

THE CHURCH IN JAPAN

A GOLDEN JUBILEE.

At the very mention of Japan mingled memories of joy and sorrow are awakened in the mind of every true child of the Catholic Church (writes Dom Maternus Spitz, O.S.B., in the *Universe*). For we recall her relation to the world-wide Church, the marvellous conquests of her Apostle, St. Francis Xavier, in 1549 to 1551, and of his successors who labored in that portion of the vineyard of Christ from 1549 to 1640, supported by Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians, and gathered into the net of St. Peter some 1,800,000 souls. But the very name of Japan reminds us also of the fearful persecutions which raged almost without interruption from 1597 to 1638, from the death of the twenty-six protomartyrs of Nagasaki to the cruel slaughter of the 40,000 heroic Christian defenders of Shimabara, under the rules of the Japanese Neros and Diocletians Taikosama Kideyoshi (1582-98), Yeyasu (1598-1615), Kidetata (1616-23), and others. It has been stated that during those forty years of unrelenting persecution some 200 missionaries, 800 catechists and tertiaries, and 200,000 Christians were put to death, apart from the tens of thousands that perished through hunger and cold, or suffered an unbloody martyrdom in the hiding-places and dungeons of the Empire. From the moment St. Francis Xavier made his acquaintance with Anjiro, a shipwrecked Japanese fugitive, and had baptised him by the name of Paul of the Holy Faith, his heart began to burn for

The Conversion of the Japanese.

For two years (1549-51) he worked among them and planted the Tree of Life which, in a short time, was to yield such a glorious harvest of heroic martyrs and confessors, virgins, and widows. When leaving Japan St. Francis Xavier wrote these prophetic words: "So far as I know, the Japanese nation is the single and only nation of them all which seems likely to preserve unshaken and forever the profession of Christian holiness, it once it embrace it." Japan did embrace it—suffered for it for nearly fifty years, and for nearly three hundred years preserved it unshaken. When in 1638 the flower of Christian manhood had been cruelly massacred, it seemed as if death had spread the pall over the lifeless body of a once flourishing Church. In order that no missionary should dare to re-enter the country, placards, which were to be seen for two hundred years, were posted up along the coast, with the inscription: "So long as the sun shall warm the earth, let no Christian be so bold as to come to Japan, and let all know that the King of Spain himself, or the Christians' God, or the Great God of All, if he violate this commandment, shall pay for it with his head." Yet the blood of so many martyrs was not destined to be shed in vain, though two hundred years passed by before the dawn of the second spring broke through the darkness. In 1831 some twenty Japanese shipwrecked sailors were picked up by the Spaniards on the Philippines, who professed themselves to be baptised Christians, as their wearing Christian medals caused much surprise. In 1832 Gregory XVI. resolved to reconquer the apparently lost heritage of St. Francis, and entrusted the blood-stained field to the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris. The priests were allowed to land and to remain, but were strictly forbidden to do anything in favor of Christianity, till by political pressure and commercial treaties with America, England, France, and other countries, religious liberty was at last granted to foreigners, but not yet to natives. On Whit Sunday, 1862, Pius IX., surrounded by 300 bishops, canonised the twenty-six protomartyrs of Japan. In honor of these saints Father Petitjean built on the scene of their martyrdom at Nagasaki a fine church (1863-65), which was opened on February 19, 1865. On March 17, in the same year, this church became the means of finding the faithful remnant of the Old Faith, which had continued to glimmer under the ashes for over two hundred years, in spite of the absence of all exterior help, and

without any sacraments except Baptism. Father Petitjean, whose name will be forever associated with

The Second Spring of the Catholic Church

in Japan as her second founder, her first Vicar Apostolic, has thus described the marvellous episode, 'The Finding of the Christians,' which, since then, has been kept as a festival day in the Catholic Missions of Japan. 'Hardly a month had elapsed since the blessing of the Church at Nagasaki, when, on March 17, 1865, some fifteen persons were standing at the church door. Urged, no doubt, by my Guardian Angel, I went and opened it. I had scarcely time to say an "Our Father" when three women, between fifty and sixty years of age, knelt down beside me and said, in a low voice: "The hearts of all of us here do not differ from yours." "Indeed!" I exclaimed, "Whence do you come?" They mentioned their village Urakami, adding: "At home everybody is the same as we are." I was obliged to answer all their questions and to speak to them of O Deous Sama, O Yaso Sama, and Santa Maria Sama, by which names they designate God, our Lord, and the Blessed Virgin. The sight of the statue of our Lady with the Infant Jesus reminded them of Christmas. They asked me if we were not at the seventeenth day of the "Time of Sadness," or mournful season (Lent). Nor was St. Joseph unknown to them; they call him: O Yaso Samana yo fu, the adoptive father of our Lord. On Maundy Thursday and Good Friday (April 13 and 14) 1500 people visited the Church of Nagasaki, and in the early days of May we learned of the existence of 2500 Christians scattered in the neighborhood of that town. . . . On May 15 a deputation arrived with some catechists, their leaders. One of them, Peter, gave us the most valuable information. His formula of Baptism does not differ at all from ours, and he pronounces it very distinctly. There are still, he assured us, a great number of Christians in Japan. . . . Before leaving, Peter wished to make quite sure that we were the true successors of the ancient missionaries. He asked us about the Great Chief of the Kingdom of Rome, and finally put the test question: "Have you any children?" I replied: "You and all your brethren in Japan, Christian and pagan, are the children God has given us. Other children we cannot have; the priests, like your former missionaries, are obliged to remain unmarried all their lives." At this information Peter and his companions bent their heads down to the ground and said: "They are celibates, they are virgins, thank God." By June 8 Father Petitjean had learnt of

The Existence of Twenty-five Christian Villages, of seven Baptisers, and of some 6000-8000 Japanese native Christians. In the following year Father Petitjean was appointed Vicar Apostolic of Japan, and a new spring began to dawn in the mission field of the Land of the Rising Sun. In 1876 Japan was divided into two Vicariates, North and South, by Pius IX., whilst Leo XIII. erected two more, that of Central Japan (1888) and that of Hakodate (1891). Finally, on June 15, 1891, Leo XIII. re-established the Catholic Hierarchy in Japan—i.e., the archdiocese of Tokyo, with the Suffragan Sees of Nagasaki, Osaka, and Hakodate, under the care of the Missionary Society of Paris, to which have since been added the Prefectures of Shikoku, 1904 (Dominicans), and of Nagata, 1912 (Missionary Society of Steyl), whilst the Jesuits and the Franciscans are at work in Tokyo, Sapporo, etc. . . .

The progress during the last fifty years has been somewhat slow. In 1870 we find thirteen European priests with 10,000 Catholics and four churches and chapels; in 1890, 82 European and 15 native priests, 44,505 Catholics, 164 churches and chapels, whilst in 1910 the number had risen to 150 European and 33 native priests, with 63,000 Catholics. The latest statistics record further progress: 69,000 Catholics, with 152 European and 33 native priests, 133 Brothers, 232 Sisters, 165 catechists, 385 school teachers, 129 principal and 277 secondary stations, 250 churches and chapels, 48 elementary schools, with 7000 pupils, 16 higher schools, with 1455 boys and 1648 girls, a Catholic University at Tokyo, etc.