

REV. FATHER MEA TOLD THE COURT OF HIS INTERFERENCE

Which Prevented Sister Basil Being Sent to An Asylum — Various Interviews with the Archbishop Over the Case.

On Wednesday afternoon the examination of Sister Mary Basil, in her action against Archbishop Spratt et al, was completed at the Supreme Court sittings in the City Hall, and Rev. Father Mea, the priest who prevented her abduction from St. Mary's-of-the-Lake Orphanage, took the stand. Father Mea's evidence was most sensational. He recounted in a vivid way about the part he took in the rescue and conversations he had with Archbishop Spratt some days afterwards. When the Court adjourned at 6:30 p.m., the evidence of sister Mary's lawyer, taken by a commission at Moosejaw, Sask., was being read.

Denied the Charges.
In continuing the cross-examination of sister Mary Basil, Mr. Tilley asked: "Was it not your custom to question an order given you by the local supervisors?" "No, it was not."

"I am told you were very offensive at houses in Brockville, Smith's Falls and Belleville. And that you shook your fist in the faces of some of the Sisters." "I never shook my fist in any Sister's face."

Witness never made any threats, but might have said that she would bring the matter before the ecclesiastical courts.

Witness never heard of a request made to Sister Justina for her attack, she said in reply to Mr. Tilley. "Not once have I had a trial nor have my complaints been heard," declared Sister Basil. When she returned from Daysland, Alberta, the Mother General told her that there was nothing against her.

In 1914 she endeavored to get a dispensation which would result in an investigation by Rome, but this was not forthcoming.

Mr. Tilley produced a letter from Mary Basil to Archbishop Spratt dated the 8th of July, 1915, in which she pleaded for fair treatment. Another letter on the 8th September asked the archbishop to make a visit to St. Mary's-on-the-Lake. A third letter was written from plaintiff's Earl street place of residence to the archbishop, telling him of her unbearable position in the community and again pleading for a fair trial and redress.

This concluded the plaintiff's evidence, after being nine hours in the witness box.

Father Mea Called.

Mr. Tilley called Father Mea to the witness box at four o'clock, Tuesday afternoon. Father Mea stated that he had been a Roman Catholic priest for nineteen years. He went as chaplain to St. Mary's-of-the-Lake in 1913, and was there till October 24th, 1916, with the exception of eight months or so.

In reply to Mr. Tilley, Father Mea said he noticed when he was there ten days that Sister Mary Basil was treated differently from the others as she was without employment. He spoke to the archbishop about the matter and the latter agreed that there should be a change. Some anonymous letters that were being read and the archbishop suspected Mary Basil. However, the witness said he was convinced that Mary Basil was innocent. The archbishop showed him a number of the cards, and remarked that the writer of such cards must be of a diseased mind and that she would find herself in an asylum. His Grace asked him to speak to Mary Basil about the matter. He hesitated about doing this, but later on he did speak to her. She went to her room and brought him a letter which she had addressed to the archbishop. Again he spoke to the archbishop about what the latter had said regarding Mary Basil finding herself placed in an asylum, and remarked that it was unfortunate that he should hold such an opinion of Mary Basil. The archbishop appeared incensed, as if he thought the witness should not interfere, so he said no more about it. Father Mea stated that it was hardship for a member of a religious

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and so that she would not seek protection of the civil courts. He thought that was feasible and said he would see about it. A week later he came back and said he could not do that. He urged me to leave St. Mary's-of-the-Lake. I pointed out to him the danger of Sister Basil seeking the protection of the civil courts, as she had threatened. After five or six weeks I called upon the archbishop and asked him if he wished me to leave. He said he did. "Very well," I said, "what do you propose to do about Sister Basil?" He said to send her to the mother house. I said she was afraid. "Would she go to Belleville?" he asked. I asked Mary Basil and she said she would develop. He said to her that if she did not get justice and was driven to seek the protection of the civil courts I would be present to tell the truth and help her. If the persecution started, he again would help her. So she agreed to go to Belleville, and accordingly I told the archbishop.

Father Mea related another conversation with Archbishop Spratt in which the latter said that Mary Basil was lying to him. Witness said he did not think so. Next day the Archbishop again spoke to him about Mary Basil and said he could not do anything in view of the anonymous letters. "I replied," said Father Mea "that if I had your authority I would settle the matter in five minutes as the Archbishop was annoyed, Father Mea said he let the matter drop. Those were the only occasions in which he had any conversations with the Archbishop in regard to the matter.

At St. Mary's-of-the-Lake Orphanage, Sister Mary Basil took charge of the rooms and himself when he was ill for some months. That relieved the situation somewhat as Mary Basil had work to do and was kept occupied. Witness for a time was practically an invalid, but finally was restored to health.

Story of the Abduction.
With regard to the events of Sept. 14th, 1916, Father Mea said he was aroused from his sleep by cries for help. He thought it was the cries of one of the large girls. He got up and went to the hall and listened. Then he went back to bed, but an hour later he was aroused again by cries. This time the person cried out, "Oh Father Mea, Father Mea!" He again got up and put on his bathrobe and slippers and went downstairs. Father Mea told of finding Mary Basil in the automobile. She told him that they were taking her to an asylum. He protested against it. Constable Naylor said he was acting under the instructions of the Archbishop.

Father Mea's story of the attempted abduction was practically the same as that told by Mary Basil. He stated that he could not believe that the archbishop was responsible for such a thing, and that was why he wanted to ring up the police by telephone. Constable Naylor did not want to pull up at the House of Providence, but when witness appeared to Driver Gallagher the latter said yes, he had promised to stop at the House of Providence, and proceeded upon the constable to permit the stop.

In the house the Mother General asked him why he was interfering. She said Mary Basil was insane, and he denied it most emphatically. "I said you have no warrant to take her to an asylum. She replied she had, that there were certificates." Father Mea told of telephoning to the archbishop, and the latter replying that he had no further orders to give. Witness told of his threats to those in charge of Mary Basil, and finally about Mary Basil being ordered by the Superior General to come inside, but Father Mea said he would not trust her there since one attempt had been made to steal her away to an asylum. Altogether they were out in the automobile three hours before they returned to the orphanage.

A Mysterious Letter.
Father Mea produced a letter which he found on his desk when he returned. It was from the Mother General, Mary Frances Regis, telling him that they were to remove Mary Basil to an asylum in Montreal that night; that this would be no surprise to him; as he no doubt knew about her mental condition, and saying they had certificates signed by two doctors saying she was mentally unbalanced. Why this letter was not delivered to him earlier he could not tell. "It looked," said Father Mea, "as if they took good care not to give it to me before I went to bed." One of the sisters on his return from the rescue of Mary Basil asked him if he had received a letter, and he said he had not. She said that one had been left for him early in the evening.

After the abduction Father Mea said he attached himself to Mary Basil as counsel. She wanted to institute legal proceedings next day, but he counselled her to wait and seek redress through the ecclesiastical courts, which would punish the guilty ones.

Interviews with Archbishop.
Father Mea then recounted an interview he had with Archbishop Spratt on the Monday following the abduction. The archbishop asked him if he thought it right to interfere with his administration. "I said that is not a part of your administration; therefore how could I interfere? The archbishop said I was injuring my future. I said: 'I don't care a snap of my finger for my future. You cannot intimidate me in that way.' I told the archbishop that he was getting information in a second-hand way, while I was in on the ground floor and getting it first hand. I told His Grace that the act committed was criminal, and that all those of the church who took part in it were indirectly excommunicated, for laying hands upon a religious with a violent motive.

"I told him that they all should thank him for his interference and preventing the abduction instead of trying to intimidate me. I said to him to let me help him. The archbishop replied to this: 'You had better leave this house at once.' 'All right,' I said, 'but the moment I step out Sister Basil steps out also and places herself under the protection of the civil law.' Then he said that I had better stay.

A Proposal He Made.
"I then proposed to the archbishop four places in which I offered to take a curacy and to place Sister Basil in a convent in one of them so that she would feel that she had protection

and so that she would not seek protection of the civil courts. He thought that was feasible and said he would see about it. A week later he came back and said he could not do that. He urged me to leave St. Mary's-of-the-Lake. I pointed out to him the danger of Sister Basil seeking the protection of the civil courts, as she had threatened. After five or six weeks I called upon the archbishop and asked him if he wished me to leave. He said he did. "Very well," I said, "what do you propose to do about Sister Basil?" He said to send her to the mother house. I said she was afraid. "Would she go to Belleville?" he asked. I asked Mary Basil and she said she would develop. He said to her that if she did not get justice and was driven to seek the protection of the civil courts I would be present to tell the truth and help her. If the persecution started, he again would help her. So she agreed to go to Belleville, and accordingly I told the archbishop.

Father Mea accompanied Sister Basil to Belleville, as he said he was afraid that another attempt might be made to abduct her.

Father Mea told of writing regularly to Mary Basil at Belleville. He put his initials on the envelope, but was requested by Mary Gabriel not to do so any more, as she did not want to let the sisters know where the letters were from. He also visited Mary Basil as her confessor and counsellor.

"Who is Father Mulhall?" asked Mr. Tilley. "Father Mulhall came with letters from the apostolic delegate at Ottawa to investigate the complaints and also the abduction of Mary Basil," said Father Mea, who said he warned Mary Basil as to the identity of Father Mulhall, telling her that if he was counsel for the other side, preparing their case, to say nothing to him.

In reply to Mr. Tilley, Father Mea told of seeing Mary Basil after the assault made upon her in Belleville convent. "Both her eyes were blackened," said the witness. "The right one was almost closed, the left one was not so bad. Her jaw was swollen and inflamed, and he felt the loose teeth of which she complained.

Later, the witness said he had an interview with the archbishop, but the latter said the matter was now entirely out of his hands.

Witness made frequent visits to Belleville to verify her reports to him. On the 14th of May he found conditions just as she described them. Mary Basil said she could no longer stand it. That day the two of them went to Smith's Falls, and he took Mary Basil to the home of his sister.

Father Mea Cross-examined.
To Mr. McCarthy, Father Mea said he was confessor at the House of Providence from 1902 to 1909, and he remembered Mary Basil being there. He heard of no complaints about Mary Basil to the Superior General. On one occasion he heard a rumor of a complaint that Mary Basil was not eating, but not of a hunger strike. This was a trivial matter to form a complaint. Minor details were rather emphasized in a religious community, while out in the world these things would be driven out of the mind.

Father Mea said he formed the opinion that Mary Basil was one of the best religious in the House. He said that she had a clear conception of the life of the religious, and was living up to the ideal of that life. She had a strong personality, and would not take kindly to blind obedience. That opinion of her had grown upon him.

Continuing in his cross-examination Mr. McCarthy brought out the fact that witness had been at the orphanage undergoing treatment for throat and lung trouble. Sister Basil had been officiating as his nurse there.

Just before adjournment, Mr. Tilley took up the evidence of Sister Gabriel taken under oath at Moosejaw. He read about one-half of the evidence, the balance being left over till the session on Thursday morning.

Sister Mary Gabriel's Evidence.
Under oath at Moosejaw, Sask., Sister Mary Gabriel testified that she had been connected with the Order of the Sisters of Charity of the House of Providence for thirty-seven years. After serving six years as Superior-General at Kingston she had been Belleville as local superior in a school mission. She declared that Sister Mary Basil always showed signs of unbalanced mind. She claimed she was not just normal, but always well-behaved. She was always a troublesome subject. Witness has known Archbishop Spratt indirectly for twenty-five years, and Mary Frances Regis for longer than that time.

In 1909 or 1910, when Archbishop Spratt was parish priest at Trenton and Mary Frances Regis was sister superior at the convent at the same place, the witness said she had issued an order stopping then Father Spratt from using a form of massage for affecting the cure of neurasthenic patients. At that time Mary Frances Regis was troubled with constipation and Father Spratt was accustomed to call at the convent and treat her. Witness found it necessary to stop the practice because there was a little disturbance. The practice was contrary to rule. Her order was to stop Father Spratt going to see her alone. One of the sisters must accompany him. When he came to see her alone some people could take offence very easily. "They think there is harm when there is not." It was witness' duty to prevent any cause of dissatisfaction. Witness further said that she thought the massage treatment would not be administered when another sister was required to be present.

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