

THE SISTERS OF THE SACRED HEART.

A CENTENARY CELEBRATION.

(From our special reporter).

Timaru, December 12.

ON this day (Wednesday) a second centenary celebration of the foundation of the Order of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart took place in the Convent of the Institute at Timaru. The general celebrations of this happy event in the history of Catholic educational work took place on November 21. The House of the Institute at Timaru joined in the celebrations, and on November 20 (the eve), November 21, and the following day the Convent and its surroundings wore a festive air. The pretty chapel was decorated with flowers, ferns, and costly hangings, and the exterior of the building was gay with flags and garlands. Solemn High Mass was sung by Father Regnault, S.M., with Father Tubinan, S.M., as deacon, and Father Aubry, S.M., as subdeacon. The Gregorian chant was sweetly rendered by the children, and Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament followed. Vespers were sung at 2 p.m., and at 5 p.m. the beautiful cantata of the Ten Virgins was performed, the music was exquisitely rendered. A sketch of the life-work of the Foundress, the Venerable Mother Madeleine Barat, written by a former pupil of the Timaru Convent, was also read. The religious functions closed with Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Tuesday, the 22nd, was observed as a holiday. Many old pupils came to spend the day at the Convent, and the day passed pleasantly in games and contests of various kinds. The evening's entertainment consisted in a play entitled *The Salve Regina*, the scene of which was laid in Poland in the time of the Tartar invasions. The exceptional nature of the occasion justified a slight departure from the usually private nature of the entertainments conducted by the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, and on Sunday, November 25, there was a second rendering of the cantata in the parish school for the children, their parents, and many friends.

His Lordship Bishop Grimes having been unavoidably absent from the centenary rejoicings in November it was decided to have a second celebration on this day, December 12, the birthday of the Venerable Foundress of the Institute of the Sacred Heart. His Lordship the Bishop, the local and many visiting clergy, and great numbers of the friends of the institute assembled to do honor to an occasion which marks the first century milestone in the history of one of the most remarkable educational organisations in the Catholic Church.

On yesterday (Tuesday) evening his Lordship presided at the entertainment and distribution of prizes, of which a report appears elsewhere in this issue. There was Pontifical High Mass to-day and Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, and his Lordship preached in the afternoon. The religious part of the festival concluded with solemn Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. During the day specimens of the children's class work, with some of their needlework, drawings, and paintings were exhibited. In the evening the play *Salve Regina* was again acted. To-morrow (December 13) will be devoted to a grand holiday for the parish school children, who number about 200. A dinner will be provided for them, and, in addition to various other amusements, the Convent children will perform the *Salve Regina*. Like the second rendering of the cantata this welcome treat for the children will come as a centennial favor. A detailed report of the proceedings will appear in our next issue.

STORY OF THE S.H. INSTITUTE.

The celebration is a great thanksgiving for the prosperous course of a great institute that counts 147 houses distributed throughout the world and an army of 7000 members devoted to the sacred cause of forming the minds of youth to learning and piety. But the centenary has a further significance: it is associated with the process of the canonisation of the saintly founder of the Order, the Venerable Madeleine Barat. The proceedings are now in progress, and at some date in the year 1902 the gifted lady whose broad culture, ripe judgment, and extraordinary piety laid the foundations of the Congregation, will probably be numbered among the saints of the Catholic Church.

A YOUTHFUL PRODIGY.

Sophie Madeleine Barat was born in 1779 in the little town of Joigny, in Burgundy (France). She was a child of singularly precocious intellect, and from the dawn of reason had an inveterate horror of falsehood. Providence had given to this rare child a mother of great capacity and an able professor and director—a guide, philosopher, and friend—in her brother Louis Barat, who was studying for the ecclesiastical state. At an unusually early age little Sophie—as she was called—studied Greek and Latin authors. Louis determined to cultivate to the utmost the brilliant talent which he discovered in his little sister—who was eleven years his junior. Step by step he brought her far beyond the usual bounds of the feminine knowledge of the time. 'He taught her Latin,' says her biographer, 'and soon she was able to read the classics in the original texts. This opened a world of delight to the eager young girl. Virgil's poems especially fascinated her. "I was a Virgilian, more than a Christian, at that time," she said, in alluding to this youthful enthusiasm. She learned Greek also, and translated Homer.' Nor was the sweet and spirited girl a mere dilettante. She was deep in the natural sciences, botany, astronomy, philosophy, etc., and was allowed by her brother to pursue the study of modern languages as 'a recreation and reward.' She mastered Spanish and Italian and found these accomplishments useful in after-life when it became her duty to instruct and edify her spiritual daughters of those sunny southern lands. Under her brother's able guidance she passed along the paths of self-culture with mind untarnished, and progressed in sweetness of disposition and love of God while enrich-

ing her mind with the treasures of the science of her day and of the love of a time that was long gone by. His holy influence and protecting hand guarded her from becoming—like Madame de Staël or Madame de Sévigné—a mere model of style and graceful language. 'The grace of God,' says a recent writer, 'took possession of her rare faculties at their dawning, and to-day her name is held in benediction in all civilised lands, and millions of hearts are purer and better through her humble instrumentality.' She was not the 'spoiled child'; she was the angel of the household, and skilled in domestic duty—from which talent and education and 'the accomplishments' nowadays form so often a certificate of emancipation.

THE BEGINNINGS.

The Reign of Terror was at its red height and the guillotine was at its grim work staining Paris with blood, when Sophie Barat, decked in her robes of white, made her first Communion in the village church of Joigny. Her brother narrowly escaped the tumbril and the guillotine. When the first violence of the storm had passed, it found Sophie Barat with her brother—now a priest—in Paris making war upon their personal defects and imperfections and familiarising themselves with the methods of prayer, contemplation, and self-mortification practised by the great saints of the Church. It was a period of extraordinary spiritual progress in the midst of surroundings of sin and sorrow and forgetfulness of God. Other pious ladies joined with Sophie Barat in her life of seclusion and sanctity. And out of this little company of elect the Congregation of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart was later on evolved.

GOD WILLS IT.

Father Varin was the organiser and lawgiver of the Sacred Heart Society. The idea originated in the mind of a saintly priest, Father Tournély, who died in Vienna, an exile from his native France, in 1797. He decided on the formation of two societies, one of men, the other of women, 'consecrated to the instruction of the children, not only of the poor, but of the upper and influential classes'—to be devoted to the Sacred Heart and to revive Christ's love in the souls, and the light of his doctrine in the minds of Christians. The society of men was duly founded. Father Tournély was its first superior. Before his death he bequeathed his other great work to Father Varin, his successor and fellow-exile. Father Varin returned to France. Father Barat joined the little band of zealous priests. Father Varin found in Sophie Barat the qualities necessary for the foundress of his intended society. After much prayer and reflection she abandoned her idea of becoming a Carmelite nun and entered with great zeal into his plans for the formation of the new Congregation of Sisters of the Sacred Heart. She brought with her other holy souls. The little dwelling of Madame Duval was turned into an impromptu convent. One of the rooms was transformed into an oratory, in which the two priests secretly celebrated the Holy Mysteries—for the times were still evil. On November 21, 1800—the Feast of the Presentation—the little band of holy and accomplished ladies pronounced their vows at a Mass celebrated by Father Varin in the modest little house in the Rue de Touraine, Paris. Madame Loquat was its first Superior. She soon abdicated, and Madame Madeleine Barat, much against her own will, entered upon the government of the Society at Amiens, and for over half a century governed it with unexampled wisdom, tact, and prudence. During the whole century the Society has had only four Superior-Generals, the last being Madame Digby, an Englishwoman of high birth and noble talents.

'It is,' says Mother Barat's biographer, 'a mixed Order, which unites the spirit of the contemplative with some of the works of the active Orders. . . . The Institute establishes two classes of religious, one under the name of lay-sisters, especially employed in manual work; the others, bearing the title of choir-nuns, apply themselves to the recitation of the office in common, to the administration of the house, or the work of education. The first imitate in Jesus Christ His obscure labors at Nazareth; the others carry on His work of adoration and preaching. But both these classes are, like Martha and Mary, true sisters of the same family. All are bound by the three vows of chastity, obedience, and poverty, to which the religious who teach add another, that of consecrating themselves to the education of youth. A Superior-General is at the head of the Society. She and her council govern the whole Order; and the Order itself, both as regards its members and its government, is subject to the Pope, bishops, and pastors, and has no other aim than that of being their most devoted child and humblest assistant.'

TOILING UPWARDS.

The new institute soon spread through France. Houses were established at Amiens and elsewhere—usually in a condition of apostolic simplicity. But many ladies who were prominent figures in the world of fashion and letters soon joined the new sisterhood. They were, curiously enough, nearly all heroines of the Reign of Terror—their robes bespattered, as one writer says, 'with the blood of the guillotine' which had severed the soul and body of their dearest relatives. In 1818 the distinguished Mother Duchesne found the first house of the Society in America, at New Orleans. The year 1820 saw them in Belgium. In 1825 the Institute received the formal approval of the Holy See. In the following year they were established in Rome, in the now famous resort of learning and learning at the Trinità dei Monti, and as time went on the houses of the Society spread over every continent. The venerable foundress passed to her eternal reward at the mother-house in the last hour of the feast of the Ascension, 1865. She lived to see her work, which had been begun almost under the shadow of the French Revolution and in circumstances of the greatest poverty and discouragement, prosper and spread to the ends of the earth. To-day—as already stated—the houses of the Institute number 147, and her spiritual daughters some 7000. Without counting several recent foundations, there are 41 houses of the Order in France, 10 in Italy, one in Holland, five in Belgium, five in England, one in Scotland, nine in Spain, 10 in Austria, 26 in the United States,