of God.

> When the first Sisters received the holy habit, she thought that she would, in her position as foundress, be their mother, without withdrawing form the world, which she had in no way thought of giving up. I still remember today, just as on that first day, the painful sufferings I inflicted upon her, making it my duty to treat her as a stranger in the work which interested her so deeply, and preventing her from handling any of the duties of authority. This temptation, which could only be understood by those who experienced it, has always seemed to me one of

> the greatest trials suffered by your small newborn community. That would be the end of it (the community) if she (Mrs. Gamelin) had resisted as she could well have done, being at the time a woman of the world, to whom religion could not impose the same rule as that which was accepted by a religious bound by a vow of obedience. For necessarily, everything would crumble, resulting in overwhelming shame for having begun to build a new community and seeing it fall apart in a few days. Now this shame rebounded primarily upon the Bishop, and then on those to whom he had given the Habit without sufficient reflexion, and not in the least on your Mother, to whom the people naturally attributed the first place in this foundation. The people, who judge divine operations in their own way, would not have failed to lay blame on those who seemed to ignore the services rendered previously by a woman so highly esteemed for her good works.

Now, once again, Mother Gamelin's virtue saved the situation:

> However, in her deepest moment of pain, your mother was kind enough not to complain to outsiders. She kept her friends in the dark concerning this bitter trial she suffered so intensely. She was ill-treated, but did not utter a word to those who would have inevitably taken up her cause. These stormy days were a time of hard trials for the mother and for the daughters. The mother could see nothing but insubordinate daughters surrounding her; and the daughters saw only a mother in distress, because of them. What painful suffering for everyone, at the dawn of a day when the community began.

One is no longer astonished when the Bishop admits that he has "taken on as a real obligation to reveal, after her death, the staunch virtues concealed in this beautiful soul, and which, because of certain spiritual and physical imperfections, have remained as though buried until now." After due consultation, Mrs. Gamelin felt that she also should join the ranks of the novices. We recall that Bishop Prince, elected as coadjutor had some scruples at having shortened the

time of her novitiate. Bishop Bourget attempted to pacify him, but without publicly stating his reasons. These reasons, he admitted elsewhere:

> And so it was that, unaware of it, this kind mother was experiencing her noviceship without the Habit. She was not really happy, nor could she be, for she was not yet totally dedicated to God. After these horrible trials, which lasted for several months, grace triumphed, and transformed this strong society woman into a generous, self-giving novice and a devout religious woman.

As for this episode, we might add that, in this as in every other instance of her life, a basic characteristic of her personality, which was noted previously, emerges: there is no sign of self-centeredness or selfishness. This was a result of a previous gift she made to God: "I want to give myself to God, that He may do with me as He wills." Faith, obedience and love having previously shown her the road, she would henceforth not reconsider, and especially not through any self-consideration.

Is this what one might describe as insensitivity? Or a lack of awareness? On the contrary: we have already seen that she was deeply sensitive. This was the greatest of her "spiritual and physical weaknesses" which, according to Bishop Bourget, "kept buried until then the staunch virtues concealed within her beautiful soul." In this respect, Mother Gamelin's poor heart must have been riddled with scars at the time of her death. The greatest reprimand addressed to her by Bishop Bourget on that memorable October 13, 1847 outburst was "that you intensely dislike the interviews of your sisters with me." His pathological fear is what caused the Servant of God to be turned in upon herself. This was due to the way authority and direction were considered at the time. How many cases of psychosis resulted therefrom? Neurotic timidity with respect to authority, insurmountable difficulty at the time of confession, qualms of conscience in

the most simple circumstances. Mother Gamelin, no longer able to confide in Mr. Prince, had to change confessor. And he, on the other hand, was beset by qualms of conscience concerning incidents of which he was not responsible. The avalanche of faults unloaded by Bishop Bourget on Mother Gamelin on that notorious October 13 has no other source precisely than this contempt for sensitivity, which was one of the characteristics of spiritual direction at that time. How far removed this was from the mercy and fortitude shown by Jesus! For he had the fortitude to confront the powerful, and did not condemn the weak and defenseless. If we were to review the list of faults thrust upon the superior by the bishop, we can see that she practised authority toward her sisters as it was practised in her regard. This was accepted. From this confusion of sensitivity resulted a feeling which tortured her until her last moment, that of not being loved by her sisters. But the "staunch virtues" which Bishop Bourget found "buried" within her had not been affected. Was she not the one who, in a state of utter helplessness and confusion over the display of her shortcomings, revived the courage of her critic? "Your care for our spiritual needs has not been lacking. But it has not yet produced results. These will come later, I am firmly convinced. Our community is very young and imperfect, but God's work will be done in spite of our unworthiness."

Conclusion

Born in a simple environment, where faith and Christian practises were strong, Mother Gamelin experienced the many states of womanhood, exhibiting in each one the virtues appropriate to a Christian woman. Her special grace was her deep love for the most neglected members of the Body of Christ. Heroic in her faith, as was evident in the consistency of her efforts; in hope, as was demonstrated by her undaunted trust in Providence; so she was also in her charity, producing many works of benevolence realized at the price of total selflessness. Inspired by these basic virtues, she strove constantly toward the perfection of the moral virtues of strength, wisdom, justice and temperance which led her to a state of self-sacrifice in religious life, by the perfect practise of chastity, poverty, and obedience.

The Sisters of Providence in the footsteps of Mother Gamelin

Aware of the fact that their Foundress was appointed by the Lord to carry out a mission of compassionate charity toward human suffering, the desire of the Sisters of Providence is to continue to reach out today to relieve suffering, in whatever form it may be present. For this reason, they can be found ministering to the poor, the elderly, the sick, students, retired priests, the needy, the unemployed, orphans, the mentally handicapped, deaf-mutes, prisoners, immigrants, cancer patients, alcoholics, drug-users, delinquents, the illiterate, and so on...

No matter where it be found, human suffering is their only point of rally. For this reason, they serve in Canada, the United States, Haiti, Chile, Argentina, Egypt, Cameroon.

The message of Providence and of our Mother of Sorrows is passed on by the sisters and their associates in the light of the vision of their Foundress, who worked very closely with associates inspired by the same desire to relieve their suffering sisters and brothers in Chirst.

Emilie Tavernier-Gamelin at work...*

She adopts a mentally retarded boy and his mother	**1827**
She begins home visits to the poor and the sick	**1828**
She takes in elderly and disabled women	**1828**
She opens her first shelter	**1830**
She works in collaboration with a group of ladies, relatives and friends	**1831**
She sets up a new shelter	**1832**
She accepts a family of six orphan children	**1832**
She responds to the needs of the poor by distributing food and clothing	**1834**
She increases the number of her "protégées" and moves into another house	**1836**
She begins visits to women and men prisoners	**1836**
She increases to 30 the number of "protégées" in her shelter	**1838**
She agrees to receive a French religious community to ensure the continuity of her work	**1841**
She begs for funds in view of building a new refuge for her beloved poor	**1841**
She opens a service counter where the poor may come for food and clothing	**1841**

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* The point of departure for simultaneous or cumulative works is indicated here, giving an approximate or accurate date, according to research conducted thus far.

She accepts 7 young Canadian women for an orientation to the Providence work when word is received that the French sisters are unable to come	**1843**
She takes in young women seeking employment and orientates them to domestic work	**1843**
She requests admission as a religious and receives the Holy Habit	**1843**
She makes her profession of vows with six other novices	**1844**
She opens a hall for orphan girls	**1844**
She begins home care for the sick and the dying	**1844**
She admits sick and disabled priests	**1844**
She admits women boarders	**1844**
She opens a home for the mentally ill	**1845**
She accepts a property in Longue Pointe to be used for a school and to conduct home visits to the sick	**1845**
She opens a new home for the elderly and the orphans at Laprairie	**1846**
She re-organizes home care to the poor, and the service counter	**1846**
She takes an interest in far-away missions	**1846**
She quickly responds to the needs of the poor stricken with the typhus	**1847**
She admits to the St. Jerôme Émilien home 650 orphans whose parents have died as a result of the typhus	**1847**
She accepts the St. James school, which is without teachers	**1847**

She shows an interest in deaf-mute girls, providing catechism classes for them **1848**

She accepts a new residence in St. Elizabeth for the elderly and the orphans, and for classroom teaching **1848**

Once again, she provides home care for the cholera victims **1849**

She opens the St. Camille Hospital to admit these patients **1849**

She also admits orphans stricken with the cholera to St. Jerôme Émilien **1849**

She takes in dedicated young women volunteers to care for the elderly and the sick at the Asile **1849**

She opens a house in Sorel to provide education, and to care for the sick and disabled **1850**

She foresees the expansion of the work with the mentally ill **1850**

She hopes to broaden the educational services offered to deaf-mutes **1851**

She dies, a victim of the cholera epidemic **1851**

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To a heroic degree

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