THE HISTORY OF
MOTHER SETON'S DAUGHTERS
VOLUME I
MOTHER ELIZABETH ANN SETON
(From an Etching by Edward T. Hurley)
THE HISTORY OF
MOTHER SETON'S DAUGHTERS

THE SISTERS OF CHARITY
OF CINCINNATI, OHIO
1809-1917

BY
SISTER MARY AGNES McCANN, M.A.
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VOLUME I

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TO
THE MEMORY OF
OUR FOUNDERS
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EMMITSBURG, MARYLAND AND CINCINNATI, OHIO
 THESE VOLUMES
ARE AFFECTIONATELY AND GRATEFULLY DEDICATED
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ELIZABETH ANN BAYLEY SETON was born in one of the most stirring epochs of American history. It was an age that was sturdy with heroism, and the daughter of one of its heroes, Dr. Richard Bayley, came into the world during that strenuous week which was thrilled by the preparations for the First Continental Congress, held in Philadelphia, September 5, 1774. Her girlhood was filled with stories of the Minute Men throughout the Colonies; and young as she was, she understood, no doubt, what it threatened for the Cause of Independence when her father, who had won a prominent place as a physician in the Revolutionary Army, returned home one day in 1780, with the astounding news that Benedict Arnold, Washington's trusted friend, had turned traitor to his country, at West Point, farther up the Hudson. She must have rejoiced with other American girls of her age in the then little town of New York, when the Treaty, which gave freedom and independence to the American Colonies, was signed at Paris in 1783. Her later life shows how truly she was a daughter of the Revolution and a child of her environment, and how thoroughly she had imbibed its spirit,—a spirit of great enterprise, of broad horizons, and of daring achievement. Married at the age of twenty to William Magee Seton on January 25, 1794, her sons and daughters—William, Richard, Anna, Catharine, and Rebecca—were all children under ten years when she was
received into the Church on March 24, 1805. Her early life as a Catholic and even as a religious busied with the foundation of her Order—the Daughters of Charity—is bound up affectionately with the very tender care she gave to her children, and is revealed frequently in her letters in these volumes. Before her death, which occurred on January 4, 1821, two of her daughters, Anna and Rebecca, had gone to their eternal reward, the former as a Daughter of Charity at Emmitsburg; and Richard, who survived his mother but a few months, died at sea off Cape Mesurado. William, the eldest, entered the United States Navy and died shortly after the Civil War. Mother Seton’s grandson—the present Archbishop Seton—has written a Memoir of his illustrious grandmother, and her nephew, James Roosevelt Bayley, became Archbishop of Baltimore in 1872. At his request, he was buried beside Mother Seton in the Valley at Emmitsburg.

There are few lives among the saintly women of America who have consecrated themselves in religion to the service of their neighbor, that deserve to be known better by all the citizens of this land, irrespective of creed, than that of Mother Elizabeth Ann Seton. She was in reality an ideal woman, as described in Holy Scripture, in the best and highest sense of the word. She was a devoted wife, a tender mother, and a true religious; and both by her virtues, the sublimity of her love of God, as well as by her prudence and her practical grasp of affairs, her life has a charm all its own and is enhanced with the number of great personages, both civil and ecclesiastic, who share in her plans and projects and who pass before the reader as characters do upon the stage. This remarkable religious, whose Life is pictured in these volumes, had a most
important mission to fulfil, namely, the establishment of Catholic elementary education in the United States, for all Catholic parochial school training may justly be said to have been originated by her. During the thirteen years she guided her Community (1808–1821), she had as directors four priests — Fathers Dubourg, David, Dubois, and Bruté — all of whom later became Bishops; and as the reader will see from the correspondence which is extensively given in this work, there was hardly an ecclesiastic in the country during that period who did not have a keen appreciation of the very important place she was filling in American Catholic life and activity during the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

At the opening of that century, Catholics were but a little flock in the Colonies and there were few schools for the education of their children. Elementary schools, such as those founded in New York in Governor Dongan's time, the schools at Newtown and Bohemia Manor in Maryland, and those at Philadelphia and Goshenhoppen in Pennsylvania were not successful owing to the fact that they had to exist silently on account of colonial prejudices against the Church, — relics of the penal laws of former days. In fact, the nearest Catholic schools were those in Belgium and in France. As Father Thomas Hughes, S.J., once wrote of these educational convoys of boys and girls to Europe in the olden times: "So, without being laggards crawling to the school door, our Catholic boys and girls performed the journey from home to the classroom in the limited space of less than three months. If they were taken by French privateers on the way, their trip was somewhat longer and more circuitous, with a bonus thrown in for the kidnappers."
the whole of the century prior to the American Revolution, Catholic parents were obliged to send their children to the colleges and universities of the Continent. There were American boys at the English colleges of Liége and Saint Omer. There is record of five Americans in the English Benedictine College of Douay. In the Benedictine Convents of Ghent, Cambrai, and Paris, young American girls of the well-known families of the Boones, the Semmes, the Roziers, and the Hogans were being educated. At the English Sepulchrine Convent at Liége, four of the Semmes girls from Maryland had taken the veil; and at the English Carmelite Convent of Hoogstraeten in Belgium, the Prioress at the time of Elizabeth Seton's birth was an American, Mother Bernadine of St. Joseph, known in the world as Ann Matthews, who was born in Charles County, Maryland, in 1732. There are other American names to be found among the English Carmelites at this time — Hill, Neale, and Mills. Nor were the English Dominican nuns without American subjects: two of the Brookes of Maryland were then at the Convent in Brussels. After the French Revolution, the English Dominican nuns contemplated coming to America, but instead the Carmelites of Hoogstraeten, led by the American, Mother Bernadine Matthews, set sail in April, 1790, and that same year founded the first house for contemplative nuns in this country, at Port Tobacco. Another American nun, Mother Ann Hill, led the Hoogstraeten Community in safety to England during the storm of the French Revolution. Apart from the Port Tobacco Community, there was but one other religious house in the United States which offered a cloistral life to American girls,—the Convent of the Ursulines at New Orleans, which had been founded
there in 1727 by Mother Marie Tranchepain. The long years of struggle they endured for their very existence, and the failure of the Poor Clares to establish themselves at Georgetown in 1801, together with the hard and bitter trials which attended Miss Lalor's efforts to organize her community at Georgetown, were sufficient to make even a stout heart like Mother Seton's pause in her intense desire to found a religious community in this land. As Dr. James Burns, C.S.C., has pointed out in his two excellent studies: The Catholic School System of the United States, and the Growth and Development of the School System in the United States, the first two communities of American women devoted to Catholic education and charitable works were founded under the shadow of the two most venerable Catholic institutions in the country — Georgetown College at Washington, D. C., and St. Mary's Seminary at Baltimore. What Archbishop Neale was to the Visitation nuns at Georgetown, Father Dubourg, the Sulpician and later the Archbishop of Besançon, France, was to Mother Seton and her Community. When Father Dubourg met her in New York in 1806, she had then almost determined to go to Canada in order to join the Ursulines there. By his advice she came with her little family to Baltimore in June, 1808, and rented a small house on Paca Street, near the Seminary. The school was opened in September that same year. Two years later the young Community moved to Emmitsburg, where the Sulpicians had founded Mount St. Mary's College in 1808, and which they governed during Mother Seton's lifetime. From 1814 to 1851 — the date of the Union of the Daughters of Charity of America with those of France — there was rapid growth on the part of Mother Seton's Com-
munity. Fifty-seven separate foundations had been made in Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, Delaware, Virginia, West Virginia, Ohio, Alabama, Missouri, Louisiana, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Massachusetts.

Probably the most interesting part of this volume is the story of the Affiliation with France in 1850–51. It is here told fully for the first time, and it is the only stormy page in the story of a Community which has been eminently successful in all its undertakings. To many who view it from an American standpoint, the Union with France was a grave blunder on the part of those who were responsible for it. Instead of a compact organization today, embracing all the multitudinous activities of her Community, and receiving its stimulus from a central home, where the spirit and ideal of Mother Seton would reign supreme, the Sisters of Charity in the United States are now divided up into independent branches; and as in all things else, independence does not make for the tradition of a dominant ideal, such as Mother Seton brought into being. The Daughters of Charity of Cincinnati have kept intact the spirit of their Foundress. It was the only branch house in 1851 which refused to be inveigled into the Union with a foreign Mother-House.¹ Mother Margaret George was the Superioress of the Cincinnati nuns at that time. She had entered the Emmitsburg Community in 1812, and was one of Mother Seton’s first companions. She knew the spirit of the Society too well to be deceived by the motivating causes of the French Union. She had stood close to Mother Seton for thirteen years, having been Secretary and Treasurer of the Emmitsburg House in the Valley, and the proposed change in the traditions, the habit, the rules and

¹ The Daughters of Charity became a diocesan branch in 1847.
constitution of the American Daughters of Charity were distasteful to her and to her six companions at Cincinnati. With the permission of Bishop Purcell, they decided to carry on in an unbroken chain the traditional spirit of their Foundress; and it is the glory of their Community today, at Mount St. Joseph's-on-the-Ohio, that they can look back through the century that has passed and see year after year an undiminished activity which links itself up with those early romantic days in the Valley, where their Mother sleeps awaiting the Resurrection.

These volumes can be divided into three separate parts — the life and labors of Mother Seton from her birth in 1774 down to her death in 1821; the history of the growth of the Daughters of Charity in America from Mother Seton’s death down to the Affiliation of the Order with the French Mother-House in 1851; and, from that time down to the present, the story of Mother Seton’s Daughters of Charity of Cincinnati. The work fills a very much needed blank in the history of the Catholic Church in the United States, and what renders it of the greatest importance is the fact that the authoress has given us a study of Mother Seton’s Daughters which she has based almost exclusively upon the best sources at her disposal. Many of these sources, of which a bibliographical list will be found in these volumes, have never before been used by historians of Mother Seton’s Community. The life of the Foundress has not been allowed to be forgotten. In the volumes of De Barbery, McSweeny, Sadlier, Seton, and White, her labors have received much of the enthusiastic praise they deserve; but it is in the use of materials which have never before been printed, that this present work takes precedence over all the
books published so far on this interesting American character. The *Journals*, particularly that of Mother Margaret George, which includes the work of the Daughters of Charity of Cincinnati between the years 1813–1868, and the numerous unpublished letters scattered profusely throughout these volumes, written by almost all the prominent leaders of the Church, render the work not only an historic narrative of the highest value, but furnish us also with a collection of sources for many other equally important aspects of Catholic life and devotion during the nineteenth century. These volumes are an excellent example of that type of historical work for which the Church in the United States has been waiting for a long time; it will only be by having recourse to the sources and by their intelligent interpretation that we can hope to reach a truer knowledge of the history of the Church in former days and of the trials our fathers and grandfathers experienced in their whole-hearted devotion to the things of God and of Fatherland.

Mother Seton is a brilliant type of the truest Americanism — using the word in its lofty and patriotic sense. She grouped around her in those early days at Emmitsburg companions of the most varied tastes but all gifted with that particular charm of the colonial times which is admired so sincerely today. Her struggles from the beginning were their struggles, for the little Community had one heart and one soul. She brought a new ideal into American life — the ideal of a band of women devoted to the care of their neighbors, through the same channels so well known in our own day: education of the children, asylums for the orphans, and hospitals for the sick.

What her Community has accomplished in its cen-
tury of existence no one can ever fully estimate. It was begun in poverty and strengthened in the crucible of trial and sorrow. A century ago Cardinal Cheverus, then Bishop of Boston, and one of Mother Seton’s spiritual directors, wrote to her: “How admirable is Divine Providence! I see already numerous choirs of virgins following you to the Altar. I see your holy Order diffusing itself in the different parts of the United States, spreading everywhere the good odor of Jesus Christ and teaching by their angelic lives and pious instruction how to serve God in purity and holiness. I have no doubt, my dear Sisters, that He who has begun this work will bring it to perfection.” It is in reading this fascinating and outspoken story of their development during the past century, that we can see how truly these words of a great Bishop and Cardinal have been verified. They are as a gage for the future. As the Church grows in the United States, the scope of the work undertaken by the Daughters of Charity will share the increase, and when another century has gone by, more volumes than these will be needed to give an historic portrait of their success.

PETER GUILDAY, PH. D.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

In all statements concerning the holiness of life of the characters who come into these volumes the writer wishes to acknowledge her humble submission to the judgment of our Holy Mother the Church and especially to the decrees of Urban VIII and other Sovereign Pontiffs.
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Sister Fidelis Milmore
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