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Sister John Rooney

Sister M. John, formerly Ellen Rooney of Chicago, died of paralysis of the brain at the Motherhouse on June 12, 1920 in the seventy-third year of her age and the fifty-first of her religious life.

Sister M. John was known in the world as Nellie Rooney. She was born in Tipperary County, Ireland in 1848. At the beginning of our great Civil War she had just immigrated with an elder brother to America and made her home for some months with her married sister living in Chicago. Afterwards she resided at the home of Mrs. Sanders, whom Sister John claimed as being her first cousin. In the summer of 1869 she became acquainted with the newly founded Community of Franciscan Sisters at Joliet, and at her earnest request was received into the Order October 6, 1869.

During the first decade of her convent life she proved herself a zealous worker in the interest of the newly opened Academy by soliciting for boarding pupils, particularly among her friends and relatives many of whom were among the first to head the list of boarding pupils when in 1871 a department of the new St. Francis Academy on Broadway of this city was opened for the higher education of young ladies. In after years many a woman, mentally and morally well trained and qualified for her future success in life, has to this day gratefully remembered Sister Mary John on account of the interest the good sister had taken in her education, especially to afford her at St. Francis Academy a solid foundation in religion, thus fitting her for her duties toward holy mother, the Church, and for her social life.

Sister Mary John was blessed with a genial disposition. A priest who had accidentally heard of this happy trait of character complimented her one day in presence of the assembled sisters by remarking that a community ought to congratulate themselves to have one or other sister among their number who was thus favored, for her presence at the recreation hour is a boon to the community.

In 1872 when still a young religious she was sent with three companions to St. Patrick's school in Memphis, Tennessee. The sisters were there just a year when the yellow fever epidemic broke out in that city. Sister Mary John distinguished herself by nursing the plague-stricken. Eventually she and two of her sister companions contracted the disease. Her two companions died, but Sister Mary John fortunately recovered. After some months the surviving Sisters were summoned to Joliet, and Sister Mary John brought with her several young girls whose

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parents had become victims of the plague. Several of their number, after spending some years in the Academy, joined the community and they distinguished themselves by becoming useful members.

Her love and sympathy for poverty-stricken people became notable in the beginning of the nineties when the coal miners and glass works in Streator, Illinois, were shut down and, as a consequence, the people were in want of the necessaries of life, especially of clothing. Now Sister Mary John, who was then acting as superior at St. Stephen's school in that city, begged the Mother Superior in Joliet to dispense the people for the time being from paying salary to the sisters, and also asked permission to write to the different houses of the Joliet sisterhood in Chicago asking the respective superiors to collect among their children articles of clothing for the poor children of St. Stephen's parish. In turn for her charitable acts, their good parents provided the sisters with vegetables from their gardens and with farm products. When better times set in, they voluntarily paid every dollar of the salary that had been remitted them. Thus they showed their gratitude to Sister Mary John who had helped them in time of utter want.

About five years before her death Sister Mary John's health became impaired by a slight paralytic stroke from which she never fully recovered. She longed to see the day of her fiftieth anniversary of her reception into religion and God granted her desire. The day, October sixth, 1919, was solemnly celebrated by a solemn high mass and the renewal of her religious vows. The remainder of the day was given over to visiting friends and relatives who gathered in her honor and whose kind attentions were very gratifying to Sister Mary John. This was practically the last feast that Sister enjoyed, all other feasts, etc., seemingly not affecting her much because of her enfeebled condition, and her death ensued without any perceptible struggle.