

OUR LADY COMES TO NEW ORLEANS



BY BROTHER ROBERTO, C.S.C.
(Brother Gerald Muller, C.S.C.)

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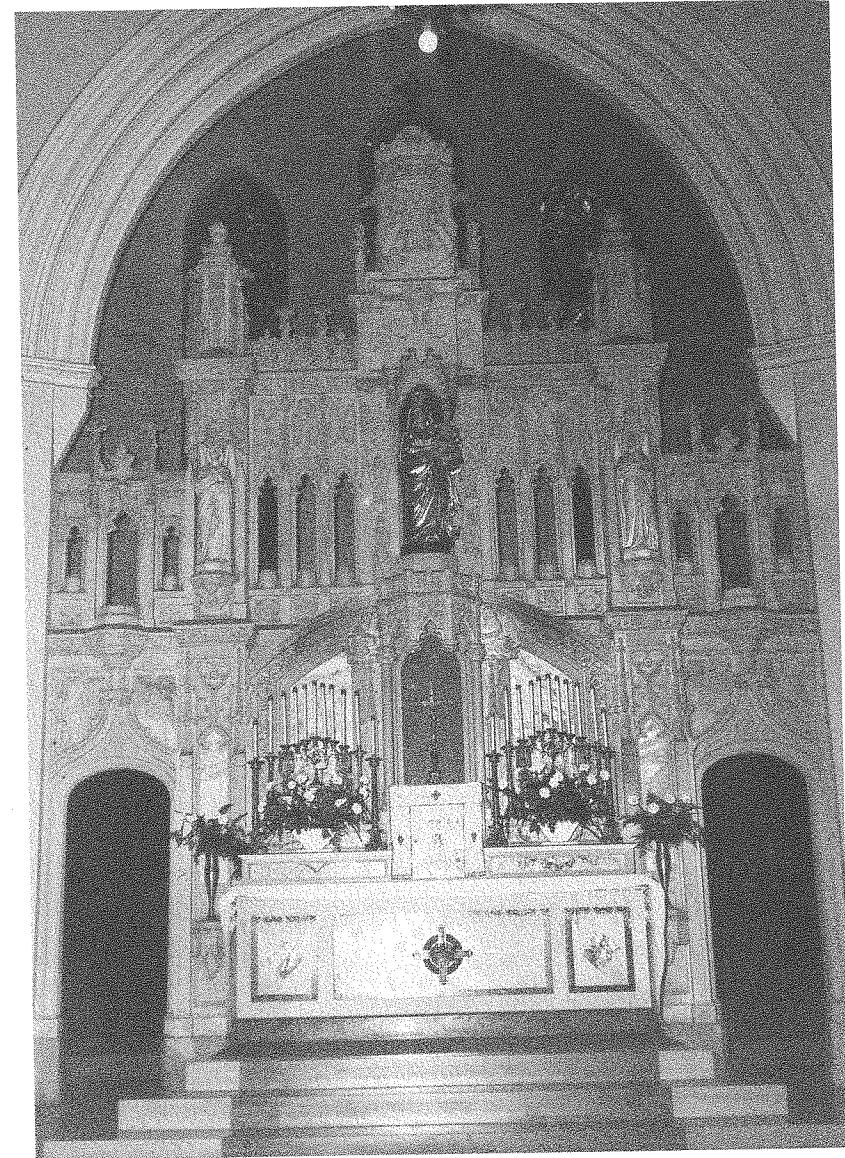
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Illustrations by
Thekla Ofria

BROTHERS OF HOLY CROSS: SOUTH-WEST PROVINCE
Austin, Texas

NIHIL OBSTAT
C.F. Brooks, C.S.C.
Censor Deputatus

IMPRIMATUR
Most Rev. Leo A. Pursley, D.D.
Bishop of Fort Wayne



DEDICATION
to
Rosemary Drown
Mother Columba, O.S.U.
Mother Dolores, O.S.U.
who helped me so much.

CHAPTER ONE

For almost two hundred years the Ursuline nuns of New Orleans, Louisiana, have owned and venerated a golden, miraculous statue of Our Lady under the title, Our Lady of Prompt Succor. This lovely statue, which today stands above the high altar of the Votive Shrine or chapel, was brought from France by a humble and holy Ursuline Sister in fulfillment of a vow. Today, it is the only statue in the United States that has been crowned by a Pope's delegate, and it is one of the few miraculous statues in North America. The favors granted by Our Lady of Prompt Succor are so numerous and wonderful, that whole books could be written about them, and in this day and age when human beings threaten to destroy themselves with sins and conflicts and nuclear weapons, more people of good will should know of the Mother of God under this title, pray to her and receive quick help.

One day in 1792 news reached the small town of Pont-St.-Esprit in southern France that the revolutionary government had passed a law, closing all religious houses in the country. Citizens of France were forbidden to become religious and all people who were religious were to remove their religious habits, leave their convents and monasteries and return to the homes of their relatives.

As soon as the terrible news reached the Mother Superior of the Ursuline convent in the town, she summoned all of her Sisters and laid her plans before them.

"We will have to leave this house at once," she said, after all of the nuns had assembled. "The French Revolution seems to be turning its attention on the destruction of the Catholic Church and all of its activities in the country. We are now forbidden by law to wear our religious habits. Our property is to be taken over by the government and used for its own purposes. We shall receive no money for it, of course, and therefore, if we do not wish to starve, we shall have to return to our homes and try to find work as laywomen in the world."

Some of the Sisters could not hold back their tears and before the Superior had finished her remarks, the whole room was filled with the sound of weeping. Many of the religious sitting around her had been members of the convent for years. Their relatives were long since dead. There was no place for them to go and there was no money for them.

"We shall have to start packing at once," said the Superior at last. "If the army of the Revolution finds any of us here when it arrives to see that the law is carried out, our heads will fall under the guillotine. Now, hurry!"

While the Mother Superior went to summon the chaplain to ask him to remove the Blessed Sacrament from the chapel, the nuns sadly made their way to their rooms to pack what few belongings they would be able to carry away with them. Among these nuns was a humble and gifted woman, Mother St. Michel Gensoul, who had taken her vows in the Ursuline chapel only a few months before. She was young and pretty and her relatives still lived in Pont-St.-Esprit. As she began to pack her belongings in preparation for leaving the convent, she turned over and over in her mind just what she could do to help the Church and the Ursuline Order, once the bloody Reign of Terror should have run its dreadful course. "The day will come," she thought to herself as hot tears ran down her cheeks, "when I will be able to do something to right all this injustice. Schools will once more be opened and the Catholic faith will be rekindled in the souls of the young. It may be long years from now, but the day will come, God willing, and I shall be ready to help bring Christ back to a land from which He and His friends have been driven!"

The Ursulines finished their packing as quickly as possible, and because it was against the law to wear the religious garb on the street, each of them had to put on a dress and bonnet of the period before she could flee from the convent. For the last time they visited their chapel. The Blessed Sacrament had been removed. The sanctuary lamp no longer burned and now the room which for so long had been the source of the community's joys and strength was dark and cold and empty—like a tomb.

There were public prayers for the welfare of the community, the town and the whole country. Then with the Superior leading them, the little group of consecrated women dressed in the strangest collection of gowns that could be found on the spur of the moment made its way out of the chapel and into the recreation room.

The nuns bade each other good-bye and then taking their bundles of belongings made their way into the street to begin a new life. For some it was to be a life of poverty and terror and finally death on the guillotine. For others it was to be a life of work and of hiding from the revolutionaries who were eager to find former religious engaged in the hardest and lowest forms of work so that they could insult and taunt them and make fools of them as Jesus had once been mocked by His persecutors.

Mother St. Michel made her way to the home of her parents and there took up a life of quiet work and prayer. She put aside her religious name as well as her black, trailing habit of St. Ursula and was known in the village as Miss Agathe Gensoul.

Years passed and so did the Reign of Terror. Miss Gensoul continued living her life as an Ursuline nun to the best of her ability even though it was difficult to find a priest to celebrate Mass and administer the sacraments. Most of the clergy who had escaped the guillotine were in hiding and often changed their places of residence. To find where they were in order to attend their Masses was a difficult and dangerous thing to do.

In 1802 after the persecution had died down somewhat, Miss Gensoul decided that the time had come for her to do something to correct the terrible effects of the French Revolution. Together with Miss Sophie Ricard, another Ursuline nun in hiding, she made her way to the city of Montpellier where, after obtaining Bishop Fournier's permission, she found and bought property for a boarding school.

After much work and prayer and sacrifice, the school opened and the work of instructing the young in the knowledge of God and His Commandments began. Miss Gensoul was aghast at the damage done to youth during the years of rebellion against God. The basic truths of religion were unknown to the young and the sins and public crimes that flowed from the Reign of Terror left the children with scarcely any moral sense of right and wrong.

The first few weeks in the classroom with such children were harrowing to say the least. Only patience and prayer gave the two noble women the courage to stay on in spite of all the difficulties, but gradually they won the children's confidence and affection, and they began to work wonders with them. The youngsters learned courtesy as well as prayer. Instead of throwing stones at the teachers in the periods of recess out of doors, they played simple games which the teachers taught

them. Slowly they learned to read and write and to do simple problems in arithmetic.

"Their 'bark' is worse than their 'bite,'" said Miss Gensoul one day after she and Miss Ricard had been teaching together for some months. "Now that we have cleaned up the children, taught them the basic truths of God and His laws, and shown them how to respect the rights of people and property, they are really more like angels than children!"

"Yes," agreed Miss Ricard, "they have certainly changed all right. They were more like a pack of wild animals than human beings those first few weeks we had them in here. But the grace of God works wonders, and I am sure His gift of patience to us was no less wonderful than the grace given these children to change their ways for the better."

And so the work of instructing and guiding the young prospered and more and more children came to the school with each passing month. More teachers had to be hired and plans made for more classrooms. Then one day a letter arrived for Agathe Gensoul. It was from New Orleans, Louisiana, and it was destined to change her entire life.

CHAPTER TWO

Miss Gensoul lost no time in opening the letter from New Orleans. She looked at once at the signature of the writer and smiled. "It is from my cousin, Mother St. Andre Madier!" she cried happily and hurried to find her friend, Miss Ricard, to tell her the good news. In the early 1800's letters came seldom from far away America, and when they did come they always contained important information.

"As you probably know, my dear cousin," the letter read, "the city of New Orleans and the entire territory of Louisiana has changed hands several times in a short period. We learned in dismay that Spain had ceded this area to Napoleon late in 1800. Fearing that Napoleon would confiscate our property and dissolve our community here in New Orleans, our Spanish Sisters wrote to the King of Spain requesting his permission for them to sail to Havana, Cuba. Left here in New Orleans besides Mother Superior are eleven nuns. Only six of these, besides myself, are active and able to work, and so the seven of us try to staff a hospital, a day school, a boarding school, an orphanage and a house of correction for wayward girls.

"The task it too great for us and unless help comes soon from France in the person of you, my dear cousin, and as many young women as you can interest in joining our Order and coming here to help us, all of the work of " our past hundred years in this city will be at an end.

"It is for this reason that I write to you. I beg you to come to our aid and to come quickly. If you are forbidden to live your religious life in France, be assured that you will have the opportunity to live it here freely and fully.

"Now that the United States has purchased the entire Louisiana Territory from Napoleon Bonaparte, we have been assured in a personal letter from President Thomas Jefferson that our property will be protected by the United States government and that we will be permitted

to govern it by our own rules without any interference from civil authorities."

Miss Gensoul read the rest of the letter silently and then looked up at her friend who stood near her with a wistful smile on her face.

"What shall we do?" asked Miss Ricard.

Agathe shrugged her shoulders. "My cousin would never have written this letter if the Ursulines in New Orleans were not desperate for help. If young recruits are not sent to America at once, all of those institutions that have taken a century to build will be destroyed."

"But how can you and I go, now that our school is doing so well and France is in such need of more schools like ours?"

"I know we are needed here, but I also believe that we will probably never again be able to live our religious life freely in this country. Since that is more important for the glory of God and the salvation of souls than all the good works of charity in the world, I think we should give up our present work and make plans to sail for Louisiana."

"But we can't go without Bishop Fournier's permission, Agathe."

"Then we shall have to ask for it," said her friend, setting her jaw firmly.

"And you know what he will say?"

"No, my dear friend," Agathe replied, "I do not know what he will say and neither do you. Let's think about this for a week or two, pray over it and leave it in the hands of Our Lady and our spiritual director. Then we shall act."

Miss Ricard smiled and went back to her classroom. She found it hard to keep her mind on her work and time and again she had to recall her wandering imagination. "What would it be like to live in Louisiana?" she mused. "How wonderful it would be to have the freedom to wear the religious habit again and live a regular community life in the midst of Ursuline nuns!"

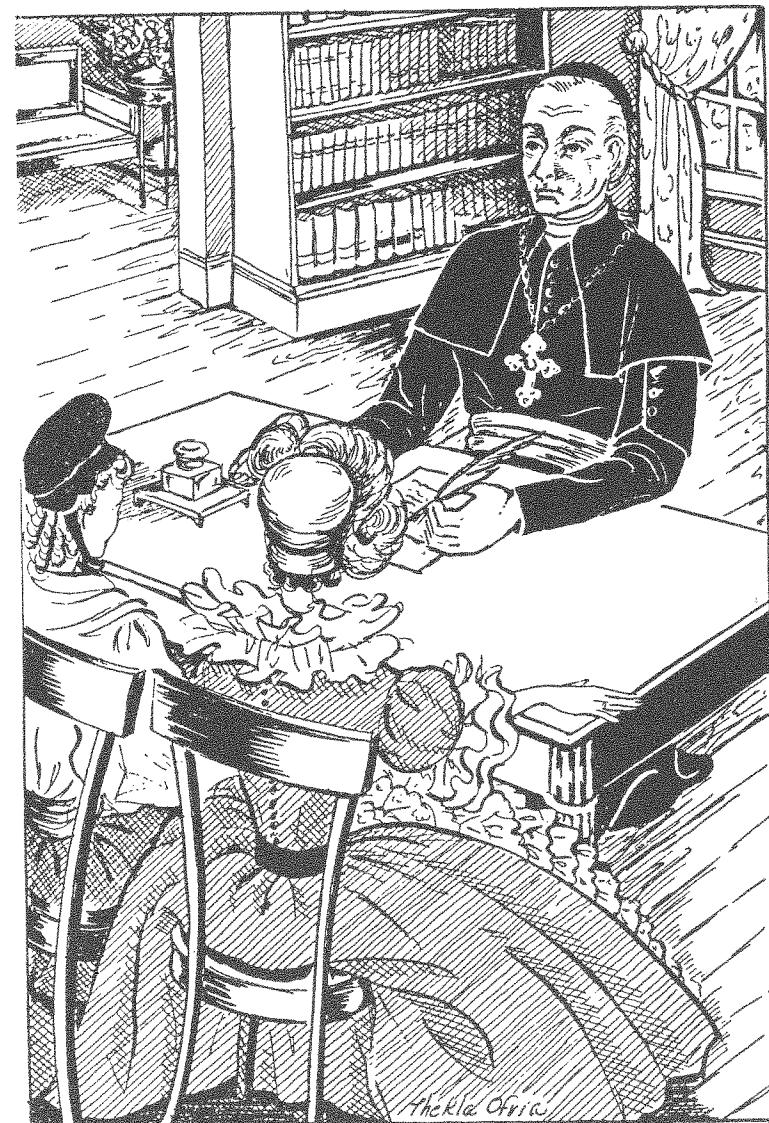
One day several weeks later, the two women put on their best dresses and sauciest hats and made their way to the bishop's palace. Their spiritual director had refused to make a decision in their case and had suggested this visit to the bishop. They were admitted to the prelate's study and were greeted warmly by Bishop Fournier.

"Well," he said cheerfully, "how are my two school teachers doing these days? I understand the boarding school is really "flourishing since you began it."

The two women nodded and smiled. "With the grace of God,

things are going along very well, Excellency," said Miss Gensoul. She felt a bit uneasy about the visit and decided to come to the point at once. "Your Excellency, we have come to ask your permission to do a very daring and difficult thing."

"You have?" the bishop replied, looking from one to the other and then back at the top of his desk. "And what is this daring and difficult thing that you wish to do?"



"We wish to have your permission to close our boarding school, leave France and take up our religious life in the Ursuline convent in New Orleans, Louisiana."

"Close the boarding school? Go to a foreign country? Throw away everything you have accomplished here over a period of years?" The bishop was flabbergasted and had some difficulty restraining his emotions. "You must be out of your minds!"

"No, Excellency," Miss Gensoul said. "We are not out of our minds, and we are convinced that it is God's will for us to accept the invitation of my cousin to sail for Louisiana." She went on to explain the difficulties facing the Ursulines in the New World owing to the departure of the Spanish nuns for Havana and the need for French women to join their religious community and carry on their good works of charity.

"But, my dear Miss Gensoul," the bishop pleaded, "there is no need to go to a foreign country to carry on works of charity. You have seen the terrible effects of the French Revolution and you in your wisdom have begun to do something about remedying those evils. Charity begins at home! Your duty lies here in France where children must be trained in the love of God if we ever hope to rid ourselves of the paganism brought into our midst during the past twenty years. Besides, I have long hoped that you would re-establish the Ursulines again here in Montpellier when the time is ripe for such a venture. You and Miss Ricard have continued living your religious lives to the best of your abilities and I am hoping you will be the core for a new community now that all of your houses in France have been destroyed."

Agathe looked at the floor and did not speak for some time. Many thoughts ran through her mind, one tumbling over another in their haste. "I had no idea you had such great plans for me, Excellency. I wish only to have your permission and blessing to take a group of young women who wish to join our Order to New Orleans and there help a weak and tired and overworked group of Sisters."

"The pope, alone, can authorize you to do such a thing--only the pope!" said the bishop finally. "Until you write to him and receive a favorable answer to your request, you will have to remain here carrying on the work of education that you have started so well."

"Thank you, Excellency," said Miss Gensoul. She was bitterly disappointed and it showed on her face but she smiled and knelt for the prelate's blessing. Miss Ricard did the same, and then they rose and

were ushered ceremoniously from the room.

Once in the street outside the bishop's palace and on their way home, Miss Ricard turned sadly to Agathe and said, "Do you know what this means?"

Her weary friend nodded. "It means that the bishop is quite sure my letter to Pope Pius VII will either never reach him or else will never be answered, now that he is held prisoner by Napoleon's troops."

"Exactly! And we will have to remain here while the convent in New Orleans dies for lack of religious!"

"I am going to write that letter to the pope and then we are going to pray. I have a feeling that God and Our Lady want us to finish our work and live in America. If such is the will of God for us, I am sure Our Lady will find a way to bring my letter to the pope and a way of returning a favorable answer."

"Agathe," said her friend softly, "you are asking for a miracle! The pope is forbidden to have any visitors. He may not even have a pen or piece of paper in his apartment, and all of his mail is read by Napoleon's agents before it is ever given to him."

"I know," said Miss Gensoul, "but Napoleon is not God. He is a weak little man whom God allows to torment His vicar but for a short time. If God wants the pope to receive my letter, He will find ways and means of getting it to him. All we can do is pray and hope."

It was on December 15, 1808, that Agathe Gensoul wrote her letter to Pope Pius VII requesting his permission to sail for Louisiana with a group of young women interested in joining the Ursuline Order in New Orleans. For three months the letter lay in her desk. Then one day while praying before a statue of Our Lady, Miss Gensoul was inspired to say: "O most holy Virgin Mary, if you obtain for me a prompt and favorable answer to this letter, I make the promise to have you honored at New Orleans under the title of Our Lady of Prompt Succor!"

The next day the letter was on its way to Rome. It was March 19, 1809—Saint Joseph's feast day. How it ever reached the hands of the imprisoned pope, no one but God and Our Lady know. It did reach him, however, and it was answered in a very short time.

On April 28, 1809, Pope Pius VII ordered Cardinal di Pietro to answer the letter. "I am happy to inform you," the cardinal wrote, "that the pope has been much pleased with the religious sentiments of your letter. He experienced great consolation on hearing that an Ursuline convent exists in New Orleans where piety and peace and regular obser-

vance reign." The pope not only approved of Miss Gensoul's voyage to Louisiana, but ordered her to act as leader of the little band of recruits from France during the sea voyage. He gave his blessing to the project and to all who would have a part in it and sent his best wishes for its successful outcome.

When the letter containing the pope's approval and blessing arrived in Montpellier, the joy of Agathe Gensoul knew no bounds nor did her gratitude to Our Lady of Prompt Succor. It was perfectly clear to her that two miracles had been worked. The first was the fact that her letter had reached the pope in the midst of his captors. The second was the fact that the pope had consented to her leaving France where her work was flourishing and where the Church's needs were so great.

Miss Gensoul lost no time in presenting herself before Bishop Fournier who, as soon as he had read the letter, smiled and shook his head. "I should have known that women are stronger than men—especially when they are helped by Our Lady. As long as the pope has given his approval in such a striking way, I have no objection to your leaving my diocese. The pope is my superior, you know, and his words are the will of God for us all."

"I am having a statue of Our Lady of Prompt Succor carved in fulfillment of a vow I made," Miss Gensoul explained.

"When it is finished," the bishop volunteered, "I would be happy to bless it for you before you crate it up for your voyage to New Orleans."

"Thank you very much, your Excellency. Our Lady would love that, and it would show that she has full control over you even when you do not think she does."

"I accept my defeat humbly," the bishop sighed in mock pain. "I can see a miracle when it happens before my eyes and until the day I die, I shall marvel that the pope ever received your letter or bothered to answer it knowing what the conditions are in France and Rome with Napoleon running everything as he pleases."

Miss Gensoul smiled and shook her head. "Even Napoleon can be controlled by Our Lady," she teased. "The only thing about it is—he doesn't know it!"

CHAPTER THREE

Agathe Gensoul's trailing, dark dress swept across the dusty floor of the artist's studio. It brushed sawdust and wood shavings along as she moved over to the bench where the sculptor sat tapping away at a large block of wood which, over a period of weeks, had gradually taken the shape of a statue of Our Lady. Now, for the first time, Miss Gensoul had come to see what progress had been made on it.

"Oh," cried the artist looking up in surprise from his work when he caught sight of the young lady. She had stood for some moments looking at his fine work before he had noticed her and now he smiled, pulled off his beret and rose to his feet.

"Sit down," she said kindly, "and go on with your work. I just dropped in to see how it was progressing. You have almost finished, have you not?"

The sculptor nodded. "How do you like it?"

Agathe took a closer look at the work and then walked around the statue which stood upright on the artist's bench. When she had seen it from all sides, she nodded approvingly. "I like it very much," she said. "The robes of Our Lady are especially interesting."

"Well, you said when you ordered it, that it was to be a statue of Our Lady of Prompt Succor, so I wanted to show by the swirl of her robes that she hurries to help those who ask her assistance. As she does so, it is as though the wind catches her skirt and robe and blows the material in great folds about her."

"I like the Christ Child very much," said Miss Gensoul looking at the serious little face and then at the tiny ball in His hand that represented the world. "He isn't wearing much, though, is He?" she asked.

"The same robe that covers His mother covers Him," explained the artist. "I wanted to show that Mary not only gave God the Son His Body but also His clothes and food and shelter all through His childhood and youth. Of course she had some help from good Saint Joseph, her husband."

"Then leave it as it is, for that is a wonderful idea that has found expression in the wood of this beautiful statue."

"When I have put the final touches on it, how would you like it to be painted?"

For a moment Miss Gensoul was silent. Then she answered: "Paint Our Lady's garments gold. Since she is the Queen of Heaven, we should give her the most costly and brilliant garments possible. Even her veil should be gold, also. The face, hands and feet of Our Lady and the body of the Child should be painted a natural flesh color."

"Very well," said the artist, going on with his work of chiseling. His hammer tapped away on the sharp metal tool as he spoke and he made deeper and deeper grooves into the bottom of the dress of Our Lady of Prompt Succor.

"Try to finish your work on the statue as soon as possible," Miss Gensoul suggested. "I want to have it blessed by Bishop Fournier before it is packed and made ready for its ocean voyage."

"Ocean voyage?" the artist asked with a frown. This was really news to him.

"Oh, didn't I tell you when I commissioned it? I am taking the statue to New Orleans in the Louisiana Territory. I vowed that if I received a favorable answer to a letter I wrote recently to Pope Pius VII, I would have Our Lady of Prompt Succor honored in New Orleans. The miracles I begged for were granted by Our Lady and having this statue carved is one of the ways I have for fulfilling my vow. It would be very hard to promote a devotion to Our Lady in a special way without a special statue of her, would it not?"

The artist agreed and smiled. "Who knows," he said putting down his tools for a moment, "perhaps this object of my art will some day be a miraculous image and a symbol to many people of the constant and quick help Our Lady brings to those who call on her."

"I'm sure it will be," said Agathe, picking up the long skirt of her dress and dusting the sawdust from it, "and I am also sure that Our Lady of Prompt Succor will richly reward you for having carved such a lovely image of her."

Miss Gensoul made her way to the door of the studio, bade the artist good-bye and hurried out into the street. She made her way back through the narrow streets of Montpellier to the school she had founded and taught in for so many years. There was much to be done there. Packing had to be finished, affairs put in order and a thousand little

chores completed before the voyage to the New World could be undertaken. She and her little band of recruits wished to sail before Easter of 1810 and there was still much to do before that day arrived.

In the midst of her many duties, Miss Gensoul prayed frequently that all would be in readiness for their sailing before the end of Lent. In due time the statue of Our Lady of Prompt Succor was completed and delivered to her residence in Montpellier. The bishop was happy to bless it and soon afterward Miss Gensoul packed it carefully in a large crate and sent it off with the trunks and boxes that were to accompany the Ursuline nuns and postulants to New Orleans.

On Holy Saturday, April 21, 1810, Agathe Gensoul stood on a wharf in La Rochelle, France, surrounded by her seven friends who were to make the voyage. Behind her lay years of suffering and prayer and exile from her beloved religious life. Before her lay long years in a new land where religious freedom was to be guaranteed and where she and her friends would once more be able to live the life of the Ursuline Rule without fear of persecution from civil authorities.

A few relatives had gathered to see the courageous ladies off and after good-byes and leave-taking, the eight women made their way up the gangplank and stood on the deck of the ship waving to their dear ones on the wharf. At a signal from the captain, the crew members raised the anchor. The sails were lowered and the ship slid slowly out of the harbor. A brisk, chilly wind filled the sails and soon the ship was heading for the open sea, leaving France behind. The women watched the horizon of their homeland disappear. There were tears in their eyes and they did not speak for all of them knew they would never see their country again.

For fifty days the sailing ship made its slow progress across the blustery Atlantic Ocean. Sometimes the winds were high and the women were frightened. In their agonies of seasickness they invoked Our Lady of Prompt Succor and before long their fears and illnesses had vanished. Carefully packed away in the hold of the ship was the crate containing the statue of Our Lady of Prompt Succor, and the good women believed that their long but safe voyage was due to her powerful protection.

On June 10th the ship arrived in Philadelphia. It was the vigil of Pentecost. After spending ten days in the city resting from their long voyage, the eight women made their way to Baltimore, Maryland. Now that they were in a free country, the Ursuline nuns put on their reli-

gious habits and veils. The recruits for the Order in New Orleans donned the black dresses of postulants and together they continued to observe as far as possible the exercises and prayers of their community.

Once in Baltimore, they were taken to the palace of Archbishop Carroll. He received them kindly and wished to know their destination.

"We are on our way to New Orleans," said Mother St. Michel, who had taken back her religious name after having been called Agathe Gensoul for ten years.

"New Orleans?" asked the archbishop. "Have you come all this distance on a dangerous ocean voyage to die in the epidemic that is sweeping over that city?"

"What do you mean, your Excellency?"

"Haven't you heard? There is a terrible yellow fever epidemic in the city of New Orleans. People are dying in droves and there is no indication that the disease will halt its course in the near future."

"If there are so many sick in the city, it is all the more reason for us to go there to nurse them and care for the orphans left by such a catastrophe."

"That is a noble idea," agreed the archbishop, "but Ursuline Sisters are scarce in these United States and I forbid you to set out for New Orleans until word reaches me that the epidemic has been brought under control and it is safe for you to travel South."

Believing that the archbishop's decision was God's will for her and her little band, Mother St. Michel took up residence in Baltimore until November of 1810. News finally arrived that the epidemic had passed and that there was no further danger of contagion. After receiving the archbishop's blessing and good wishes the Ursulines set off for New Orleans and arrived there on December 31st.

News of the arrival of the French recruits and Ursuline nuns spread quickly through the old convent on la Rue Condé or what is today Chartres Street.

"What a great New Year's gift Our Lady has brought us this year!" cried the Superior rushing to greet the weary women. "Oh, how wonderful of you all to come to help us!"

Mother St. Andre, the cousin of Mother St. Michel, who had written the letter that had led to this happy event, could not hold back her tears. She swept her cousin into her arms and held her tightly unable to speak for a long time.

"We've come in answer to your letter," Mother St. Michel said. "I

am so happy to be here!"

"And what do you think we are!" sobbed her cousin brokenly as she held the nun out at arm's length and looked at her joyfully. "Why, if you hadn't come and brought all these wonderful women with you, the Ursulines in New Orleans would have had to stop all of their works of charity!"

"Thanks to God and Our Lady!" said the Superior. "We are all delighted you have come to help us. We will find rooms for you at once and we want you to feel right at home. Now, let's visit the chapel and thank the Lord you have come to us safely."

The visit was made and then the nuns and postulants filed out of the chapel and into the recreation room of the convent. Servants were carrying the trunks of the travelers into the large hall and putting them at the foot of the wide, winding staircase with its old iron railing that can still be seen in the ancient building.

"Take the trunks upstairs, please," the Superior ordered. "We will find rooms for the tired Sisters at once and see to it that they get plenty of rest after their months of travel." At that moment Mother St. Michel caught sight of two men carrying the big crate which contained the statue of Our Lady of Prompt Succor into the building.

"Where should we put this?" one of the men asked.

"What on earth is it?" the Superior wanted to know raising her eyebrows.

"That is a very special statue of Our Lady of Prompt Succor that I had carved in France," Mother St. Michel hurried to explain. She went on to describe how she had written to the pope after receiving her cousin's letter begging her to come with other Ursulines to New Orleans. The Superior listened in wonder as the nun explained how the pope had granted her request and answered her letter even though all access to the Holy Father had been cut off by Napoleon. "Why, this is wonderful!" cried the Superior after Mother St. Michel had finished her explanation. "The Ursulines have always had a profound devotion to Our Lady since their arrival here in 1727 because she worked more than one miracle for us in those early days. It is touching to know that she is still watching over us, bringing us new vocations from France and now eager for us to honor her under the title, Our Lady of Prompt Succor."

The two Ursulines had become so engaged in conversation that neither of them noticed that the two men were still standing near them

holding the heavy crate. At last Mother St. Michel saw them and gave a little gasp. "Put it down, gentlemen," she said. "Your arms must be tired after holding it all this time." The men sighed with relief as they lowered the big crate to the floor and stood rubbing the small of their backs with their big hands.

"Just leave it there," said the Superior. "We will have to find a special place for the statue. You can finish bringing in the rest of the baggage and then that will be all for today. You have done more than enough work for one day." The men smiled, bowed to the nuns and hurried out the front entrance that faced the Mississippi River. By the time the last of the baggage had been brought in, the men noticed that the statue of Our Lady had been uncrated and unwrapped and the nuns were ready to install it in a special shrine outside the chapel.

"May we help you with that?" one of the workmen volunteered. "It is very heavy for you Sisters to carry and we have finished our work."

With the Superior's approval the beautiful statue was lifted by the strong men and carried to the shrine that had been hastily prepared for it. They put it down gently and kept turning it under the directions of the Superior until it was finally in the correct position. There the statue was to remain until January 7, 1815, when it would be carried into the chapel of the Ursulines. The city would be attacked on the following morning by thousands of British troops and the citizens of New Orleans would flee to Our Lady of Prompt Succor and plead with her to save them from conquest. She would answer their prayers by working a wonderful miracle. To this day it is remembered and commemorated and wondered at by all who learn of it!

CHAPTER FOUR

Devotion to Our Lady of Prompt Succor spread quickly after her statue was enshrined in New Orleans. Not only the Ursuline Sisters, but also the girls they taught, liked to bring their problems and difficulties to the feet of Our Lady and ask for quick assistance. Help never failed to be given and before long the citizens of New Orleans heard of the statue and came to pray to Our Lady under that title and asked to see the statue.

Mother St. Michel who served as the instrument in the hands of Our Lady to bring this devotion and beautiful statue to Louisiana slipped quickly and quietly into the background after her important work of beginning the devotion was finished. Her days as well as those of the other Ursulines were filled with prayer and teaching and prefecting. Life in the convent was calm and orderly until one day in 1812 when terror struck. Someone rushed in from the street screaming, "Fire! Fire! The whole city is burning!"

Nuns and children hurried to the windows of the convent classrooms and looked out to see huge billowing clouds of smoke rising from the nearby area. A strong wind drove the flames nearer and nearer to the convent, and because the houses of the Vieux Carre or French Quarter were old and dry and very close together, little could be done to put the fire out.

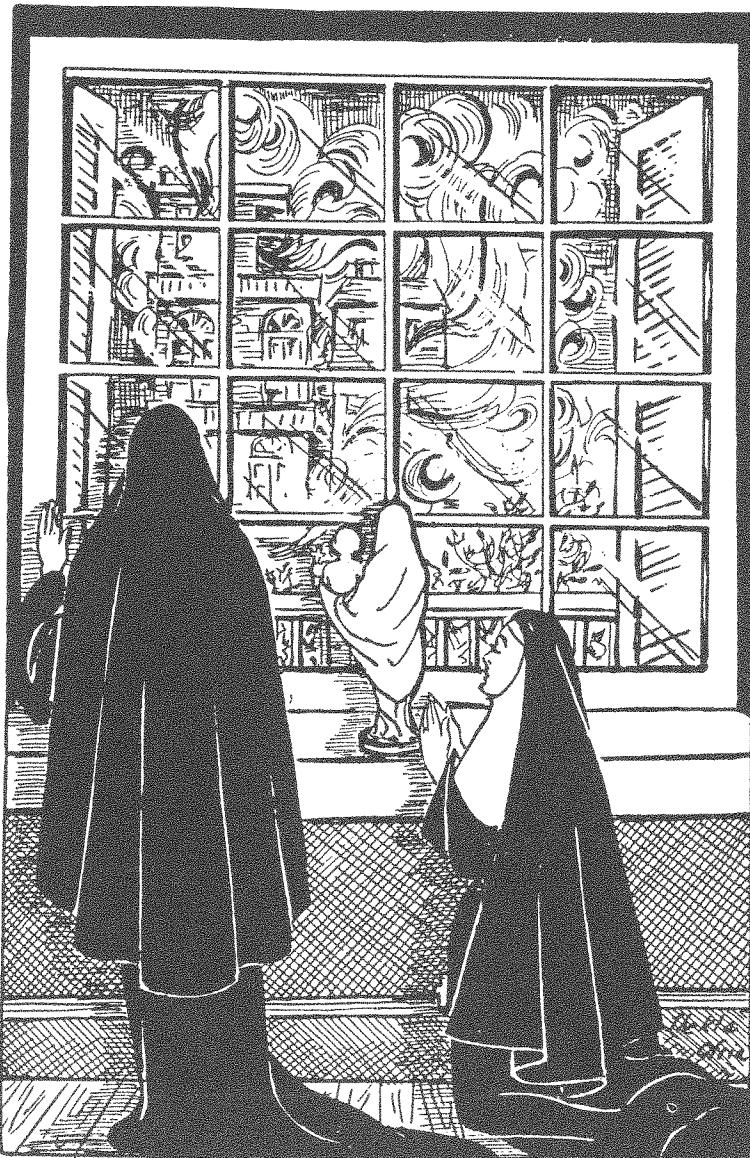
The Mother Superior rushed through the long corridors calling nuns and children into the hall and ordering them leave the building. "We can't stay here or we will all be burned to death," she explained as she made her way along, anxious for the welfare of her community and the children.

Then suddenly Sister St. Anthony, a lay Sister, the first Louisiana woman ever to enter the Ursuline Order, appeared in the midst of the confused corridor with a small statue similar to Our Lady of Prompt Succor in her hands. It was a very old statue that had been brought to

the convent in 1785 and it was only about twelve inches high. The trusting old nun full of faith in Our LAdy hurried along holding the statue tightly in her hand.

When Mother St. Michel caught sight of the old nun climbing the wide stairs to the second floor she hurried to her side asking, "Why are you going upstairs, Sister?"

"You will see," was all the old nun would say.



When the two women had reached the top of the stairs, Sister St. Anthony led Mother St. Michel to a room that had a window overlooking the approaching fire. She threw open the shutters and put the statue of Our Lady holding the Christ Child on the window sill. Even as she did so the flames from the burning city had reached the brick walls of the convent garden and threatened to sweep over them, destroy the building and everything in it.

Mother St. Michel saw the Sister throw herself on her knees and cry aloud, "Our Lady of Prompt Succor, we are lost if you do not come to our aid!"

At that instant, a miraculous thing happened. In the twinkling of an eye the wind changed its direction! The flames that had destroyed much of the French Quarter turned back upon the devastated area and died out. The convent was saved! Our Lady had worked another miracle for her dear friends—the Ursulines.

Their gratitude can only be imagined and the intensity of their devotion to Our Lady of Prompt Succor steadily increased as news of the wonder that had been worked by the power of Our Lady spread far and wide. The small statue that had been used to turn back the flames was given a special place of honor in the chapel and though it is not to be confused with the large statue that Mother St. Michel brought from France, it is similar to it and can still be seen in the private chapel of the Ursuline nuns, crowned today with jewels and affectionately called "Sweetheart" by the Sisters Our Lady protected. At its feet can be seen the silver wings of American pilots who came safely back from World War II through the intercession of Our Lady of Prompt Succor and who left at the feet of the Queen of Heaven the mute offerings of their hard-earned wings.

CHAPTER FIVE

On June 18, 1812, the United States declared war on Great Britain. In the months that followed, Washington, D.C. was raided by the British and President Madison had to flee the city to seek refuge in the forests of Virginia. English troops burned the Capitol building, the White House and several government buildings before finally departing for Baltimore. They had sacked the entire city and left it in shambles.

The war had its effect on the city of New Orleans also for as the conflict dragged on the British decided to attack the city and thus seize control of the entire Mississippi River valley. Since much of the commerce of the area was carried on by means of shipping on the great river and since New Orleans was the most important city on the river situated as it is near its mouth, the British prepared an army of nearly 15,000 men in Jamaica to be used in the conquest of the city. This was in the fall of 1814. Fifty-four ships were assembled in the bay and when they were fully equipped with guns, ammunition and supplies of all kinds, the British soldiers in their brilliant red coats climbed aboard the vessels and began the voyage to Louisiana.

Hearing of the expedition, the United States government promptly ordered General Andrew Jackson to New Orleans to make preparations for defending the city. Early in December, 1814, the General arrived in New Orleans only to find everything in chaos and confusion. He placed the city under martial law and went to work. No plans had been made for the defense of the place and there were few men able to bear arms. Guns and ammunition were scarce also, and had it not been for the militia of backwoodsmen from Tennessee and Kentucky who brought their own firearms with them, very little war materiel would have been available for the battle of New Orleans.

About three thousand volunteers finally gathered around Jackson to defend the city which was being approached by nearly 15,000 British Redcoats. Strange are the instruments Our Lady uses to bring about desired results. In the battle of New Orleans she found a place for the

services of a famous band of pirates led by the dashing Jean Lafitte and his brother Pierre.

South of the city of New Orleans on Barataria Bay lived a band of pirates and smugglers who made a profitable living for themselves by plundering Spanish and British ships on the Gulf of Mexico, stealing their rich cargoes and selling the merchandise cheaply in New Orleans. They were thieves and murderers. For years their lives of crime had prospered and little had been done by the authorities to punish them. Then shortly before the British fleet arrived to attack the city, Governor Claibourne, the first Governor of Louisiana, decided to send militia to raid the camp of the pirates and arrest the ringleaders. Pierre Lafitte was captured and locked up in a prison in New Orleans. However, his brother, Jean, remained free and continued to carry on his cut-throat activities.

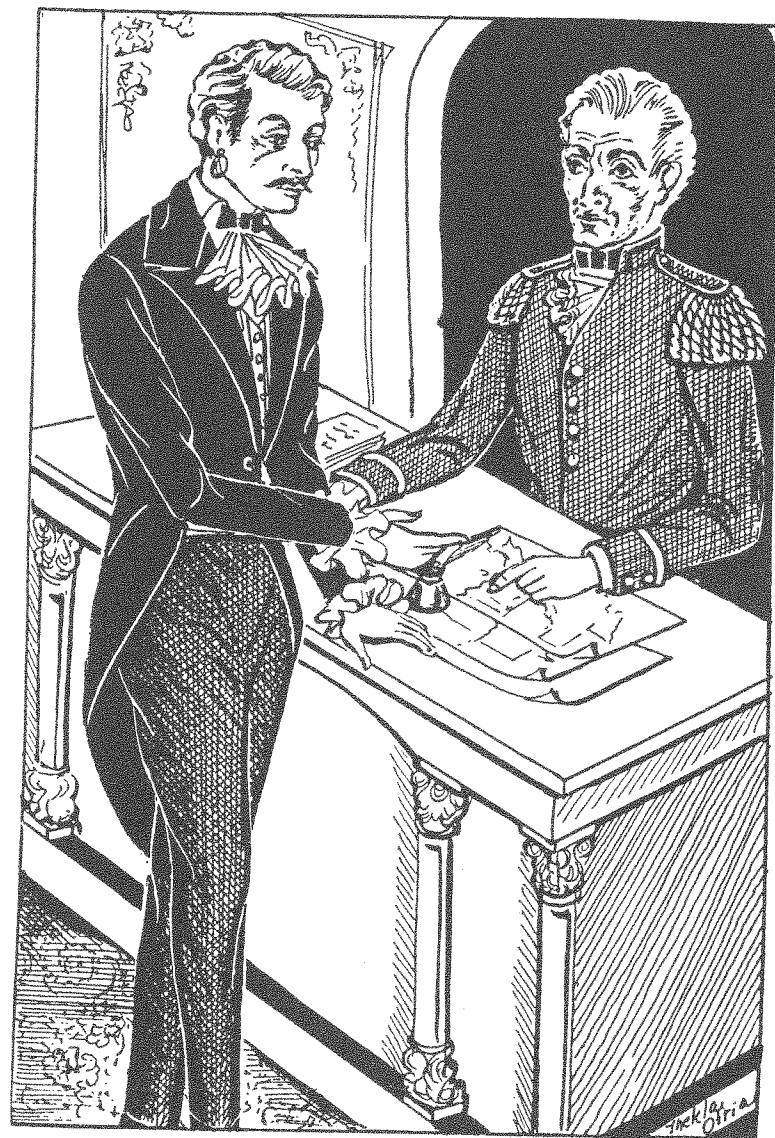
One day a British warship anchored in Barataria Bay. A small boat filled with British officers rowed up to the smugglers' camp and a polite letter was handed to Jean Lafitte. He opened it at once and read it quickly. He learned from its contents that if he would come to the aid of the British and help them in their attack on the city of New Orleans, he would be made a captain in the British navy and receive an enormous sum of money—\$30,000!

"After all, Mr. Lafitte," one of the British officers said, "why should you not serve the interests of England? Are you not considered an outlaw by the Louisiana government? Is there not a price on your head? Isn't your brother lying in chains in prison in New Orleans?"

Jean Lafitte nodded in agreement. "I will need a little time to consider your proposal before making my decision," he said. "I suggest that you gentlemen return to your ship and allow me a few days to consider this serious matter."

The British agreed, climbed back into their row boat and returned to their warship. There they remained for some days but as time passed and Jean Lafitte did not show any signs of having made up his mind, they weighed anchor and sailed away. It was just as well they did for as soon as they departed from his camp, Jean Lafitte sent a letter to the Legislature in New Orleans warning the members of the approach of the British fleet and even enclosing the letter the British had given him. He begged to be allowed to help in the defense of the city, even though he was considered a dangerous outlaw and his brother remained imprisoned in the Cabildo or local jail.

The Legislature flatly refused his help and paid little attention to his warnings of the approaching dangers. One day when General Jackson was busy preparing the defenses of the city, he was surprised on looking up from his work at a cluttered desk to see a tall, dark man standing before him. After Jean Lafitte had introduced himself, the General frowned. So this was the robber and smuggler about whom everyone in the city spoke and feared.



"I wish to help you in defending the city of New Orleans," said Lafitte coming to the point at once.

"Good!" said Jackson, who had very few guns or men at his disposal. "What can you give me?"

"I have thousands of flints for pistols that I will be happy to turn over to you," said the pirate with a smile. "And I have five hundred of the most deadly marksmen in these United States!"

General Jackson was pleased. "Without those flints we are helpless," he confessed. "Send me as many as you can. We need them. Three-fourths of my men are without arms or ammunition so if there are any cannon or guns or pistols at your disposal that we could use, bring them to me also."

"I shall do as you wish," Lafitte promised, eager to help in the defense of his country and pleased that the General trusted him.

"I'll make a bargain with you, Lafitte," Andrew Jackson said gruffly. "If you and your men behave yourselves in the coming battles and carry out your promise to supply my men with arms and ammunition, I will write a personal letter the President of the United States asking him to pardon you and your brother and your band of pirates for your crimes. Is it a deal?"

"It certainly is, General!" replied Lafitte holding out his large, strong hand. The two men shook hands and Lafitte hurried to the door. He made his way back to his pirate camp, prepared 7,500 pistol flints and sent them at once to the General. Cannon and guns and other war materiel were rounded up and delivered later. In the ensuing battle Lafitte's men did astonishing things for the American cause and later true to his word, Jackson wrote to the President and obtained pardons for the outlaws.

The British fleet finally arrived at the mouth of the Mississippi River but fearing that the river was heavily defended, the officers decided to sail their ships into Lake Borgne to the east of the city. On the lake a small American fleet, sent there to hold back the British ships, was quickly defeated and blown to pieces and the enemy troops scrambled down from their many ships and pitched camp on a nearby plantation.

Late in December, 1814, General Pakenham took charge of the entire British operation and at once made plans for the attack on New Orleans. During the final days of December and the first days of January, 1815, British troops were busy bringing heavy guns from their

ships to land and preparing them for the shelling of American fortifications. Jackson's men busied themselves erecting a high board fence from the east bank of the Mississippi River to a great swamp some distance away. The area was called the Plain of Chalmette and here the famous battle was destined to be fought. When the board fence had been constructed, General Jackson commanded his men to dig a deep ditch in front of it and throw the soil from the ditch up against the boards for added protection and strength. When the ditch was finished, it was flooded making a moat. If the British wished to cross over to the American lines, they would have to cross a moat and a high fence of mud and boards before being able to do so! The American troops would be quite well protected behind the barricade.

On January 7th it was learned that the British planned their attack on the city early the next morning. Long before, General Jackson had warned the Ursulines and all the citizens of the approaching battle and begged their prayers for victory for his out-numbered American forces. In late afternoon Mother St. Marie Olivier de Vezin, the Ursuline Superior, ordered the statue of Our Lady of Prompt Succor to be carried from its shrine in the convent into the chapel. All night long the Ursuline nuns, wives and mothers of New Orleans and old men who were unable to bear arms knelt in the chapel pouring out their prayers to God and Our Lady of Prompt Succor for the success of the American cause in the approaching battle.

At dawn Father Dubourg, vicar general of the diocese and later Bishop of New Orleans, arrived in the chapel to say Mass. It was Sunday, January 8th. He vested and made his way to the altar where the Holy Sacrifice began before the statue of Our Lady of Prompt Succor. At the very moment the priest began the Mass, a British rocket was sent up over the fog banks along the river. It burst in an instant over the battlefield and trailed down from the sky in a thousand ribbons of grey smoke. This was the signal from General Pakenham that the battle had begun.

While General Morgan led the Americans on the west bank of the river, General Jackson took charge of those on the east bank, and here the important battle was fought. The British had planned to attack the American defenses on the Plain of Chalmette in the darkness before dawn since they feared the deadly marksmanship of the American riflemen. But all of their plans were suddenly and unexpectedly upset and they were delayed in carrying them out until after sunrise. Fog hung

over the cane stubble of the field and concealed the British advance. But then something strange and wonderful happened. A wind dispersed the fog just long enough for General Jackson to see the British Redcoats advancing in a straight line, shoulder to shoulder with bayonets drawn. On their chests were white military crossbelts. Jackson gave the command to aim at the crossbelts and his men carried out his order when the enemy had marched within range of their guns.

There was a deafening explosion from the American guns and at once the front rank of the British column fell and died. The big guns of the British now went into action filling the air with smoke and noise and destruction. Jackson had lined up his men in files. When the first file had fired its guns, it withdrew to the rear to reload while the second file came forward to the wall, took aim and fired. When it had finished its deadly work, the third file advanced. Thus it went in orderly fashion with each of the volleys from the guns taking a terrible toll of the British soldiers.

The British kept advancing after each deadly volley of gunshots in a straight unbroken line. Instead of breaking ranks, crouching to the ground and firing, they continued marching forward in plain sight of the American militia who were well-protected behind the mud wall and the high boards. The white crossbelts over the scarlet coats made perfect targets for the backwoodsmen from Tennessee and Kentucky, and the British fell lifeless on top of one another under such deadly fire.

To add to their confusion and rout, those British who had been assigned by Pakenham to bring the scaling ladders to be used in crossing the moat and climbing the walls to the American lines forgot to bring the ladders, and while they rushed to the rear to fetch them, their men were taking a merciless pounding from American guns. British General Gibbs rushed into the lines of his men on horseback encouraging them to attack with bayonets, but the front rank of his soldiers was in retreat and there was so much confusion that he accomplished nothing.

Next Sir Edward Pakenham himself tried to rally his troops, but his horse was shot dead under him and the General was wounded in the arm. He climbed on another horse in a last effort to avoid defeat, but he was struck twice more by American bullets and was carried from the field to die.

Before thirty minutes had passed, the battle was over. It was a complete defeat for the British army, and when the fog lifted almost three

hundred British soldiers lay wounded or dying and some five hundred were missing.

Behind the American barricade only SEVEN volunteers lay dead and another six were wounded! At such a miraculous result against such heavy odds, General Jackson could only shake his head in wonder and say over and over: "The unerring hand of Providence has shielded my men!" The divine Providence of God through the intercession of Our Lady of Prompt Succor had indeed shielded the Americans and had granted this stupendous miracle to them. A courier set off at a wild pace to the city of New Orleans which lay some eight miles from the battlefield. He arrived at the Ursuline chapel during the Communion of the Mass and could not restrain his joy. "Victory is ours!" he shouted as he fell on his knees gasping for breath and giving thanks to God and Our Lady.

Women in the chapel began to cry for joy and relief. The Ursulines bowed their heads in the presence of so great a wonder and so quick a reply to their prayers. Never were their Communions more fervent or overflowing with gratitude to the Son of God who came into their hearts that morning. When Father Dubourg had finished Mass, he turned to the joyous congregation and said, "Our Lady of Prompt Succor has heard our prayers in a wonderful way. I suggest that we sing the *Te Deum* together in thanksgiving for this great victory which has saved our lives, our honor and our city from the enemy."

Great chords burst from the organ and the people took up the triumphant hymn of the Church: "We praise You, O God, we acknowledge You to be our Lord. All the earth worships You, the Father Everlasting. To You all the angels cry aloud, the heavens and all the heavenly powers...." When the hymn was finished, the people rushed into the streets to shout and laugh and celebrate the victory. But the Ursulines knelt in silence, pouring out their heartfelt gratitude for hours before the shining image of Our Lady. "My dear Sisters in Christ," Mother St. Marie said aloud after the nuns had finished their prayers, "last night I made a vow to Our Lady of Prompt Succor that if the Americans won the battle, I would have a Mass sung in her honor each year on the anniversary of their victory. Since she has heard our prayers, I intend to keep my vow and I hope that it will be fulfilled in the years to come after my death. In this way the victory of the battle of New Orleans will be kept alive in the memories of all, and Our Lady and her Son will be glorified and thanked each year for the wonderful

mercy and kindness they have shown us." To this day the vow is kept, for each year there is a Mass sung in the Ursuline chapel commemorating the great miracle that occurred during the battle of New Orleans.

The battle was over. It had been one of the bloodiest ever fought on the soil of the United States. The dead had to be buried and the British were allowed to do this duty of charity under a flag of truce. Once that task was finished, they withdrew from the field and after ten days returned to their ships and sailed away. The wounded volunteers of General Jackson's army were carried to New Orleans soon after the battle and the doors of the Ursuline convent were thrown open to them.

Beds were set up in classrooms of the day-school, and the nuns took up their duties as nurses caring for the suffering men. All doctors of the city were rushed to the bleeding and broken soldiers and their wounds were tended. The most seriously injured of the British troops were also brought into the city for treatment, and the Ursulines, with General Jackson's permission, took them into their school and cared for them with as much charity as they did the backwoodsmen of Kentucky and Tennessee. In the Sisters' eyes all men were brothers and children of God.

CHAPTER SIX

For three months the wounded soldiers who had survived the battle remained in the school of the Ursulines. When they had finally recovered enough strength to return to their homes, the gentlemen from Kentucky and Tennessee thanked the good nurses for their hard work and care, put their rifles on their proud shoulders and marched back to families and farms. They never forgot the charity of the good nuns and each year they sent to the convent generous gifts of bacon, hams, sacks of flour and bushels of fruits and vegetables for the Sisters and the girls of their boarding school.

When the wounded British soldiers had recovered enough health to travel, their passage was arranged on English ships sailing back to Great Britain and the last remnants of the once powerful army of Sir Pakenham returned home.

Not long after the battle and his triumphant return to New Orleans, General Andrew Jackson, accompanied by his staff, paid a visit to the Ursuline convent. Mother Marie Olivier de Vezin and the nuns greeted their honored guests warmly from behind the parlor grille which separated them from people of the outside world. "I have come to thank you good ladies for your prayers for our victory," the General said quietly. "Without the help of God, there would have been no victory. Because of His help there has been such a victory the like of which will probably never be seen in this land again."

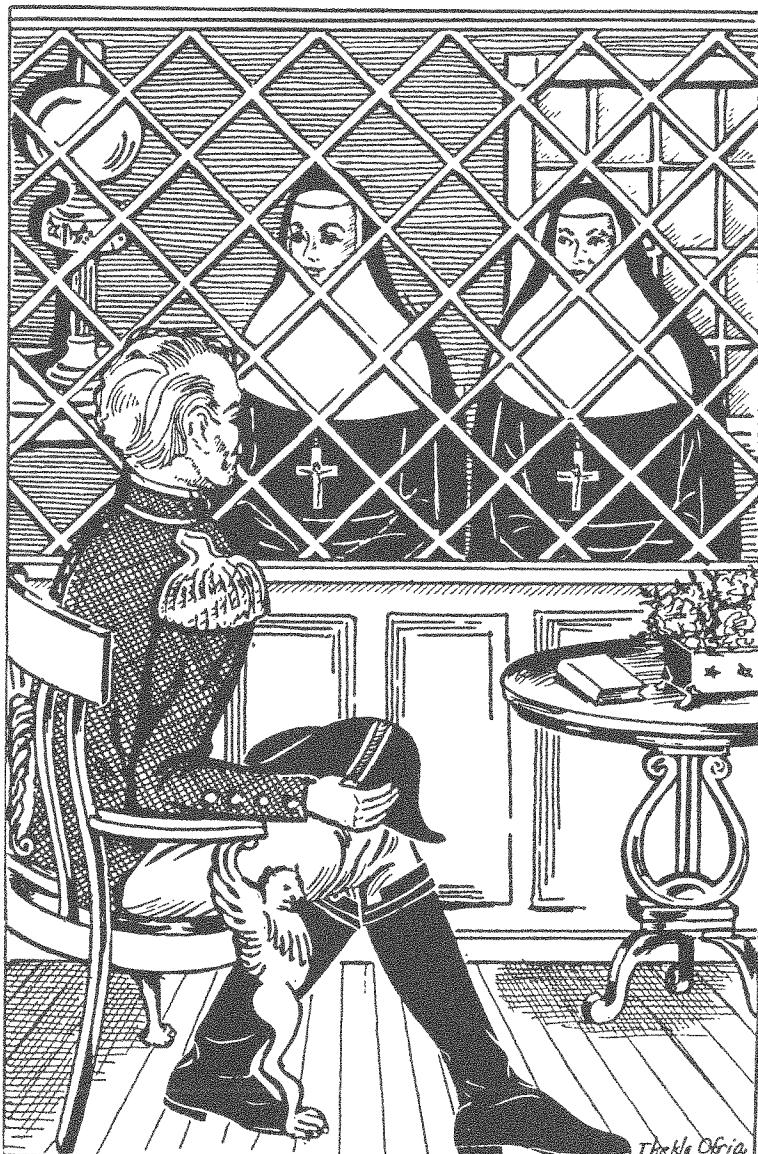
"We have been praying for you, General Jackson," said Mother Olivier, "since I wrote to you in December. We shall continue to pray for you and your men until peace is restored and you are able to take up your duties as private citizens again."

"And will there be no more prayers for us after that?" the General asked, sitting stiffly on a straight hard chair.

"Of course," the Superior assured him. "We shall pray that all of your activities are blessed by God and Our Lady of Prompt Succor."

She told him that she and the Ursulines had begged for victory from Our Lady and that they had vowed to have a special Mass said in her honor yearly once the victory had been granted in such a miraculous way.

"I am delighted to hear that," said the General getting to his feet and stretching his long legs. "How fitting that we show our gratitude to Heaven for favors received." Andrew Jackson picked up his hat,



motioned for his staff to follow him and bade the Sisters good-bye. Years later he returned to visit them again. He had served in many powerful positions and had twice been elected to the Presidency of the United States. Yet this great man on visiting New Orleans as ex-President paid a special visit to the humble Ursuline nuns to whom he owed so much. He thanked them again for their prayers for him during the long years since his last visit and recalled with full details the battle of New Orleans that had made him a national hero and begun his rise to power and to the highest office in the land. Andrew Jackson never forgot his friends nor did he forget the Ursulines whose prayers had helped him so much.

Soon after the battle of New Orleans, General Jackson dictated a letter to Father Dubourg: "Reverend Sir," he said while an aide scratched out the message with pen to paper, "The interposition of Heaven in giving success to our arms against the enemy while it must excite in every bosom emotions of the liveliest gratitude, requires at the same time some external manifestation of these feelings. Permit me, therefore, to entreat that you will cause the service of public thanksgiving to be performed in the cathedral in token of the great assistance we have received from the Ruler of All Events and our humble sense of it." Jackson was not a Catholic, but he had the good sense to realize Who had given him the victory.

On January 23, 1815, a great public celebration of thanksgiving to God for the victory of Chalmette took place in front of St. Louis Cathedral in the Place d'Armes or what is today Jackson Square. The General was crowned with laurel by Father Dubourg, speeches were made, bands played. At the end of the ceremony the *Te Deum* was sung praising God for His aid and the aid of His mother in delivering the city from siege.

Months later, on October 27, 1815, Mother St. Michel was elected Superior of the Ursuline convent only a few days after Pope Pius VII in Rome had ordained Father Dubourg Bishop of New Orleans. Under Mother St. Michel's leadership, the Ursuline convent continued its excellent work of educating young women. Vocations to the religious life were few, however, and when Mother St. Michel's health began to fail, she wrote to the Ursuline convent in Quebec, Canada, begging for Sisters to come to New Orleans to join them in their work for souls.

Mother St. Michel also spread devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In a dream she had once seen the Sacred Heart of Jesus on fire

with love for all peoples and surrounded by countless angels. Above the Sacred Heart appeared God the Father who seemed to say to her, "Behold the hope of Christians!" The dream had a profound effect on her and after experiencing it, she could not do enough to promote devotion to the Sacred Heart among the three hundred students of the school and the many African-American women who came to the Ursulines for religious instructions.

Three Sisters from Quebec finally arrived in New Orleans in 1822. They came to replace three nuns who, worn out by work and care, had gone home to their heavenly reward. Yellow fever raged again in the city and under its deadly influence Mother St. Marie Olivier, Sister St. Anthony and Mother St. Michel died. The nun who had done so much to begin and promote devotion to Our Lady of Prompt Succor and to the Sacred Heart of Jesus died on St. Joseph's feast day, March 19, 1822. Her last words were, "O God! My God! I thirst for You. How lovely are Your tabernacles. My soul longs and faints for the courts of my God!" Bishop Dubourg had given her the last Sacraments, and as he came away from her death bed he said, "May my soul die the death of the just and may my end be like unto theirs!"

When roads were cut through the Ursuline property in the French Quarter, the convent and school had to be moved to more spacious grounds. A plantation was found at some distance down the river and after it was purchased, a larger school and convent were built. In 1824 the miraculous statue of Our Lady of Prompt Succor was brought to this new convent. However, in 1911 this property was purchased by the city for the Industrial Canal. Finally, in 1912 the statue was moved to its present site on 2635 State Street where today it stands above the high altar of a beautiful Gothic chapel crowned with jewels and visited by hundreds of pilgrims seeking her aid.

CHAPTER SEVEN

For forty years devotion to Our Lady of Prompt Succor increased in the city of New Orleans. It was a private devotion during that time, but with the increase of wonders and favors, the bishops of the diocese took greater notice of the devotion and at last asked for official approval of it from Rome. On September 27, 1851, the saintly Pope Pius IX granted a special privilege to the Ursulines of New Orleans of chanting the Mass of Our Lady of Prompt Succor in their chapel on January 8th of each year. This was the first official approval of devotion to Our Lady under the title Prompt Succor. It was not to be the last.

Cures and answers to prayers continued to be granted in abundance by the prayers of Our Lady to her Son as years passed. In 1893 Archbishop Janssens wrote a pastoral letter to the clergy and faithful of his archdiocese recalling the favors Our Lady of Prompt Succor had given the people of New Orleans and Louisiana. He encouraged all Catholics to consecrate themselves to her in a special way since Our Lady of Prompt Succor was to be considered the Patroness of both the city of New Orleans and the State of Louisiana.

In the following year, Archbishop Janssens sailed for Rome to visit the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIII. During their interview, the archbishop begged permission from Pope Leo to institute a Confraternity of Our Lady of Prompt Succor. "As you know, Your Holiness," the archbishop said, "a confraternity gives glory to God and helps souls by joining fervent people together in prayer to increase devotion to Our Lady and to protect themselves from spiritual and temporal dangers through her intercession."

"But why a confraternity under the title Our Lady of Prompt Succor?" the pope wanted to know.

The archbishop quickly described the miracle the Blessed Virgin had worked in turning the flames away from the Ursuline convent in 1812, the miracle worked to save the city from British invaders in 1815 and the hundreds of miraculous cures and favors granted since that

time to the people of his archdiocese. His enthusiasm and zeal impressed the pope.

“Very well,” Pope Leo told him, “I grant you my permission to begin the Confraternity. I also grant a plenary indulgence on the day of admission to the Confraternity to each person who joins it and another indulgence at the hour of death for invoking the names of Jesus and Mary.”

Jubilant at the pope’s decision, the archbishop thanked him and before the interview concluded, he was granted more favors. Further indulgences could be gained by members of the Confraternity during the octave of January 8th, the feast of Our Lady of Prompt Succor, as well as during the octave of the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, December 12th.

Once founded, the Confraternity grew in numbers so quickly that in two years it was raised to the status of an Archconfraternity with more privileges and indulgences granted its members. Not only did Pope Leo XIII approve of the Archconfraternity, but he granted a rare privilege to the statue of Our Lady of Prompt Succor. He wanted it solemnly crowned, and delegated Archbishop Janssens as his special representative in carrying out this function with full pageantry. A pastoral letter from the archbishop proclaimed a public novena in all churches and chapels before the day of the crowning, November 10th, 1895. He requested the women of the archdiocese to contribute their jewels and gold for the crowns that were to be made for the heads of Our Lady and the Christ Child. So great was the response to this request by the women of the area that there were enough gems for two crowns for each statue. One set of crowns was filled with precious stones of fabulous value and the other set of semi-precious stones.

A jeweler fashioned these works of art and the day arrived for the coronation of the statue. Thousands of people assembled at the Ursuline convent for the ceremonies, but because of rain, much of the pageantry had to be eliminated. Archbishop Janssens had the honor of placing the sparkling jewels set in gold on Our Lady of Prompt Succor and her Child. Then the cannon of the city roared a salute and the organ in the chapel began the music for the Mass as bells of all churches in the city rang out. Five bishops had come to join Archbishop Janssens in honoring Our Lady. Because the chapel was not large, only a small number of the vast crowd could get into it. Bishop Meerschaert of the Indian Territory or what is now Oklahoma gave a sermon in

French to the people gathered in the galleries of the convent. The bishop recalled the Battle of New Orleans and mentioned the fact that Our Lady of Prompt Succor was the first and only statue to be crowned in the United States.

The bishop spoke long and well of Our Lady. Unfortunately not long after the coronation ceremony, he was afflicted with Bright’s disease. He was taken to Hotel Dieu hospital in New Orleans and there after a thorough examination by doctors was declared to be in critical condition. Given only eight days to live, the bishop began a novena to Our Lady of Prompt Succor. Before he had finished it, he was completely and miraculously cured! Nine years later he was working harder than the priests of his diocese and each day he said the rosary in thanksgiving to Our Lady for his prompt and complete cure. When he finally died at an advanced age, it was not from the dreaded Bright’s disease but from another illness. After his cure he was never again troubled by an attack of his former ailment.

Our Lady of Prompt Succor did not forget good Archbishop Janssens who had done so much to honor her in his archdiocese. In June, 1897, realizing his archdiocese was heavily in debt, he boarded the *Creole* with his chancellor, Father Thebault. He planned to sail to France where he hoped wealthy friends would help him financially. The steamer sailed down the Mississippi River and passed the convent of the Ursulines that housed the miraculous statue of Our Lady. Late that night, Father Thebault was summoned by the archbishop. He was dying and he asked the priest to hear his confession and administer the sacrament of Extreme Unction.

Father Thebault did so and then the archbishop asked to be placed kneeling on the floor. In that position he surrendered his good soul to God. As soon as the captain of the ship was informed of the archbishop’s sudden death, he asked Father Thebault when he wished the burial to take place.

“Burial?” the priest asked dumbfounded.

“Of course,” said the captain. “Your archbishop will have to be buried at sea.”

“We are not going to throw the body of this holy man into the sea, Captain! He will be buried in New Orleans!” The priest could scarcely control his anger.

“I shall give you one hour to decide when the burial is to take place,” said the Captain leaving the cabin. “It will take place on the open sea!”

Father Thebault knelt down and began to pray. He was in great need of prompt succor and so he prayed to the Lady the archbishop had loved so much. His prayer finished, he rose to his feet, stepped over to a desk on the other side of the cabin and wrote a vow. "In honor of Our Lady of Prompt Succor, I vow to say fifty Masses of thanksgiving, nine at her altar in the Ursuline convent, if she will send a ship bound for New Orleans that will carry back the remains of Archbishop Janssens for proper burial."

No ship was expected for a week along the course the *Creole* was following. To beg for such a favor was asking for a miracle. And the miracle happened as swift as it was dramatic. Less than an hour passed before the captain of the ship was back in the cabin. "We have sighted the *Hudson*, a steamer bound for New Orleans," he said. "We are signaling for it to stop!"

"My prayer has been answered! Thanks to Our Lady of Prompt Succor!" the priest exclaimed.

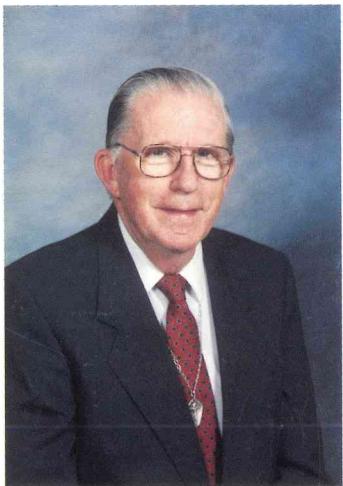
Passengers on both ships watched at the rails as the archbishop's coffin was lowered into a small boat and Father Thebault climbed down the ladder to take his place beside it. Rowers pulled the small boat away from the *Creole* and as they plied across the choppy water in the early morning light, the passengers were amazed at seeing a rainbow suddenly appear in the sky. It spanned the two ships and then vanished. Never before had they seen such a marvel—a last touch of Our Lady in answer to her son's prayer.

The body of Archbishop Janssens was returned to New Orleans where it was buried. But to this day the story of the two ships that came together by a miracle is told and marveled at.

To tell of all the cures and favors and blessings Our Lady of Prompt Succor has worked would fill more than one book. Needless to say, the Blessed Mother of God has not forgotten her children. She listens to their cries for help and when she hears them, she almost runs with the Divine Child in her arms to aid them and bring them quick relief.

Our Lady of Prompt Succor, hasten to help us!

The End.



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