THE HISTORY OF MOTHER SETON'S DAUGHTERS
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THE SISTERS OF CHARITY OF
CINCINNATI OHIO

CHAPTER I
HER LIFE BEFORE CONVERSION—HER CONVERSION—
BEGINNINGS OF HER COMMUNITY
1774–1810

The story of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati Ohio, does not begin with their arrival in the Queen City of the West on October 27, 1829, but twenty years earlier, in historic Maryland, when Elizabeth Ann Bayley (Mother Seton) founded the American Daughters of Charity. This she did at a period contemporaneous with the spread of Catholicity through the thirteen original colonies; for, while the Holy Spirit was whispering to Mother Seton the needs of this country during the hundred years to come, the same Divine Person of the Blessed Trinity urged Bishop Carroll, then the head of the Church in the United States, to ask His Holiness Pope Pius VII to erect the episcopal sees of New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Bardstown. In the year 1808,¹ the Sovereign Pontiff granted this petition and, in that same year, future Ordinaries of the above named dioceses were interesting themselves in Mother Seton's recent conversion and her pronounced vocation

to a religious life. Her biography has been known to Americans since the second decade of the nineteenth century, her beautiful character and many trials having endeared her to all who knew her personally or from the pages of history. Her parents were Dr. Richard Bayley, born in Fairfield, Conn., and Catherine Charlton, daughter of an Episcopalian clergyman, Rector of St. Anne's, Richmond, Staten Island. Elizabeth (Mother Seton) was born in New York, August 28, 1774, but enjoyed the tender care of her mother only a few years. Her father, in his desire to supply the affection of which death had robbed his child, bestowed upon her such a measure of paternal love and solicitude as to gain her unbounded devotion and admiration. Recognizing her uncommon graces of person and her deep intelligence, he endeavored to enhance the one and to enlarge the other by a broad and solid cultivation of heart and mind.

From his noble example she imbibed a tenderness for suffering, a care for those in affliction, and a stern adherence to duty, all of which moulded her character for the great mission God was preparing for her. As a surgeon in General Howe’s army during the Revolutionary War, Dr. Bayley, after the Battle of Long Island, gained the love of Americans by his gentle care of the wounded colonial soldiers, and the people of New York regarded him as a public benefactor for enforcing proper rules of quarantine to protect the port while he discharged the duties of Health Officer. In this latter capacity, he found it in his power to

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1 Then the capital of the United States.
2 White, Life of Mrs. E. A. Seton, p. 14, New York, 1853.
3 White, op. cit., p. 40.

Doctor Bayley was elected a member of the Faculty of Columbia College in 1792. Thacher, American Medical Biographies, pp. 156–168, Boston, 1828.
alleviate the sufferings of the immigrants whose wonderful faith and confidence in God made a deep impression on his soul. He would relate to his sympathetic little daughter the story of those wearied voyagers and the hardships and dangers of the slow-sailing vessel and describe how, on reaching land, they prostrated themselves on the ground, kissed it reverently, and extending their arms, thanked God for their safety and their new home. Later, on going to Trinity Church for Sunday service, when she saw those same immigrants hurrying to old St. Peter’s Church in Barclay Street, was it any wonder that she felt inclined to follow them? Grace was urging their footsteps to visit Christ in the tabernacle and He was longing for the cherished work of His future Daughter of Charity—Elizabeth Ann Bayley (Mother Seton).

Married in the twentieth year of her age to Mr. William Magee Seton, she was surrounded by all that the world holds dear; but neither her own charms, her husband’s noble character and position, nor any worldly attractions were able to divert her religious soul from its extraordinary love of God and respect for His law. She was the happy mother of five children, two sons, William and Richard, and three daughters, Anna Maria, Catherine Josephine, and Rebecca. In 1803, her husband’s health failed and a sea-voyage was prescribed for him.  


2 Mrs. Seton’s original Journal, in the Archives of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati Ohio, at Mount St. Joseph, Ohio. This Journal and other papers were used by Rev. Dr. Chas. I. White in his life of Mrs. E. A. Seton. His letter asking for the privilege is dated September 26, 1847, and his acknowledgment of the favor, when returning the documents, September 22, 1852.
him to Italy at the urgent invitation of the noble Filicchi brothers, who proved the depth of their friendship by caring for the widow and children, when God called to Himself their beloved husband and father. In that foreign land, Elizabeth, with her little daughter Anna Maria, realized that God is truly our Father and that He can change the greatest trials of our lives into His own best blessings and out of darkness of soul and heaviness of heart bring abundant light and holy peace. Not her five little children alone but the orphans and untaught little ones of the whole United States were awaiting the loving ministrations of Mother Seton; and although she had not yet discovered her call, she was ready to lay aside the mantle of her own sorrow, and go forth to meet any summons of Providence. Returning to her own country under the protection of Mr. A. Filicchi, although previously unknown to Bishop Carroll or any of his co-laborers, she at once engaged the interest and attention of the leading dignitaries in the Catholic Church. Following the directions of her own conscience and encouraged by her friends the Messrs. Filicchi, after many trials of soul, she made her submission to the Catholic Church, at the hands of Rev. Father O'Brien in old St. Peter's Church, Barclay St., March 14, 1805. Well might she exclaim in writing to Mrs. Antonio Filicchi, "O day of days!" for it was one of

1 Philip and Anthony Filicchi were sons of a patrician of Gubbio. Philip travelled in the United States during 1785-1786, married an American lady, Miss Cooper, and was appointed consul-general of the United States at Leghorn. While in New York he became acquainted with William Magee Seton, who visited him in Italy a few years later. Right Rev. Robert Seton, Memoir and Letters of Elizabeth Seton, p. 107. New York, 1869.

2 March 14, 1805, Mrs. Seton gave to Mr. A. Filicchi a "Following of Christ" bearing this date — "A memorial of his success in her soul's affair."

3 She was confirmed in this same church by Archbishop Carroll, May 26, 1806.
supreme happiness to her, as the outpourings of her soul show, and no one can read her tender letters without being moved to tears or without feeling that God had set the seal of His divine predilection on this cherished daughter. We do not marvel at the influence she exercised and the numbers of gifted companions she drew from luxurious homes to the abnegation of a religious life. In her childlike humility and simplicity she did not dream of founding a community — she had but lately learned of the existence of such a life — but prelates and priests encouraged her, feeling that through her, at no distant day, their dioceses would have homes of religious and bands of women who would be mothers to the orphans and devoted guides and instructors of the young. To this goal Mother Seton walked over the path of tribulation. Her relatives felt themselves disgraced by the step she had taken in embracing Catholicity, and deserted her, denying her support for herself and her children. The Messrs. Filicchi, with brotherly affection came to her aid, placing her sons at Georgetown College at their own expense. They gave her a regular allowance, and commanded her to call upon them for whatever means she might need, instructing likewise their agents in New York to honor her every demand.¹ To make the burden of her friends

¹ Transcript of letter in Archives at Mount St. Joseph, Ohio. (Mrs. Joanna Barry to Archbishop Carroll, June 17, 1806.) Original in the Archives of the American Catholic Historical Society, Philadelphia.

NEW YORK, 17th June, 1806.

... Mrs Seton who is now here prays me to present her to you, her Father. A Doctor Charleton of this city a very rich man, died a few days ago. It was always thought he would leave a handsome legacy to Mrs Seton & her sister “Post” his only two nieces — but it is to be regretted that all he has done is one thousand to each after the death of his wife — should Mrs. Charleton not approve of it, the same was to be done away, — this good Doctor left in different charities 20,000 dollars. Mr. Filicky seeing this, & wishing to have a certainty for her & her children drew up a paper which he gave Mrs. Seton yesterday signed as follows, to be paid her annually.
less heavy, she opened a school in New York. She was forced to discontinue it by, what seemed to her then, untoward circumstances, but which later she recognized as God's Providence for her and her work.

The first proof of this was her seemingly accidental meeting with Father Dubourg, at whose earnest per-

Mr. Felicky & his brother $400
Mrs. Stovitin 200
Doct' Post 200
Mrs. Scott 200
two Mr. Wilker of this place 250 or three I forget which. I know it will give you pleasure that this poor but happy woman has a provision, yet sho'd be glad you wod not mention it, until Mrs. Seton writes you on the subject.

Most respectfully yrs. Joanna Barry.

1 Transcript of letter as above. (Mrs. Seton to Archbishop Carroll.) Nov. 26, 1806.

Rt. Rev. Bishop Carroll.
Baltimore.

Dear & Reverend Sir,

Trusting to the indulgence you have already shown me and the interest you have so kindly expressed for my dear little children I must trespass a few moments on your precious time and beg your direction in a case of the greatest moment to my happiness here, & my eternal happiness.

Accidently meeting Mr. Dubourg as he passed thro' Nyork he entered into conversation with me respecting my little Boys and my intentions for them - I told him Mr. Felicchi's earnest wish was to place them at Montreal & mentioned also that he had given me a distant hope that I might myself, with my little girls be received in a convent there, & perhaps be so happy as to make myself useful as an assistant in teaching, as that employment was (from the particular Providence in which I have been placed) familiar to me, & most suitable to my disposition. This hope which had hitherto been but as a delightful dream to me and appeared too much happiness for my earthly pilgrimage Mr. Dubourg brought in the nearest point of view, and has flattered me with the belief that it is not only possible but may be accomplished without difficulty.

My situation since I had the happiness of seeing you is very, very painful as it respects all my connections. One part of them never suffer even their Children to speak to me or mine - the other, tolerate my coming in their doors as a favour - Mrs. Duplex is totally separated from me — and I should return Home without a breakfast from my dear Church if Mrs. Barry or Mr. Hurley did not open their doors & hearts to me — and this for refusing the unreasonable request to persuade my Sister Cecilia to relinquish the Catholic Faith after she was united to the
suasion she went to Baltimore and there began what proved to be the foundation of the American Daughters of Charity and of the great Catholic School System.

Church — and then receiving her under my roof after their Solemn Avowel that She should never re-enter theirs, or be suffered to see any one of her family again — I know that you will be very much pained by these circumstances — but I assured you I would do every thing for Peace, & have yielded every point that was possible consistent with my Peace for the hour of Death — and for that hour my dear Sir I now beg you to consider while you direct me how to Act for my dear little Children, who in that hour, if they remain in their present Situation, would be snatched from Our dear Faith as from an Accumulation of Errors, as well as misfortune to them. For myself — certainly the only fear I can have is that there is too much of self-seeking in pleading for the Accomplishment of this object which however I joyfully yield to the Will of the Almighty, confident that as He has disposed my heart to wish above all things to please Him, it will not be disappointed in the desire whatever may be his appointed means — the embracing a Religious life has been from the time I was in Leghorn so much my Hope & consolation that I would at any moment have embraced all the difficulties of again crossing the Ocean to attain it, little imagining it could be accomplished here — but now my children are so circumstanced that I could not die in Peace (& you know dear Sir we must make every preparation) except I felt the full conviction I had done all in my power to shield them from it — in that case it would be easy to commit them to God —

If you had received the packet of thanks & acknowledgments my heart has written to you my dear Sir in overflowing gratitude for your Goodness to my Darling Boys you would acquit it of any omission in the most affectionate respect to you — and very very often in the intention of transcribing it the idea of intrusion on your sacred time which I knew from Mrs. Barry was burdened with Correspondants, deterred me.

Mr. Barry will no doubt tell you every particular of his family I passed a very cheerful hour with them this morn, their spirits are at least more composed, tho' really it appears from Mr. Barry's Situation new trials are preparing for them — dear Ann I fear has already the most painful presentiment — your friendship & affection seems to be their only earthly consolation.

I am most gratefully dear Sir,

Your Obedient Serv!

M. E. A. SETON

You will be pleased to hear Mr. Filicchi is safe in London & mentions Mr. Tisserant is well. I have letters from them both — Mr. Tisserant's some weeks ago, Filicchi's of much later date.

1 Mr. A. Filicchi desired Mrs. Seton to go to a convent in Montreal, but Fathers Cheverus, Matignon, Dubourg, and Tisserant did not sanction this plan. They had foreseen the need in this country of a society of women who, while seeking especially their own sanctification, would devote themselves to the young in schools, asylums, and similar institutions. Seton, op. cit., p. 45.

In explaining his project to Mother Seton, Father Dubourg stated, “We wish to found a school for the promotion of religious instruction for those children whose parents are interested in that point.”

When Bishop Cheverus and Rev. Dr. Matignon were notified, they expressed their hearty approbation and Bishop Cheverus wrote, “Such an establishment would be a public benefit for religion. We infinitely prefer it to your project of retreat in Montreal.”

Father Dubourg was not anxious for Mother Seton to have a large school at once. He said, “The fewer you will have in the beginning, the lighter your task and the easier it will be to establish that spirit of regularity and piety which must be the mainspring of your machine. There are in the country enough and perhaps too many mixed schools, in which ornamental accomplishments are the only object of education; we have none that I know, where their acquisition is connected with and made subservient to pious instruction and such a one you certainly wish yours to be.”

He then entered into details about the maintenance of the institution and the probability of attracting other ladies to join her and expressed his willingness to give a lot on the Seminary grounds for the building. Under his guidance she began her preparations to leave the home of her childhood. The day before she left New York, she received from him these encouraging words: “I remain more and more satisfied that even were you to fail in the attempt you are going to make, it is the will of God you should make it, so great is the number of circumstances concurring

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1 White, op. cit., p. 220. Dr. Matignon wrote, “You are destined, I think, for some great good in the United States.” Ibid., p. 213.

2 White, op. cit., p. 221.

3 White, op. cit., p. 222.
in its favor. Among many I cannot help being struck at the unanimity of all your friends, both worldly and spiritual, in recommending and encouraging it and particularly at the eagerness with which every member of our Community [Sulpician] has received the overture I have made them on the subject. There is not one of my respected brethren but anticipates the greatest advantages from the proposed institution and is ready to promote it to the full extent of his powers. Let us, then, place our whole confidence in Him Who chooses thus to make us know His Holy Will and be ready to meet with joy every contradiction or ill success which might attend our compliance.”

Buoyed up with the bright prospect before her and strengthened with the knowledge that she was acting according to the “Will of her Heavenly Father,” Mother Seton with her three daughters embarked in a packet for Baltimore on June 9, 1808, just a year after Robert Fulton had made his first steam voyage from New York to Albany in the “Clermont.” She reached Baltimore Wednesday night, June 15th, but remained on the boat until morning, when a carriage conveyed herself and little children to St. Mary’s Chapel, where the Feast of Corpus Christi was being celebrated and the church attached to the Seminary was being dedicated to God’s service. The splendor of the ceremonies and the affectionate welcome given her almost overpowered the grateful soul of Mother Seton. A few days later, she went to Georgetown and brought her two sons to St. Mary’s College, where they continued their studies and had the advantage of her motherly watch-

1 White, op. cit., p. 223.
2 Memorial Volume of St. Mary’s Seminary of St. Sulpice, 1791-1891, p. 36.
fulness and training. Her conversion as well as her removal from New York under such painful circumstances, together with the desire to open a school in Baltimore, attracted the interest of many, and persons of the first rank in society called upon her to offer their tribute of respect. Among these was Colonel John Eager Howard, who during his visit renewed an old friendship and offered her a home in his elegant mansion, promising likewise to educate as his own her sons and daughters. She appreciated this generosity and testified her deep gratitude, but told Colonel Howard "she had not left the world for the purpose of entering it again." She wished to dispense with the visits of sympathizing friends and admiring acquaintances, but her directors advised her not to forget, through love of recollection and retirement, the duty she owed to those who were interested in her welfare and in that of her new establishment. Her great delight was to entertain the members of the clergy, who proved warm and efficient friends, and who regarded her as an instrument in the hands of God for advancing the interests of His Church.

Bishop Carroll especially honored her with his friendship and showed paternal kindness to her and her little family. The impression made by him on Mother Seton was such that she could never find words sufficiently eloquent to describe his character. In later years a pupil asked her the meaning of benignity. "I cannot give a better definition than you will read in the countenance of Archbishop Carroll," replied Mother Seton. This holy prelate vied with numerous clergymen in showing his appreciation of God's favor to her and she marvelled at the kindness extended

1 Colonel John Eager Howard was Governor of Maryland from 1788–1792.
to her on all sides. She wrote to a friend, "I find the difference of situation so great that I can scarcely believe it is the same existence." "On every countenance is the look of peace and love." With alacrity she wrote of this change to her friends in Leghorn and beautiful expressions of love and appreciation came to her in reply, with the ever insistent warning "not to hesitate in presenting to them her material needs." They ascribed to her prayers great success in business at a time of general stagnation and even threatened "a withdrawal of friendship," if she did not freely call on Murray and Sons, their financial agents, for the furtherance of her work. In September, 1808, she opened her boarding school for young ladies and admitted only the children of Catholic parents, the main object of her institution being to impart a solid religious instruction, thus leading young hearts to the love and practice of virtue. Her pupils said morning and evening prayers in common, recited the Rosary together, and assisted at daily Mass. The course of studies embraced the usual branches of a young ladies' academy: reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, history, plain and fancy needle work, and the English and French languages, to which was added Christian Doctrine, which she impressed deeply on their minds.\(^1\) In the hope of soon consecrating herself to God in a regular religious community, she arranged her plan of life accordingly, applying herself only to the duties of her charge and her own spiritual needs. She paid no visits except those of business and charity. She spent much time in meditation, visited the Blessed Sacrament frequently, and received Holy Communion daily; and, as she said,

\(^1\) Burns, *op. cit.*, p. 211; White, *op. cit.*, p. 233 *et seq.*
“experienced delight in the secret of God’s Tabernacle where alone safety was to be found, with true liberty and sweet content.” Every Friday, she read to her pupils the history of our Saviour’s Passion that their tender hearts might be filled with loving gratitude towards their Divine Redeemer.

To the care of Rev. Peter Babade, a Professor in Mt. St. Mary’s College, the religious instruction of the pupils was confided, and Mother Seton soon discovered in him a spiritual director to whom she could open her whole heart. He often visited the school and became in truth the spiritual director of the little group. In the spring of 1809, after a week’s retreat, which he conducted, some of the children made their First Communion. Mother Seton’s transports of joy on this occasion are shown in the following letter to her sister-in-law:

“O Cecil, Cecil, this heavenly day, and the heavenly week that is past — every hour of the week filled with sacred sorrow; and this day, imagine six of us, the girls all in white, as modest as angels, receiving from the hand of our blessed Father Babade our adored Lord. He has been all the week preparing them, and every night our little chapel has resounded with love and adoration. This morning in the subterranean chapel of the blessed Virgin, in the very depth of solitude, on the tomb of our Lord, he celebrated the adorable sacrifice and dispensed the Sacred Passover. His tears fell fast over his precious hands while he gave it, and we had the liberty to sob aloud, unwitnessed by any, as no one had an idea of our going there.

1 The Rev. Peter Babade was a member of the Society of St. Sulpice. He was born on June 20th 1763, in Pont-de-Veyle, France. During the French Revolution he was cast into prison on June 20th. As confessor of the Sisters of Charity he inspired them with special love for the Sacred Heart long before the devotion was publicly known.
What a scene! Could you but have shared it! Immediately after, the dear Mr. Dubourg came down and said Mass of thanksgiving, served by our Father Babade, whose gray hairs looked more venerable than can be expressed. Every night we have Benediction. Imagine twenty priests, all with the devotion of saints, clothed in white, accompanied by the whole troop of the young seminarians in surplices also, all in order surrounding the Blessed Sacrament exposed, singing the hymn of the resurrection. When they come to the words ‘Peace be to all here,’ it seems as if our Lord is again acting over the scene that passed with the assembled disciples.”

Her sisters-in-law Harriet and Cecilia received the news of her happiness and success with deepest gratitude. Cecilia, already a convert, longed to be with her “soul’s sister,” and although she suffered unnumbered affronts from relatives and friends, she remained steadfast and gained strength from Mother Seton, to whom she poured forth all the trials of her soul. What comfort such words as the following must have brought her, “Yes, my Cecilia, favored by Heaven, associate of angels, beloved child of Jesus, you shall have the victory, and He the glory. To Him be glory forever Who has called you to so glorious a combat, and so tenderly supports you through it. You will triumph for it is Jesus who fights, not you, my dear one.”

Father Babade and Father Dubourg recognized in the beautiful letters of Cecilia Seton the higher call of the Holy Spirit and felt she would soon follow Mother Seton in the hallowed path of religion.

MISS CECILIA O’CONWAY, “Philadelphia’s First Nun,” on December 7, 1808, joined Mother Seton in Baltimore and was known as Sister Veronica. She

1 White, op. cit., p. 225.  
2 Ibid., p. 241.
had made preparation to enter a convent in Spain when Father Babade told her of Mother Seton’s foundation and her father took her himself to Baltimore — "a child whom he consecrated to God.” Miss O’Conway was of great assistance in the Academy on account of her finished education and knowledge of several languages, having belonged to a family of noted linguists. ¹

Fathers Babade and Dubourg, feeling that Providence was arranging for a numerous band of spiritual daughters to gather around Mother Seton, requested

¹ American Catholic Historical Society, Vol. V, Records, Sara Trainer Smith; Ibid., Vol. X, p. 294:

“The founding of the American Sisters of Charity shows in a striking manner the wonderful ways of Providence. Slowly and silently had God quarried the pillars of his temple; strongly and carefully had he forged the bands that were to hold the timbers together: for his house was to be a great structure that would endure forever. He guided the footsteps of Elizabeth Seton out of the most luxurious environments through sorrow and tribulation into a Catholic atmosphere in Italy so that she might be prepared for the work which was in store for her. He led the unbaptized Cecilia through dangers and vicissitudes to the baptismal font in New Orleans, kept her under Catholic influences, with Ursuline convents at New Orleans and Havana as object-lessons of convent life and inspiration for her own vocation, and brought her back to Philadelphia to await the call to her chosen field of labor. He brought Father Dubourg from San Domingo and Fathers Babade and Dubois and Matignon from Europe, all driven from their homes or their chosen fields of labor by the spirit of evil and placed them where they could best help along his elected work. He raised strong friends and financial supporters for Mrs. Seton in the brothers Filicchi in Italy and he struck down Samuel Cooper in Paris, as he had stricken down Saul of old, to open his eyes to the truth, and led him to the knees of Father Dubourg to offer his wealth for the founding of some educational institution, at the very moment when Elizabeth Seton knelt in the same church, preparing for confession and resolving to speak to Father Dubourg about her project of devoting her life to the education of children under the special blessing of Mother Church. How wonderful the workings of Providence, when we can contemplate them in the relation of cause and effect! How edifying and inspiring must have been the birth of the community for the founding of which all these miracles of grace had been worked by Almighty God! No wonder O’Conway wrote home to his wife: ‘Ah, my Rebecca, if you and my poor family could have shared with me the happy scenes that I have assisted at here, how much it would add to what I have enjoyed!’”
her to recite often the words of the Psalmist, "Who maketh the barren woman to dwell in a house the joyful mother of children." They were the more firmly convinced of God's will in this regard when Mr. Cooper, a convert, then a student at St. Mary's Seminary, expressed a wish to give his property for charitable purposes. It happened that both converts, Mother Seton and Mr. Cooper, assisted at the same Mass in St. Mary's Chapel. Both had the same desire to give themselves to God and the service of the poor. After Holy Communion Mother Seton prayed, "Dearest Saviour, if you would give me the care of poor little children, no matter how poor!" Then seeing Mr. Cooper kneeling before her, she continued, "Mr. Cooper has money; if he would only give it for the benefit of poor little children to know and to love you!" Mr. Cooper at the same time was whispering his desires into the Sacred Heart of Jesus and wondered if Mrs. Seton would accept the responsibility. Mr. Cooper called on Father Dubourg after Mass and revealed his desires, Mother Seton at the same time awaiting her turn to do likewise. The zealous clergyman and wise minister of God was struck at this coincidence and recognized the inspirations of the Holy Spirit in both chosen souls, but he advised them to reflect seriously on the subject for a month without conferring with each other and then acquaint him of their decision. They came to him with no change of sentiment and he, knowing that God's Providence in behalf of the American Church was clearly indicated, approved of their designs and informed Bishop Carroll, who gave it his hearty approval and blessing.¹

Many persons wished the new establishment to be

¹ White, op. cit., p. 245.
located in Baltimore, but Mr. Cooper insisted that Emmitsburg was an ideal place for a convent. Father Dubourg immediately went to Emmitsburg and bought a site about a half mile from the village. On it was a small stone house still in existence. Father Dubois, who was afterward so deeply interested in the Society of the Sisters of Charity, was pastor of several parishes in Frederick County and president of a school recently opened, the beginning of Mount St. Mary’s College, the companion institution to St. Joseph Academy, Emmitsburg, for more than a century.

The Bishop of Boston, afterward Cardinal Cheverus, one of Mother Seton’s spiritual directors, through the medium of letters, hearing of the progress of her work, wrote her April 13, 1809: “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 Sister, that He Who has begun this work will

1 Mr. Cooper, a native of Virginia engaged in maritime pursuits, had travelled over a great part of the world. During a dangerous illness in Paris, he was inspired to read the Holy Scriptures and was very deeply impressed by the history of our Saviour, wishing he could have such a friend. He seemed to hear the words, “If you wish me to be your friend, it depends only upon yourself.” A Protestant friend advised him to examine the claims of all denominations. This he did, and finally receiving from a Catholic lady a book L’Ami de la Religion, he was convinced of the truths of the Catholic religion, and in the autumn of 1807, he entered the Church. His gift to the Sisters of Charity amounted to $8,000.

2 M. de Cheverus was born at Mayenne, January 28, 1768, and received the Sacrament of Holy Orders at the last public ordination before the revolution in Paris, December 18, 1790. He was made Bishop of Boston in 1808 and was nominated to the See of Montauban in 1823. He, with M. de Quelen, Archbishop of Paris, received in 1830 the highest title which a king of France can bestow, “Commander of the Order of the Holy Ghost,” remarkable for being the last conferred by Charles X. He was created Cardinal on February 1, 1836. Walsh, Life of the Cardinal de Cheverus. Philadelphia, 1839.
bring it to perfection.” Mother Seton herself felt the same confidence and was now saluted, far and near, as the mother of a new spiritual family. Postulants were petitioning to join her ranks and at each arrival her heart expanded with joy. She wrote at this time: “The scene before me is heavenly. I can give you no just idea of the precious souls who are daily uniting under my banner, which is the cross of Christ. The tender title of Mother salutes me everywhere, even from lips that have never said to me the common salutation among strangers.”

Miss Maria Murphy, niece of Matthew Carey, Esq., of Philadelphia, came in April, 1809, the second

Matthew Carey was born in Ireland in 1760. He received a good education, and when, in his fifteenth year, his father placed a list of twenty-five trades before him and bade him make his choice, he selected the trade of printer and bookseller, much to his father’s disappointment. Two years later he published a treatise on duelling, followed by an address to his fellow-Catholics that was so revolutionary in tone as to draw down on its writer the wrath of the British government, and he was forced to fly to Paris. There he met Benjamin Franklin, then representing the United States at Versailles, and Franklin employed him for about a year. Returning to Ireland, young Carey published The Freeman’s Journal, and afterwards The Volunteers’ Journal. The latter paper became a power in Irish politics, and to its efforts was attributed, in great measure, the legislative independence of Ireland. Accused of libel, because of an attack on Parliament and the Ministry, he was arraigned before the House of Commons, in 1784, and imprisoned until Parliament was dissolved. When liberated, he sailed for America, landing in Philadelphia, November 15, 1784. He began the publication of the Pennsylvania Herald in 1785. Because of a journalistic difficulty with Colonel Oswald, he met him in a duel, January 1, 1786, and Carey was shot through the thigh bone. Among his achievements were his heroic services as a member of the Philadelphia Committee of Health during the yellow fever epidemic in 1793. The same year he founded the Hibernian Society to care for the Irish immigrants. He met William Cobbett in controversy and vanquished him. He published, for six years, a magazine called The American Museum. Matthew Carey married Miss B. Flahaven in 1791, and shortly afterwards opened a small bookshop. No citizen of his day was more deeply interested in every public question and movement. Like FitzSimons, he was an ardent Protectionist, and between 1819 and 1833 published fifty-nine pamphlets on the tariff. Numbers of pamphlets and newspapers attest his interest in the questions affecting the United States Bank. His political books, The Olive Branch, New Olive Branch, and Essays on Political Economy, are regarded as authorities on the political history
postulant. She was called the "Dove" by Mother Seton because of her beautiful disposition.

MARY ANN BUTLER of Philadelphia, sister of Rev. Thomas Butler,¹ a President of the Emmitsburg College and afterwards Professor at the Seminary in Cincinnati, was the third companion.

She entered in May and, a few days later, SUSAN CLOSSY came from New York.

Several ladies in Baltimore and some near Emmitsburg were awaiting the joyful moment of their union with Mother Seton. Her fervor was communicating itself to other chosen souls but a feeling of her own unworthiness predominated in her heart. One day, when conversing with her companions on the probable designs of God in their regard, she became so overwhelmed at the responsibility of her office and her own incapacity that she wept bitterly and, then, throwing herself on her knees, she acknowledged aloud the frailties and humiliating actions of her life even from childhood days exclaiming, "My gracious God, You know my unfitness for this task! How can I teach others who know so little myself and am so miserable and imperfect?" ²

Father Dubourg, the spiritual director of the little company, felt now the time had come for assuming

1 Reverend Thomas R. Butler was President of Mount St. Mary's Seminary from 1834 to 1838. For two years he was secretary to Archbishop Eccleston and then left for Cincinnati, where he was made pastor of St. Mary's, Hamilton, Ohio. He was Vicar-General for Bishop Carrell from the time Covington was made an Episcopal See, 1858, until his death in 1869, a few weeks after the Bishop's death.

2 Archives of Mount St. Joseph, Ohio; White, op. cit., p. 253.
the dress and regulations of a religious community. Mother Seton suggested a black habit and short cape similar to a costume she had seen worn by some nuns in Italy. Since her husband's death she had worn a neat white muslin cap with crimped border, having a band of black crepe fastened around the head and tied under the chin. The Sisters adopted the black habit, cape, and white cap on June 1, 1809, and the following day, Feast of Corpus Christi, they appeared at the solemn services in St. Mary's Chapel for the first time in their religious garb. Father Dubourg was overjoyed at the sight of this devoted band of Sisters, which had been formed under his own wise superintendence with the approbation of Archbishop Carroll first Bishop of United States and with the cooperation of his suffragans, a little band which he felt would be the source of great good to religion and society. The congregation of St. Mary's thanked God for being witnesses to this solemn but gladdening spectacle, the first public appearance of the American Daughters of Charity. Mother Seton had been following a provisional rule and had consecrated herself to God by the vows of religion in the presence of Archbishop Carroll. She now placed her community under the protection of St. Joseph, and Father Dubourg, being named ecclesiastical Superior, drew up a formula of observance until the adoption of a permanent rule. The Sisters were exhorted to practise mortification and hours were set apart for study to qualify themselves for the future designs of Providence. Regular hours were appointed for domestic duties and exercises in the school, and stated days fixed for receiving Communion.

Shortly after this, Mrs. Rose White, a widow, and

Miss Catherine Mullen, both from Baltimore, presented themselves to Mother Seton as members of her religious family. Miss Cecilia Seton had accomplished the longing of her heart to be united to her beloved sister-in-law. On account of Cecilia's weak state of health, her sister Harriet was allowed to accompany her to Baltimore and now, by advice of physicians, both were to spend the summer in the mountains. Emmitsburg being in the mountains, Mother Seton set out on June 21, taking with her in the coach her two sisters-in-law, her little daughter Anna Maria, and Sister Maria Murphy. They reached Emmitsburg the following day. Mother Seton wrote: "being obliged to walk the horses all the way and having walked ourselves, all except Cecilia, nearly half the time: this morning, four miles and a half before breakfast. The dear patient was greatly amused at the procession and all the natives were astonished as we went before the carriage. The dogs and pigs came out to meet us and the geese stretched their necks in mute demand to know if we were any of their sort, to which we gave assent." ¹ The cheerfulness shown in this letter was a great comfort to Mother Seton and her companions later on during seasons of desolation and destitution.

The house on the Sisters' land was not ready for their reception; but Father Dubois, President of Mount St. Mary's Seminary, offered them a log house² on the mountain above the College and showed them the greatest kindness and hospitality.

This year, 1809, which brought Mother Seton to St.

¹ White, op. cit., p. 256, note.
² "Father Duhamel's house." The spot is now marked by a granite cross, the gift of Rev. Dr. Flynn's sister.
Joseph's Vale, by the tender dispensations of Divine Providence, united Father Dubois with the Society of St. Sulpice, and made him eligible as director of the infant community which had been from its beginning under the care of that Congregation. We shall see later that he succeeded Father David in 1811 and labored during fifteen years impressing upon the Community the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul. In 1810, when Bishop Flaget brought the Rules of the Daughters of Charity from France, Father Dubois translated them into English, leaving a margin for such amendments as Archbishop Carroll deemed essential for a community just starting in the United States. He attended to the minutest details and Mother Seton once exclaimed: "Long may our Lord spare him to the community, for who could ever be found to unwind the ball as he does and stop to pick out every knot." One of the Sisters commenting on this remark of Mother Seton said, "This was not the spirit of our Mother, though she bent herself to it." ¹

Father Dubois was an experienced educator and a thorough student of human nature, and he wrote the regulations for the school in the same detailed manner and touched upon every point relating to the spiritual, moral, intellectual, and physical training of the young. He arranged the order of the day for winter and summer. He warned the Sisters against bias in their judgments of pupils and he instructed those in authority to weigh well all complaints and to decide without prejudice, saying; "Everyone who succeeds others is apt to claim an exclusive talent and to condemn predecessors. My experience is that reformers often do worse than the reformed." Such was the character

¹ Archives of Mount St. Joseph, Ohio.
of the man destined by God to assist Mother Seton in forming the Sisters of Charity for the varied work that coming years and a broad new country had in store for their highest heroism, mental and spiritual.

By giving them their first little resting place on the mountain above the College, he inspired them with confidence in God, filled their hearts with generous gratitude, and produced a willingness to follow his advice.

Harriet Seton, who had accompanied her invalid sister, Cecilia, but who had struggled against the attractions of grace, at length acknowledged its mastery. On the Feast of St. Mary Magdalen, July 22, 1809, between ten and eleven o’clock at night; “stealing up to the church by the light of a full moon, in deepest silence, her arms crossed upon her breast and the moon’s reflections full on her pale but celestial countenance, I saw,” says Mother Seton, “the falling tears of love and adoration, while we said first the Miserere and then the Te Deum, which from her childhood had been our family prayers. Descending the mountain, she burst forth the full heart. ‘It is done, my sister, I am a Catholic; the cross of our dearest Lord is the desire of my soul; I will never rest till He is mine.’”

Harriet was the pride of her family and one of the belles of New York, and Mother Seton knowing from her own experience what she would be compelled to suffer on her return to New York (she was engaged to Mother Seton’s half-brother, a non-Catholic) called to her mind the consequences of the step she now meditated. “Yes,” said Harriet, “I have examined all this in my own mind. I have weighed well the consequences, and the engagement I have made I will keep, if as a Catholic,

1 Archives of Mount St. Joseph, Ohio; Seton, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 56; White, op. cit., p. 258.
I am received by those dear friends to whom I am sincerely attached; but I cannot remain a Protestant; and if as a Catholic, I am rejected even by this dear one (showing the miniature of him she had promised to marry) *I must save my soul!*” She was expected to return to New York in July, but, as we shall see later, her home was to be with her sister at Emmitsburg.

The Sisters took possession July 30, 1809, of the “Stone House,” the cradle of Mother Seton’s community. In a recess at the left hand from the north door, between the corner of the house and window was the chapel. Father Dubourg had an altar erected at the north wall and said the first Mass for the young community. In this chapel the Archbishop administered Confirmation to Harriet Seton, and Father Dubourg here conducted the first retreat of the Sisters of Charity.

Father Dubois came every morning from the College even through the bitter winter colds to say Mass for the community. At the top of the building was a garret, used for a dormitory in which were two windows without glass, over the openings of which were nailed some rough boards to keep out the stormy weather and the strong winds from the Blue Ridge Mountains. It was not unusual for the Sisters to find themselves covered with snow in the morning, and on one occasion nearly two cart-loads of snow were shovelled from their sleeping apartment. During this time the new house, the White House, was under cover, and carpenters were at work. The Sisters were doing their best to live by rule. Sister Catherine Mullen was appointed Housekeeper; Sister Rose, Assistant to Mother; Sister

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1 This house is still standing and all the sacred spots are marked, reminding Mother Seton’s Daughters, who visit it as pilgrims, that they have come from a noble ancestry — one which gloried in the Cross of Christ and burned with zeal for souls.
Cecilia, Secretary and School Sister; Sister Sarah, Procuratrix, washer, and baker. The Sisters took turns in cooking and all helped at the ironing. On wash days they took their clothes to the creek early in the morning, and remained all day, without a board to stand on or any shelter excepting the trees beneath which they placed their tubs. There was no water at the house, or any accommodation whatever. If rain came while they were at the creek, they carried the clothes wet to the house. To this house came Mother Seton, her two sisters-in-law, three daughters, and three members of her community. Two postulants, Sarah and Ellen Thompson from Emmitsburg, had entered lately. The Sisters from Baltimore had started for their new home on the same day, July 30, and reached St. Joseph’s Vale on the Feast of St. Ignatius, July 31. There were nine persons in the little party and the journey was made in a wagon partly filled with furniture and baggage. Mother Seton’s two sons were among the travellers and all received a most affectionate welcome from her, who was to be the support and guide of so many chosen souls.

The community at this time numbered ten Sisters:

Mother Seton, Veronica Cecilia O’Conway,
Maria (Burke) Murphy, Susan Clossy,
Mary Ann Butler, Rose White,
Catherine Mullen, Sarah Thompson,
Ellen Thompson, Cecilia Seton.¹

The Sisters arose at five o’clock in the morning and after prayer and meditation until half past six, they assisted at Mass, reciting the first part of the Rosary on their way to the Chapel and the second after entering. At nine o’clock they made the Act of adoration of the Sacred Heart and attended to their various duties until

¹ White, op. cit., p. 200, note.
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a quarter before twelve, when they devoted fifteen minutes to examination of conscience, prayer, and reading of the New Testament. During dinner, one of the Sisters read a portion of the Holy Scriptures. After recreation, at two o’clock, there was a reading from the Following of Christ, praying, and work until five, then a visit to the Blessed Sacrament and recitation of the third part of the Rosary. At supper the Spiritual Combat was read. After the recreation, at half past eight o’clock, there was spiritual reading followed by prayers; then the community retired.¹

A spiritual retreat, their first, was opened August 10, by the Superior, Father Dubourg. He brought home to his hearers most eloquently and impressively the great truths of religion and the motives of Christian perfection. Besides the daily exercises prescribed for the Sisters, they were exhorted to employ themselves in offices of charity and in the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Among their spiritual duties mental prayer was to be considered of prime importance and they were urged to perfect themselves as far as possible in the holy art of conversing with God and to remember that recollection and detachment are the two principal dispositions necessary for successful meditation. Next in importance were spiritual reading and examination of conscience. There was private reading in addition to the spiritual lecture in common and, once a week, they met for a conference on spiritual matters. Father Dubourg thought there was danger in frequent Communions in a body and emphasized the necessity of arousing the proper dispositions for receiving Holy Communion often.

Charity was the reigning virtue in this favored valley of St. Joseph, their director urging the Sisters as the Beloved Disciple had done, until the day of his death: “My little children, love one another.” Class work began with the two boarders from Baltimore and Mother Seton’s three daughters. Charity to the sick was exercised almost immediately, since fever broke out in the neighborhood of Emmitsburg and the Sisters hastened to the relief of the sufferers.

Father Dubois celebrated Mass daily in the little Chapel and on Sunday, after early service at St. Joseph’s, he officiated either in the village church or in that on the mountain. The Sisters attended the late service, decorated the sanctuary, and performed the duties of the choir. After the morning ceremony, the Sisters and the young ladies assembled at the “Grotto,” a romantic part of the mountain a little above the College, where there was a crystal stream which flowed down the hill, and above were huge moss-grown rocks projecting over a ravine in which there was dense foliage with flowers of various hues. The hand of piety, had planted here a cross and erected an image of Mary, Help of Christians. In this beautiful natural shrine Mother Seton and her little band would partake of their simple repast after invoking God’s blessing and reciting the “Canticle of the Three Children.”

In going to the mountain church, which they did for years in summer and winter, they had neither road nor bridge, and when the creek was high, they had to cross the stream on horseback. In rainy weather Father Dubois always sent a horse to the creek, and the Sisters would take their turns riding across, the eldest Sister standing near the oak tree in the rain until all had passed over. They wore no shawls in those days, and
had no umbrellas. Two candidates from New York were received at the Stone House, and, as the place was very much crowded, it was decided to have Sisters Sarah, Catherine, and Rose sleep in an unfinished room in the new house. Often they would rise at two or three o'clock, and start for the Chapel thinking it time for morning prayers. When it rained heavily they could not leave the house as the ground was muddy and roughly ploughed. One would manage to reach the community house and return with something to eat. Spinning wheels in the new building kept them busy during their imprisonment.

Christian mortification was a characteristic feature of these first Sisters of Charity as is shown in a letter written by Mother Seton. "So earnest is every heart that carrot-coffee, salt pork, and butter-milk seem, yet, too good a living"; and describing a Sister who had been reared in great luxury, she said; "She is making fine progress in the paths of penance and drinks carrot-coffee with as good grace as if she had been used to mortification all her life and takes dry bread at breakfast as if it was really her choice. Besides, her eloquent tongue has a continual embargo on it, except at recreation, and this is no small penance you may suppose to us all."

The Community was often very destitute and frequently knew not whence the next meal would come. On Christmas-day, the Sisters considered themselves fortunate to have smoked herrings for their dinner and a spoonful of molasses for each. Their residence was too small for them to conduct a school large enough to give them means of support and the revenue of the institution was used for the purchase and improvement of their property. Mother Seton rejoiced in
these opportunities of sharing in the cross of Christ. Often, as if in transport, she would exclaim with arms extended towards Heaven: “O my Sisters, let us love Him: let us ever be ready for His Holy Will. He is Our Father. Oh, when we shall be in our dear eternity, then we shall know the value of suffering here below!”

Harriet Seton, from the day she listened to God’s voice in her heart, ceased not to prepare herself to receive Him in the sacrament of His love. The Feast of Our Lady of Mercy, September 24, was the day of celestial gladness to her and to the whole sisterhood; but who can picture the grateful joy of Mother Seton’s heart? As soon as the news reached New York, Harriet was besieged with reproachful letters from friends and learned communications from ministers of various churches. Mother Seton’s “siren voice” was blamed for the “dreadful mischief” and censure was heaped upon her dear head. Harriet Seton had looked forward to the “supernal prize” and having conquered self and worldly considerations, she was ripe for Heaven. The fall and winter of 1809 were very severe on the little band so poorly sheltered in such an inconvenient house. Bishop Carroll writing to Mother Seton in November expressed his fears concerning their unprotected state and said; “I cannot reflect with patience on your situation and that of your dear Sisters for this Winter—I trust and hope that not any of you may get your deaths.” For several months indeed St. Joseph’s was an infirmary. William Seton, attacked by nervous fever at college, was sent to his loving mother to be nursed. The scant accom-

1 Archives of Mount St. Joseph, Ohio.
modations of the house made it impossible to furnish the patient with necessary rest and remedies, and he became so ill that the last rites of the Church were administered to him, and his Aunt Harriet made the shroud for his burial. It was God's will to spare the boy, and the garment prepared by his Aunt Harriet very soon enveloped her own precious body, but lately the tabernacle of the Lord of Hosts.

Sister Cecilia Seton was also sick and when Harriet Magdalen was taken ill in December, both occupied the room next to the chapel, in which there were only two cots. The other Sisters slept on the floor. Mother Seton rested on the floor with Rebecca and Josephine in the room occupied by her two sisters-in-law. During Mass the door would be left open for the spiritual benefit of the two dear invalids who would also receive Holy Communion very often. The people of Emmitsburg would come to Mass early on Sundays and Rev. Mr. Cooper, a seminarian at the time, often served the Mass. What an edifying sight! Old, young, sick, and well, all crowded around the simple altar and the sick beds. Shortly before Harriet's death she had a night of burning fever and had broken her fast, but when Communion time came she eagerly watched the priest, forgetting in her delirium that she might not receive her Beloved. When the priest turned to the tabernacle, and, placing the ciborium in it, closed the door, she began to speak in her sweet voice so plaintively and tenderly to her Jesus of her great disappointment that all present were moved to tears. The beautiful dispositions of her soul were shown all through her illness. Her devotion to the Blessed Sacrament was most tender, her last act of consciousness being an effort to join the Sisters in a hymn at
Benediction. She died December 22, and Cecilia, who was lying in the bed next to her, asking to be raised, leaned over and kissed her, thanking our Lord that He had taken her to Himself. She was placed in the very spot she herself selected in the "Woods." During the previous summer Mother Seton had invited the Sisters to go with her to select a place for a cemetery. Miss Harriet Seton was with them. Some designated one spot, some another. Miss Harriet noticed a large oak tree before her and having in her hand an apple, she playfully tossed it against the tree saying aloud, "This is my spot." It was a prediction. In a few months she reposed there,—the first to sleep in St. Joseph's Valley. ¹ Mother Seton sorrowed for her dear one but not without consolation as Rev. Anthony Kohlman S.J., who was then in New York, wrote her on January 17, 1810, "You are happy enough to take your many trials in that light in which the saints considered them, as great favors of your Divine Bridegroom." Father Cheverus wrote to her also, on January 24, 1810, "What a happy death! May my last end be like hers. She who loved much became in a moment a saint and a friend of Jesus. I look upon your trials, difficulties, etc., as the stamp of divine favor and protection upon your establishment. Remember St. Theresa and St. Francis de Chantal. Like them, I hope you will become saints and the mothers of saints."

Mother Seton received similar holy communications from Bishop Carroll and other members of the clergy, and a very striking letter from Rev. John B. David who had been but recently appointed ecclesiastical Superior of the sisterhood. He wrote to her on December 28, 1809:

¹ Archives of Mount St. Joseph, Ohio.
“Crosses, privations, and afflictions seem to be the lot which our Blessed Lord has appointed for your soul. Courage, my dear Mother, these are the precious jewels with which the Divine Spouse is pleased to adorn His bride. They are the most valuable earnest of His love and the sweet pledges of His liberalities. Our dear Harriet is not dead, but lives to her God. In lamenting her loss to us, I cannot forbear looking upon her death as a happy event for herself: from what storms and dangers is she not delivered! Perhaps God foresaw that, if she had lived, the persecution and allurements of a wicked world would have shaken her constancy and caused her to forsake her good resolutions. Let us adore the inscrutable, but always wise and merciful ways of Providence and let us more than ever convince ourselves that Jesus wishes to be the sole possessor of our hearts, and would have His spouses above all others to abandon themselves with perfect resignation into His Hands, casting away all anxious cares, leaving entirely to Him the choice of the good or evils that are to befall them.”

The loss of dear ones was a severe cross to Mother Seton. Many other trials were awaiting her in the very near future; but her feet were planted firmly on “The Rock” and Christ Suffering possessed her heart.