



THE APPEALS  
OF OUR LADY  
APPARITIONS  
AND  
MARIAN SHRINES  
IN THE WORLD

# Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in ORNANS



FRANCE, 1803

**I**n the parish of Sey-en-Varais, and in the missions of Maisières and Malcôte, the Sacrament of First Holy Communion was not celebrated since the dark days of the French Revolution. On the 3rd of April 1803, Cécile Mille, 13 1/2 years old, was going to the parish church with a friend, to participate in the ceremony.

“While we were walking on the path of Malcôte,” she narrates, “I saw a beautiful woman dressed in white, accompanied by four young girls also dressed in white, each one with a lit candle in her hand. The beautiful lady continued to walk all the way up to “The Oak of Our Lady.” She stopped, as if to wait for us. When we arrived at the oak tree, she rose into the air, surrounded by a luminous light. Until that moment I had no fear; I thought it was about a little procession from Ornans, but when they vanished, I was frightened. We ran up to the first house of Maisières, the home of Monsieur Verny, and we told him everything that happened.”

No one of the parish or of Cécile’s family wanted to believe her story, irrespective of how much she insisted. “It is truth, as real as the light of the sun.” Her father, Pierre-Antoine, who cultivated a vineyard in Malcôte, scolded her saying: “Stop saying nonsense.” Nevertheless, the events that followed made him change his mind. On the 15th of August, feast of the Assumption of Mary, at an early hour of the morning, Pierre-Antoine Mille was going to Mass with his daughters Simone, Marguerite, and Cécile. With them was also a friend, Louis Seure, from Vieille Loye (in the Jura region); he was a peddler and a maker of woven baskets, and had spent several days with the family to fabricate baskets and bins for the imminent grape harvest. Traversing the road they approached an old oak tree that was traditionally called “The Oak of Our Lady” and Marguerite told him that which Cécile had seen the day of her First Communion. Looking up toward the tree, they all remained amazed at seeing two beautiful lights that seemed to arise from the tree trunk, from where the lowest branches sprouted. They would have remained to gaze but it was time to go to Mass. After the church service, word of what happened began to spread; a procession was organized and they returned to the oak tree. After having recited hymns and prayers, Pierre-Antoine and his friend cut into the trunk, in the spot in which the lights had appeared. On the inside they found a little statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Some time ago, someone must have hidden it in an opening of the trunk, which grew safeguarding its treasure. The statue had been forgotten for a while but everyone continued to call the tree “The Oak of Our Lady.”

At the site a chapel was immediately built, which was designed by Pierre Bossan (first-place winner in Rome for architecture in 1870, who later was chosen to design the church of Our Lady of Fourvière in Lyons). He refused payment for his work. “I had neither faith nor morals,” he wrote, “when Our Lady of the Oak appeared, procuring for me my first assignment, I was an evil laborer, but she was kind and taught me the joy of serving her. This is why I do not want any financial profit.” Bossan lived in Lyons and one of his colleagues, the architect Ducat, from Besançon, was a supervisor for him in the field; he had already demonstrated his competence during the construction of the Shrine of Mont-Roland, near Dôle.

The cornerstone was placed on the 13th of July 1863. On the 3rd of August 1869 the chapel was consecrated by Cardinal Mathieu, the Archbishop of Besançon. The general architecture is typical of Bossan: a blend of Romanesque and Gothic with some elements of ancient architecture. Above the entrance is an extraordinary bas-relief illustrating the apparition of the 3rd of April 1803, carved in 1885 by Jules Franceschi.



Drawing that illustrates the apparition of Our Lady to Cécile



On the 15th of August in 1803, while Pierre-Antoine Mille was going to Mass with his daughters Simone, Marguerite, and Cécile, and a friend, Louis Seure, they saw in the oak tree two beautiful lights that seemed to arise from the tree trunk. They would have remained to gaze but it was time to go to Mass, right after the church service, word of what happened began to spread and a procession was organized and they returned to the oak tree. After having recited hymns and prayers, Pierre-Antoine and his friend cut into the trunk, in the spot in which the lights had appeared. On the inside they found a little statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary



Shrine of Our Lady of Chêne



Bas-relief in which the apparition is illustrated that adorns the facade of the Shrine



The miraculous statue that was recovered from inside the tree



Interior of the Shrine



Altar where the precious little statue is treasured