

## LETTER OF A "COLORED CHILD OF THE SACRED HEART."

### *Introduction by the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia:*

The following letter was dictated by the negress Eliza or Liza Nebbit, and addressed to the Rev, Mother Randall, when she was Superior of the Madison Avenue house, New York , probably towards the year 1880 [N.B. In these years, Sarah Randall was superior in Boston, not New York, so this addressee is unlikely]. The "ole Archbishop" was Monseigneur Napoleon Joseph Perche, of New Orleans. Mother Aloysia Hardey was the successor of Mother Eugenie Aude, in the office of Superior of St. Michael's. The Rev. M. Mary Elizabeth Moran was Vicar of the Louisiana houses when Liza wrote the letter to Mother Randall. Liza, of course, had her cabin in the negro quarters belonging to the Convent; and probably that is why the heading of her letter is " St. Michael's Plantation."

Liza was given to Mother Duchesne at Florissant, Missouri, by Monseigneur Dubourg, about A. D. 1821. She was then a sickly, neglected child of six or seven years, whom the Archbishop had picked up somewhere during one of his journeys. She grew up strong and sturdy, and later on, in 1827, Mother Duchesne gave her to Mother Eugenie Aude for the foundation of St. Michael's, St. James Parish, Louisiana. She lived there until her death in 1888; serving the Community with entire devotedness: especially during the latter half of her life. She was buried in the Convent cemetery; a privilege she had asked for and obtained of the Superior General of the Sacred Heart, Very Rev. Mother Adele Lehon.

### *Introduction on SSH archives copy, in same hand as the letter:*

Note. This letter was written to Mother Bouvier [Louise Bouvier, RSCJ, then at 533 Madison Ave., New York], thanking her for a dollar she sent to old Liza, to have a Mass said in thanksgiving for Revd. Mother Moran's return to the south last fall, and for her almost entire restoration to health. Old Liza wrote a most touching letter to Halifax, thanking them for all they had done for her dear chile and said that all the dollars she got she would spend on Masses.. Mother Bouvier's heart was moved when she heard it.

St. Michael's Plantation

June 1<sup>st</sup> 1882

Dear Mother. It seems as what it is an age since I received de letter what you sent me fur to have a mass said fur yore tentions and fur to have all de darkies in dese parts to exist at dat holy sacrifice to St Joseph, but I has been so upside downwards fur dese last six weeks dat I aint had no time to think of nothin but my pore ole soul, what has had a heap of sorry and tribulations, but I wants you to have a good understandin of what for I hav not sent you a letter long afore dis present time.

First and foremost I was a waitin fur dis here lady what is a sittin in my Cabin now a writin' down all what I tells her to sa, 'cause she knows you and and I knowd she was coming up here wid my chile, fur to see our ole Archbishop what is stoppin on dis here plantation fur to be took great care of, till he gets over dis spell of sickness; dat is de why and de wherefore dat you ain't got a letter from Liza long afore now. I hopes dat you has a good understandin' of my 'poligy, cause I was riz by dese ladies of the Sacred Heart, and I don't want to bring no disgrace on dem by bad manners fur Me Duchesne and Me Aloysius Hardy was mighty particlar when they was raisin' me to show Liza what was right and what was left, so I knows p'liteness most as well as white folks, and fifty times better dan any of my kin and colour.

All de members of dis here coloured congregation sends dare best love and compliments to all you ladies. Dey will jine in de Mass when our drector says it next week; dey has all been invited to exist at de

Mass an communicate. Maybe I'll go an maybe I'll not go, cause you se 'se in great 'fliction at dis present time. My legs is swellep up like two drums and my feet is so sore, I can't put on my shoes. De Father say "Liza, put on a long gown and go to de holy table in your bare feet" but I says "No, I ain't goin' to make any show like I was so virtuous when all de folks knows dat Liza ain't no saint. I ain't goin' to do no such thing. De Lord 'flicts me, and when He tink I'se done suffer enough, den he made de way smooth, but now It's all hills and hollows, and de pebbles and de sharp bits o' rock sticks in mighty smart, but den de Lord knows how

many torns He puts on de briar bush and it seems like he soon tell me to quit, dat He's tired 'flictin pore old Liza, and wants to give her a rest. I don't say dis to grumble 'bout His hand, what is laid so heavy on me, but to splain de reason dat may prevent me to exist at yore Mass, but de Lord is in my ole cabin and I kin pray dare for all you ladies of the Sacred Heart.

My chile (Rev. M. Moran) looks mighty smart, but I done cried a hogshhead o' tears cause she can't be 'suaed to come and live quiet at St Michaels' sence she's been superior, she's like a spirit goin' pro and con. I blame Aloysia Hardy fur givin' dem Superiors here in Louisiana dem ideys 'bout flittin' from house to house... afore she was come down here, dey was all quiet and contended to stay in de same convent from de beginnin to de end of dere days, but she comes and gives dem a taste fur boats an cars; and sence den dey is every one like de moon what never settles down but is always a changin' and a changin' But I ase de Lord to lev my chile here to me, so I can keep an eye after her health. She is so valable to dis here society, dat ought to be took double care of. If I see her cheeks sinkin' in or her complexion gittin like whitewash, I keep a jawin' and a grumblin' till dey send her back to dat ere Halifax fur I don't want never again to see her look like chalk like she used to. I'se taxed wid de rheumatiz, an' a troupe o' odder misfortunes and it 'pears to me like ole Liza won't do much more in dis worl, it seems like her web is most spun; dare ain't much more yarn left on de spool, an' de Lord is pretty nigh settin' his foot agin de wheel fur it to stop whirlin' round any more. So if you don't hare any more news from Liza ye need'nt 'sprized. Please present my compliments to all de ladies of de Sacred Heart, and tell "how you do" to every one of dem. I love 'em all, dey is locked up in my heart, 'cause dey was 'fectionate an 'tentive to my pore sick chile (Mother Moran)

I draw my letter to a close wid love

LIZA NEBBIT

Coloured child of the Sacred Heart, first slave what was bought in dis Convent by Mother Duchesne.