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SISTER MARY ANGELE

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This is the journal of the most remarkable events since the eve of our departure, April 7. 1858. On this day we made our adieux to the Community. We began by our dear pupils of St. Jacques. They had assembled at four, and were waiting for the satisfaction of seeing us and speaking to us once more on this earth. The silence which pervaded the apartment made us presage the sorrow which was soon to find vent in sobs and tears. After a short talk we recommended ourselves to their innocent prayers, which they promised us and accompanied with gifts. When we said our last good-bye, their sobs became audible, and their tears flowed so abundantly that our hearts could scarcely bear this first outbreak of our sad departure.

This was, however, only the beginning, We had to say farewell to our sisters, and you do not ignore that in communities farewells are more solemn than elsewhere. I shall tell you how ours were made. This little picture may not be without interest to you. At five o'clock all the sisters gathered in the community room where there is a statue of our Good Mother Saint Ann. We four missionaries knelt at its feet to recite her litanies and the Magnificat.

After supper we remained in the chapel to ask our Lord strength and courage to go through the solemn adieux. During this time, our good sisters again went into the community, where we soon rejoined them. Again kneeling before the statue of St. Ann and reciting her litanies, Mother General and the novice-mistress intoned the Magnificat, while we went around the sisters and gave them the kiss of peace. So choked were all hearts with emotion that one by one the voices of the singers failed, so that at the end only Sister Mary of the Sacred Heart could continue the hymn. I need not tell you what we felt at that moment; it is easier for you to imagine it than for me to express it. Next we went down to the chapel for solemn Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament which is always sung on such an occasion. We knelt at the foot of the altar rail, with our sisters around bathed in tears. Was more required, my dear parents, to unsteady our vocation? But no, the Holy Ghost strengthen us against such weakness.

After Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament, we went into the community room and after some conversation, said our evening prayer and retired. After the scenes which had preceded it is useless to say that we dreamed with wide open eyes. It was our last night in the cradle of our religious life.

The eighth we were afoot at three in the morning. After our prayer we saw to our bag and baggage that nothing might be forgotten, then we assisted at Holy Mass, and in holy communion receive the companion of our voyage. Nothing was now wanting since we possessed Him who is our all, Our Lord Jesus Christ.

The hour of departure draws near.; we hear the words all is ready, The

drivers are waiting; finally, we take our places in the vehicles. We cast our eyes for a parting look on all the objects so dear to us, Renewed efforts are required to tear ourselves away; another act of resignation. At this saddest of moments, we hear only these words, "Adieux dear sisters, adieux forever... never shall we meet here below;..." Impossible to describe the emotions of our hearts at that supreme moment... More poignant souvenirs- Adieu dear chapel; adieux, all you who surround us; adieux, dear sisters: adieux cherished community, you are only at the dawn of your existence, and already four of your daughters are going from you, never more to see you; but divine Providence will guide them and they shall surely arrive safely in port. The signal for departure is given. "Adieux, once more, beloved sisters...we will never forget you...never; although far apart, our prayers and our hearts remain united." We left them all in tears and envious of our lot. As for ourselves our hearts were bursting, it is true, but they were peaceful, for, more than ever, they were resting in God.

"From the 16th. to noon of the 17th. we were the guests of the Sisters of St. Vincent of Paul. Not one of them understood French but that did not dampened their warm hospitality. Bishop, after introducing us to these good sisters and blessing us, with the injunction to thank God, retired. Next morning we assisted at the conventual Mass said by the superior of the community and then made our act of thanksgiving during that of bishop Demers. In the evening, Bishop came and conversed with us about our mission and on leaving blessed us. We went to our rooms filled with joy and consolation on seeing ourselves under the guidance of so kind a Father and called to share his labors.

"Next morning we heard His Lordship's mass at which we received Holy Communion. Having breakfasted we proceeded to the parlor where the personnel of our party awaited us. His Lordship engaged a carriage to take us to the "Philadelphia" the steamship on which we were to voyage; we travelled first class, respected and well treated by every body.

"The boom of a cannon announced the departure of the vessel, which left at two in the afternoon of the 17th. At five we lost sight of land and saw only sky and water. The weather was beautiful and the sea calm, but...at six I began to be seasick and continued so till the twenty second. The sailing southward which lasted five weeks, was very pleasant. More than once we had occasion to admire the protection of Divine Providence over us; we attributed ^{it} to the prayers said for us in Canada. Here is a convincing proof; a steamship which left New York three days after ours, was compelled to return there after two days, so great was the storm which menaced it, while our ship in the full force of the waters of the Gulf of Mexico continued calmly on. Flying fishes leaped to the surface of the waters, seemingly for the purpose of amusing the passengers- which they did. Only three whales favored us with their snorting. Our chief occupation during the voyage was prayer, pious reading, and meditation. Frequently our reflections were on the blindness of man, his attention and worry in the pursuit of gold, the source of so many miseries.

"For what do we see? Five hundred passengers on one steamship, seven hundred on another, and more than a thousand on a third. Where are you going, we asked?-To California...to the mines...It is enough; they burn with the thirst for gold. Their whole being is centered on that one purpose-gold and money. But God...salvation...Ah! if you wish to see how much the goodness of God is ignored, offended, travel. But no, do not take a step, it is too pitiful to see. Rather let us pray and have no consideration for gold and money, but for God alone. Our fellow passengers inquired if we were going to California. "No, we are bound for Vancouver," They were astonished that we were not concerned about gold but only for the welfare of society by devoting our lives to the education of youth. We were careful not to tell them that our principal aim was to spread the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His holy religion; they would not have understood, so we put in practice the counsel of our Divine Master, not to expose holy things to profane eyes.

"The "Philadelphia" was eight days at sea with nothing but sky and water in sight. At Havana, the capital of Cuba, we exchanged vessels without, however, setting foot on land. This is the reason. The island is inhabited by Catholic Spaniards, and its laws forbid any stranger to disembark on its shores, under penalty of a fine, unless provided with a passport. This measure is taken to prevent sickness and the protestant religion from penetrating into the country.

"Four of our missionaries went ashore to visit the city. This is what they had to say about it. "We entered three churches which struck us as very rich and whose architecture is very ancient. Their roofs are of sheet iron. The houses are made simply as a protection from the excessive heat of the sun; the streets are narrow, filthy. The dead are buried without a coffin; they are carried to the cemetery on a stretcher laid on a cart; such was the manner we saw a young man borne to his last resting place. The fortifications are considerable.

"We arrived at Havana Saturday the twenty-fourth about two in the afternoon and left the next day at noon. After seven days we reached the isthmus of Panama.

This crossing was as fortunate as the previous, except for an accident which gave us a great fright. At about eleven the last night, our ship suddenly came to a stop and we were awakened by frightful screams. "What is it?" we asked. The screams continued and we saw the boats lowered. I opened our window, and listened without understanding a word. Bishop then came and told us not to be afraid, that all this rumpus was to save some drowning individuals whose schooner had struck against our steamship. The fifteen persons aboard were all saved, the last just as the schooner was submerged. We thanked God for having saved these poor creatures who were all intoxicated.

"The "Grenada" docked at Panama the thirtieth, at two after midnight, and at six ^{our} feet touched land ^{for} the first time since we left New York. The wharf was some four acres long. We were conducted to, what they said was a French hotel; for my part, I do not know to what nationality its operators belonged, but one had to be as hungry as we were to eat the unappetising food set before us. I believe the table service had never been washed. While we took our meal at one table, hens took theirs at another. The building is an oblong-at home we would call it a shed. A partition separates a dirty parlor from an equally dirty dining room.

"Negroes predominate in this place; they have a marked preference for white, which I suppose, is because of the great heat, the market, which is always open, is run by negroes and negresses. Fruit, such as oranges, citrons, lemons, bananas, cocones, pineapples, etc, abounds. Nothing so curious as to see the negresses carry their wares on their heads-a case, a pail of water and even a bottle; all this they carry, arms hanging, as if it were nailed to their head. All wear a red handkerchief around their head, long earrings, red bracelets and necklaces, white skirts and dresses and slip shoes, or go barefoot. We saw some who smoked. This place is not big; it has very few handsome houses. The climate is hot. The morning of our arrival the temperature was freshened by a little rain.

"The train made two trips across the isthmus, which is fifty one miles long. We went on the second; it took three hours and a half to make it. Nothing more beautiful than this passage through the isthmus. The variety of trees and fruit the mountains, the small houses that line the route-all this made time pass too quickly. The trees are quite unlike those of Canada; they are very high and have narrow trunks. There are cocconut and orange trees, and another species about twenty feet high whose leaves ten or twelve feet long and three or four wide, answer the purpose of branches. These leaves form a fine head for the tree which bears a blossom resembling our beet; it is red. Within this blossom are the seeds which develop bananas; the soil is deep red. The mountains are little more than hills, and the rivers mere streams. We counted twelve good enough looking houses, two storeys high and surrounded all way round by two galleries. Small houses are quite numerous; I counted thirty in one place. They are constructed with the leaves which I have just mentioned. They are inhabited by half dressed negresses; the children are absolutely naked. Cattle, is rather numerous and very fat...horned beasts, goats, and horses. I saw fourteen of these together.

"From time to time the cars stopped to take a supply of water and coal. The negroes took advantage of these delays to come up with their baskets of every sort of fruit and flat cakes, nor do they ever forget the BOTTLE. The excessive heat made the cars damp. As the heat was our only discomfort we could not but compare the ease with which we were travelling westward with the dangers, the misery, the suffering of the missionaries who till quite recently, crossed the continent by canoe, portages, and calvalcade, many of whom perished on the way.

On leaving the train we waited on the wharf for the tender which was to take us to the "J. ELLIS STEEVEN", the steamship on which we were to sail to San Francisco. But we waited in vain. After standing under the broiling sun three hours, we were obliged to hire a row boat, and that at rather a high price. And now a new difficulty presented itself. The tide was low and the nearest the rowers could come to the shore was ninety feet. Negroes were standing by to

" Impossible to describe our joy on touching our Land of Promise. After the description given us of this country, as you heard it, we were most surprised to see two hundred neat houses, and Indian cabins at some distance. Our greatest surprise, however, was the sight of thousands of tents—numbered at thirty thousand. In San Francisco we had heard of the discovery of gold up in these parts, but we were not prepared to see such a "City of Tents." Victoria was the outfitting town where final preparations were made for reaching the gold fields, near Yale on the Frazer. The "Sea-bird" had not yet anchored when Bishop came into the social hall and transported with joy exclaimed, " My house! my house! come and see my house!" Finally the ship stopped in the middle of the bay. Bishop and his party told us to hand our luggage and get in the row boats. It was three in the afternoon when our feet touched the ground of our adopted country. Several persons came to welcome the Bishop, among them was an Oblate Father who had been expecting him for several days, and a resident priest. Everything was joyful; in less than two hours all the Catholics, with their children, had assembled to receive the blessing of their chief pastor.

" We were led to the bishop's house. On entering we passed into the chapel, to thank Our Lord, ⁹ Dear parents, how our hearts dilated and how much they had to say to our good Master after having been deprived of the Most Blessed Sacrament as long as we had been. After this outpouring of our hearts before our divine Spouse, we took some nourishment, while Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was being prepared. As I have said, the house was full of people. The Bishop after having blessed them sent them to shake hands with us; it was like a procession. Do not be surprised at this ceremonial, it is a mark of politeness even for children. We returned to the chapel with this crowd for Benediction, which was followed by the chanting of the Te Deum and the singing of the Magnificat, to thank Our Lord and His holy Mother for having preserved us from danger during our long voyage and having safely brought ^{us} to port. It was now seven o'clock. Bishop, with eight priests, and the people who had assisted at Benediction, conducted us to our dwelling. His Lordship opened the door, and standing aside, said, "Take possession of your house, sisters." After that, he and the clergy entered. Having conversed some minutes, Bishop said, "Kneel, I will bless you before

* S.S. Pacific arr. at Bellingham pier to June 11. See Puget Sound Herald June 11/58.

leaving." He left us under the protection of the Mother of God, St. Anne, St. Joseph, St. Joachim and our holy Angel Guardians, telling us to place them on guard ^{at} all the avenues to our cabin - and, promised to come next day. If all our heavenly guardians were invisible, this faithful Shepherd was always our protector, adviser and father in Christ and for Christ.

" Left alone in our new abode, a woman brought us some water, coals and wood of her own accord. It was the first act of charity we received, and not the last. We said our night prayer, and spread our bedding on the floor where we retired at eleven. Next morning we rose at four, and after an hour and a half we went to the Bishop's house to scrub our consciences, which had received no attention for a fortnight. We continued taking our meals at the Bishop's all that week. On Sunday evening we were provided with enough necessaries for our kitchen and food to start with, and in the morning we began our own cooking and regular community life.

" Our house - a log cabin - is thirty feet ~~eighteen~~ and clapboarded. In front it has a door between two windows, the same at the back, and a window at each end. Exteriously it looks all right enough, but inside it is quite different. The log joints have not been filled in, and there is no ceiling, but the floor is like those in Canada. ^{The cabin} is separated in two by rough lumber; in the middle of this partition is a double chimney.

" Before leaving, almost a year ago on his quest for sisters, the Bishop had bought this house and two lots, for the use of his co-operators. It had belonged to a French-Canadian, who like many others, had a squaw wife. She had died of consumption and left a little girl ten or twelve years old. His Lordship had left orders for the house to be put in a fit condition for the reception of the sisters. This precaution had not been attended to, so we found the place as it had been left after the funeral of the poor woman - bed unmade, floor littered with medicine bottles, basin, etc. and window panes cracked or broken. We hung up our aprons for window blinds.

" Already a wing, the same dimensions of the cabin we occupy, is being built. It differs from it, in this, that it has a dormer window, a covered gallery, and a belfry eleven feet high. We will lodge in this wing. It is planned to have a little chapel, in which Holy Mass will be said daily: a parlor, a refectory and a community room. They have built us a lean-to for a kitchen. Across the narrow street in front of the building, is our vegetable garden. The climate is mild and salubrious, except for rheumatic persons. The soil is good and produces big-sized potatoes, turnips, onions, etc.

" Dear parents, I am sure you are impatiently waiting for news from me, and that you find the time long, but my numerous occupations have not allowed a moment's leisure. I can, however, say that I have thought of you very, very often. I am most happy in Victoria, and have not been lonesome one minute; perhaps it is because I had not the time. We are building our wing, and His Lordship is building his cathedral. Building is very expensive in this country. Lumber is high and so is labor...even four dollars a day! You see, my good brother, you would be well off here, both for His Lordship's sake and for your own. The news we hear of the gold mines is uncertain; some talk advantageously of them, others to the contrary. All that I know is, that those who go encounter many difficulties. A few months ago twenty persons were drowned on returning, unsuccessfully, from the mines. Nearly every day we hear that some one was drowned, another shot, and that many die of misery. Goodby, the steamer is leaving.

Your affectionate, daughter and sister,
Sister Mary Angele.