

+  
+  
+ + + + +  
+  
+  
+

Sister M. Hildegarde Kroll

She has gone to the "nurseries of Heaven," - our Sister Hildegarde, "little mother" of Guardian Angel Home, taking with her the merits of her fifty-nine years' service in the kindergarten there. At the Solemn Requiem celebrated by Franciscan Fathers in the Convent Chapel on Saturday, the 25th, Monsignor Blanchette represented Bishop McNamara, and four priests of the diocese were in the sanctuary. Six of her former "boys" carried her to her grave in Resurrection Cemetery.

Sister M. Hildegarde, aged 85 years, had come to the Community as Martha Kroll from Chicago sixty-five years ago. After two years of domestic work on mission, she was in 1898 assigned to Guardian Angel Home as prefect, nurse, and teacher of the pre-school group. For 47 years she provided for all the needs of these children, She mothered them twenty-four hours a day, she nursed thm when they were sick; she conducted their kindergarten classroom program. In 1945 an assistant was assigned as teacher, and in 1955 the nursing was also taken care of by a helper; but through all theyears until spring of 1957, Sister Hildegarde prefected her 'darlings.' It was April when she was brought to the Motherhouse as a retired Sister. Two years later she entered the Infirmary as a patient.

In all of Sister Hildegarde's sixty-one years of "heavy duty service," she had found nothing so difficult as retiring. She yearned for the "babies"; she yearned to serve. She remembered the happy release of pent-up energy through useful years and she longed to tap once more the reservoir of power that had seemed exhaustless. But here she was, "doing nothing, good for nothing." The Sisters offered what comfort they could. Her prayers, they reminded her, were priceless and would outweigh even her many charitable deeds of the past.

Soon the sustaining faith of a lifetime came again to the fore, and she accepted her quiet days. She would give herself more completely to the prayer she had always loved--that would be her entire work. Accordingly, each day she recited three rosaries for all the members of the Community; she prayed much for priests and included especially Franciscan Fathers. When she spoke of this to Father Kusman, S.M., and he remarked, "But I'm not Franciscan," she answered, "That's all right; I'll pray for you anyway."

She prayed much for vocations, and whenever she spoke to a postulant or novice she would tell them of the value and beauty of religious life. "Don't turn back," she would say; "don't go home." It was a real grief to her when she heard that any Sister or postulant was leaving.

Sister also prayed often for conversions, a cause that had always been dear to her. Bob Peterson, a friend of the Home, was one of her "special intentions." When he and his wife visited Sister, she would ask, usually plucking his sleeve, "Bob, when are you going to join us?" And when Bob met with a train accident that cost him his leg, Mrs. Peterson was certain it was Sister Hildegard's prayers that won him the grace of being baptized and anointed at the hospital, and that later motivated him to continue instructions and receive Holy Communion.

Another activity which she intensified was her work for the Community—now it was for the building fund. She wrote hundreds of Christmas cards to friends of the Home and to former children of GAH, hoping to get a donation in return. And donations came. All were happily turned in to the fund.

These interests Sister pursued wholeheartedly, but at the last she was homesick for heaven. Often when Sister Peter would ask, "What do you want?" she would respond, "Just heaven." For "How are you?" the answer would be, "Ready for heaven." Then she would add, "God's holy will be done, but I'm ready day or night, whenever He wants to take me."

That Sister was finally taken with a heart ailment was one of Death's little ironies, for it offered a decided contrast. Never had her great heart failed when there was a need in nursery or kindergarten. Nothing was too much, nothing too messy, too troublesome. In the early days at the Home accommodations were limited and there were many demands on her time and strength. From personal care of a neglected or sick child to stoking the furnace and scraping ice from the walks, she was equal to everything, serving with energy and good will.

But above all, Sister Hildegard was remarkable for her heart's great love, given to the hundreds of children placed under her care. Many of them revered her through the years as the only mother they had ever known. And through them she became something of a celebrity. They came back to visit her; they brought the young man, the young woman they intended to marry, and later they brought their children. No grandmother could have been more honored and feted. Annually they remembered her birthday and always made sure that the newspapers printed their tribute of love and praise.

But Sister's death also offered a consoling parallel. A tender nurse who had lulled many a tired child to sleep, she herself simply wearied and weakened. Her last morning she still received Holy Communion; she accepted a light luncheon and responded to questioning, but shortly a change occurred, and within an hour she had slipped away, soothed to eternal rest by the "kind old nurse, Death." - How bright must have been the dawn of Eternity, how eager her awakening at the Master's "Come, you blessed of My Father!"