

NAPIER

GOLDEN JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS.

(From our own correspondent.)

February 26.

An impressive ceremony took place at the convent yesterday, when the golden jubilee of the founding of the Institute of the Sisters of the Missions in Napier was celebrated. Solemn High Mass was sung at nine o'clock by Rev. Father W. Tymons, Rev. Father Mahony being deacon, and Rev. — Stewart subdeacon. There were also present Rev. Fathers O'Sullivan, Gogan, McDonnell, Delach, Dignan, and O'Farrell.

Very Rev. Father O'Connell, S.M., Wellington, preached the occasional sermon from the following text: 'Every one that hath left house or brethren or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for My name's sake shall receive an hundredfold and shall possess life everlasting' (St. Matt. xix. 29).

Four years have passed (said the Very Rev. preacher) since the Sisters of Notre Dame des Missions celebrated throughout the world the golden jubilee of the foundation of their Institute. The glad songs of thanksgiving from over 500 spouses of Jesus Christ could be heard in fair France, where the Institute took its rise, and in the many countries where branches have been established—England, Canada, India, Burmah, West Australia, and New Zealand. To-day we are assembled to commemorate the golden jubilee of the arrival of the first Sisters of Notre Dame des Missions in New Zealand. It is a fitting occasion, then, to bring before us the history of an Institute which has done so much for religion here as in other parts of the world. From the time that Jesus Christ commanded His Apostles to go to the uttermost bounds of the earth to preach His Gospel to every creature, He has been filling His vineyards with willing and worthy successors to the first band of devoted workers; and to-day the Catholic Church is spread throughout the world, and is exercising its wondrous powers over three hundred millions of loyal and faithful children, who are as strong in faith and hope and charity as the early Christians, who had but one head and one soul in love of Jesus Christ, and in mutual love amongst themselves. From the earliest times God has made use not only of apostles in the priesthood, but He has chosen holy men and women to co-operate in extending His kingdom from north to south, from east to west, wherever possible. No sooner had the Church emerged from the Catacombs to proclaim her glory in the full light of day and to captivate the hearts of men by her beautiful teachings, than religious Orders sprang into existence. We find them in the East, where St. Anthony the Great, St. Pachomius, St. Hilarion, and St. Basil were the first masters. In the West, St. Martin of Tours and St. Benedict are renowned teachers. Soon their influence was extended, and we see the sons of St. Benedict in England transforming forests into smiling meadows, and cornfields, and vineyards. This was but a preparation for the transformation of the human heart through the introduction of arts and sciences. They built magnificent edifices which would educate and lead man to the higher things of God. Religious Orders have sprung up according to the growing needs of the Church. Hence we find some devoted to education, others to the care of the sick, the poor, the aged and infirm—each adding lustre to the crown of religious life.

About the beginning of the past century Pope Gregory XVI. was deeply concerned about the spiritual welfare of the South Sea Islands and New Zealand. He saw in our new country a vast field to cultivate. He heard the voice of the native and that of the sturdy pioneer, who had crossed the seas to make his home among strangers, begging him to send missionaries to their aid. God has always raised up men to carry on His works, and He selected John Claude Colin to be the founder of a missionary Order, known as the Society of Mary. Associated with him were Blessed

Peter Chanel and another Father, who went in the year 1833 to Rome and were encouraged by the Sovereign Pontiff to begin their work. In 1836, he solemnly approved the Society of Mary, and confided to it the care of Oceanica. Blessed Chanel was amongst the first band of missionaries, and immediately following were devoted priests and lay Brothers who came to New Zealand. Amongst them was the venerated Father Forest, whose mortal remains the Napier people are privileged to have in the cemetery close by. With one desire and with the motto of the blessed martyr: 'To love Mary, and to cause her to be loved by all,' they began their heroic work, and it has gone on in every land with undiminished fervor. Churches and schools sprang up as if by magic, and the great difficulty experienced by the missionaries was to find teachers who would leave home and father and mother for Christ's sake and for Christ's little ones. Frequent appeals were made to the Superior-General, and it was answered by Sister Mary of the Heart of Jesus, who felt called by God to undertake the work. The Superior-General of the Marists found in her a truly valiant woman. Her name in religion (Sister Mary of the Heart of Jesus) showed that she wished to possess the beautiful qualities of the Heart of her Saviour—meekness and humility. Next Sister Winifred, the valiant woman who in God's designs was to found the Institute of Notre Dame des Missions, went to Lyons, and placed her services at the disposal of the Society of Mary. A little cottage was rented, and there the two Sisters lived and prepared themselves for their religious profession, which took place on Christmas Day, 1861. Our Blessed Lord seemed to wish that this day should mark the beginning of the religious Institute in humility—such as it was found at Bethlehem on the first Christmas morning. It was the venerated Father Yardin, known so well in New Zealand, who preached the profession sermon; and it must be a source of great joy to the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions to have his precious remains so near them in the little graveyard at Tara-dale. Like our Blessed Lady, the Sisters of Notre Dame des Missions wished to live a life of solitude in preparation for their great missionary enterprise, and their novitiate was like to the home of the Holy Family at Nazareth. There the spirit of faith was manifest; there confidence in God was ever foremost, and there the true spirit of charity prevailed.

In the year 1864, the Mother Foundress had the happiness of seeing her first batch of novices professed. It was on the glorious morning of the Feast of the Assumption, and all the angels in heaven rejoiced. These Sisters, four in number, were destined for New Zealand. Mother Mary of the Heart of Jesus, like the Venerable John Claude Colin, founder of the Marist Fathers, longed to go forth into the missionary field, but it was God's will that they should remain in their respective houses to impart the true spirit of their religious life into the hearts of those whom God would send into the vineyard to be trained to work wherever sent. The first four Sisters of Notre Dame des Missions set out for New Zealand in 1864, and they arrived in Napier in 1865. Great was the joy of the saintly Father Forest when he welcomed the Sisters on their arrival. Great the joy of the Catholic people as they saw new evidence of God's watchful care over the little ones of His flock. The little grain of mustard seed was sown by the Sisters of the Missions in Napier, and to-day, when the golden jubilee of their arrival is celebrated, the Institute has the joy of seeing a stately tree, which has extended, and whose branches have spread all over New Zealand, and even into far-distant lands—England, Canada, India, Burmah, and Western Australia.

The spirit of the Institute has been well maintained through the fifty golden years, and to-day priests assemble at the altar to celebrate a Solemn Mass of Thanksgiving for His protection over the Sisters and their many works. The Napier people assemble to do honor to the good Sisters and to express their gratitude. Surely, to-day the Sisters must feel that God's promise of a hundredfold reward has been fulfilled.