

A NEGRO "ISLAND OF SAINTS."

(New World).

Perhaps it may surprise many of our readers to know that there is a model Catholic community in this country made up entirely of colored people. The location of this community is on the west shore of Mobile Bay and is cut off from Alabama mainland by Fowl River, thus forming a little island called Mont Louis Island and commonly known as "the Island of States." This latter appellation may seem an exaggeration considering the reports circulated by nearly all the papers of the country about the "degraded negro."

The people of the community are colored, but they are also Catholics of the strictest kind. As to their sterling faith, the testimony is not that alone of the writer, but also of four bishops of the Mobile diocese and of all the missionary priests who have at different times attended this model community.

The first trip the writer made to this place will never be forgotten, because of the exemplary faith there manifested and the like of which he never before witnessed in any other place in his missionary career. When he got off the train, some thirty odd miles from Mobile City, he found himself at a small station. There were no cabs to drive through the woods to the Catholic settlement, and to which he was sent to say Mass. Meeting two young men near the railroad, he learned from them that he had yet to travel some three miles before reaching his destination, and knowing there was no team on hand to go there, the two young men generously offered to take the priest in their naphtha launch down the river to the objective point, which they called "Settlement." The day was hot, there was no shade in the launch, and no breeze on the water. The reader can imagine the condition of a traveller in Alabama waters on such an occasion.

After an hour we reached a shipyard at the mouth of Fowl River. On arrival we were joyfully welcomed by a colored family of Mon Louis Island. The father was at work, but the mother leading the family came to the priest, and, kneeling, asked his blessing for herself and her children. This, certainly was the most welcome address any priest could desire. This house formed, as it were, the outpost of the settlement, which was reached by a short jaunt through the woods. Approaching our point proper, the people came forward, and with glad smiles welcomed the priest and asked his blessing. The houses are all clustered together, not, however, too close to prevent each family from having a small yard for garden. From house to house the priest went, simply by leaving one and entering another through gates, which opened each into its neighbor's yard most conveniently. Everywhere neatness and cleanliness were noticeable. The countenances of these good people reflected the purity of their hearts. Coming to a small church-shaped building, the priest was told it was the "Oratory." On the walls were small sized stations, a small altar in front and the statues of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph. The inner roof of the building was bare, and the rafters bespoke their age. This was the first church these good people put up some seventy years ago. Over the door was the cross, and near it the bell. At present this so-called "Oratory" is used for daily prayers and devotions. Every morning at six the bell calls the people to morning prayers; at midday the Angelus is rung, and again at six o'clock in the evening all the year around; the third bell calls every one for the recitation of the beads.

After highly commending this devotion to the Queen of the Holy Rosary, the writer was told why they were so faithful in the daily recital of the beads. During the civil war the Confederate forts at the mouth of Mobile Bay were in danger, every available man was taken away from Mon Louis Island to defend them. Young and old had to go. It is needless to say what sorrow this occasioned. The good Jesuit Father who was visiting this place at the time was

the only one the people could turn to in their affliction. And he, to comfort and console them, led the way to the "Oratory" and recited the beads. He advised his sorely stricken flock to say the Rosary every day, that the Mother of God might protect those in war and assist them at the hour of death. The misfortunes of war, particularly the diseases of the swampy camping grounds, left little hope in the hearts of the mothers, wives and sisters for the return of their beloved ones.

One evening, however, about six o'clock, as the people were coming out of the Oratory after the recital of the beads, their hearts sad but reconciled to God's will, they were startled by cheering which echoed in the piney woods. Before they had a chance to realize the situation, they heard the strong voices of their fathers, sons, brothers and husbands joyfully chanting a hymn to the Blessed Virgin. This was sufficient, and soon the women folks joined their sweet voices. This was certainly a beautiful thanksgiving rendered publicly to God by a whole community; and good reason they had, too, for not a man was missing. The forts which they were to defend had been taken by the Union forces the day before their arrival at the mouth of Mobile Bay, and they were allowed to return to their homes in Mon Louis. The Rosary had been recited every day since by these good Christian people, in thanksgiving to the Blessed Virgin for the return of all their kinsmen.

Every Saturday night at 7.30 all go to church and sing most devotedly the Litany of the Blessed Virgin. After this, prayers are said for the pope, the bishop, the poor souls in purgatory and for the conversion of sinners. At the close of this pious exercise the De Profundis is slowly recited, and the church bell is tolled as if there was a funeral. This tolling is called the "De Profundis bell," and all who are unable to attend at the church silently recite the prayers for the dead.

The first Saturday the writer was there he heard about seventy penitents—all that could possibly get there—and to say the confessions were a source of edification is only to express the fact mildly. If the priest remains a few days, Mass is attended by the people at six o'clock. Some of the men work their farms, some are engaged on the river, others in the woods and at the shipyard. The women and girls have all that Christian modesty and refinement about them which is so characteristic of a good Catholic maiden or mother. Sunday is a typical Sabbath resting day wherein all are happy. The children are delighted to receive a holy picture or medal from the priest. Their little Rosary beads are entwined on their fingers or hang around their necks. In every house is the crucifix, holy water, blessed candles, religious pictures, and very often the photos of missionary priests, who have visited the place during the last seventy or eighty years. The chalice used by the writer when saying Mass was one presented to the Mon Louis people by Bishop Quinlan, the second Bishop of Mobile.

Never has the writer elsewhere met people more grateful for Mass, benediction or sermon than he has found these good people of Mon Louis Island. The last though not the least, fact to be recorded in favor of this model community is, that they follow their religious practices now and have ever done so, without the assistance and encouragement of a permanent pastor. They simply have the benefit of a travelling missionary priest, who calls at their good settlement once a month.

REV. FRANCIS J. TOBIN.

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very much frightened. It was mid-day, in the summer in my father's garden. . . . I heard this Voice to my right toward the Church; rarely do I hear it without its being accompanied by a light. . . . It seemed to me to come from lips I should reverence. I believe it was sent me from God. When I heard it for the third time, I recognized that it was the voice of an angel. The Voice has always guarded me well, and I always understood it; it instructed me to be good and to go often to church; it told me it was necessary for me to come into France. . . . It said to me two or three times a week, 'You must go into France.' My father knew nothing of my going. The Voice said to me, 'Go into France.' It said to me, 'Go raise the siege which is being made before the city of Orleans.'"

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