

from the HouseTops

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We are indebted to the Sisters of Charity of Mount Saint Vincent on the Hudson, the Daughters of Charity of Emmitsburg, Maryland and the Sisters of Charity of Convent Station, New Jersey for pictures.

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Saint Benedict Center

The Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

To Our Readers:

What could be more of an inspiration to every American woman than the feature of this issue of *From the Husetops*, the life story of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton! Indeed, what could be more of an invitation to share the highest ideals of heroic sanctity and genuine patriotism than the life of this fascinating daughter, wife, mother, nun, and foundress of a religious congregation—and of the American Catholic school system—all wrapped in one beautiful, and peculiarly American little package!

We take no small delight in the awareness that it was our Founder, the Reverend Leonard Feeney, M.I.C.M., through the interest he took in her, and the wonderful account he wrote of her precious person, who contributed in no small way to that crescendo of enthusiasm which led to her canonization.

And now that Saint Elizabeth Ann shines securely and forever as a star in our sky, we call all women of every age (and it will not be easy to keep the men away) to the joy of getting to know intimately, a most challenging but lovable saint, who lived through the delights and difficulties of our modern times; who trod our streets, and who breathed the very air we breathe.

Faithfully, in the Immaculate Heart of Mary,

Brother Francis, M. I. C. M.



This portrait of Mother Seton was painted for the Filicchi family.

"... And it's about time we had some saints in the United States. It is not because we cannot get sanctifying grace to make them. We hear lots about Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Anthony of Padua, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. How about a Saint Barbara of Brooklyn, Saint Helen of the Bronx, or Saint Robert of Jersey City?"

A Saint from New York

Mother Elizabeth Ann Seton

It was Father Leonard Feeney, one of Mother Seton's earliest biographers, who asked this important question in a 1937 sermon given at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. In 1975 his hope was realized, and we now have a Saint Elizabeth of New York—Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton, our first "All-American" Saint, and this in every sense of the word. Possessing typical American intensity, in her short life she was a belle, a wife, a mother of five, a widow, a nun, Foundress of the Sisters of Charity in America, and the originator of our parochial schools.

That our Saint should have come into this world during a time of such great importance to our nation was in God's mind, no mere accident. His Provi-

dence directs the course of all human affairs. Undoubtedly, then, the formative years of our country and the beautiful life of Saint Elizabeth are much more than an interwoven chain of events with no real connection or purpose. Rather the Divine dispensation was generously bestowing a most sublime gift upon the American people—sanctity.

Early Years

Elizabeth Ann's timely arrival was on August 28, 1774. The previous December had witnessed the dramatic Boston Tea Party, and the following September would see the decisive meeting of the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia. Her father, Richard Bayley, a surgeon of high repute (more devoted to his profession than to his fam-

ily), was nominally Episcopalian. Her mother, Catherine Charlton, was the daughter of an Episcopalian minister. They had three children, all girls, Mary Magdalen, Elizabeth Ann, and Catherine Josephine, in that order.

When Elizabeth Bayley was two years old the Declaration of Independence was signed, and during her childhood the American Revolution was fought. Her father was a Royalist, in fact a surgeon in the British Army. But such were his qualities of character and learning that, when American Independence was established, he was warmly received by the citizens of the new Republic and given posts of honor in the community. The war cost him no serious reversal of fortune and the days of Elizabeth's girlhood were passed in extreme comfort.

Yet, there can be no sanctity without suffering and in view of her future mission and vocation, little Elizabeth was visited with a long succession of sorrows from the very start.

Her mother died May 8, 1777, when she was not yet three years old. The following year Doctor Bayley married Charlotte Amelia Barclay, daughter of Andrew Barclay and Helena Roosevelt, whose father was the founder of the Roosevelt dynasty in America. Elizabeth came to love and respect her stepmother as much as is possible in such cases, but her father became for her, henceforth, pretty much of a mother and father combined. This was soon followed by an-

other tragedy, the death of her two-year-old sister Catherine. When asked if she were not sad at the loss of her little sister, Elizabeth expressed her early realization of the very purpose of our life in this vale of tears by replying, "No, because Kitty is gone up to heaven. I wish I could go there too." This yearning for Eternity was but the seed of her spirituality, which God Himself would carefully nurture, and with the passing years, render fruitful.

Elizabeth was brought up in an age when a girl was given a distinctly feminine education. Music, drawing, French, literature, sewing, dancing, and housewifery were the general curriculum allotted to her. Her father also strove to develop in her everything that was fine in the way of moral virtue. But what was lacking in Richard Bayley was a belief consonant with his disciplinary regime. The discipline was Christian, the doctrine indefinite, for he was no more or no less than a Christian humanitarian. It is not surprising, then, to find Elizabeth upon the threshold of adulthood, thoroughly indoctrinated with the ideas of Rousseau, the philosopher of the French Revolution. That harm was not done, and that, without any spiritual direction, she gradually disregarded Rousseau and reverted to her quest for something in which her spirit could rejoice without disillusionment, is a tribute both to the character of the girl herself and to the intense impulse of grace that was drawing her step by step to the

goal God had intended for her from the beginning.

It was evident that heaven had also endowed Elizabeth with a naturally pious disposition which even the tempting vanities of girlhood could not impair. There was no question about it; Elizabeth was a beauty, a model of slenderness and grace. Her features were finely cut and her eyes a brilliant dark-brown. And, as one might expect of an attractive young woman, she was courted lavishly. She attended cotillions and balls, escorted by handsome young men from the prominent families of New York society. Nevertheless, she wondered after being at public places—"why I could not say my prayers and have good thoughts as if I had been at home".

Who could have fully perceived the beautiful desires of her youthful heart? Elizabeth as she was known to her family, friends, and many social acquaintances was quite different from the Elizabeth known to God and God alone. Fortunately, she kept detailed journals throughout her

life, and from these it is easy to see the grace that was forever at work in the depths of her soul. It was during these early years that she had "passionate wishes that there were such places in America . . . where people could be shut from the world and pray and be good always." Little did Elizabeth Bayley imagine that her desire for detachment and prayer would one day be happily fulfilled beyond all expectation. But this day would have to wait.

Mrs. William Seton

At one of the many social functions that this daughter of the American Revolution attended she met "her William" . . . William Magee Seton. The young New York financier was handsome, charming, successful, but also of extremely poor health due to an advanced case of consumption. He was the oldest son of William Seton, Sr., who headed the commissioning firm of Seton, Maitland and Company. Their courtship began upon William's return from Italy, where he had spent considerable time as an ap-



Elizabeth.



William.