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Elizabeth Ann Seton: Key Relationships in Her Life 1774-1809

BY

ELLIN M. KELLY

The Oxford English Dictionary defines relationship first as “the state of being related; kinship,” which is not flexible enough for this presentation. Two of its other definitions for relation are more appropriate. “The connexion between persons arising out of the natural ties of blood or marriage” applies to the relationship between Saint Elizabeth Seton and her family members. “The position which one person holds with respect to another on account of some social or other connexion between them; the particular mode in which persons are naturally connected by circumstances” provides the flexibility needed to discuss her friends and her spiritual advisors.

The individuals mentioned by Saint Elizabeth Seton in her letters and journals to 1809 include members of the Bayley and Seton families, other relatives, a few very good friends, and some important spiritual advisors. I will discuss some family relationships and a few individuals, who had a significant impact on her life, especially in New York, and with whom she had a special rapport.

Family Relationships

For young Elizabeth, her relationship with her mother was brief because Catherine Charlton Bayley died on 8 May 1777, after the birth of her third daughter, Catherine, when Elizabeth was almost three. A year later on 10 June 1778, her father, Doctor Richard Bayley, married Charlotte Amelia Barclay. In the next twelve years, Doctor Bayley’s second family included seven half brothers and sisters for Elizabeth

and her older sister, Mary.¹ Information on Elizabeth's childhood appears in her memoir, "Dear Remembrances," written in 1812 after she had founded the American Sisters of Charity. The earliest passages indicate that Doctor Bayley's second marriage was not always happy for his two oldest daughters. Many times during her early years and into her teens, she and Mary lived with her Uncle William Bayley's family because their Father was often away. "14 years of age—at uncle B.s New Rochelle again. . . . Spring there—joy in God that he was my Father insisting that he should not forsake me—my Father away, perhaps Dead—but God was my Father and I quite independent of whatever might happen."² On 8 August 1808, Mary Post wrote to Elizabeth, then in Baltimore, after a visit to "Uncle B—at the Manor," and recalled those early years.

I can scarcely describe to you the state of mind I was thrown into by recalling scenes and persons that every year of my life seems to have been connected with. Beginning with the unhappy situation of our Mother—our taking refuge in the same place on our Father's going to England. The *very very* painful events that succeeded our leaving there until we married. Even that eventful step scarcely inabled [*sic*] us to shake off all that was disagreeably attached to our situation before, because we were drove [*sic*] from circumstances into situations that we must ever regret being attached to the life of any young person. Happy those who have an affectionate Mother to advise and maintain their own respectability by observing her precepts.³

By the time Elizabeth was sixteen, family difficulties had escalated. "Family disagreement—could not guess why, when I spoke kindly to relations they did not speak to me—could not even guess how anyone could be an enemy to another."⁴ But a bright spot in 1790 was Mary's marriage to Doctor Wright Post on 10 June.

¹Annabelle Melville, *Elizabeth Bayley Seton: 1774-1821* (New York: 1985), 24-25. All quotations from archival documents are exact and include misspellings and grammatical errors. I have used abbreviations for the following archives and have indicated the manuscript numbers where available.

SJPH: Archives, Saint Joseph's Provincial House, Emmitsburg, Maryland. The full identification of Elizabeth's papers is 1-3-3 plus the volume number and the document number within that volume. Only the volume and document numbers are included in these notes.

MSJ: Archives of the Sisters of Charity, Mount Saint Joseph, Ohio.

MSV: Archives of the Sisters of Charity, Mount Saint Vincent, New York.

AAB: Archives of the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

²SJPH. *Elizabeth Seton: Selected Writings*, ed. Ellin Kelly and Annabelle Melville, (Mahwah, New Jersey: 1987), 345. The complete text is on pages 344-53. All subsequent references to that edition are cited as Kelly-Melville, *Selected Writings*.

³SJPH 11:3. Emphasis in original.

⁴Kelly-Melville, *Selected Writings*, 346.

Elizabeth recalled that when she was eighteen, she was "very miserable," but that God "was too good to condemn so poor a creature made of dust, driven by misery." After she met and was courted by William Magee Seton, her misery changed to joy. The couple was married on 25 January 1794. "My own home at 20—the world—that and heaven too, quite impossible!"⁵

In the early years of her marriage, the Setons welcomed three children: Anna Marie in 1795, William in 1796, and Richard in 1798. But life changed for the young couple after the death of William's father on 9 June 1798, when William found himself responsible for his stepbrothers and sisters.⁶ On 5 July, Elizabeth wrote to her friend, Julia Scott, a recent widow, "To be sure for me who so dearly loves quiet and a small family, to become at once the Mother of six children and the head of so large a number, is a very great change."⁷ On 25 November, she gave Julia further insight into her changed situation: "Suppose you had a nursling and a half a dozen besides—Suppose the providing and arranging my family—and suppose yourself a teacher of Reading, writing, sewing etc. for I devote the whole Morning—that is from ten until two to my three Girls"—Cecilia and Harriet, her husband's half sisters, and her daughter Anna Marie.⁸

Early in 1799, Mr. Seton's business began to fail. In a letter on 26 December, Elizabeth indicated their deteriorating financial status: "I have this last week watched and attended the street door to keep out the Sheriffs Officers . . . and have given up my list to the Commissioners of Bankruptcy, of all we possess, even to ours and the children's clothing."⁹

After her marriage, Elizabeth's relationship with her father improved dramatically. Elizabeth and her children spent the summer of 1800 with Doctor Bayley, and her fourth child, Catherine, was born.¹⁰ When the Setons' fortunes did not improve in 1801, the demands on Elizabeth's time were even greater as she indicated to Julia on 10 March, "I have so many indispensable employments. . . . The general tenor is to rise early," but she noted, "The afternoon and Evening is as regularly filled by my Father and Seton."¹¹ But even this peaceful

⁵Ibid., 346.

⁶Melville, *Elizabeth Bayley Seton*, 54, 55-56.

⁷SJPH 6:7.

⁸Ibid., 6:16.

⁹Ibid., 6:37.

¹⁰Melville, *Elizabeth Bayley Seton*, 79-80.

¹¹SJPH 6:39.

existence was shattered that summer. On 11 August 1801, Doctor Bayley contracted fever from his patients and died on 17 August, and a week later Elizabeth and her children returned to New York.¹² Writing to Julia on 27 October, she recalled her father's death. "They will be done'—Oh Julia what a comfort and support those four little words are to my Soul—I have repeated them till they are softened to the sweetest harmony. They recall the death bed scene of my own Father, and I counted his dying pulses so long to that time, whilst repeating them, I can imagine I still hold his hand—Surely in my last hour my heart will lean on them."¹³

When she wrote Julia on 7 January 1802, she commented on her teaching, "I keep all at Home, William makes his letters very well and Anna begins to join hers, they spell very well and would read, but I promised my *Father* the first of last Summer that I would keep them back for twelve months."¹⁴ On 20 August 1802, Elizabeth gave birth to Rebecca, her fifth child and third daughter.¹⁵

After the death of William's father, Elizabeth had found a kindred spirit in her husband's half sister, Rebecca, only six years her junior. Rebecca not only shared Elizabeth's renewed religious faith but also her concern for poor widows and orphans.¹⁶ In 1803 she shared Elizabeth's concern over William's deteriorating health. Prompted by the hope that his health would improve, the Setons and their oldest daughter, Anna Marie, sailed from New York for Leghorn, Italy, in October. But their arrival became another serious trial when the authorities, convinced that the ailing William was suffering from yellow fever, quarantined the Setons in the Lazaretto.¹⁷ During their confinement, Elizabeth kept a journal for Rebecca, her soul's sister. A few quotations from this lengthy text illustrate her concern for her husband:

20 November—my Husband on the cold bricks without fire, shivering and groaning lifting his dim and sorrowful eyes with a fixed gaze on my

¹²Melville, *Elizabeth Bayley Seton*, 85-86.

¹³SJPH 6:43.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 6:44. Emphasis in original.

¹⁵Melville, *Elizabeth Bayley Seton*, 92.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 95, 98, and 100.

face while his tears ran on his pillow without one word—Anna rubbed one hand I the other till his Fever came on.

30 November—At Willys Bed side we have said our dear Service—he thought it would stop his shivering.

5 December—was early awakened by my poor William in great suffering—sent for Dr. Tutilli, who as soon as he saw him told me—he was not wanted, but I must send for Him who would minister to his Soul.

13 December—When I thank God for my “Creation and preservation” it is with a warm of feeling I never could know until now—to wait on him, My *W. Soul and Body* to console and soothe those hours of affliction and pain weariness and watching which next to God I alone could do.¹⁸

When they were finally released and moved to Pisa, her husband’s condition did not improve. Her journal entry for Christmas reflects the depth of her religious convictions which she shared with her husband.

25 December—[he] rested until midnight . . . then awoke, and observed I had not laid down I said no love for the sweetest reflections keep me awake—Christmas day is began [*sic*]—the day of our dear Redeemers birth . . . is the day that opened to us the door of everlasting Life—Yes he said and how I wish we could have the Sacrament—Well we must do all we can, and putting a little wine in a glass I said different portions of Psalms and Prayers which I had marked hoping for a happy moment and we took the cup of Thanksgiving, setting aside the sorrow of time, in the view of the joys of Eternity—Oh so happy to find that those joys were more strongly painted to him.¹⁹

In spite of all her efforts and those of William’s friends, the Filicchis and Carlton Bayley, Elizabeth’s half brother, William Magee Seton died two days later on 27 December, a week after their release from the Lazaretto.²⁰ Even after his death, Elizabeth cared for her husband. “Finding every one afraid of catching the complaint as we should be of the yellow fever, I took two women who had washed and sometimes assisted me, and again shutting the door with their assistance did the last duties; and felt I had done all—all that tenderest love and duty could do.”²¹

Following her husband’s burial in the Protestant cemetery in Leghorn, she and Anna Marie remained with the Filicchis until suitable transportation to New York became available. They sailed from

¹⁸MSV and SJPH 3:14 and 8:59 and 60. Kelly-Melville, *Selected Writings*, 100, 109, 113, 118, and 120. Emphasis in original. For the complete text see *ibid.*, 101-38.

¹⁹Kelly-Melville, *Selected Writings*, 123.

²⁰Melville, *Elizabeth Bayley Seton*, 105.

²¹Kelly-Melville, *Selected Writings*, 124.

Leghorn on 8 April 1804 under the protection of Antonio Filicchi and arrived in New York on 4 June.²² There Elizabeth discovered her soul's sister, Rebecca, near death. After her death on 8 July, Elizabeth wrote, "The Home of plenty and comfort, the Society of Sisters united by prayer and divine affections—the Evening hymns, the daily lectures, the sunset contemplations, the Service of holy days, the Kiss of Peace, the widows' visits—all—all—gone forever."²³

During the following months while Elizabeth busied herself caring for her children, she also underwent a spiritual crisis which she settled with her profession of faith in Saint Peter's Catholic church on 14 March. When she received Holy Eucharist for the first time on 25 March 1805,²⁴ she must have recalled what she had written in her Italian journal for Rebecca Seton, "How happy would we be if we believed what these dear souls believe, that they *possess God* in the Sacrament and that he remains in their churches and is carried to them when they are sick."²⁵

In the spring of 1805, she joined Mr. Patrick White who planned to begin an English seminary, but in August when Mr. White was unable to pay his share of the house rent, Doctor Wright Post removed Elizabeth and her children to his home.²⁶

In her memoir, Elizabeth indicated her concern for her children: "Fear of their eternal loss, the prevailing care through all the pains and pleasures of a mother."²⁷ To supplement her own instructions in their religious faith and social behavior, she prepared books for each child, but only the one for Catherine survives. Just when she prepared "Josephine's Mother's Advices" is unclear, but much of its content relates to Catherine's going out in the world so it must have been composed at Emmitsburg. It contains advice on good conduct, charitable speech, the dangers of the theatre, of dancing, of pleasures in general, acquiring virtue, avoiding sin, and of course, her favorite topics: death and eternity.²⁸

During the summer of 1805, Elizabeth was reconciled to her father's second family. Her half sister, Emma Bayley Craig, died in childbirth on 22 July, and her stepmother, Charlotte, died on 1 September. Eliza-

²²Melville, *Elizabeth Bayley Seton*, 106, 110-15.

²³Kelly-Melville, *Selected Writings*, 136-37.

²⁴Melville, *Elizabeth Bayley Seton*, 137, 142.

²⁵Kelly-Melville, *Selected Writings*, 133. Emphasis in original.

²⁶Melville, *Elizabeth Bayley Seton*, 149-50.

²⁷Kelly-Melville, *Selected Writings*, 347.

²⁸SJPH JMA.

beth told Julia of this change: "I have had the indiscribable satisfaction of attending Mrs. Bayley in her last hours—I believe I have expressed to you my pleasure in receiving from her since my return Home every mark of Peace and reconciliation."²⁹ Writing to Antonio Filicchi after Mrs. Bayley's death, she commented, "When I see these poor souls die without Sacraments, without prayers, and left in their last moments to the conflicts of parting Nature without the divine consolations which our Almighty God has so mercifully provided for us, I feel then while my heart is filled with sorrow for them as if my joy is too great to be expressed at the idea of the different prospects I have before me in that hour thro' the divine goodness and mercy."³⁰

After Elizabeth opened a boarding house in November for boys attending a school operated by Mr. William Harris, she wrote Julia, "scarcely can that happiness be realized which has given me again a Home—three dollars a week for each Boy with washing and mending paid for, will help at least to make Us less a burthen—and the pleasure of doing something for my Darlings makes every labor easy."³¹ Her worries for her sons, William and Richard, decreased when they were enrolled at Georgetown with the financial help of Antonio Filicchi and Bishop John Carroll.³²

But uncertainty about her family's future continued as a major worry. In 1807 she set her hopes on moving to Montreal where her boys could attend school and where she and her girls could find refuge and work in a convent school.³³

By the spring of 1808, the Setons and five boarders had moved to a smaller house because some parents, dissatisfied with her supervision, had withdrawn their sons. At this time, Elizabeth wrote enthusiastically to Julia about a plan suggested by Reverend Louis William Dubourg, president of Saint Mary's Seminary and College in Baltimore. During Holy Week while he was assisting at Saint Peter's church, Dubourg had offered "to give me a formal grant of a lot of ground situated close to the college . . . and procure me immediately the charge of a half dozen girls and as many more as I can manage added to this he will take my boys in the college, and the intire [*sic*]

²⁹Melville, *Elizabeth Bayley Seton*, 148, and SJPH 6:59.

³⁰MSJ S-F 19.

³¹SJPH 6:60.

³²Ibid., 6:62.

³³Melville, *Elizabeth Bayley Seton*, 169.

charge of them for a small consideration in order that Filicchi's money may assist me in another way."³⁴

On 1 June, she wrote Julia that her move to Baltimore was settled, and on 9 June, Elizabeth and her three daughters sailed from New York for Baltimore. They arrived on Thursday, 16 June, the feast of Corpus Christi, during the consecration of Saint Mary's chapel. Her arrival in Baltimore signaled the beginning of a new life, secure within the religion of her choice and replete with many new relationships as well as several old ones.³⁵

Three Friendships

Elizabeth had three close friends: Julia Scott, Eliza Sadler, and Catherine Duplex,³⁶ who remained loyal to her throughout her life. They stood by her through the Setons' financial troubles, through her struggles to support her children after William's death, and even after her move to Maryland. She in turn offered her support in their trials and tribulations. What is obvious from the archival letters is their undying loyalty to Elizabeth and her devotion to them, even though Eliza and Julia never shared her religious convictions.

Julia Sitgreaves Scott

Julia Sitgreaves from a prominent Eastern Pennsylvania family moved to New York after her marriage to Lewis Allaire Scott. Elizabeth's first recorded reference to her appears in a letter to Eliza Sadler on 11 August 1796. Even though Julia was several years her senior, Elizabeth called her "a little rain shadow" who "never interests me but when she is in sickness or sorrow."³⁷ A promising New York politician, Mr. Scott died in March 1798, leaving his widow and two children, Maria and John.³⁸ On 27 March, Elizabeth wrote Eliza Sadler, then in Europe, "I meant to have had a letter ready for whatever opportunity presented, but Fate orders all things, and since that time has ordered the *Husband* of my poor little Julia Scott to the regions of

³⁴SJPH 6:71.

³⁵Melville, *Elizabeth Bayley Seton*, 175-76.

³⁶The name is often spelled Dupleix. I have used Duplex because it was the form used by Elizabeth Ann Seton.

³⁷SJPH 7:2.

³⁸Melville, *Elizabeth Bayley Seton*, 71.

Peace — I have not left her night or day during the excess of her Sorrows and such scenes of terror I have gone thro' as you nor no one can conceive—'tis past—little Julia goes to Philadelphia next week, where she is to fix her residence, as her Family connections are all there."³⁹

Julia's return to Philadelphia marked the beginning of their correspondence which lasted for twenty-two years. The value Julia Scott placed on their friendship and Elizabeth's letters became clear to the Sisters of Charity at Emmitsburg when, after Julia's death on 30 March 1842, her daughter-in-law, Mrs. John Scott, wrote to offer Julia's collection of 133 letters and notes from Elizabeth.⁴⁰ The letters from 1798 to 1803 abound with details about the Seton children, other family members, and New York friends; the letters after Elizabeth's return from Italy to the end of her life reflect not only her deep gratitude for Julia's continual monetary assistance but also her own newfound religious convictions. Because of their continuity, this collection of letters has been and continues to be a priceless source of information about Elizabeth's life from 1798 to 1820. No one can study Elizabeth Seton's life without referring to this impressive collection.

In her first letter on 16 April 1798, Elizabeth was concerned for Julia's well-being after her return to Philadelphia, "May Heaven grant you Peace in return for all the sorrow and confusion you have passed thro' here."⁴¹ Later in the month, she wrote, "[I] implore the care of your good angel for the future, who if it should ever be inclined to remissness or inattention in your concerns will receive many a check from *mine*."⁴² Julia was one of Catherine Josephine Seton's five sponsors, by proxy, when she was christened in 1800.⁴³

When Julia's father died in December 1800, little did Elizabeth imagine, as she wrote to console her on 26 December, that eight months later she would experience a similar loss.⁴⁴ Because Julia was one of Doctor Bayley's special favorites, Elizabeth provided details of her father's illness and death in her letter of 5 September 1801.⁴⁵ Subsequent letters refer to the growing financial difficulties of William Seton, but her letter of 16 November 1802 signaled a personal change

³⁹SJPH 7:5. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁰Information provided by Sister John Mary Crumlish, former SJPH archivist.

⁴¹SJPH 6:1.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 6:2. Emphasis in original.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 6:35.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 6:37.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 6:42.

for Elizabeth. Spiritual direction from Reverend John Henry Hobart of Trinity church had caused renewed interest in her religion, as Elizabeth tried to explain to Julia.

So many years I have called you dear friend, and shall your dear friend be insincere to you?—dear Julia—then I will tell you the plain truth, that my habits of both Soul and Body are changed—that I feel all the habits of society and connections of *this* life have taken a new form and are only interesting or endearing as they point the view to the next.

This is not to say that my affection for you is lessened, for oh with what tender pity and love do we regard one who is dear to us when we see them walking in a path that leads to sorrow and pain, unconscious of their danger. . . . now then dear friend I explain to you why I have not as much pleasure in writing to you as I formerly had—why it appears to you . . . that I do not love you sincerely.⁴⁶

Her correspondence with Julia between this date and the Setons' departure for Italy amounted to five brief notes, the last written on 1 October 1803.

Was Julia disturbed by the content of that November letter? Perhaps. During Elizabeth's sojourn in Italy, Julia apparently received no direct word. But little more than a month after Elizabeth's return to New York, she renewed the correspondence. In this phase of their relationship, Julia came to Elizabeth's aid. In fact, Elizabeth anticipated Julia's response in her letter of 15 July 1804: "Can you not share with me your portion? can you not add to the contributions of those friends who support me?—in answer to these questions, which I am sure of from you, I assure you that for the present there is no necessity."⁴⁷ Julia responded by visiting New York in order to assess Elizabeth's situation in person and offered to adopt Anna Marie. Although Elizabeth rejected her generous offer, she indicated her appreciation on 28 November 1804, "God will bless your kind intentions to a fatherless child, and however rough or unhinged my mind may be, my Soul must be attached to you tenfold forever."⁴⁸

However, Julia did begin regular contributions to the Setons' welfare because on 13 December 1804, Elizabeth thanked her, "Your gift of love to my dear ones will I fear be expended in wood and Bread for us all," and included a description of her own daily activities:

⁴⁶Ibid., 6:47. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁷Ibid., 6:53.

⁴⁸Ibid., 6:54.

Yet dear if you could see your friend turn out at day light in the coldest mornings, make fire, dress and comb wash and scold the little ones, fill the kettle, prepare breakfast, sweep make beds and the etcetera work, nurse the old woman, keep the school, make ready dinner, supper and put to bed again, you will say could she go through it, all the while *looking up too*. . . . You will say where are *all the friends*, but must consider every one has their own occupations and pursuits and often for ten or twelve days I see no one.⁴⁹

After she had taken in the school boys as boarders, she explained that she had not written because “whenever affection suggested write to Julia the same affection pleaded—what to grieve and pain her?”⁵⁰ But her task was not easy as she admitted on 6 December, “We begin at the dawn of day, and by the time all is done I actually fall asleep *even at my prayers*.”⁵¹

Responding on 20 January 1806, to Julia’s questions about her religion, she explained, “You asked me long ago about my Religious Principles—I am gently quietly and silently a good Catholic—the rubs etc are all past, no one appears to know it except by showing redoubled kindness, only a few knotty hearts that must talk of something, and the worst they say is—’so much trouble has turned her brain.’”⁵²

Through 1806 and 1807, Julia regularly enclosed money in her letters. Elizabeth told her in November 1806, “Your steady unremitting affection in my worldly shipwreck is a sweet consolation, and one of the very few remaining endearments of this life.”⁵³ In another letter in April 1807, she declared, “I cannot tell you dear Julia how your generous attention presses on my heart.”⁵⁴ When Elizabeth detailed the problems she faced from the parents of her boarders in November 1807, Julia again offered to adopt Anna Marie, but Elizabeth answered on 6 December, “You talk of taking her from me—dearest friend if it was difficult two years ago—imagine now.”⁵⁵

Her letter of 8 March 1808 expresses appreciation for Julia’s continued friendship: “Of all the many attachments I have had you are the only one on Earth who my heart turns to in the simple unexpressed

⁴⁹Ibid., 6:55. Emphases in original.

⁵⁰Ibid., 6:60.

⁵¹Ibid., 6:60. Emphasis in original.

⁵²Ibid., 6:61.

⁵³Ibid., 6:63.

⁵⁴Ibid., 6:65.

⁵⁵Ibid., 6:68.

warmth of confiding love—every Other is shackled with hesitations, doubts, calculations etc so contradictory to my nature.”⁵⁶ In April after Elizabeth had moved to a smaller house, she explained Mr. Dubourg’s plan, and when she wrote on 1 June, she thought of going by land so she could see Julia, but added, “They tell me it will be much less expence [*sic*] to go by water, and I know so many of us must be an embarrassment to you.”⁵⁷ Almost a month after her arrival in Baltimore, she wrote Julia, “After so long a period of trouble and confusion to lead a life of regularity and comparative repose . . . but such is the contrast of my present situation I scarcely dare think of it.”⁵⁸

Elizabeth’s renewed interest in religion and her profession of faith in the Roman Catholic Church prompted her to include fervent exhortations to Julia that she spend less time in worldly pursuits and give more attention to religion, especially eternity. In her letter of 12 February 1810, Julia finally responded to the pleadings of her friend. Declaring that it was Elizabeth’s fate “to be the death Bed comforter of so many, “ she continued:

Do you know I have often wished that when my last hour arrives, I might behold you at my bedside—you believe that of that hour I never think—you are mistaken my friend—I know I am not what I ought to be, but I endeavour to be what I can in the situation in which I am placed, which I believe to impose certain duties on me different from those you have to perform—I pray for Grace to be what I ought, and I entreat that your prayers may be added to mine. . . . If you were nearer to me, your influence and timely admonitions might be of much advantage to me.⁵⁹

But Julia lived for almost twenty years after Mother Seton’s death.

Eliza Craig Sadler

Eliza Craig Sadler was the wife of a New York merchant, Henry Sadler. Obviously a woman of considerable means, Mrs. Sadler had sailed for Europe in 1795. In her letter of 8 February 1796, Elizabeth contrasted their present lives:

⁵⁶Ibid., 6:70.

⁵⁷Ibid., 6:72.

⁵⁸Ibid., 6:73.

⁵⁹Ibid., 11:B25.

... and really Mrs. Sad ... you go to balls on Sunday night, you depraved creature, and what Balls or amusement can compensate for that quiet calm tranquility which Sunday and particularly Sunday evening affords with Husband shaking his slipper by a good coal fire and a volume of Blair [sermons] opened on the table. But certainly my Sad I almost envy you the view of so fine a country and your description of the people awakens what formerly was a reigning passion in my breast, a curiosity to see the world and Europeans in particular.⁶⁰

Although Eliza was not in New York in 1797 to join Elizabeth and Catherine Duplex as charter members of the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children, the first benevolent association managed by women in the United States and founded by Mrs. Isabella Graham, she did join the Society on her return in 1799. Mrs. Graham believed that the Society's activities would prove "useful to those ladies who have sufficient health and leisure to engage in it."⁶¹ Although Elizabeth later had less leisure time and family worries, she continued her efforts for the society even after the Seton's financial troubles.

Eliza's return in 1799 created difficulties for Elizabeth because her half sister Emma was engaged to William Craig, Eliza's brother. She told Julia on 20 January that Doctor Bayley had forbidden any reconciliation between Elizabeth and her stepmother; therefore, "I can never visit [Eliza] without expecting to meet those I do not wish to meet."⁶² When she visited Mrs. Sadler on Long Island in June, she told Julia, "Emma's marriage takes place on Wednesday, the 19th, and I hope, not withstanding all difficulties, I shall be present and forget the past as far as possible." The visit provided Elizabeth with "all the enjoyment of books, music, walking, etc. that my most romantic fancy ever formed. Mrs. Sadler always possesses these as naturally as I do the air I breathe, as she has nothing else to employ her, but to me who has so long been tied to sick rooms and a large family it appears like a change to some better region."⁶³ During this visit Elizabeth began reading the works of Rousseau. After Mother Seton's death, when Father Bruté examined her letters and notes, he added this comment to one of Elizabeth's notes to Eliza, "This poor mother 1799!!!— perverted to Rousseau and Emile by her unhappy friend, Mrs. Sadler."⁶⁴

⁶⁰Ibid., 7:1.

⁶¹Barbara J. Berg, *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism* (New York: 1978), 155, 158-59.

⁶²SJPH 6:19.

⁶³Ibid., 6:27.

⁶⁴Ibid., 7:18.

On 7 December 1800, Elizabeth reported to Julia, "Mrs. Sadler has been at the point of death with a paralytic complaint but is now recovering tho' very slowly." Because Elizabeth had the care of an infant daughter, she wrote, "I see her as often as 'the times' will allow."⁶⁵

After Henry Sadler's death in 1801, Elizabeth described Eliza's condition to Julia on 27 October:

tho' the last three weeks has been tryed [*sic*] to the utmost by my poor little friend Sad who has gone thro' more fatigue with a weak frame, than the strongest could have endured . . . for Mrs. Sadler is more like a lifeless body then anything liveing [*sic*], and in fact so stupified, that it seems almost the same situation she was in twelve months ago from a paralytic affliction which threatened her life and deprived her for three months of the use of her right side. . . . She staid [*sic*] with poor Sadler to the last, and I was (as seems my lot to be) her only Earthly Support. Mrs. Duplex a particular friend of our circle stays with her for the present, but it is difficult to imagine a Being more forlorn. Yellow fever—the very sound drives the blood from my heart.⁶⁶

This last statement suggests the cause of Mr. Sadler's death.

When Elizabeth wrote to Antonio Filicchi in September 1804, she mentioned that she had seen "Mrs. Sadler, who cannot enter into the spirit of our cause."⁶⁷ But after Elizabeth's conversion, both Mrs. Sadler and Mrs. Duplex took up her defense when Reverend John Henry Hobart attempted to disrupt Elizabeth's arrangement with the Whites. Elizabeth told Antonio that when they found that the plan might fail, they explained to Hobart "that Mr. and Mrs. White were Protestants and that Mrs. Seton's only intention was to obtain bread for her children and to be at peace with all the world, instead of making discord between parents and children."⁶⁸

In the summer of 1807, Eliza Sadler and Catherine Duplex sailed for Ireland. In two letters to Sad, Elizabeth reflected on their friendship. On 28 August, she wrote, "The Soul that is pressing on must not stop a moment but you must let it know particularly and minutely how you and dear Due [Mrs. Duplex] have passed thro' the storms."⁶⁹

⁶⁵Ibid., 6:36.

⁶⁶Ibid., 6:43.

⁶⁷AAB 7N3.

⁶⁸MSJ S-F 15.

⁶⁹SJPH 7:31.

On 7 October, she asked, "Where are you Eliza when you were surrounded by your Books flowers and retirement at Home tho' many cares were mixed with them the necessity that separated me from you and seemed almost habitual was considered among the privations of my fate—since I no longer know you are well and that I may see you at any time I would follow you where ever you go, and wish to know all those pains or consolations which neither my solitudes could lessen—or affection increase."⁷⁰

Elizabeth wrote to Eliza in November 1807 and in March 1808 before deciding on the move to Baltimore. Almost a year later, in January 1809, she wrote of her new situation and employment. However, she had not forgotten her friends or former life. "But I find in proportion as my heart is more drawn towards the summit, it looks backward with added tenderness to every one I have ever loved, much more those who have long possessed its intire [*sic*] and truest attachment."⁷¹ Eliza responded from abroad on 1 June, "Useful you can now be and fully employed in a work suited to your talents and feelings."⁷²

Eliza and Elizabeth continued their friendship through letters, but when Eliza sailed for France on 25 October 1819, Elizabeth knew that she would never see her again.

Catherine Duplex

Catherine Duplex was the wife of a naval captain, George Duplex, and joined Elizabeth as a charter member of the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children in 1797. In July 1800, when Due was in Ireland visiting her family and "all those dear ties which my Du has long wanted the consolation of enjoying," Elizabeth promised, "I shall not omit any opportunity of writing to you whether you receive my letters or not, for I love to give you every chance of what to me would be so great a pleasure as hearing from you."⁷³

Writing to Julia Scott on 19 November 1800, Elizabeth reported on Catherine's christening that day: "Her sponsors (you will laugh when I tell you she had *five*) were Sister Post, Mrs. Duplex who sent her an

⁷⁰Ibid., 7:32.

⁷¹Ibid., 7:35.

⁷²Ibid., 11:B6.

⁷³Ibid., 7:62

elegant christening suit from Ireland with a particular request that she might stand for her, that is by Proxy; *myself* for *you* . . . and my Father and Mr. Curson godfathers."⁷⁴ Due eventually returned from Ireland. In 1805 she not only joined Eliza Sadler in explaining Elizabeth's association with the Whites to Reverend Hobart but also fielded criticism against Mrs. Seton's conversion as Elizabeth told Antonio Filicchi: "My Mrs. Duplex goes on very fast—every day some one of the kind ladies sheds tears to her for the poor deluded Mrs. Seton, and she always tells them how happy she is that anything in the world can *comfort* and *console* me."⁷⁵

Due and Sad sailed for Ireland in 1807, and in November Elizabeth wrote Sad that rumors had Due returning with her husband, but she doubted Due would leave her friends so soon.⁷⁶ Shortly after Elizabeth had settled in Baltimore, she wrote Due on 20 June, voicing concern because she was worried about her. On a happier note, she recalled the birth of her daughter, Rebecca:

Memorable day to us both, what did you not suffer for me my Due on that day. You were the first person who cherished and nursed the dear little being, and many many days and nights of watching and anxiety you gave us after that, and you will ever love us my own friend. While away from all to whom we are allied by natural affection, aliens to our nearest connections and seeking bread among strangers, my Soul cries after you as its dearest Sister and rests assured of your love—yes we are among strangers in one sense of the word—but not strangers in kindness nor affection for we never received so much before since we were left desolate but from you.⁷⁷

After returning to New York, Catherine Duplex became a Catholic in the fall of 1812, and Reverend Anthony Kohlmann, the pastor of Saint Peter's church in New York, praised her as "a mother to a widow and orphan, and her lively faith goeth a pace with her charity."⁷⁸ In a letter to Elizabeth, Mary Post indicated that Due's conversion had created problems for her.⁷⁹ However, in the fall of 1813, she travelled to Emmitsburg to visit Elizabeth, who wrote to Sad, "To say Due dear is behind my curtain with the children is the only word. . . . Could you

⁷⁴Ibid., 6:35. Emphases in original.

⁷⁵MSJ S-F 11. Emphases in original.

⁷⁶SJPH 7:33.

⁷⁷Ibid., 7:63.

⁷⁸Melville, *Elizabeth Bayley Seton*, 257.

⁷⁹SJPH 11:18.

see my heart in the Silence of this moment while she rests—No—you can guess a little and only a little—dear dear Eliza—Peace—You shall know at least that this happy Tuesday night . . . she is safe and surrounded with love and tenderness . . . she says she is in perfect health compared to the beginning of her journey.”⁸⁰

Due’s conversion brought her into close contact with the Sisters of Charity when they opened an orphanage in New York in 1817. One of the last letters Elizabeth wrote her friend was sent through the sisters in New York. Due continued to assist the sisters and their institutions in New York after Mother Seton’s death.⁸¹

Spiritual Advisors

Clearly, the most important event in Elizabeth Seton’s adult life was her profession of faith in the Roman Catholic Church in 1805, but this decision was not easy. From her return to New York in June 1804 until early 1805, she examined the positions of both the Catholic Church and her own Episcopal Church; she debated within herself and with others before making her final commitment.

In a January 1805 letter to Filippo Filicchi, she described her inner turmoil:

They told me from the beginning that my strong belief in your doctrine must be a temptation. . . . I resolved to double the only weapons against him—humility, prayer, and fasting—and found my mind gradually settle in confidence in Christ and the infinite treasures of His mercy. For some months I have stood between the two ways, looking steadily upwards but fearing to proceed, never crossing the street that led to your church without lifting up my heart for mercy and often in the Protestant church finding my soul at Mass in Leghorn.⁸²

As she struggled over her religious convictions, she was encouraged by two different defenders of religious faith: the Filicchi brothers, especially Filippo, as Roman Catholic friends, and Reverend John Henry Hobart as her Episcopal minister. The arguments posed by Filippo Filicchi and John Henry Hobart, together with the books they suggested, played crucial roles in her struggle and its resolution. Both

⁸⁰Ibid., 7:53.

⁸¹Melville, *Elizabeth Bayley Seton*, 369.

⁸²SJPH 10:6.

men were well versed in Scripture and Church history as they defended their own faiths.

Reverend John Henry Hobart

Ordained a deacon in June 1798, he became an assistant minister at Trinity church in New York in December 1800 and was ordained a priest in the Episcopal Church on 5 April 1801.⁸³ As a member of Trinity, Elizabeth Seton responded to his gifted oratory and sought his spiritual advice.

In February 1802, when Hobart traveled to Philadelphia, Elizabeth introduced him to Julia Scott with this appraisal: "The soother and comforter of the troubled soul is a kind friend not often met with. The convincing, pious, and singular turn of mind and argument possessed by this most amiable being, has made him, without his even having the least consciousness that he is so, the friend most my friend in this world."⁸⁴ References to Hobart and his sermons appear frequently in Elizabeth's notes to her "soul's sister," Rebecca Seton.

Her second notebook has a reflection on the verses, "The Lord is My Shepherd," which she associates in "Dear Remembrances" with her stepmother, "then in great affliction learnt me the 22nd Psalm . . . and all life through it had been the favorite Psalm."⁸⁵ However, the vocabulary of this reflection is more stilted than her usual writing so it could be based on a sermon of Hobart's.⁸⁶ Reflecting on a sermon of Hobart's, dated 11 August 1803, Elizabeth listed his eight rhetorical questions, but for her the final one was most significant: "Do we wish to anticipate on Earth the joys of Heaven—to be exalted to the celestial courts and celebrate in strains worthy the harps of angels the praises of God most High—we must have recourse to the Divine Compositions of the Psalmist of Israel—These divine Hymns should be the constant companions of the Pious, the subject of their daily meditations, their animating guide and assistant in all the exercises and duties of a Holy Life,—*their Companion to Heaven.*"⁸⁷

⁸³*The Posthumous Works of the Late Right Reverend John Henry Hobart, D. D. with a Memoir of His Life by the Rev. William Berrian, D. D.*, 3 Vols. (New York: 1833) 1:4, 9, 15, 67, 71, 76.

⁸⁴SJPH 7:45.

⁸⁵Kelly-Melville, *Selected Writings*, 344-45.

⁸⁶MSV Notebook 2:2-15.

⁸⁷SJPH 3:59. Emphasis in original.;

When Hobart wrote Elizabeth about some household items she had entrusted to the him after the Setons had sailed for Italy, he told her, "My soul rejoices in the reflection that this amiable and ardent disciple of the Savior regards me as her endeared pastor and friend." But later in the letter, he offered this warning: "The sumptuous and splendid worship of Italy will not I am sure withdraw your affections from the simple and affecting worship of Trinity Church."⁸⁸

Filippo Filicchi

The Filicchi brothers, Filippo and Antonio, had formed Filicchi Brothers, a commercial mercantile establishment. Because William Magee Seton's father and the Filicchis were business associates, William Magee was their guest in Leghorn during his travels in Italy before his marriage.⁸⁹

During the Setons' quarantine in the Lazaretto, both the Filicchi brothers and their wives were most solicitous for the Setons' welfare. After William's death, Elizabeth and Anna were guests in their household until they returned to New York. The examples set by Antonio and Filippo and their wives, Amabilia and Mary, together with Elizabeth's own introduction to and observations of the Catholic religion in Italy, fostered her interest.

During her stay with the Filicchis, she was struck by their piety, remarking that "there is a chapel in the very house of Mr. F."⁹⁰ On 29 January, Filippo entered her room and announced, "St. Francis de Sales day. . . . I will give you his devout life to amuse you," and she noted, "amuse it truly did."⁹¹ On 24 February, she commented in her journal for Rebecca Seton: "How happy would we be if we believed what these dear souls believe, that they *possess God* in the Sacrament and that he remains in their churches and is carried to them when they are sick."⁹² On 18 April, one of the Filicchis taught her to make the sign of the cross, and she noted, "All the catholic religion is full of those meanings which interest me so."⁹³

⁸⁸Ibid., 11:70.

⁸⁹*Memoir Letters and Journal of Elizabeth Seton, Convert to the Catholic Faith, and Sister of Charity*, ed. Robert Seton, 2 Vols. (New York: 1869), 1:106-07.

⁹⁰Kelly-Melville, *Selected Writings*, 133.

⁹¹Ibid., 130.

⁹²Ibid., 133. Emphasis in original.

⁹³Ibid., 134.

Their Manuscripts

Filippo Filicchi's interest in Elizabeth's spiritual welfare prompted him to prepare for her a fifty-six page manuscript entitled "Brief Exposition of the Catholic Faith." His opening paragraph states: "The principles of the Roman Catholicks [*sic*] are always misrepresented. I shall not presume to examine the motives of such a conduct. Everybody will acknowledge that it is unfair. My present object is to prevent your being imposed upon by false assertions. To obtain it, I give you the translation of our profession of faith in the very words of the Council of Trent. I shall add such notes as may illustrate the subject."⁹⁴

Dividing the pages into two columns, he placed his principal text in the right column and reserved the left column for Scriptural and other references. Using the text of the profession of faith, he defended the Church as founded by Christ, its apostolic succession, and the doctrine of infallibility. After discussing the origin of the Protestant churches, he turned to the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church, first defining the word and listing the three parts. Since the Episcopal Church admitted only two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper, he began with them. But the bulk of his discussion related to sacraments not accepted by the Episcopal Church: penance, extreme unction, holy orders, and matrimony. However, he omitted any discussion of confirmation.

Turning to the doctrine of Purgatory, which the Protestants rejected, he pointed out that they did accept a third place "which is neither Heaven nor Hell." His next discussion centered on saints and angels because invoking them was "a subject of scandal for the Protestants." He defined their roles as intercessors and then explained the respect Catholics paid to images and relics. After brief explanations of indulgences and the Catholic Church's views on the destination of the unbaptized, he concluded:

The Church of Christ begins from him who is her head. Every Church that has had her birth in later times is not the Church that was built on St. Peter. A reformed Church is not that Church which is called by St. Paul the Pillar of truth and firmness. The true Church could not err and of course could not need reformation. When this was attempted the

⁹⁴SJPH 10:50, page 1.

Catholics might justly have addressed to these reformers the words of St. John "They went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us."⁹⁵

When Elizabeth recalled Hobart's warning about the "sumptuous and splendid worship of Italy" on her return voyage, she drafted a letter to him.

As I approach you I tremble and while the dashing of the waves and their incessant motion picture to me the allotment which God has given me the tears fall fast through my fingers at the insupportable thought of being separated from you and yet my dear H you will not be severe—you will respect my sincerity and tho' you will think me in an error and even reprehensible—changing my religion I know that heavenly Christian Charity will plead for me in your affections. . . . Still if you will not be my Brother if your dear friendship and esteem must be the price of my fidelity to what I believe to be the truth—I cannot doubt the mercy of God depriving me of my dearest tie on earth will certainly draw me nearer to him.⁹⁶

Sometime after her return, she showed Filicchi's document to Hobart who then drafted a seventy-five page rejoinder which opens with the following statement:

You may naturally conclude that the subject on which I now address you is deeply interesting to me. When I see a person whose sincere and ardent piety, I have always thought worthy of imitation, and an honor to the church in which it was quickened and cherished, in danger of forsaking it and associating herself with a communion which my sober judgment tells me is a corrupt and sinful communion, I cannot be otherwise than deeply affected. When I see one too from whose friendship myself and many others have derived, and have hoped always to continue to derive, the highest satisfaction, comfort and pleasure, in danger of taking a step which in its consequences may separate her from our society, a society which in times past was her solace and enjoyment, it would be strange indeed if my anxious sensibility were not awakened.⁹⁷

He emphasized the value of Scripture texts and contrasted the language of the Roman Catholic Church with his own. Rejecting the proceedings of the Council of Trent and the concept of infallibility, he argued that the validity of the Episcopal Church rested on the doctrine

⁹⁵Ibid., 10:50, page 56.

⁹⁶Ibid., 3:16.

⁹⁷Ibid., HH, page 1.

and priesthood of the apostles, that the only sacraments instituted by Christ were Baptism and Holy Communion, that the other five recognized by the Catholic Church were rites rather than sacraments. Although he traced apostolic succession from the apostles through the early Church to the Church of England and thus to the American Episcopal Church, he rejected the primacy of the successors of Saint Peter. Refusing to accept the decrees of the Council of Trent, especially its profession of faith, he declared that the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed represented the primitive Church, which the papacy and various councils had corrupted. After declaring the doctrine of transubstantiation to be "the vilest species of idolatry," he insisted that the Church of England, by rejecting additions made by non-primitive councils, had returned to the practices of the early Apostolic Church.

He ended his document with the following paragraph:

From my soul, I believe, that our church is the true church, the church instituted by Christ and his Apostles. I do not think or say so rashly—it is the result of deligent [*sic*], anxious, attentive and I trust candid examination, in every stage of which I became more grounded in this opinion. Would to God that it were not necessary for me to say any thing more to make this opinion—to lead back your perplexed soul to that church in which you once enjoyed *light* and *peace*—the church in which your forefathers and nearest relatives have gone to rest—the church thro' which, believe it, some of your best and dearest friends are confident they win pass to the church triumphant in heaven.⁹⁸

Certainly the sincerity of both men cannot be doubted; both were staunch believers that their own faith was the true one. Elizabeth Seton studied both manuscripts and the books each man had suggested. In January 1805, she wrote Amabilia Filicchi:

Now they tell me take care *I am a Mother*, and my children I must answer for in Judgment, whatever Faith I lead them to—that being so, and I so unconscious, for I little thought till told by Mr. H that their Faith could be so full of consequence to them or me, I WILL GO PEACEABLY AND FIRMLY TO THE CATHOLICK [*sic*] CHURCH—for if Faith is so important to our salvation I will seek it where true Faith first begun, seek it among those who recieved [*sic*] it from GOD HIMSELF, the controversies on it I am quite incapable of deciding, and as the strictest Protestant allows Salvation to a good Catholick [*sic*], to the Catholicks [*sic*] I will go, and try to be a good one, may God accept my intention and pity me.⁹⁹

⁹⁸Ibid., HH, page 75. Emphases in original.

⁹⁹Ibid., 10:3a and Kelly-Melville, *Selected Writings*, 164-65. Emphases in original.

She made her profession of faith on 14 March and on 25 March received the Holy Eucharist for the first time and then declared, "GOD IS MINE and I AM HIS."¹⁰⁰ Trials and sorrows lay ahead for this valiant woman of faith. But she persevered, remained steadfast in her decision and became "the mother of many" within the emerging American Catholic Church. Throughout her life as a Catholic, she never forgot her family, her friends, or her spiritual advisors.

¹⁰⁰SJPH 10:3a and Kelly-Melville, *Selected Writings*, 167. Emphasis in original.