

St. Francis Xavier at Goa

(By JOAO DA ANNUNCIACAO.)

On December 3 his Excellency the Most Reverend Dom Mathew d'Oliviera Xavier, Archbishop of Goa and Patriarch of the East Indies, assisted in his episcopal city in India at the solemn exposition of the Sacred Body of St. Francis Xavier, who, in his sumptuous shrine will draw Catholics not only from all parts of India, Burma, and Ceylon, but from other parts of the world, to the historic city where his relics have been enshrined since 1554.

It is 300 years since the saint was canonised, and his tercentenary has been the occasion of brilliant ceremonies in both the Old and the New Worlds.

Goa! It is a name to conjure with! A name that wraps itself about with ancient splendors; a stage on which springs up one of the most magnificent pageants of ecclesiastical history.

The Franciscans came here in 1550, with the Portuguese fleet of Pedro Alvarez Cabral, and in 1510 the first church at Goa was erected, dedicated in honor of St. Catharine, after a great military victory. This same church of St. Catharine was raised to the dignity of a cathedral when the diocese of Goa was established in the early part of the 16th century. The first Bishop, Dom Francisco de Nello, who was consecrated in Lisbon, never lived to take possession of his See, and the first Bishop actually to rule was his successor, Fra Alfonso de Albuquerque, who was appointed by Pope Paul III. in April, 1537.

The Archbishopric of Goa dates from 1558, when Pope Paul IV. raised the See to metropolitan rank, with Dom Gaspar Leao Pereira as its first Archbishop. From then on there is a regular record of magnificent prelates, who ruled the illustrious See in a manner worthy of their high primatial rank. The Patriarchal dignity was conferred on the Archbishopric by the Apostolic Constitution *Humanae Salutis Auctor* of September, 1886, and the present Archbishop is the second Patriarch.

Saint Brought to Goa.

When St. Francis Xavier died in December, 1552, he was buried at Sancian, in China. But in the following year his body was removed by the Portuguese to Malacca, where a solemn funeral was held. Again the body was disinterred, and in 1554 brought to the city of Goa in Portuguese India, where a magnificent state entry into the city was made, and the sacred remains laid to rest in the church of St. Paul.

But a further translation took place, when the Jesuits of Goa, to celebrate the canonisation of the saint, caused the relics to be translated in 1624 from the Church of St. Paul to the Church of the Bom Jesus, then newly erected. At first the resting place of the saint's body was in the chapel of St. Francis Borgia; but in 1655 it was once again removed to the chapel of St. Francis Xavier, where it is now preserved.

The casket containing the body of St. Francis Xavier is a rich coffer some five feet long, which is opened with three keys. When the solemn exposition of the body was due to take place in 1859 it was found that the keys had disappeared, and so three new keys were made, one of which was entrusted to the Portuguese Governor-General of Goa, the second to the Archbishop, and the third to the Chief Secretary of the Civil Government.

Previous examinations of the holy relics established the fact that although the body of the saint had shrunk in the course of the centuries, it was in excellent preservation. On the right foot the fourth and fifth toes are lacking. It is said that a Portuguese lady, one Dona Isabel de Carom, who kissed the relic in 1554, bit off one of the missing toes in her eagerness to possess a primary relic of the saint.

In 1614 the reigning Pope permitted the right arm of the saint to be removed, and this has been divided into four relics. The larger part is conserved in the Church of the Gesu in Rome, whence it has been taken on a triumphal progress through Spain and France during the past few weeks.

When the body was exposed for veneration in 1890, part of one of the right toes became dismembered. Pope Leo XIII. gave instructions that it might be divided, and

in 1892 Dom Valente, then Archbishop of Goa, divided this relic into two portions with a silver saw made for this special purpose. One of these portions was placed in a basilica built in Spain by a collateral descendant of the saint.

Relics Jealously Guarded.

The sacred body of St. Francis Xavier has not been exposed for public veneration for 11 years, and the present veneration, which lasts from December 3 until January 3 of next year (1923), is drawing the faithful to Goa from all parts, even from Japan.

But in the 16th and 17th centuries the public expositions were much more frequent. Travellers to India in the 17th century state that the relics were exposed generally on the festival of the saint every year. But the expositions became abridged, and a traveller to Goa in 1695 says that the body had not been exposed for nine years.

The eagerness of the faithful to obtain relics of the saint, and perhaps their lack of scruple in securing the same, no doubt led to the infrequency of the public expositions. However, it came about that only the Portuguese Viceroy and a few privileged persons of high rank were permitted to view the saint's body, and in 1755 even this high privilege was withdrawn by an order of the Portuguese Crown, and since that time exposition has been permitted only on the express orders of the Lisbon Government.

There was a public exposition in 1782 and one in 1859, and further expositions in the years 1878, 1890, and 1910. A rumor started in 1784 that the relics of the saint had been spirited away led to the casket being opened. The opening took place in the presence of the Bishop of Cochin, who was accompanied by the Viceroy and dignitaries of the Church and State. The sacred body was found to be intact and incorrupt. It was solemnly exposed for eight days, during which time it was visited by thousands of the devout, and at the expiration of the time it was enclosed in a marble receptacle, and locked with eight keys.

The Saint's Ancestry.

The noble Navarrais family, of which St. Francis Xavier was so distinguished an ornament, hailed from the village of Jassu, which the Basques pronounce *Yatsou*. It is near to Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, and at the present day is a tiny hamlet of about 300 inhabitants. In the 14th century there lived at Jassu the Lascor family, and, next to them in importance, the family of Echberria.

The former family pertained to the *higosdalgos*, or nobles and landed gentry; the Echberrias were squires, and from these last the saint was descended on his father's side.

About the middle of the 14th century the heir of the Echberrias of Jassu married the daughter of the Garats, of Suescun, also a noble family. Of their children one Pedro settled himself at Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, establishing the branch of the family in which Francis de Xavier, or Javier, was born.

Some of Father Bernard Vaughan's Sayings

To politicians.—Live above the snow line and refuse to be dragged down into the mud.

To Wedded Folk.—Live up to your marriage vows, and prepare to rock the cradle for many years to come.

To the Average Merchant.—Live on a level with your samples, and shun dishonesty as you do shoddy.

Instant in repartee, Father Vaughan made a delightful companion. During one of his American visits he was asked by a Suffragette of the militant type, "Where would you be but for a woman?"

"Madam," came the quick retort, "I should on a sultry evening like this be eating ice cream under an apple tree in the Garden of Eden."

On another occasion he offered a cigar to a Nonconformist minister, who refused it with the remark that he had not been sent into the world to smoke.

"Quite so," said Father Vaughan, "but as I belong to an old-fashioned Church which prefers to get its smoking done in this world, you will excuse me if I light up."—*Daily Chronicle*.

A. L. Simson

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