

BIOGRAPHY OF MOTHER MATHILDE RACLOT IN JAPAN

By Sr Francis Xavier

PREFACE

ST. FRANCIS XAVIER'S MISSION

"To be loved, one must love" - that beautiful lesson which, our Redeemer gave to the world is as applicable in the East as in the West; and the Japanese people never fail to prove it. Those, who love, love deeply. They are no longer enigmatic; they open up and respond to the devotedness that they experience. They are capable of showing gratitude in a manner that costs.

St. Francis Xavier was the first to love those unknown brothers for whom other missionaries in their turn crossed the seas. He knew so well how to find a way to their hearts that he was impelled to write when speaking of them, "The Japanese people delight me!"

It is a known fact that Francis Xavier, a leader and a model, who perpetually dreamed of introducing God to new realms, eagerly followed the first Europeans to penetrate that far off, newly discovered land. Storms were so frequent in its surrounding sea that of the three primitive sailing ships used by those intrepid navigators who braved the Indian Ocean, only one returned to port.

Nothing hindered the saint - neither the perils of the sea nor the foreseen difficulties to be encountered on arriving in that very strange country. Accompanied and guided by an adventurous Japanese young man whom he had known in India, Francis Xavier set sail for those beloved islands that had been attracting him. His companion, whom he had instructed and baptised, was known by his Christian name, Paul of Holy Faith.

Together, after a very dangerous voyage of seven months, they disembarked on August 15 1549 at Kagoshima in Kyushu. They were accompanied by two Jesuits and three new Japanese Christians. It would be impossible to describe all the marvels accomplished by Francis Xavier in the course of twenty-seven short months on his new mission field.

Firstly, there was the favourable welcome to the Bungo Province by the Prince of Satsuma, a petty ruler of whom Paul of Holy Faith was a subject. In due course Francis Xavier began his painful study of the Japanese language. Initially God seemed to withdraw the gift for languages that he had previously given him. That, however, was only a passing trial! Very soon the saint was able to make himself understood.

As a matter of fact, he did so marvellously well that he was able to answer several questions with just one reply.

With remarkable ardour, Francis Xavier began to preach the Good News and we are told that the first to accept his teaching was a poor man who, when baptised, was given the name of Bertrand, and was later very renowned for his virtue.

In the course of one year, about one hundred inhabitants of Kagoshima were converted. From then on, the saintly missionary's successes multiplied in a most extraordinary manner. Even though he worked extremely hard, his body seemed to become stronger and he was able to spend entire nights in prayer.

Buddhist priests created numerous obstacles for Francis Xavier. They waged war on him. The saint, however, was not afraid to accost them, even in their own pagodas. In order to make his work more efficacious, God permitted him to perform numerous miracles. His mission was, in fact, to repeat in the Orient the prodigies that occurred in the early days of Christianity. He raised a

young girl from the dead on the day of her funeral, by simply saying to her father, "Go, your daughter is living". In addition, the memory of such marvellous happenings remained deeply engraved in the minds of Japanese Christians. Those whom the 19th Century missionaries met in Nagasaki naively asked them to perform again the wonderful deeds that had accompanied and lent weight to their first Father's preaching of the Faith. Today, it is not uncommon to find traces of the tradition that pictures Xavier as an extraordinary person whom all nature obeyed.

In the midst of the numerous blessings that accompanied his labours, the saint was informed that St. Ignatius had just founded a province in India and had named Xavier as its first superior. In spite of his strong attachment to Japan, the latter obeyed at once.

On November 20, 1551, when, in order to set sail for China, Xavier tore himself away from those Christians that he described as the "joy of his soul", he had regenerated thousands of new believers with the waters of Baptism, had won the hearts of several princes over to the true religion and confounded the Buddhist priests. In a word, he had victoriously planted the standard of Jesus Christ in the midst of a new people. It is true he left his work unfinished, but later numerous soldiers of Christ would continue his task and complete his victories.

After Francis Xavier's death, the Christian Faith spread considerably throughout Japan. Not only the Jesuits, but also the Dominicans and other religious participated ardently in the work of the Father's beautiful mission field. All went well until the Buddhist monks convinced the Japanese chiefs that the Christian preachers, under the pretext of assuring the people of eternal salvation after death, were intent on drawing them to themselves so as to entice them at will to revolt against the sovereign of Japan and make it possible for European powers to take possession of the country.

From the day that those disastrous ideas entered the minds of the Japanese chiefs, they resolved to persecute and suppress without mercy the Christians and, above all, their priests. No other calumny could have done so much harm. Nothing is dearer to the Japanese people than their country. The thought of it being taken from them engendered an irreconcilable hatred in their hearts. It was only three centuries later that they finally understood the aim of the Gospel preachers was not what they had been led to believe. While waiting for the light to dawn on them, however, it was necessary for them to endure the terrible consequences of their false judgment.

The first prince to persecute was Taiko Samu, whose real name was Hideyoshi. Taiko Samu was only an honorary title given to a high-ranking lord. He was merely the real Emperor's deputy, but in reality had full authority as happened with the Mikado's deputies who were called "Shoguns" and who succeeded him until imperial power was restored in the period between 1867 and 1868. In fact they were the chief mayors of the Palace.

THE TWENTY-SIX FIRST MARTYRS

For some time Hideyoshi hesitated about shedding Christian blood, but the foolish remarks of a Spanish ship's captain aroused suspicion and mistrust. Consequently, the decision was taken to exterminate the Christians, and on February 5, 1597 the twenty-six Japanese martyrs (Jesuits and Franciscans) climbed their crosses at Nagasaki.

At that time there were 300,000 Japanese Christians under the direction of 134 priests and monks from various religious orders. The first bloody persecution did not stem the flow of conversions. There were about 70,000 in that one year of Taiku Samu's death in 1599.

From that period until 1640, there were appalling persecutions that were responsible for thousands of glorious victims, who are to be admired for their supernatural outlook and magnanimous courage in the face of terrible torments.

In 1640, the godless Yemitsu Tokugawa believed that he had achieved his goal of exterminating the Christian priests and their followers, without a single exception. He even made the following absurd statement, "As long as the sun heats the earth no Christian will be so daring as to come to Japan. Let them all be aware, be it the King of Spain himself, the Christian God, or the great Shaka (Buddha), whoever violates this prohibition will be beheaded."

Stupid blasphemy! Now Yemitsu Tokugawa is dead; his remains are consumed in some isolated pagoda. The teachings of Jesus Christ have been resurrected in Japan (actually they were never totally extinguished). The House of Mikado, which did not defile Christian blood in the past, recovered its glory and the descendants of the cruel persecutors have been forgotten by the Japanese people. Such are the ways of God!

From 1640 to 1648, ten Jesuits and five Dominicans tried to enter Japan but their attempts failed. Some of them died as a result of terrible torture, others succeeded in escaping safely from the country. From that time, it seemed impossible for foreigners to enter Japan. Nevertheless, in spite of that fact the Apostolic Church never forgot that country, so beautiful to the eyes of Faith, a country that had been baptised with the blood of numerous martyrs. Confident of the future because of the past, the Apostolic Church remained partial and loving towards it.

(Abbe Marnes: "The Resurrected Religion of Jesus").

Hateful of Catholicism, the Japanese Empire remained closed, even to European commerce. For many years, intrepid and mysterious missionaries, whose names are unknown, tried in vain to break the insurmountable barriers.

THE FOREIGN MISSION SOCIETY

Finally, from 1844 to 1858, the valiant Foreign Mission Society tried, in its turn, to triumph over Japan's great and amazing obstinacy. During those fourteen years, from the Ryukyu Islands south of Japan, they kept their eyes steadily on the Land of the Great Martyrdom's continuously closed doors. They were determined to choose the first opportunity to penetrate that long-coveted country.

It was only the fear, however, of European and American cannon that made it possible for the Sons of God to gain access to the Japanese Empire. For the nation and the Sovereign, there were costly struggles and internal strife. In 1858, the first treaties giving foreigners permission to inhabit waterfront towns were signed. Those treaties brought about the fall of the "Shoguns" and the restoration of the "Mikado".

MISSIONARIES PENETRATE JAPAN

As soon as the ardent Foreign Mission Priests had availed of the long-awaited opportunity to freely enter Japan, they settled in the first towns that were opened to foreigners. For a long time, they were treated with the greatest distrust. It took the Japanese government about thirty years to abandon its obsolete ideas in regard to persecution and intolerance of Christianity.

At first the missionaries were not allowed to speak to any of the native people. Consequently, they were obliged to wait patiently for the day when it would be possible to discuss the concerns of

after-life with the Japanese people. In the meantime, while longing for the opportune moment, they prayed and built churches in Yokohama and Nagasaki.

DESCENDANTS OF THE FIRST CHRISTIANS WERE DISCOVERED

Finally, on March 17 1865, a very happy day dawned when, in the Nagasaki newly erected church, a few Japanese Christians secretly informed one of the Missionaries, Father Petijean, of the existence of many descendants of the first Christians, who had remained faithful to the Faith of their forefathers but had to remain hidden in the valleys, hills and surrounding islands for fear of being persecuted by the government.

For almost two hundred and fifty years, the descendants of the first Christians, in spite of being rejected, threatened with death, and having neither churches, priests nor the sacraments, kept their faith and passed it on to their children as their most precious treasure. They numbered more than twenty-five thousand!

LAST PERSECUTION

The great joy experienced first by the missionaries and then by the Sovereign Pontiff, Pius IX, who cried with joy, and the entire Church, was soon mixed with great sorrow. There was a revival of fierce persecution which lasted for several years.

POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS REVIVAL

In haste we must add that after a few years of contact with civilised people from the Old World, the Japanese completely dropped those narrow and barbarous ideas that caused all the persecutions through the years.

As Japan, in many areas, made a remarkable progress that caused it to become a great world power, it adopted an enlightened and wide line of conduct towards other nations. It came to accept each one's right to liberty of conscience.

It was precisely at the time when the final persecution was starting to subside that Bishop Petijean, Vicar Apostolic to Japan since 1866, considered that the moment had come to appeal to a religious congregation of women to devote themselves to education in Japan and to dedicate themselves to the numerous works of charity awaiting their zeal. He wrote a letter to Singapore to Mother Mathilde that filled her with joy and brought about her departure for Japan two weeks later.

That departure took place in memorable circumstances that will be related in the following pages.

CHAPTER ONE

MOTHER MATHILDE'S CALL TO JAPAN

As a first step, Bishop Petijean approached the Sisters of Nevers in regard to the possibility of procuring a few eligible sisters for the Japanese mission field. His request was seriously considered and during the Eastertide of 1872, four of them were due to arrive in Japan.

On hearing that the sisters of Nevers were about to set out for Japan, Mother Mathilde and her sisters frequently made the sacrifice of that mission so dear to them. However, "Man proposes and God disposes."

God, in His infinite kindness, did not reject the request of his lowly servants. He even granted those wishes that they did not dare express.

In 1872, two weeks before the feast of Pentecost, Mother Mathilde and her sisters were fervently preparing for the reception of the Holy Spirit and His precious gifts. They sought to seek only God's companionship during the preparatory novena.

On Saturday, the eve of Pentecost, as the sisters were about to go to the church for the May devotions of the Mother of God, the Superior, Mother Mathilde, received a letter. The handwriting was not familiar, so on opening the letter she looked inquiringly at the signature. It was Bishop Petijean's. On reading the few lines with much emotion, her first impulse was to share the content with a sister who was standing nearby, but because of the Bishop's urgency, she restrained herself.

He was calling the sisters to Japan because the sisters of Nevers, on whom he had counted, were unable, for the time being, to grant his request. The letter contained an urgent appeal that required the sisters to set out at once and to inform him by telegram of their travel arrangements that were to be made with "Messagerie Maritime".

Mother Mathilde could not make such an important commitment without the approval of the Congregation's Superior General who was resident in Paris. She consulted Bishop Leturdu who urged her to make the important request by telegram.

The beautiful eve of Pentecost seemed endless. Mother Mathilde had the impression that the hours were being doubled. As for the sisters, they were deep in contemplation and prayer while awaiting the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The following morning at 8 a.m, Mother Mathilde received the eagerly awaited telegram. She trembled with excitement as she hurried to the chapel and knelt before the tabernacle to present the reply to the Lord with her submission to His holy will, that she was confident would be expressed through the Superior General.

On the beautiful feast of Pentecost, around noon, May 20th, Mother de Faudoas had written and signed a solemn "YES" for her sisters in Malaya. Mother Mathilde's happiness was great, very great!

Before sharing the joyful news with the sisters, she thought it appropriate to inform Bishop Leturdu. At her request, he went to the convent at once. As he held the Institute of the Infant Jesus Sisters in high esteem, he thanked God for having chosen it, and in a very kind manner shared Mother Mathilde's joy.

The sisters were in the dining room with no idea of the great surprise that awaited them. Before announcing Mother de Faudoas' decision, His Lordship decided to read Bishop Petijean's letter of

request. As he read it, all eyes were turned on Mother Mathilde, as if trying to discern her thoughts. Her calmness caused the sisters to tremble. They sought a sign of consent; but none was offered. Then there was a volley of questions, "You will accept the offer, Mother!"

"You must accept." "Surely you have said 'Yes'?" Then she reminded them of Bishop Petijean's condition. She explained that if they could not leave at once, they must forget about going. She reminded them that she was unable to give a positive response without Mother de Fautoas' authorisation, which would take a long time to acquire.

There was a moment of anxious silence. Then Bishop Leturdu broke it with a question, "Could you not send a telegram?" All present thought it was a splendid idea and prepared paper, pen and ink. The telegram was written, the paper folded, then his Lordship seemed to be indecisive and to have changed his mind. There was a general air of uneasiness, when suddenly a sheet of paper fell from his sleeve. He picked it up with an air of surprise; opened it and cried, "Well! Here we have an answer from Paris! How quickly it has come!" There was an air of utter astonishment that could be overcome only by curiosity.

The circle became smaller and smaller, necks were craned, and the group was almost breathless. Finally, they had heard, they had understood, hearts beating more normally, but emotions and feelings were tense.

Father Ligneul wrote later in a document, "It was true then, according to the most ardent wishes of the sisters, the Holy Spirit had visited the Singapore Community on the holy day of Pentecost, and they were about to set out for Japan and thus would realise the prophetic words of their founder, Fr. Barre who knew that his spiritual daughters would go to the ends of the earth.

Another scene succeeded the first, less agitated, but not less touching. It was the nominating scene. The sisters were confident that the first question had been resolved, some sisters were going to Japan. The second question remained to be answered - who then would be sent? Each sister wondered interiorly if she would be chosen. As Mother Mathilde had time to reflect, she was soon able to answer those unspoken questions.

Sister Norbert on hearing herself named as the Mother Superior of the new foundation seemed to be pulled in two directions, fear and joy. She became as pale as death and was unable to speak

Sister Gregory with a mixture of English and French exclaimed, "Oh Mother! The Holy Spirit does know how to console. I never expected to be chosen for Japan."

Gentle Sister Ferdinand was overcome with joy and wondered if she had heard and understood aright. The others, whose names were still not mentioned, were waiting with hope still shining in the eyes of each one. They were waiting, because a fourth had still to be named. Mother Mathilde, however, counted on the Penang Community being happy and eager to supply the fourth person.

It was only a few days later that Mother Mathilde was in a position to tell Sister Gelase that she would go to Japan instead of the person that the Penang Community was unable to offer. Four sisters from the Singapore Community were indeed a lot, but no sacrifice seemed too great, even for those who were destined to remain in Singapore.

The ten days preceding the departure were spent thanking God and making the necessary preparations. On June 10, the "new Japanese" left Singapore, accompanied by Mother Mathilde. It was a very emotional moment for those who were departing. They were sad at the thought of leaving the house where they had spent such happy days, and the sisters whom they loved so dearly. Those who were remaining were heartbroken on seeing them go. Finally, while promising to remain united in spite of being separated, to pray for one another, to have but one heart and

one soul in their love of God and their desire to make Him loved, their last good byes were said. Their eyes were riveted on the shore from which their sisters were following the progress of the ship as it sailed away. There was no lack of courage, the sacrifice was made very generously but at the moment of departure, its reality and emotion were keenly felt. All were silent, a few tears, that the Good Lord surely pardoned, were shed.

The voyage from Singapore to Hong Kong was uneventful - the weather was good, the sea calm. Settled in the women's salon, which they had to themselves, they were able to follow their usual community schedule. The days passed quickly as they worked, read about Japanese martyrs, sang, prayed, meditated and chatted happily.

On arriving at Hong Kong, they set out for Peiko to travel by a smaller boat, "the Volga". While in the Strait of Formosa; the ship was tossed about by a terrible typhoon. It was advancing slowly towards the coast of China. The horizon was threatening, as waves lashed the sides of the ship, covered the deck and rushed into cabins. The captain seemed worried and no longer left his post. The entire crew was on the alert. The other passengers, mostly traders, appeared to be terrified, but the sisters remained serene during the ordeal. They were indifferent to death, since they were going willingly to the land of the great martyrdom.

After two very stormy days, the sea gradually became calm and the ship was able to take a more direct route to Japan. On arriving at the Van Diemen Strait, it was possible to glimpse the far Nagasaki Mountains. It was a very emotional experience that recalled the memory of those generous martyrs who were crucified on one of their summits.

The southern islands with their smoking mountains were soon to disappear. Land was no longer visible. As the sisters gazed at the sea that was still tossing their ship, they became vividly aware that they were following in the footsteps of the first apostle, who, for love of God and his spiritually deprived brothers, had braved the unknown.

The following day, the land of Japan became visible. Lovingly, the sisters peered at its picturesque coastline, numerous green hills, its bays, its beacons, its little villages, its multitudes of fishing boats crossing one another in many directions. All was of interest to the newcomers and spoke to their souls.

When they were about a hundred miles from Yokohama, Mount Fuji, Japan's highest and most famous mountain, was sighted. Its summit, still covered with a mantle of snow, was a sleepless one. To them it was like that of a miser who was about to seize a treasure.

Towards 5:00 a.m. on June 28, the ship reached Yokohama port. It had scarcely arrived when two elderly missionaries, sent by His Lordship, Bishop Petijean, came on board. Without delay, they helped the sisters get into a little ferry boat that was to take them ashore,

With hearts overflowing with emotion, the sisters walked through the streets that took them to the Catholic Church that was then situated near the entrance to what is now ChinaTown. Dressed in his clerical attire, Bishop Petijean was awaiting them at the main door. Having blessed them in an affectionate and paternal manner, he went straight to the altar to offer Mass. It would be difficult to put into words what that first Mass and Holy Communion in Japan meant to those newly-arrived sisters. Often in the years that followed, Mother Mathilde shared those very personal thoughts that invaded her mind on that memorable day.

She said, "As for me, I could hardly realise what was happening. Here was I at last in the Japan of my childhood dreams. It was no longer one of those thousand dreams that had enchanted me. No! I had really crossed the seas, and arrived at that same island where, three centuries earlier Xavier

had planted the Cross. His picture over the main altar was before us. The saint was kneeling and looking upward. He seemed to be begging God's gift of Faith for Japan."

At the end of the Mass, Bishop Petijean invited them to a nice breakfast that he had kindly requested for them. His welcome could not have been more cordial. He wished to hear all the details of the travellers' voyage and took the time to teach them a few words of Japanese before they were taken to the house that they were to occupy for their first month in Japan.

When the sisters walked outside, their religious habit greatly intrigued the Japanese people who came out of their houses to stare at them. Curiously they asked each other whether those strange people were male or female, and wondered what they were doing in Japan. Many of them followed the sisters to the Bluff where their house was located.

The following day there were numerous conjectures in the newspaper regarding the new arrivals. The Europeans were delighted to see them but they considered that the sisters' religious habit was not very fashionable!

For a few days the sisters had to go to the Church to hear mass, which gave them the opportunity to be greeted on the way with the gracious smile of a Japanese lady who sold fruit and vegetables in her little shop. She knew a few words of French and used them with great pride. As soon as the sisters came near her premises, in a loud voice she greeted them in that language, "Good-day gentlemen! Is everything going well, gentlemen?" The sisters responded with fond smiles.

After a short period, the sisters found a much larger house on the Bluff. It was more suitable for the classes that they were being pressured to commence. Their greatest consolation was that there was space for a chapel where the Blessed Sacrament could be reserved. They were able to have the sacramental presence of Him for whom they had left everything.

Each morning, Mass was celebrated for them by a missionary priest.

During their first years in Japan, the sisters encountered numerous difficulties. They had no idea of the language, which was so different from their own. They had neither a grammar nor a dictionary, nor even a printed vocabulary list. Consequently, the missionary priests were unable to give profitable lessons to the newcomers. Besides, many of them were at the beginning stage of their study, just like the sisters. In addition, the houses of the priests and sisters were quite far apart, which made it impossible for the latter to seek the priests' help at the times when they had difficulty making themselves understood.

The sisters whose knowledge of Japanese was almost nil, were provided with an elderly housekeeper who did not understand any European language. As a result, there were many misunderstandings that would have been amusing under different circumstances, but for the sisters they provided numerous deprivations and near starvation.

Finally, Mother Mathilde succeeded in procuring a few suitable English/Japanese text books and a good dictionary. She was often heard to say, "I would have paid the books' weight in gold if it had been necessary." Thanks to her initiative, the sisters and the Japanese people were gradually able to understand one another.

In due course, about twelve English and American little girls were confided to their care, much to the joy of the new missionaries. They were happy and full of hope. Alas! Here below, joy can be dimmed by sorrow. The youngest and most healthy looking of the four sisters, Sister Ferdinand Tantin deteriorated rapidly. A cough, which at first was attributed to a cold that she had caught on board the ship when on her way to Japan, became a cause of much anxiety. The doctor who was

consulted gave a little hope which consoled the sisters but did not convince them. Mother Mathilde's nights, like those of the patient, were sleepless.

The three convents in Malaya were founded on the cross and it seemed inevitable to Mother Mathilde that the Japanese foundation would have the same beginning. Already she could see the victim and the sacrifice that God was going to ask of them. Her heart was submissive, but it was a painful situation.

Mother Mathilde's suffering was increased due to the fact that she was obliged to return immediately to Singapore. There was no possibility of bringing the dear patient with her. To leave her with no hope of seeing her again was indeed very painful. She had to resign herself to God's will, but the sacrifice cost her many tears.

The sisters prayed fervently for their companion, she also prayed, but more for a holy death, rather than to be cured. She frequently said, "I am happy to make the sacrifice of my life for Japan, if the Lord would accept my sufferings for the salvation of the children of this country."

The Europeans who had settled in Yokohama, on the whole, showed much concern for the sisters' welfare. Several English families were very kind to them, especially when they became aware of their great sorrow. Knowing that the sisters were poorly housed and nourished, they often sent little delicacies to their sick one. It was evident that when God sends a trial, He never forgets His own.

The saintly Sister Ferdinand died on October 23 1872, four months after arrival in Japan. On the morning of her death, she had insisted on going to the chapel to receive sacramentally, once more, the Good Lord, whose reward she was soon to receive. At midnight, she breathed her last in the arms of her sisters, who were surprised when the end came so suddenly. Her serenity and patient acceptance of the sufferings that she did her best to conceal, had raised their hopes until her last breath was drawn.

The whole area shared the sisters' bereavement. Many official people from both Tokyo and Yokohama were present to see Sister Ferdinand lying on her death bed, where they surrounded her with wreaths and flowers. They accompanied her remains to the Bluff Cemetery. Such was the foundation stone on which the works of Saint Maur in Japan were built!

Suddenly, Sister Gregory, one of the remaining three sisters, became seriously ill due to change of climate and lack of nourishment. So it happened that the same letter which informed Mother Mathilde of Sister Ferdinand's death urged her to recall the devoted Sister Gregory to Singapore for the time being. The trial was still greater as the sisters who were expected to arrive from France were delayed.

Mother de Fautoas, the Superior General, informed Mother Mathilde that if she did not come herself to fetch them there would be numerous difficulties in regard to their departure. Mother Mathilde, however, was greatly troubled at the thought of leaving the Yokohama Community with just two sisters and so little help, while she would be in Paris. Fortunately, one of the sisters who had been in Singapore for some time - Sister Wilfred, volunteered to join them. Her age, her virtue, her education and her dedication were certainly equal to such a sacrifice, so Mother Mathilde, having no reservations in her regard, assigned her promptly to Yokohama. After two or three zealous years in Japan, however, she became seriously ill and passed away quietly in her sleep.

CHAPTER TWO

APOSTOLIC WORK- TOKYO AND YOKOHAMA

Mother Mathilde was eager to bring to Japan the twelve sisters that Reverend Mother de Faudoas had so kindly granted to her. Her original plan was to remain only a short time in France. Still, she took the time to go to Rome. As Saint Paul did in the past, the indefatigable apostle wished to see "Peter", in order to receive the Sovereign Pontiff's blessing for her faraway mission. She also needed his direction and enlightenment, both of which were difficult to receive promptly in distant Japan.

Reinforced by Pius IX's blessing and helpful encouragement, Mother Mathilde hastened to return to her mission. This time she did not revisit her native town. On August 30 1873, she left Marseilles with her twelve new missionary sisters. It was her last departure from France, she was never to return there.

The voyage was pleasant and on September 27, all arrived in good health at Singapore where there was great rejoicing on receiving such reinforcement. Unfortunately, the health of a few of the new missionaries did not correspond with their generous dispositions. Two years later, five of them had already gone to Heaven!

Soon after her arrival in Singapore, Mother Mathilde took three of the young sisters and Sister Gregory, who was completely healthy again, to Japan where they arrived in November 1873. Their arrival, so soon after the previous year of sickness and death, gave much joy to Mother Norbert, Sister Wilfred and Sister Gelase.

In March 1873, the decrees related to religious persecutions were withdrawn, consequently, there was an appeasement of the growing prejudice against Catholicism. About 15 young Japanese girls were entrusted to the sisters' care. There was even a hope that the number would increase later. It became obvious that very soon the existing facility would be inadequate. With her usual business alacrity, Mother Mathilde went promptly in search of suitable land on which to build a house.

Mr. Turenne, a plenipotentiary French minister and Mr. Colleau, the Yokohama French Consul, agreed to work on the project. They purchased from the Japanese Government, at a reasonable price, a very beautiful site on the Bluff. It overlooked the City of Yokohama on one side and on the other, a delightful landscape and seacoast. It would have been very difficult to find, or even imagine, a more picturesque, pleasant or suitable piece of land. The only inconvenience was that it was more exposed, than the former location, to typhoon winds. Sometimes, however, those gales were more severe on the lowlands than on the heights ... for God takes care of those who work for Him... this was even more evident in Japan than elsewhere.

There were many difficulties involved in the construction of the house. At that time the Japanese people had no notion of what a solid building meant. Nor did they realise that their type of house was more appropriate for a country frequently exposed to earthquakes and typhoons. Be that as it may, they were unable to build, except for their little wooden houses with their paper partitions, all very beautiful, delightful, but as fragile as birds' cages. So it happened that Mother Mathilde herself showed the Japanese workmen how to make mortar!

A Chinese contractor agreed to execute her plan in five months and he was true to his word, in spite of many damages and delays caused by a terrible typhoon that demolished three-metre high walls.

When all was repaired and completed, the community had a house that was adequate at that time for their needs and permitted them to offer classes for European children. In due course, plans

were made to construct another building at right angles to the first one, for Japanese children. Later it was found to be too narrow for its length. That defect was rectified by increasing the width of the building. When a construction is begun in an unfamiliar country, there are many trials to be endured.

Before returning to Singapore once again, Mother Mathilde had the joy of being called to Tokyo to act as godparent to the first Christian to be baptised in that vast city which had just been connected to Yokohama by a new railway line. The person to be baptised was a young lady whose husband had been introduced to Catholicism during a trip he made to the centre of Japan with a young missionary. On his return to Tokyo, the gentleman, who was from a noble family, asked to be baptised and later shared his joy with his young wife.

A few days after Marie's baptism, the Yokohama sisters had another joy that was equally sweet. After a hard year of many trials, the sisters had the consolation of opening the doors to about twelve Japanese girls. A few of them were already sufficiently instructed in regard to Christianity and were impatient to be baptised. Their number, by coincidence, equalled the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, to which the sisters were especially consecrated since that unforgettable feast of Pentecost in 1872. Bishop Petijean had the honour of pouring the water of Baptism on the heads of these young girls. Like the sisters, he was overcome with emotion.

Of those first fruits of the sisters' mission in Japan, all of them, except one, responded to what was hoped of them. Later, two of them entered the Infant Jesus (Saint Maur) novitiate, one died in the holiest of disposition, and the other, having contracted a very serious illness, returned to her non-Christian family where she preferred to die rather than accept delicacies that had previously been offered to idols.

Mother Mathilde had to leave Japan for a second time in February 1874. By then, the Yokohama foundation was reasonably well-organised, so she returned to Singapore to devote herself, as before, to the Malayan mission. She was needed to organise the opening of the Malacca convent.

Alas, in March 1875 Mother Mathilde again received sad news from Yokohama. Sister Wilfred had just died and Mother Norbert, the superior of the community had become so seriously ill that she was obliged to undergo a dangerous operation. As usual, the intrepid and untiring foundress did not hesitate. Once again, she braved the stormy sea to be present for the operation; it was a great comfort to the patient who eventually seemed to be completely cured.

In the meantime, at the wish of Bishop Petijean, a new foundation was about to be made in Tokyo. The house was already purchased and its repairs were being done. The location was almost directly opposite "The Catholic Mission" on a ground that was part of an area called "The Grant". It was on the outskirts of the capital and assigned to those foreigners who wished to live close to Tokyo, but far from the residences of the court aristocracy and nobility. It was certainly not a beautiful area. On the contrary, it was very low land that had formerly been a marsh near the sea and had been reclaimed. The name itself was indicative of its origin, it was called "Tsukiji", which means "reclaimed land". At that time, one was not free to choose. It was a matter of settling there or nowhere else. The Japanese authorities were still somewhat wary of foreigners.

On August 14 of that same year, the very humble Tsukiji convent was blessed by Bishop Petijean and the Blessed Sacrament was reserved in a room that served as a chapel.

Having spent three months in Japan, Mother Mathilde returned to Singapore full of joy.

Confidence in Mother Norbert's cure was of very short duration. Towards the end of autumn, a letter from Yokohama dismayed and saddened Mother Mathilde. Her successor in Japan was again stricken by her former malady and obliged to withdraw from her duties. Initially, courageous

and hard on herself, she did not believe her illness was serious. The time came, however, when all remedies were ineffective, the day of reckoning was on the horizon.

On December 10, there were serious complications. For the first time the saintly religious understood that her Divine Master was about to call her. On December 12, she relinquished her soul peacefully to God, in the midst of her sisters whose sorrow was softened and courage revived by the confident calm and serene tranquility with which their Mother accepted death. Her departure was a harsh trial for both newly founded convents. She was a tremendous loss from many points of view.

An acquaintance of Mother Norbert wrote, "I have known few souls that were so persevering in the manner she chose to overcome herself and to arrive at perfection in virtue, few were perfectly mortified in regard to food and work. She seemed to have no preferences."

A detail will long be remembered in regard to Mother Norbert's love of the Blessed Virgin and her fidelity in mortifying herself discreetly and constantly in a hidden manner. For years she held night and day between the folded little finger of her left hand, a statuette of the Blessed Virgin, two or three centimeters long. A devoted nurse, who had discovered that pious and inconvenient skill of love and penance, treasured that statuette of Mary that Mother Norbert held in her cold hands of death.

One of that faithful sister's last joys and, at the same time, the cause of a great preoccupation was the Tokyo house. The beginnings of the latter were even less than modest. The house, built on a narrow piece of ground in a bad location, was extremely small. Without seeing it, there could be no possibility of understanding what the sisters and pupils had to endure. For diverse reasons, it was not feasible to have a kitchen or find a suitable cook. That situation continued for several weeks. Each day, provisions had to be sent from Yokohama, which was an hour's journey by train. Sometimes the dinner did not arrive on time. When it did come, the sisters and pupils were almost at starvation point. The food was always cold on arrival and to reheat it, the sisters had only a saucepan hung over a makeshift stove that consisted of a few bricks placed on top of each other in the middle of the yard. When it rained, which happened frequently, it was necessary to light the fire underneath an umbrella.

One day, from the entrance to the missionary priests' house, one of them became aware of that new and very saddening manner of preparing dinner. Charitably, he put an end to that unique system by arranging that, until a better installation could be found, food was no longer to be brought from Yokohama. The housekeeper at the Mission House was given the charge of preparing the necessary food and bringing it each day to the sisters. There still remained the street to be crossed, which was not without inconvenience. It was a great relief, however, to the sisters who found the arrangement perfect. The slight trouble did not seem of importance to the missionary priests. There were others that were much more serious and peculiar to Japan.

The sisters had barely the great joy of welcoming Mother Mathilde back to the community when a terrible fire broke out. It threatened to destroy the entire property. The Sacred Heart of Jesus, who had always been invoked with confidence and whose picture hung over each door, preserved them from the flames that surrounded them on all sides during a long December night. Their prayers of thanksgiving were said with fervour as were those of their sisters in Malaya.

As a result of that dangerous experience, it became evident to Mother Mathilde that the sisters in Japan could no longer be left without a superior to support and encourage them in their trials. Again, it was the foundress who had to make a decision as to what course should be taken. The following is her account of the matter:

I was very perplexed after Mother Norbert's death. In Malaya, where there were several sisters who were very capable and dedicated to replace her, but because they had been many years in the Torrid Zone, I feared they would be unable to cope with the Japanese climate. Considering myself to be physically more able to endure the Japanese climate, I had to share my concern with Mother General and offered myself as a willing replacement for the outstanding deceased Mother Norbert.

On January 6, 1886, I left Singapore with Sisters Xavier and Emmanuel but without telling the community about the big sacrifice I was having to make. The sisters, who thought I would be absent for a short period, were already trying to guess the approximate date of my return. My heart was torn and I was on the verge of tears. On boarding the ship, I had to go at once to my cabin in order to give free rein to the very strong emotion that I had been trying to suppress. It was only a few weeks later that Sister Gaetan was named Superior of the Singapore community and that my stay in Japan was officially sanctioned by Mother General.

In the past, Mother Mathilde had an opportunity to return to her beloved Singapore several times when her zeal and charity required her to do so. This time, however, she was very much aware that she was leaving for the last time the house that she had dedicated herself to in the course of twenty years. She carefully hid her presentiment that it was a final departure and that there would be no return. She feared that there would be opposition to her following the path that the Divine Master had opened again for her. People had become accustomed to looking upon her as a visible Divine Providence. Those enduring numerous kinds of miseries seemed to have had recourse to her. All, irrespective of religion, who came to knock at the door of her heart were warmly granted access. Among them were strangers, travellers, the sick and dying. Without exception, they were warmly received. She made herself all things to all people, in order to win them to Jesus Christ.

The British Government and the people of Singapore held her in high esteem. She was considered the angel of the city, a beacon showing the way to our Heavenly Home.

With the above tribute in mind, it is easier to understand the tears that were shed by Mother Mathilde on the ship that was due to take her to a new world of people, because it was impossible not to form strong ties where such a mutual and touching rapport had existed.

God rewarded the new sacrifice that the ardent missionary had to make, with a long and magnificent career in Japan. On her arrival there in 1886 at the age of sixty-two, neither she nor those who welcomed her could have envisaged such a lengthy and remarkable future for her.

When Mother Mathilde arrived in Malaya twenty years previously, a priest informed her that the greatest obstacle to doing good there was ignorance of the native language. She faced the same obstacle in Japan. It was complicated by the difficult and very different idioms that had to be learned, and her advanced age at which study and memorisation were problems. She did not hesitate, however, to undertake such an arduous task. This again was an example of her indomitable energy! As a result of her earnest application and practical patience, she finally became sufficiently fluent to say what was necessary and to give religious instruction. Until she knew a text perfectly, she copied and recopied it in Roman letters. She often had to modify her text many times until it could be used in all parts of Japan. Without allowing herself to be discouraged, she repeated and repeated unpleasant tasks related to the study of the Japanese language. She never gave up until her goal was reached.

When in 1876 Mother Mathilde was finally given the responsibility of the Japanese foundations that she had initially organised, the Yokohama section for foreign children was adequately filled, but the number of Japanese children was still very low.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PROGRESSIVE GROWTH OF THE JAPANESE MISSION

In the course of 1878, after the arrival of three new sisters, there were ten nuns all together in the communities of Yokohama and Tokyo. Mother Mathilde usually lived in Yokohama, but periodically she would spend a week in Tokyo where a sister acted as her deputy. Sister Hubert, one of the most recent arrivals, had the charge until 1888 when she was sent to Malaya to administer and take charge of the government hospitals that were assigned to the sisters' care. At that same time the Superior General and her council decided that the Tokyo community should have its own superior, as the number of its sisters and pupils had greatly increased and Mother Mathilde was advancing in years. Since 1878, the pupils, young and older, were growing in number every day, the two houses were becoming inadequate for the influx, but the intrepid Mother Mathilde, influenced solely by her zeal and charity, had no fixed limit in regard to admissions. In order to provide board and lodging for all who sought entrance, she firmly trusted in Divine Providence. It was at that time that she wrote to France, "Ah! If only it were possible for us to get those generous souls who still exist in our country, to realise the good that could be done here, if those young, generous people knew the number of souls that could be helped to gain eternal life! They would fearlessly leave all, and cross the seas in order to bring the Good News to Japan!"

More than ever, the work became immense. Not only did children's baptisms become a daily matter, but those of adults greatly increased too. On each special Church feast, the sisters had the joy of seeing the water of baptism being poured on the heads of twenty or thirty people. Their hearts were full of gratitude as they sang their "Laudate" after those touching ceremonies, as well as after the baptisms that took place on ordinary days!

That pious custom was inspired by their desire to praise God who deigned to make use of them for the salvation of so many souls, and by the recollection of the heroic records kept by the Church in Japan. It is said that the glorious martyrs of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries went to their death singing the "Laudate" and the "Magnificat". In the same way, Mother Mathilde and her sisters were penetrated with joy on seeing growth and ripening in their beautiful land the fruit of the seeds sown by the Japanese martyrs' sacrifice.

A few of the very young children who had been received by the sisters went to their Heavenly Father soon after receiving baptism, to pray for their parents and their country. Many of the others had to be put out to be nursed, that is to say, they were taken by some honest and good women of the neighboring countryside, in return for a modest monthly allowance. They kept and raised the children until they were old enough to be taken back to the sisters in order to begin their education.

Eventually, that little family of young children became so very numerous and costly that it became necessary to refuse children, and to accept only the most unfortunate, weak or sick. Eventually the time came when they had to be satisfied with just replacing those who died or those who, for one reason or another, left one or the other of the two houses.

The results that were achieved within a few years were consoling.

Because of the number of children and the rate at which they were growing, the burdens and difficulties increased too. In Yokohama alone, the total of boys and girls had reached 350. It became necessary to add annexes to the existing buildings.

The first task was to enlarge the orphanage to twice its width, as was said earlier. That was a great improvement. The children who were lodged there were much more comfortable as the increased

width provided additional fortification to the building and greater resistance to the typhoons. Prior to that improvement, storms caused the house to shake like a ship on a rough sea.

When the renovation was completed, it was necessary to face the fact that funds were greatly depleted and that there was still a lack of space to accommodate all the members of the "family" that had come to number 700 children, including those at Yokohama and Tokyo, as well as the little ones who were in the countryside with foster parents. Many of the latter group were old enough to be taken back to the orphanages where they needed a place apart, since they were still too young to follow the regular classes. The tantalising question was, "Where was the money to build?" The amount allocated by the Holy Childhood Organisation was scarcely adequate to feed Mother Mathilde's beloved children. Rice was expensive, appetites were excellent. Then there were times when the children needed new clothing. All was very simple and poor, both in regard to dress and nourishment of the precious proteges. In Europe, the most destitute would not be satisfied, for example, with straw sandals and no socks, even during the severe cold weather.

In their difficulties, the sisters had recourse to Him who said, "Let the little children come to me." It was not in vain! Thanks to the assistance of charitable people, Mother Mathilde soon had the means to build a wooden 'chalet' for the babies. That 'chalet' which was enlarged little by little according to need, eventually had a length of 34 metres. It was not large but satisfied those who were content with what was barely necessary. Eighty little children were sheltered there, and from time to time, there were a few sick ones who had nowhere else to go. At least they received bodily care and consolation. From that humble dwelling many went to heaven. In addition, there were two families who helped as much as they could with the young children in gratitude for the hospitality they had earlier received from the sisters.

In 1882, the indomitable Mother Mathilde had a beautiful chapel built in Yokohama to replace the original small oratory that had become too small for just the sisters and helpers.

In 1884, the foundress managed to finance the construction of a little convent to answer the needs of the moment. A little while later, however, the Japanese section was greatly enlarged and upgraded. Then in 1886, a beautiful Japanese building was constructed. It included a large dining room and the former one was utilised as a large workroom where the girls had more space in which to do their exquisite embroidery and needlework.

That same year at Tokyo, a splendid day and boarding school was constructed in a few months. A little later, some Japanese style rooms were added for the exclusive use of the Japanese boarders.

Between 1890 and 1896, another spacious one-floor house fitted with matting was realised in Yokohama for the very little ones, as the 'chalet' had become inadequate for the 144 children who needed to be lodged there. The 'chalet' was kept in reserve for the sole use of the poor sick, a large number of whom were always welcome. Finally, a spacious bath-house, to which two rooms were added, completed the buildings of the first Yokohama property on the Bluff.

In 1896, as all the existing Yokohama property was being utilised for the works that were in progress, Mother Mathilde purchased from an English judge, at a reasonable price, a nice Western style house with a beautiful garden which was adjacent to the northern limit of the original property. The new acquisition enabled her, through her admirable and tremendous confidence in Divine Providence, to realise her wish to enlarge the boarding school for foreigners, and to inaugurate a paying Japanese boarding school.

Without a doubt, of all the buildings that were erected, as it were, miraculously through the assistance of Divine Providence, and as a result of the venerable missionary's deep faith, the one

that gave her the greatest holy joy was the Yokohama chapel. It might be more appropriate to call it a 'Church', because many parish churches in the countries did not have such a space.

The benediction of the long awaited and much-loved sanctuary took place on June 18, 1883. It was indeed a remarkable occasion for Mother Mathilde, the sisters and the Foreign Mission priests themselves. At that time, it was relatively simple to count the buildings erected on Japanese soil for the glory of the true God. They were so few that it is easy to understand the supernatural joy that caused the virtuous Reverend's soul to tremble, she was so conscious of the honour of offering the Most High that terrestrial dwelling in a country where He was still so little known and so little served. The Foreign Mission priests shared her happiness in a large way, their sentiments being similar. They contributed by their presence and their song to give the touching occasion all the stimulation possible. A large number of foreigners and Japanese responded eagerly to the invitation to attend the ceremony.

The Foreign Mission priests had a double reason for rejoicing on that happy occasion, because Bishop Osouf, their Apostolic Delegate, titular Bishop of Arsinoe (later to become the first Archbishop of Tokyo) had willingly agreed to be the architect of that very graceful edifice. The number of trips he made from the capital to Yokohama for that purpose surpassed all expectations. By the dint of hard work and perseverance, he succeeded in erecting a real little masterpiece, in a pure gothic style of the 13th century. The Japanese people, even though they were not accustomed to the architecture of Christian monuments, were admirably impressed by its precise and elegant proportions.

As several of the Saint Maur Convents in France had contributed financially to the construction of the chapel, it merited to be both an artistic piece of work and a testimonial to the generosity of the Congregation.

In order to build a new chapel in Tokyo, Mother Mathilde profited by a good opportunity to acquire some property adjacent to that of the Tsukiji sisters. As soon as the registration procedures were completed, she made a construction contract with a Chinese gentleman who had impressed her up to then. This took place on May 3 1884. It could be said that the date, the feast of "the Discovery of the Holy Cross" was prophetic, because of the numerous disappointments associated with the work that had been undertaken.

As Bishop Osouf was travelling in the United States, the workmen were left without adequate supervision. Mother Mathilde, however, did very careful planning and her energy would certainly have overcome all difficulties, if the Chinese gentleman had not cheated heavily in regard to the materials purchased, in order to compensate for the money he lost in gambling. The intelligent Mother Mathilde became aware of the deception, but she had no idea of how to modify the walls that she knew were lacking the right proportion of lime. The problem, however, was solved in an unexpected manner, and from a certain point of view, disastrously! On 15 September 1884, a very terrible typhoon struck the entire region. One needs to experience a typhoon gale in order to understand why people voluntarily attribute it to a diabolical intervention. From 10 a.m. on that September 15 until the late evening there were indescribable turbulent winds that battered the Kanto area. The higher the buildings, the more they were damaged by the winds. The Yokohama convent was badly hit, its balcony was blown away, the orphanage roof was ripped off, one wall fell. Luckily, no one was harmed. Only half of the chapel's roof tiles remained, the choir walls cracked, the windows were carried about fifty metres from the chapel and the nave swung around its pillars as if it were in the middle of a turbulent sea. As for the poor wooden 'chalet', already very old and not too solid, it needed to be supported interiorly by planks and props. The forty young boys, proteges of the Holy Childhood and still in the care of the Yokohama convent, leaned hard against the fragile walls of the 'chalet', as if to prevent it from being torn down by the hurricane.

During the same time, Mother Mathilde who was in Tokyo, was experiencing the same scene of devastation. She was looking with anxiety at the walls of the new chapel that were already near the roof, when with a last burst of anger, as it were, the walls were swept down to the ground. As a result, the entire construction had to be redone, however, in that misfortune, there was a certain amount of good. Those badly constructed walls were rebuilt under better conditions. It created, it is true, a great loss of money, as did the devastation at Yokohama. The unshakable trust in Divine Providence of that courageous Superior, however, was once again recompensed by remarkable proofs of divine protection.

Until its completion, the new chapel caused great anxiety and annoyance. Nevertheless, perseverance triumphed over all and the happy day of the new sanctuary's blessing drowned the previous worries. The celebration took place on June 11 1885. It was a renewal of the manifestation at the inauguration of the Yokohama chapel. The sisters again received very precious testimony of appreciation and sympathy. In the absence of Bishop Osouf, Father Midon, his pro-vicar, spoke in the name of his bishop. In words full of faith and kindness he expressed the sentiments that filled many hearts. The Plenipotentiary Minister of France was represented by his secretary from the embassy, Mr. Duatremer, a devoted friend of the sisters. The foreign and Japanese guests were so numerous that they filled the little building and beyond! The Foreign Mission priests, always ready to share the joys and sorrows of their sister collaborators, were responsible for the musical side of the ceremony. They sang the Mass, and at the Elevation, one of them, Father Mutel, a missionary from Korea, who later became Bishop of Seoul, accompanied by the harmonica, gave a beautiful rendering on the flute of Berman's Canticle "Sacred Tabernacle, delightful abode, where the sole object of my love resides," ... It must also be mentioned that the chapels of both Yokohama and Tokyo had each a grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes.

Two new sisters who had arrived in Japan on November 1 1883, were given the charge of bringing a very special present that brought tears to the eyes of Mother Mathilde. It was a large and beautiful statue of Our Lady of Lourdes, as well as a grotto. It arrived in perfect condition, in spite of its extra-large dimension and the difficulty of hand-carrying it up the hill to the Bluff. In Japan at that time, all heavy loads were carried in that manner! The statue was installed on the spot where the altar of the first primitive chapel had been. Our Lady of Lourdes was in a room that opened on to the new chapel.

Father Midon, chaplain of the Yokohama convent for fifteen years, that is from 1873 to 1888, undertook to place around the grotto stones and little rocks that had been sent from France. From that time onward, he never entered the chapel without first praying before the statue of Mary Immaculate. He also frequently offered fresh or unusual flowers to her, sometimes he took the trouble to bring them from Tokyo. His love of the Virgin Mary was touching and he was responsible in a large measure for communicating that love to the young Christians at the convent. Mary's little sanctuary became very dear to them. On numerous occasions they were there to present their requests of the moment to the Blessed Mother. One of their preferred practices of devotion was, on the feasts of the Blessed Virgin, to keep a perpetual recitation of the rosary going. Groups of fifteen replaced each other from morning until night. It was rarely that their testimony of filial love was left without some special graces. It was remarkable that there were numerous conversions as a result of those days of prayer.

A similar devotion to the Blessed Virgin existed in the Tokyo house which had also received a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes.

As a conclusion to the account of Mother Mathilde's construction projects in Japan, it is necessary to add that the frequent typhoons and earthquakes obliged her to undertake numerous repairs.

The typhoon of 1894 left her with no alternative but to entirely reconstruct the two principal buildings of Yokohama and Tokyo. It was astonishing to see her submit to the necessity of shouldering the huge expense involved. It was obvious that God helped her in extraordinary ways.

For the virtuous Mother Mathilde, the great joy of witnessing the blessing of the Tokyo Chapel was tinged with very great sadness.

Sister Gregory, the last of the dear companions who had left France with her on September 18 1852 for Malaya and who had assisted again with the Japanese foundation in 1872, had been feeling for some time that death was near. She had been affected by a fatal disease. Her days in this world were numbered. For her, the hard fight between life and death was very brief. Three months later, that dear sister who had been selflessly devoted to Mother Mathilde and her undertakings, died in Yokohama, having religiously endured great suffering. By a remarkable coincidence her death occurred on September 18 1885, thirty-three years to the day after her departure from Europe.

Very humbly, Sister Gregory had always devoted herself to the work that was confided to her. Her desire to assist in the zealous undertakings of her venerable Superior caused her to be devotedly industrious and untiring in her effort to avoid any necessary expense in regard to the ever increasing upkeep of the growing family sheltered under Mother Mathilde's charitable wings. Nothing disheartened her. She had concern for the orphans, the sick, and people of any nationality or religion. The last great joy of her life was the celebration of Mother Mathilde's Golden Jubilee.

For some time before 1885, Mother Mathilde had been obliged to abandon her sea-trips. From her arrival on June 10 1872 until the day she returned half-dead in 1881 to Japan, the courageous Mother had made twelve voyages on those stormy seas. In the Far East, everyone was accustomed to looking on her as the Superior General's right arm, so they had to be reconciled to her absence from important events. In a word, there was always a need for her virtuous wisdom and advice, for the light that came from her experience. Sometimes it was difficult to explain matters clearly in a letter or to iron out problems. Mother Mathilde, for that reason, never hesitated to obey, nor to ignore the filial pleading of her sisters. She crossed and re-crossed that perilous route. The voyage from Japan to Singapore took from fifteen to seventeen days. Once, however, the ship which took her from Japan to Malaya sank with its crew on the return trip. Without a doubt, God preserved His servant from all shipwreck, but how many times would she not have trembled, if her soul had been less strong. She chose neither favourable seasons nor occasions, she went where her duty called her, and surely, she experienced at sea, hours and days filled with anguish.

Even though Mother Mathilde was always valiant through will power and mortification, she must have been aware that old age was approaching. Even if one were robust and in the time of life, nothing tests the constitution more than sudden and frequent changes of temperature, especially going from great heat to a cold climate. In time, she was seriously affected by such changes of temperature, but never so much as during the voyage of 1880 that she undertook at the formal request of Mother Aloysia, the then Superior General.

Mother St. Gaetan and her first English postulants had arrived in Singapore. Their rather prompt decision to join the Congregation and leave for Malaya required serious discernment before they could receive the religious habit. The Superior General was of the opinion that the wisdom and experience of the Foundress of the Mission should help Mother Gaetan and the Novice Mistress, Mother Spooner, with that delicate matter. On her arrival in Singapore, Mother Mathilde was sixty-seven years of age and, as was her custom, she devoted herself wholeheartedly to her task which did not stop at interviewing the young people who had arrived. It also required her to make

numerous visits to other establishments of her first mission. There was no shortage of contradictions at Penang from relevant people in regard to matters concerning property and construction.

The severe heat to which she had become unaccustomed in Japan, weakened and drained her. Her resistance seemed to have been spent when she set out on her return journey to Japan. The voyage, far from helping her to regain her strength, caused her to become generally more ill. As soon as she arrived in Hong Kong, she realised that it was impossible for her to continue her voyage. Fortunately, the very ill Mother received the greatest kindness and the most delicate charity in the convent of the Saint Paul de Chartres Sisters. The superior welcomed the sick traveller with sincere affection and gave her the most expert care, so much so, that her condition improved rapidly. She had been suffering from a violent fever that caused pain throughout her entire body.

In Japan, the sisters were preparing a special welcome for their foundress, after her long absence. Great was their consternation when she failed to arrive on schedule and when they learned the cause, immediately, the most fervent prayers were offered for her recovery and the sisters were soon notified that she was able to continue her voyage. But whether the effort was too much for her weakened condition, or that her malady had come on with a redoubled force, hardly had she returned to Yokohama than she became more ill than before. For a long time, she remained between life and death and had even to receive the last rites. But God, once again, heard the prayers that were being offered in her regard. Not only was she cured of her sickness, but for more than thirty years, she was permitted to add many flowers to the already very beautiful crown that she was preparing for eternity.

From the time of her sickness, however, she remained unhealthy. She had chronic pains in her limbs, especially in her hands. Her fingers were always swollen, sometimes they were more so, and became more like a painful knotted string that if touched would seem to be on fire. Her hands were extremely sensitive, and if someone unknowingly shook her hand or just touched it, the poor Mother had to have recourse to her indomitable courage in order to refrain from uttering a cry of pain.

In ordinary circumstance she joked about her malady which did not hinder her from doing embroidery, knitting or other beautiful needlework, nor from making her own bed, as long as she had the strength.

CHAPTER FOUR

MOTHER MATHILDE'S CHIEF WORKS IN JAPAN

Before going any further with the remarkable chronological events in the saintly Mother Mathilde's life, it is important to glimpse at her daily schedule as a means of grasping a more intimate moral picture of her religious fidelity and of becoming aware of the exterior framework in which she passed her well-filled day. It was evident that she could not be satisfied with just the pious atmosphere that was evident in the convents. She was concerned with stimulating the apostolic ardour that surrounded her and doing her utmost to contribute to its initiation and growth. This she achieved by pious readings, lofty thoughts and every word she spoke. All her activities were stamped with an intense desire to procure the glory of God. If the fire of the most persevering zeal and supernatural diligence were found to be alive in each of the communities where she spent some time, without a doubt, next to God, it would be due to her.

While referring to those works to which the sisters, under her direction and impulse applied themselves, it would be impossible not to recognize in them her influence, her touch and her very remarkable dedication. It is rare that a person placed in charge of a religious institution, or any organisation, does not leave a personal imprint on it. A glance at its works reveals the personality, character, multiple and astonishing works from whom they emanated. To study the diverse, charitable, multiple and astonishing works that expanded through the Saint Maur convents in Malaya and Japan during the inspiring lifetime of that devout and outstanding religious is to know her better. The finger of God was there ... God was with her.

Mother Mathilde's apostolic work can be briefly summarized as follows:

- she loved the poor
- she instructed and brought up the children who were given or confided to her
- she took care of the sick, either by visiting them at home or in hospital, or distributing free medication, or kindly assisting them in the little hospices that were attached to the convents
- in her advanced years she occupied herself especially with the evangelisation of the richer class of young girls and women.

A few details on each of the above points will clarify the extent and efficacy of her activity in her undertakings.

In this account, it is proper to give the first and very honourable place to the work which was always and everywhere the object of her predilection: the evangelisation of the poor.

The Venerable Mother openly declared that she came to Japan expressly to assist the poor, to support the needs of the abandoned. The most unfortunate were always the first to be helped. That was the order of her charity. She delighted in that expression of faith and mercy, recalling that the Saint Maur Institute had been established at its origin, in order to educate the children of the ordinary people, the poor; and that its first works were known as "the Charitable Schools".

She certainly never overlooked anybody. Her zeal extended to all classes of society, but her evident preference was for the poor. Although she always had at Yokohama a boarding school for children of the upper-class foreign families, during the first twenty years of her life in Japan, the needy children who were brought to her were the sole beneficiaries of her charity.

It was to the underprivileged that Mother Mathilde had devoted her life and she referred to them with an inimitable intonation as "Our Children". She thought incessantly of them and worked diligently for them. She contrived in a thousand ways to provide them with the spiritual nourishment of Christian teaching and material food to ensure their existence. It was also

necessary to secure the future of those numerous children who inhabited the Yokohama and Tokyo houses. It was not only necessary to instruct them fully in the Christian religion, and to inculcate in them the practice of that religion, but it was also very important to provide them with the means of earning an honest livelihood in later life. To achieve that practical aim, in addition to giving them the elementary education required by the Japanese government, they were taught needlework, embroidery and other similar skills that would enable a woman to earn a living. She was like a Mother to them, and, as in Malaya, she had the responsibility of getting her girls married. In addition, she usually gave some advance money generously to the young couple, along with a modest trousseau. Her solicitude did not stop there. She never lost sight of her children when they left the shelter of the convents. She enquired about them, and made sure they were encouraged and stimulated when she was unable to do so herself. She loved to see them and to get to know their children.

At the time of Mother Mathilde's death, out of the three thousand Japanese children that she provided with a home and an education, and helped to become Christians, about fifteen of them joined the Saint Maur Institute as associate or helping sisters. When asked to express their feelings about the Mother they had lost at the time of her death, they opened their hearts in the following manner,

"Ah.' She loved the Japanese children. At one time we were more than 350 together in Yokohama and more than 180 of those had come as infants.

How concerned she was about our health. She was always interested in those who finished at the school and had left. She saw that they were well placed and were able to make good marriages. She had presents for them on certain occasions, just as a very kind grandmother would do. When they brought their children to visit her, it gave her much joy."

Once a year she organised a reunion for the former students who were able to be present. She had no greater happiness than to welcome them. Two of the sisters were assigned to visit the sick ones who had come to Yokohama from the countryside. In order not to tire the sisters too much, each time they had to go to the hospital she paid for a rickshaw to take them there. If the journey was rather long, she did not go to bed until they had returned. Above all, she wished to know if the sisters had "succeeded" in enlightening, consoling, and opening the gate of Heaven for the sick one that was visited.

"Our Venerable Mother was concerned for both our bodies and our souls. She provided remedies for those who happened to be unfortunate and buried them when they died.

Whenever it was a question of helping a soul for eternity, she refused nothing. To us it would be no exaggeration to say that she was a second Saint Francis Xavier. When we went to her to discuss a personal problem, immediately she filled us with courage. Briefly she would say, "Don't worry, I'm going to pray for you." Whenever she spoke about us, she never used the word "orphans" it was always "Our Children'.

Having had before our eyes such a beautiful person, was a grace for which we shall be eternally grateful to God."

Children, the elderly, the sick, the dying, all those whom she could reach caused her to be restless until she had put them on the road to salvation. For that reason, she greatly appreciated visits to the sick and the poor; she considered them as excellent occasions for doing good. She concerned herself wholeheartedly with such visits, either by going herself or sending some sisters to bring help and consolation to the afflicted and the poor whose trials had been made known to her. She

also arranged for some medication to be given to those who came requesting it at either of the convents.

The dispensary that had been installed at the Yokohama convent became quickly known to all the poor of the city. God permitted that the sister in charge of the medication for the needy gained a reputation that any doctor would have envied. She was referred to as, "The great doctor on the hill." That famous doctor, however, confined herself to prescribing the most simple remedies that anyone without a medical background could use, such as fortifying tonics and first aid dressings for just simple cuts or injuries. There was even a time when people who were more secure financially requested a visit from the dear sister who knew her limitations and did not over prescribe medication. Many profited by her free access to so many houses in order to become aware of the sick who were in danger of death, or little children who were about to enter eternity. It goes without saying that those last mentioned never set out on that last important journey without being adorned in wedding garments for the great festive meeting with God.

The Western hospitals in Japan were not what foreigners were accustomed to in their native countries. Rather, they were well-equipped, paying clinics that were frequented by the wealthy. In addition, each of the larger countries that were represented in Japan in the late nineteenth century had its hospital which was uniquely reserved for its own subjects. The French one that served civilians, sailors and soldiers adjoined the convent property, which was very fortunate for Mother Mathilde, who paid a daily visit there in the hope of gleaning something from the Father's celestial "store-house".

As for the Japanese hospitals, there were some huge ones, especially in Tokyo. Some of them were designed for specific maladies, for example, smallpox, cholera or other badly contagious diseases.

The Reverend Mother and her sisters, or some people who were attached to the convent had the permission to enter any of those hospitals where they frequently had the opportunity to accomplish some touching work of mercy, both spiritual and corporal. At certain times those works became very extensive and important, as when there was an outbreak of smallpox or cholera. In spite of all the precautions that were taken, those maladies were apparent rather frequently in Japan. At such times the "harvest" was richer than usual. Nothing deterred the courageous visitors, they managed to be admitted in all hospitals, no matter how serious the epidemic, and they were rewarded with numerous baptisms as death drew near for the afflicted. One year, it was estimated that about 600 cholera victims received the sacrament of regeneration. At Tokyo, because of its vastness and size, there was a still greater opportunity for that type of apostolate. In due course, a large number of pupils from Tokyo convent preferred to remain attached to the Saint Maur Institute as tertiaries, in order to devote themselves to good works. Baptism of the dying was one of their blessed occupations.

On one occasion, even the goodwill of a non-Christian Japanese nurse was used! She agreed to become an apostle of the truth for the dying in a large Tokyo hospital, where for some time it was difficult to gain admission. The sisters taught the progressing catechist what she should say to the patients and how to administer the sacrament of baptism. The undertaking was so extraordinary, that the tentative catechist was crowned with success. Later the obliging nurse was recompensed with the gift of Faith.

Not content with so many beautiful results and being guided by a supernatural predilection for the poor, Mother Mathilde had wished to be in a position to shelter within her convents, all the miserable, the abandoned and the sick that were discovered when the sisters visited their humble hovels. She could not rest until she managed to provide both in Tokyo and Yokohama a few

square metres of housing to serve in a small way as hospices. On those poor Japanese straw mats, sheltered by some wooden laths that served as roofing and paper-covered doors that helped to screen the patients from the outside world, a number of sick people were nursed, consoled, helped and baptised.

The following is what Mother Mathilde wrote herself in a letter of November 30, 1893, addressed to the Superior General, Mother Aloysia,

“For about twelve years, we have had in both Tokyo and Yokohama our own hospices. There we receive the poor and the most abandoned. We are responsible for all of the expenses, but there is nothing to prevent us from speaking to the sick about God or making Him known and loved. The little wooden rooms where we receive and care for those unfortunate ones are more useful for doing good than the big hospitals of Singapore and Penang.”

In Yokohama, the above-mentioned hospice had previously served as a “Chalet” for the babies. It could accommodate about twenty patients. In Tokyo the sisters had rented, at a short distance from the convent, a large enough house that could shelter from twenty to thirty sick people.

All types of miserable human beings received a welcome to this poor establishment. It could have been possible to make a complete study of the innumerable maladies caused by the physical and moral afflictions encountered.

The generous Mother spared nothing in order to ease the many sufferings of her beloved sick ones. A doctor used to visit them and devoted nurses, supplied by the sisters and tertiaries, gave themselves and their expertise day and night. At the same time, the afflicted ones heard about God, of whom they were ignorant.

As they suffered, they were encouraged by the immortal hope that comes with Faith. It was very rare for anyone who died at the hospice to do so without a "passport" to eternal happiness.

The patients under the care of the sisters were entirely free to accept or refuse the religious teachings that were given. Once it happened that a young man strongly refused to give his assent to the words of Faith. His freedom was respected.

At the sisters' hospices, however, refusals similar to the above mentioned one were rare. Suffering and poverty were two great providers for our Father's House. Most of Mother Mathilde's beloved patients found in the shelter not only physical comfort and nourishment but also health for the soul. Many of them appeared to be ravenous for eternal truths and died as chosen ones. The freedom of the individual was always respected.

For about twenty years, Mother Mathilde and her sisters devoted themselves unsparingly to the above-mentioned works. In the meantime, it became evident that Japan was changing greatly. Its war with China in 1891 had revealed, both within the country and abroad, the immense progress it had made scientifically and otherwise, through its observation of Western civilization. Until then, the socially high Japanese kept their daughters apart from foreigners in regard to what concerned the latter.

Earlier, the instruction of noble Japanese ladies was limited to what was strictly necessary. As for moral formation, it was considered as a very special and delicate art strongly related to the Japanese mentality, which was an enigma to foreigners. That part of education was exclusively "national" and it was guarded carefully and jealously.

For many years, high-ranking Japanese refrained from entrusting their daughters to European or American teachers. The foreign missionaries were no exception. In addition, the convent schools of that time were mostly run for the poor, and so did not have the programme that the higher-class

children would require. There were, of course, boarding schools in both Tokyo and Yokohama for the foreign children, but neither of them was a resource for the wealthy Japanese whose parents, following their national prejudice, insisted that they did not wish their daughters to absorb the European or American cultures. Therefore, it was impossible to combine the children of the East and West.

Little by little, however, there was a remarkable change of attitude amongst the Japanese. In both public and private schools, the curricula underwent a change. Many Japanese people had travelled abroad, so society became aware of numerous foreign ideas and dress styles. Gradually there was a remarkable change in mutual relations.

Foreign customs increased, while many of Japan's outdated ones disappeared.

The Imperial Court itself led the way in that trend. If the Emperor retained old-style Japanese customs in his private apartments, he received foreign guests in a Western manner. His dress style lost its greatly treasured Japanese form. For Imperial Palace festivals only, western apparel was acceptable. With such a change of outlook, a need became apparent for a broader education than that of former times. Above all, it needed to be "different". This applied also to female education. While maintaining its Japanese element, it had to provide at least an introduction to a European language and the customs of that continent's society.

At last, the door was opened for a new form of indirect education and undoubtedly the opportunity was not to be neglected. Until that time, it was the poor alone who were in direct contact with the Catholic religion. In a general manner, Japanese society had been shielded from its influence. What was missing to the ardent missionaries was not the desire to propagate the faith, it was the opportunity to mix with the upper social class. That very welcome opportunity came with the change of Japanese outlook and circumstances.

Since the Japanese men wished to give their wives and daughters a knowledge of foreign languages, the way of life in the "old World," and art, it would follow then that their daughters and wives would be in contact with religious teachers. Until then, the Japanese attitude towards Christianity would change, the sisters would refrain from exposing the pupils to Christian Doctrine, but at least they would see it practised before their eyes, which was very important. Being curious, intelligent and keen as they were, the pupils would soon observe and have a clearer understanding of Christianity. Most probably they would return to their homes full of respect for their teachers and esteem for the religion that inspired their lives. That in itself would be a beautiful achievement and the beginning of a spiritual conviction. No doubt that step would lead to the study of religion and the reception of baptism. The process would, of course, take time. It would, however, be a remote preparation for the regeneration of those souls who might otherwise have remained far from the knowledge of religious truths.

Mother Mathilde realised that it was important to no longer hesitate in regard to that new type of work that other religious denominations, by means of their books and conferences, their relationships and schools had already more or less penetrated the different levels of society and were beginning to exercise a considerable influence there.

On the other hand, the work for the poor was undergoing some inevitable changes. In all towns the government was establishing public schools with the objective of making a national and uniform education available to everyone. Education became obligatory and almost free of charge.

Moreover, a still more important law was enforced throughout the country, particularly concerning the authentic documents related to one's civil status. There were no more children without a family, at least on paper (which was easy in the light of the adoption system, that came to be recognised).

In the absence of a father or mother, the relation or guardian was responsible for the child. To be known as "abandoned" was the sense in which henceforth "orphan" would be understood in Japan. Likewise, for a child himself, or his family, to be brought up by strangers in a school run by those strangers, without contributing even a little towards the educational expense, became much less acceptable than previously. From day to day, and particularly when it was a question of girls, the life style changed considerably. Instead of being a burden to their families, parents were happy to use them for work because of the continuous industrial progress and commerce. Occupations formerly unknown became available in factories and spinning mills. Numerous young workers were being employed there,

It was not that the lot of the ordinary people's children was to be envied, nor that their eternal salvation was more assured in the schools and "homes" provided by the Japanese government in order to support those who were without any resource, but it explains the decrease in the number of children applying to Mother Mathilde's houses.

The ardent missionary submitted painfully to the new conditions, while maintaining her perfectly reasonable conviction that evangelisation of the people by means of Christian schools was an essential work. She went to her grave regretting her inability to see such a work begun in her life time for the less gifted, financially and socially. She would never have admitted, on any pretext whatsoever, that, for example, factories (often just pure exploitation of the poor) or schools deprived of the divine ideal, were the best for the future of her humble favourites, but the time came when she was morally obliged not to speak, even to friends, of her personal apprehensions in regard to the pursuit of good. She accepted in silence the non-realisation of her charitable dream.

No doubt, Mother Mathilde's dreams were too beautiful; and does it not still happen today that such holy inspirations are wrecked because of misunderstandings? She was aware that such trials existed. From then on, God's faithful servant limited herself to being consumed by the most ardent desire to spread the faith more extensively. She knew that "the reign of God on earth" would never be completely accomplished, since He wished us to await His coming. She did not, however, ignore the fact that our holy desires are a sort of remedy for our helplessness, and a means of making up to God for the glory that the world failed to give Him.

From then on, without neglecting the poor (she took good care not to!), she added to her original works, courses for the upper class in foreign languages, fine arts, and European etiquette. They were begun in Tokyo where the trend to move towards "Old World" customs were more pronounced. At about the same time, however, that is in 1887, a similar move took place in Yokohama. When Japanese pupils applied for admission, they were accepted.

Once the idea had entered her mind, Mother Mathilde became more and more favourable towards its execution. From 1887 to 1899, that new work developed in a most simple manner, as was her customary approach to all her undertakings, even those that she was very confident would succeed. More humble beginnings could not be imagined in regard to the fairly large establishments of Tokyo and Yokohama, where a large number of young, rich and sometimes noble Japanese people were permitted to study foreign languages, fine arts, and European etiquette.

The suburbs of Tsukiji, where the sisters' convent was located, because of its distance from the centre of the city and because of the disrepute associated with the concessions accorded to foreigners, in the eyes of many, was not a site suitable for the new work that was to be established.

Mrs. Kanegaye, a young and rich widow from an important family and who was Mother Mathilde's devoted godchild, sincerely used all her ingenuity to persuade her godmother to start a class, completely separated from the other works, exclusively for the "Kazokon", the name given to the nobility and meaning "flowers". Using her influence and her own finances, she rented a nice house in Kojimachi, one of the most beautiful areas of Tokyo. It was inhabited by the upper class. In due course, two sisters travelled there each morning from Tsukiji to give French and Fine Arts courses.

The opening of Kojimachi took place on January 15 1887. About twenty people sought admittance and seventeen were accepted. To welcome them there was a little Japanese festive ceremony at which there was no shortage of tea, cakes and salutations!

Unfortunately, for various reasons, that first attempt did not succeed where it had begun. The sisters' daily commute by rickshaw was long and extremely tiring. As Mother Mathilde was very concerned for their health, she searched around for a suitable place that would be closer to the convent. She found it but not without difficulty. It was a short distance from Tsukiji. A Protestant pastor agreed to rent it to her on a temporary basis. On September 10 1887 the seventeen pupils of Kojimachi arrived to continue their studies at Number 5 of the European Concession.

The class of extern people remained under the protection of Mrs. Kanegaye but it was no longer in her name.

The new installation was only temporary. Another was erected on the convent ground, completely separated from the other parts of the establishment. It was hoped that, in this way, the new pupils would consider themselves sufficiently separated from the classes destined for the poor. It was an expensive undertaking.

The boarding and day facility which was begun on April 30 1888 was finished on September 15 of the same year. Mother Domitelle, previously a member of the Yokohama community, who was named superior of the Tokyo convent at the beginning of 1888, did her best, with the welcome assistance of the devoted Mother Mathilde, to develop the new undertaking. She added a new building, the rooms of which were in complete Japanese style so that the young girls who were admitted could live according to their Japanese culture and customs. The teachers and courses were exactly in line with government regulations. In spite, however, of relative success, the boarding school, in what concerned its Japanese element, did not develop according to expectations, nor respond to the needs of the times. The "Kazokon" stayed at home except for a few who came expressly for private tutoring from the sisters. Definitely, Tsukiji was too far away from the homes of the upper class and the new buildings were of more service to the European boarders.

Archbishop Osouf, of Tokyo, the Foreign Mission priests and those foreigners who appreciated Mother Mathilde's works, with their remarkable spirit, and her sound judgement, insisted more than ever that what seemed impossible should be done, in order to prepare a favourable future for Catholicism in this "Emirate" that appeared to have a mysterious destiny and much hope.

It was necessary then to further study the possibility of establishing a school for the "Kazokon" in another area.

Karouko (Spring Princess), the Imperial Spouse of Moutsu Hito, the Emperor of the Restoration, had founded, not far from the Imperial Palace, a magnificent establishment where young girls of the nobility were receiving an excellent education. It could be compared to St. Cyr. A little distance from that distinguished school, in an elegant neighbourhood of Aoi-cho, on a hill called "Renzaka", Mother Domitella rented a beautiful house and garden. There classes, uniquely for

the upper classes, were organised. Daily, because of the distance, some sisters were transported from Tsukiji to the property in order to give the required courses.

The proximity of the Empress' palace made it possible for her proteges, when their Japanese classes were finished, to go willingly to the sisters in order to supplement their instruction and receive some European education for which they were eager.

Gradually, it became evident that such a combination had a future. Without delay a Japanese-style building, with a garden and out-houses was purchased. It was situated almost next to the Palace, in the area of Hirakawa-cho.

The above different attempts and enterprises took place between 1895 and 1900. From that last date, the "Kazokon" courses developed rapidly and extensively. Towards 1910, the Japanese pupils that included extern people and boarders of the upper class, became so numerous, that eventually it was necessary to transport the Tsukiji house to another area. The required site for a new and spacious building was found, still quite near the Imperial Palace and in the same area of Kojimachi where the first "Kazokon" had been attempted. As it was not possible to construct a building for the poor on the same site, it was Yokohama that received those dear children, but Mother Mathilde was not there to welcome them. At the beginning of 1912, God had called her to her eternal rest.

In Yokohama, the establishment of a school where a fee was required, did not cause the same difficulty as in Tokyo. The first pupils who were accepted did not refuse to mix with the Europeans in the dormitories, dining room and recreation areas. Nor did they object to following the same classes as the orphans in all that concerned the Japanese side of their studies. When their numbers increased, Mother Mathilde bought land and a house adjoining the existing property. The house was allotted to the European boarders who were rapidly increasing in number.

By 1900 a Japanese school was constructed, it included all that was necessary to satisfy the requirements and programmes of the Japanese government.

In a very short time, the number of Japanese pupils greatly increased and they became very attached to their school which was both a day and boarding facility. According to the Japanese custom, it was given a symbolic name, "Koran Gakko" which means, "The Orchid School".

CHAPTER FIVE

APOSTOLATE WITH THE POOR

At this stage a question might be asked, In an ardent quest for souls, much work and supernatural management was undertaken. Was the result valuable?

Those Japanese people that included the underprivileged and the dying, the pupils, rich and poor, the orphans and all those who were the object of dear Mother Mathilde's untiring zeal, among them the hospitalised sick of many nations, have they responded worthily to her incessant efforts to get them on the right path to their eternal salvation? The following is a brief and general response to that interrogation.

It has often been asked if the Japanese who become Christians are really committed to Christianity. Their sincerity and reliability have been questioned. Let us glance at the overall picture. Has there not been among the Japanese as amongst all human beings, the weak and the inconstant, that is not surprising since we all share the same fragile human nature. It cannot be said, however, that they are less courageous than other people in maintaining their faith. In order to be convinced of that point, one has only to be aware of the history of the three-hundred-year-old Japanese Church. It is a veritable history of martyrdom. Every imaginable suffering was endured by the Japanese Christians.

Again, there is the example of the martyrs' descendants who, during two centuries, remained faithful to their religion without the help of priests or the sacraments to strengthen them. During the long period of over two hundred and fifty years, they were rejected everywhere and threatened with death. They knew how to conserve their faith and to transmit it to their children as their best and unique treasure.

When we look at them in retrospect, we have the right to conclude that the Japanese Christians have shown themselves to be extraordinarily faithful in preserving their faith.

The fruits of Mother Mathilde's apostolate are a further proof of the Japanese religious sincerity and commitment. In receiving such a multitude of children and providing them with religious instruction and an opportunity to put it into practice, the saintly Mother had as her aim to help them live honestly and in a Christian manner. Her hope was that when they would return later to their own national milieu, they would bring their faith with them and be models for other Christians.

The drawback that limited the success of the saintly Mother's plan was that there was no similar plan for boys. Frequently, she begged the brothers concerned with Christian schools to dedicate themselves to such a need. On learning that they were unable to cooperate, she wrote to Don Bosco himself, requesting his help with the evangelisation of the poor children of Japan. The saintly man had a letter sent to her, which he signed himself. (She kept it as a relic!) It stated that for the time being all his suitable subjects were being sent to South America. It was the period when the venerable religious was founding the Patagonian missions, which had been confided to both his male and female congregations by the Pope, Leo XIII, himself. He did assure her, however, that he shared her sentiments in regard to Japan's need for Christian schools for boys.

Mother Mathilde had to abandon her long-cherished hope of seeing her first work being completely successful. She had hoped that a Christian school for boys of the lower and middle classes would eventually provide Christian husbands of the same social rank for her girls. Without any fault on her part, her work on behalf of her orphans was destined to remain incomplete.

At that time, in a country where women counted for very little, a young girl needed remarkable courage to remain faithful to the practice of her religion when she returned to her family where she was the only Christian among her relatives and neighbours. Many, however, had the necessary courage, they were excellent examples. Those who had the happiness of making Christian marriages either in Yokohama, Tokyo, or even further away, generally became good mothers of families whose Christian children increased the number of believers grouped here and there around the missionaries.

If, as a consequence of their living situation or the various difficulties encountered because of their work, some girls found it impossible to persevere in regard to the practice of their religion, they rarely lost their faith. In most cases the voice of conscience spoke to them, even after many years. When a favourable opportunity arose, they returned to the Christian life that had been interrupted.

On the Japanese islands, leprosy was rampant. At times it passed unperceived and consequently was easily communicated to others by someone who was afflicted. Then later, when its existence became noticeable because of exterior open wounds and scars, the Japanese would forget at such a time, their usual concern for the misfortunes and trials of other compatriots. The lepers, having become an insurmountable horror, (it required Christian charity to dare approach them) were relegated to faraway places, most often to the middle of the fields, in miserable huts that were in ruins. When the latter did not exist, in summer the lepers were without shelter from the strong sun, and in winter they were exposed to the rude winds and bitter cold. A few handfuls of rice were thrown to them from a distance, cold water carried in a bowl was placed at arms' length from them. It was in such a manner that they finished their agony, bereft of all, and deprived of any help and consolation. It was expressly forbidden to transport those sick ones to any inhabited location. The only possibility was to help them on the spot and try tearfully to assuage their sufferings a little. This work of love Mother Mathilde and her sisters did with all the love of their hearts when they became aware of the existence of some lepers in the near countryside. They brought them tea and hot food. Above all, they lovingly shared "the Good News" and filled them with radiant hope. Several of them were baptised.

CHAPTER SIX

APOSTOLATE WITH THE SICK IN HOSPITALS

As Mother Mathilde was deprived of the consolation of extending the walls of the convent hospices in proportion to the abundance of charity that filled her heart, she compensated by her diligent visits, especially when there was an epidemic of some kind, to the big hospitals of the different countries and also the Japanese government hospitals. She gave herself the task of going personally to the "General Hospital" which was close to the Yokohama convent. That hospital was better known as the "French Hospital" because the French people who frequented it were in the majority.

Sometimes the visits from the convent were simply a distraction for the patients, and as such, were already an act of charity, but frequently they became more a means of touching hearts. Thanks to the latter factor, many of the dying received the last rites. Catholics who had neglected their religious duties for a long time began to take them seriously; some non-Christians asked to be baptised.

With the passing of the years, walking became a problem for the aging Mother Mathilde. Having to go just next door facilitated a labour that was very dear to her heart. Each morning, after a rapid breakfast, which followed mass and some prayer time, she was seen making her way quickly to her dear sick ones. She visited them all, irrespective of their religious beliefs or nationality. It did not matter whether they were rich or less fortunate, officers or sailors. They were free to speak openly to her. She was greatly respected for what she was. More than one of those she visited treasured the memory of her conversations that sustained them when death drew near. Her attitude in dealing with those who were in need of spiritual help was as discreet as it was ardent. She continued to assist as much as possible with the urging of grace but never went too far with her advice and exhortations.

Mother Mathilde was especially happy when there were some French people who needed her attention at the hospital. That opportunity came her way many times. In 1885, at the end of the Tonkin War, and in 1901 as a result of the Boxer Insurrection, they were numerous French sailors and soldiers who were sent to Yokohama to be cured of the maladies they had contracted during the hostilities. For her compatriots, her work was not without fruit.

Of the contingent of soldiers and sailors that arrived in 1885, not one of those who died left this world without the last rites, and the funeral services were held in the convent chapel. Those who were eventually cured after a lengthy stay in the hospital, had been encouraged in their sufferings and were helped to recall with appreciation the Christian teaching of their youth. Many of them returned to their religious duties and attended the Mass that was said for them on Sundays in the convent chapel.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE FIRST SEEDS OF THE JAPANESE BOARDING SCHOOLS

When Mother Mathilde left this world, the results of the new schools and courses for the upper-class Japanese were not yet complete. She was able to rejoice, however, because of the very promising prospects.

She, who already loved so sincerely the young Japanese of the ordinary people, with their beautiful native qualities, was able to convince herself that the children of the more privileged class, far from resembling the description of many superficial and light writers, were gifted with a winning native disposition. She saw them as being sweet, modest, hardworking, affectionate and patient. No doubt, she was convinced that, in order to become real moral treasures for their families and their country, they needed the Christian faith.

The first two pupils of the Tokyo Boarding School were Miss Kodzene Goto and Mrs. Kanegaye. Both of them expressed the desire to become Christians and for that step they obtained all the necessary permission from their families. Until then, women in Japan had little independence. In the case of the paying pupils, the rule was that they could not be given religious instruction without the written permission of their parents.

Count Goto was one of those intelligent men, highly qualified and humane, who founded modern Japan. He himself had no very strong beliefs, but being broad-minded, he saw no inconvenience in permitting his daughter to become a Christian. She was called Kodzene, and was a candid young girl of simple tastes, who remained very innocent in the non-Christian society of her environment. She was the perfect type of Japanese nobility, very gentle and peaceful.

As for Mrs. Kanegaye, she was a young widow, generous and sincere in her desire to embrace the Christian faith. She knew how to be amiable and obliging with her teachers in many situations. The latter trait was very noticeable when the first classes were being initiated at Kojimachi.

Both Kodzene and Mrs. Kanegaye were baptised in the Cathedral at Tsukiji on Pentecost Sunday, June 1, 1886. Kodzene's godparents were Mr. and Mrs. Bertin and those of Mrs. Kanegaye's were Mr. and Mrs. Rosseler. Mr. Bertin was a very renowned architect in the French navy. He had been lent to the Japanese government and was responsible for designing the dock yards and ships from which the very powerful Japanese Navy had its beginning. Mr. Rosseler, a Catholic from Wurtemberg, forced out of Germany by Bismark and his "Kulturkampf", was a renowned specialist in law, in the service of Japan. Together with a French gentleman, Mr. Boissonnade, he created a new code of law for the Emperor. Mrs. Rosseler was a delightful English lady who became a Catholic and had Mother Mathilde as her godmother. The two families were close friends of the latter and held her works in high esteem. They accepted the great honour of presenting the two new converts for baptism.

All the Goto family, although non-Christian, came by carriage in full dress to assist at the ceremony. The godparents, intent on paying full honour to the religious aspect of the moment, displayed the courtesy of good taste that the occasion demanded. Kodzene took the name of Emilie, Marie Louise and Mrs. Kanegaye was called Marie Agnes.

Mr. and Mrs. Bertin took their responsibility very seriously in regard to the gentle and kind Kodzene and they frequently acted as her guardians at the social events of the court where she was due to "come out" shortly after the baptism. As soon as she had acquired sufficient French, art and music, she withdrew from the school and was married in 1887 to a young and very promising Japanese

officer, Mr. Wakayama, who had returned from France, having followed some courses at the French Military Academies and acquired some knowledge of European etiquette.

It happened that Mr. Wakayama's tastes were in perfect harmony with those of his young wife.

They were united and happy. Kodzene, faithful to her religion, would certainly not have delayed in winning her husband over to Catholicism. In the meantime, however, Mrs. Wakayama, while awaiting the birth of her baby, had a fatal accident that resulted in instant death. What was most remarkable about that sad event was the profound respect shown to that young lady's beliefs by all her non-Christian entourage. Mr. Wakayama wished to confide the preparation of her remains to the care of the sisters. He insisted that since his wife had been a Catholic, he wished everything to be done before and during the funeral according to the customs and requirements of the Church. Kodzene's godparents, Count Goto and his wife, were in agreement. The sisters, themselves, laid out the dear lady, placed a crucifix, lighted candles and blessed water beside her. It was they who put her in her coffin. This religious service took place at the Cathedral. The numerous non-Christians who were invited to attend were most respectful and appeared to be greatly impressed and moved by the penetrating hymns that were sung at the funeral ceremonies. Count Goto was especially struck by the deportment of the children who were present and lined up at the door of the Church. They seemed to be greatly touched as they joined the procession that in itself was a religious triumph, because it was led by a Foreign Missionary priest.

Having gone through a few of the results of Mother Mathilde's apostolic work in her new country, we must conclude that it was as effectual as it had been in Malaya, and that God had blessed her in proportion to her generosity. Perhaps one might now wonder if she had been repaid in some small way here on earth by those for whom she devoted herself without counting the cost, by those unfortunate ones that she had helped in their miseries and sickness!

Undoubtedly, gratitude is a plant too heavenly and too rare to be expected to flower abundantly in the lifetime of those who would merit most to enjoy its sweet perfume. Consequently, it should be all the more remarkable to state that the Venerable Mother Mathilde often received touching signs of a devotedness inspired by the desire to return, as much as possible, her charitable kindness. The most humble and dearly loved members of her large family, were certainly not the last to show their very sensitive gratitude in times of need.

It is well-known that Japan is a classic example of a country prone to disasters, especially typhoons and earthquakes. During those early years, however, there was never a need to register the loss of a sister or pupil as a result of those catastrophes. As for the walls of the buildings that housed the Saint Maur ever-growing family, they were often cracked and split asunder and shaken to such a point that it was necessary to demolish and rebuild them. Even up to the latter part of the nineteenth century, the previous experiences of earthquakes and typhoons had not taught the Japanese people to build in a more solid manner than previously typhoon created terrible disasters in both of Mother Mathilde's houses. The extensive damage done represented an enormous material and financial loss, but the main concern of the sisters was the welfare of their little proteges! The latter, however, encouraged the sisters by their self-possession and good humour. They begged them not to worry and assured them that they would economise, work harder and be satisfied with a little, in order to make it possible to have the damage repaired as soon as possible. Without a doubt, it was not the work alone of those excellent children that got the two houses out of their difficulties, but it was a considerable help and a comfort during the trial.

Ten years later, in 1894, on June 21, a terrible earthquake shook Tokyo Bay and its surroundings, including the capital and nearby Yokohama, as well as many other cities and towns. The major sections of the sisters' two houses were razed to the ground. In due course they would need to be

rebuilt according to the manner most appropriate for a country that was frequently "in motion". The material loss was enormous, but in addition there was a serious problem of housing the inhabitants of the two buildings.

In spite of the contractor's good will and hard work, the new buildings, begun in August, could not be even partially inhabited until the end of December. Consequently, the majority of the orphans ran the risk of being without lodging for six months.

To solve the housing problem, arrangements were made to give "a long vacation" to those children who had parents or friends who were in a position to receive them. In addition, the sisters returned many of the children to the foster parents in the countryside who had taken care of them when they were babies. The devotedness and love with which they were accepted was admirable and touching. Many of the foster parents, as soon as they read of the disaster in the newspapers, came forward of their own accord to offer hospitality to the homeless ones. Their sympathy and concern were sincere. Emotionally they begged to have their little ones returned to them. They promised to take care of them free of charge until the buildings were ready to receive them. More than sixty of those kind people made that generous offer and kept their promise faithfully in order to show their appreciation of what the sisters had been doing for Japan. Several of the former "children" who had already left the orphanage and were obliged to work very hard in order to earn a living, offered to take care of and feed some of their former "little sisters" until the buildings were completely restored.

Mother Mathilde had known how to find a way to Japanese hearts. Those she came in contact with knew that she was dedicated to helping them, and that she was full of sympathy for their beloved country. They allowed themselves to be understood. Openly and without exaggeration they amiably shared with her their natural qualities. It could be said that more than one of her very humble Japanese associates were willing to go through fire and water for her. Among many examples, there was a young workman called Take, which means "bamboo". His devotedness was exceptional. He was scarcely taller than a child, however, he had extraordinary energy and skill. His work was digging, but he could be asked to undertake all sorts of tasks. It can be said that during many years he worked at the Yokohama house, because not only did hurricanes and earthquakes create a need for frequent repairs, but very often the venerable mother wished to improve, enlarge or modify the existing buildings that were sheltering several hundreds of children and a numerous community of foreign and Japanese sisters. Now "little Take" was a very clever and persevering handyman for those numerous and important construction jobs. Having been in close contact with the sisters for many years he studied them silently. Eventually, he was convinced of the dignity and virtue of the good Mother Mathilde, as well as of the sisters. He became aware that every moment of their lives was dedicated to the care of the little children that eagerly gathered around them. He recognised the assistance that was given to those unfortunate ones who rushed to their door. His esteem and heart were conquered, so there was no turning back. He did his utmost to make that fact understood.

Take could not endure waste of time or poor workmanship on the part of those who were under his direction. Whenever the walls of the old or new buildings were endangered because of threatening weather, without being called, he would run to the area in need of supervision and display powerful energy in fighting the raging elements. On one occasion, there was a strong typhoon that threatened to uplift the chapel roof. When the hurricane was at its worst, Take, in the darkness of the night and with a very rare agility, scaled the walls by means of a fragile pole that he used as scaffolding. He climbed in under the roof and did not leave until he had strengthened its weak areas. Later when he was asked why he had endangered himself in such a manner he replied, "I

did it for Reverend Mother and all of you who love my country". That was only one of the proofs of his devotedness.

In due course, Take became more and more impressed by the Christian works of charity that were being done around him. He became convinced that the sisters were being strengthened and driven because of their religious beliefs. The little workman, who had very little leisure time, expressed his desire to receive religious instruction. Japanese laborers are usually allowed a siesta break, especially in summer time. While his fellow workers took a necessary and well-earned rest, he studied catechism and very soon became most appreciative of its holy doctrine. For some time, he did not feel well. Then one Friday in Lent, he said to a Japanese sister whom he met in the hallway, "I know you are fasting today for Jesus, I am unable to do so, but I am offering my sufferings to Him, because I am not well". Neither he, nor anyone else, had any idea that he was in danger of death. The sisters were greatly distressed, however, on hearing that when he returned home he had a stroke. At once he asked for a sister to come and baptise him, but the message arrived too late. Nevertheless, his integrity, his gratitude, his zeal for religious instruction, and his sincere longing to become a Christian, undoubtedly merited for him baptism of desire. From his place in heaven, he must be thanking those whom he greatly esteemed here below for having brought to his dear Japan the gift of faith and Christian charity.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE CONFIDENCE MOTHER MATHILDE HAD IN DIVINE PROVIDENCE

Very frequently the following question has been asked in regard to Mother Mathilde. "From where did she get the resources needed to found so many works and to ensure their viability?" That very interesting point has been clarified in the story of her life.

It was evident that the money she received annually from the Holy Childhood Association barely sufficed to pay for a six-month supply of the rice consumed in her house. From where did the rest come? There is no doubt that those constant and inexhaustible resources were the answer of a divine generosity to the unlimited confidence Mother Mathilde had in regard to the goodness of God.

She was sure that help would come from above. She was of the same breed as Don Bosco and God's other servants who were admirably abandoned to the powerful Providence of their Father in Heaven. Not only was the Saintly Mother having to rely on Divine Providence. Such a reliance seemed to thrill her with a holy joy.

Very frequently she encouraged and assured the sisters in the following manner, "If the Association of the Holy Childhood should no longer be able to help us, or if its monetary help were to be diminished or communication between Asia and Europe were interrupted, let us not worry. God will never fail us. Our houses are filled with His poor ones, and we are not assured of even tomorrow's bread. We are here to realise our Founder's great wish, that is that we be dependent on Divine Providence. Then we shall be assured of God's blessing. Let us remain in the true spirit of our Institute and we shall never be materially in need."

And, in fact, there were typhoons and earthquakes. At times the walls fell like a castle of cards, the crops were poor, and one year even failed completely. Always, most opportunely, the daily bread arrived. It was not only the daily bread that came, it was also the means to rebuild the fallen walls, to construct new houses and to acquire additional land.

One would have thought that Mother Mathilde was the object of royal liberality in all her zealous enterprises. There is something better to add! In reality she perceived those signs of Divine munificence, the hundredfold that has been promised to those here below whose sacrifice is complete and whose hearts are full of unshakeable faith in God's all-powerful goodness. She never longed, like the possessors of this world's goods, for those treasures that she did not have. She had no anxiety about debts, nor was she worried about tomorrow. That was the happy abandonment of a child in its mother's arms, the cheerfulness of birds in the sky, and the peace of mind of those who while having nothing, possess all.

Whenever it pleased God to try her faith, Mother Mathilde used the experience as a lesson in perfection. On September 15 1884 when she was told that her houses were badly damaged by the typhoon, she replied, "All that is much less serious than even a small offence against God." A few days later, a child was brought to the convent with the hope that the sisters would agree to take care of her. To the sister who asked what response she should give, Mother Mathilde answered, "Act as if nothing had happened, the Good Lord is treating us as He did Job, the holy man of long ago. He has taken back a little of what He gave us. If He wishes to return it, He will find the means to do so. Receive that child."

On another occasion she found herself in a very uncomfortable situation. It was in 1884. The Chinese gentleman who had been contracted to reconstruct within six months the building that had been destroyed during the June earthquake, failed to keep his agreement. Terrified by the

declaration of war between China and Japan, he wished, at all costs, to escape from Yokohama, leaving his work barely begun. Mother Mathilde did not lose her serenity or confidence.

"Let the will of God be done," she said. "Again, He will know how to get us out of this difficulty." To the relief of all concerned, a Japanese person took over the contract and finished the construction in the required time. As the work was being done during the exceedingly hot summer, however, another incident occurred which, though not miraculous, seemed providential. The water needed for the mortar had to be drawn from a well that was quite a distance from the construction area. It was an arduous process. There was another well nearby but it had gone dry because of it being extensively used during the previous earthquake. Undaunted, Mother Mathilde, placing the matter in the care of Divine Providence, tried digging in order to deepen the well. Suddenly water began to spring up! The quantity, though minimal, was adequate for the needs of one day. Each night, the well filled up with the next day's supply. It seemed as if the source trickled at a command! The supply was available until the construction was completed and then seemed to evaporate.

It can be said that during Mother Mathilde's sixty years as a missionary, God always came to the aid of that beautiful soul completely devoted to His glory. The truth is that she did her part in a very practical manner. Without a doubt she lived the maxim of Saint Ignatius, "Depend on God for everything, as if we were capable of nothing. God helps those who help themselves." She was an indefatigable worker and she knew how to get all those around her to work.

On the door of the Yokohama house, the words "House of Charity" were engraved in the Japanese characters for "Jijido" (charity). It was the characteristic of the houses that Mother Mathilde founded. It was never ignored. Because of the universal sympathy that was found there, generous help for all the charitable works of the sisters was given unstintingly. There was never a question of whether she was French or Catholic. People of various nationalities and religious denominations came to her aid, mainly because she was doing good work. The Japanese government always showed her a discreet but sincere good will. In 1913, when Emperor Yoshi Hito was enthroned, the Yokohama sisters, who had continued the work of educating the less privileged that had been begun by her, were included with those who received gifts that were distributed for the joyous occasion. The Venerable Mother had already gone to her Heavenly reward. What she had continually lived during her lifetime, brought prompt assistance in a deep spirit of gratitude when there was a need.

CHAPTER NINE

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE SAINT MAUR FAMILY

About fourteen different nationalities and people of various religious denominations sowed the seeds of the Saint Maur Family. At one time or another, they generously and happily participated in raffles, concerts and other activities, especially at times when unexpected catastrophes seriously affected the beloved works of charity so dear to Mother Mathilde.

The representatives of France were remarkably favourable to the venerable religious. Because of the honour she did to their country, they felt obligated to her. After the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871, France had unfortunately lost much of its prestige in the eyes of the Asian people. In Japan, more so than elsewhere, the representatives of France could show no signs of anti-clericalism. It was the French missionaries who were gradually regaining the lost prestige of their homeland.

Mr. Sienciexez, a French plenipotentiary minister in Japan, and his wife merit a special remembrance. On hearing of the catastrophes caused in Yokohama by the earthquake of 1884, they came at once to assure Mother Mathilde of their sincere concern in regard to the material losses that greatly disrupted her works of charity and to present her with a substantial monetary donation. In addition, Mrs. Sienciexez circulated a subscription list to the various legations in Tokyo. Later she organised a concert with the help of Count Zaluski, an Austrian minister. She chose to sing herself and the Count did his part as pianist.

A few years later, a French diplomat, Mr. Bourgarel, was also very helpful. Along with providing a large donation, he invited all the orphans from the Tsukiji convent in Tokyo to visit the French Legation property. They were permitted to stroll around in a relaxed manner and enjoy the beautiful cherry blossoms that were in flower. Cakes were also distributed.

After the departure of Count Zaluski, the succeeding Austrian ministers and consuls continued to generously support the works of Mother Mathilde. Mrs. Von Kreitner, wife of the Austrian General Consul, took the initiative to organise a Charity Concert, the entire proceeds of which would be donated for the needs of the orphanage. While preparations were being made, the Austrian Warship, "Kaiserin Elizaudh" (the Empress Elizabeth) anchored at Yokohama. On board was the heir to the Austrian throne, Archduke Francis Ferdinand, whose assassination in Sarajevo on June 28 1914 brought about World War 1. While in Yokohama during his tour of the world, Mrs. Von Kreitner asked him to lend the ship's musicians for the concert. The archduke agreed most graciously. The officers aided personally in designing very artistic programmes.

There were other examples of princely generosity. The Count and Countess of Bardi passed by Japan in 1889. The Prince was a nephew of the Count of Chambord, through his mother, Louise of France, Duchess of Parma, and the Princess Dona Aldergonde of Braganca, daughter of the King of Portugal, Don Miguel (dethroned during the French Revolution).

During her stay in Yokohama, the Countess of Bardi was greatly impressed by the department at Church of the children from the convent. She visited Mother Mathilde and the sisters several times. Simple, cheerful and intelligent, she showed in many ways her appreciation of the work that was shown to her. She and the Count, when they were leaving, left a personally signed photograph of themselves with the community. The Princess added to her previous donation a package containing numerous Venetian mosaic lockets and tiepins, having heard that they could be used for an up-coming raffle.

Very often it was the long line of orphans going to Church that awakened the generosity of foreigners in transit, as happened with a young English man who, at the end of a long pleasure

trip, went to Mass at the Church out of curiosity. The following day he made his way to the "House of Charity", bringing with him several boxes of unused assorted provisions, some cooking utensils and what remained of his foreign currency. He was due to leave the following day for the United States. His gifts were accepted with much gratitude and a silent prayer that the Good Lord would largely repay his generosity.

Another time, after the United States war with Spain, a magnificent American warship, the "Marion" docked in the bay, on returning from the Philippines. A few of the sailors when attending Sunday Mass at the Church were struck by the presence of so many orphans. On returning to their ship, of their own accord they made a collection from their companions for those children. The \$100 collected, which was a significant amount at that time, was the gift of simple sailors, not officers!

Mr. Rosseler, a Wurtembergeois Catholic who, because of the hatred Bismark had for him, had to leave his country at the end of the Cultural Revolution, took refuge in Japan with his young English wife. The Japanese people, aware of the valuable scientific background of the exile, esteemed him highly, and availed of his expertise during his twenty years in their country. He completely revised their code of laws in collaboration with a French jurist consultant.

Shortly after his arrival in Japan, Mr. Rosseler became acquainted with Mother Mathilde and from that time he was devoted to her and her works. A sincere friendship, well above national enmity, was forged between that highly-esteemed family and the venerable religious. There was just one family with the same Father, united in the same love and desire to do good.

Mr. Rosseler, absorbed in his difficult and time-consuming work, believed that since he himself could not give the Japanese people a good knowledge of the truth, the missionary priests and Mother Mathilde could do so instead of him. With that in mind he was always ready to help them financially with their apostolic work. His support was invariably given with the full consent of Mrs. Rosseler. Because of the implacable vengeance of the Iron Chancellor, Bismarck, the family had come to Japan divested of all its earthly goods. As a result, when he made a monetary donation it was at a considerable personal sacrifice. What was still more admirable than his generosity was the sentiment that accompanied it. "Do not thank me", he wrote to Mother Mathilde, "what I am doing is very little in comparison to what you have done in Japan for the propagation of the Faith. In return, all I ask is to be blessed with your precious friendship."

CHAPTER TEN

MEMORIES OF SISTER MARTHA

Having seen a few of the means used by God to support, materially speaking, the Foundress of so many beautiful works, it would seem proper to add a few words concerning the cooperation of another type that she experienced in the course of her Japanese mission. That remarkable cooperation came from her sisters and companions in her apostolate. Most of them passed their entire lives at a constant and obscure work, to which they devoted themselves without counting the cost. Remote from their respective countries and in a strange milieu they willingly accepted the sacrifices that came their way. Many of them never revisited their native countries. Content with their daily immolation of themselves, the sisters, encouraged by the example of Mother Mathilde, dedicated their intelligence, strength, time and hearts to their missionary tasks. They did not count the cost. To pay tribute to them individually is not feasible. It is necessary, however, to introduce one shining example to souls desirous of imitating those early missionaries. A glance at the very beautiful life of Sister Martha will show what a dedicated religious can become in the accomplishment of good.

Sister Martha Agniel was born in 1854, at St. Ambrose, in the Gard. At an early age she became a Saint Maur Sister. Almost all of her religious life was passed in the convent of Louhans. She used to recall that on the day of her Confirmation, the saintly Bishop of Nimes, putting his hands on her head said, "My child, you will go far away." Nothing, however, was foretold to her in regard to her missionary vocation. Loved by her pupils, in whom she inculcated obedience by first winning their hearts through kindness, she was content to devote her life to them.

In due course, the convents in France heard the sad news of the grave trial experienced by the first house of the congregation in Japan, the death of the young Sister Ferdinand three months after her arrival there. She had been struck by an incurable malady. At once, Sister Martha received the inspiration to offer herself to replace the first sentinel to succumb on duty. Her generous offer was doubly meritorious since she herself had had a very serious health problem, the effects of which always remained. Her generous request was granted and she left France with eleven other missionaries that were being escorted by the very ardent Mother Mathilde after her second voyage to France. They left Marseille on August 30 1873.

The voyage was difficult. Sister Martha suffered greatly from seasickness. Nevertheless, she finished her long journey to Japan without any serious interruption. In Yokohama, Mother Norbert was in great need of extra help. She and Sister Gelase were the only ones left of those who had made the first voyage to Japan. A little later they were joined by Sister Wilfred. Health problems had not ended for the sisters. Sister Martha, shortly after she had arrived, was afflicted with an ulcer on her tongue which caused her to entirely lose that organ. Then Mother Norbert contracted a terrible malady that eventually caused her death. Those were the severe conditions under which Sister Martha, who was not yet thirty years old, began her missionary life. She invariably showed an indefatigable kindness in her dealings with the suffering. Day and night she nursed Mother Norbert with an admirable devotedness and a filial graciousness, while making every effort to assuage her pain and discomfort. It would seem that the loving care she bestowed on her dying superior gained special blessings for Sister Martha that supported her throughout her life. From that time, she remained the comforter of the sick and the afflicted. There were no ailments that she was unable to alleviate physically and morally, no wound, no matter how revolting, repelled her, not even the ravages caused by leprosy. Her warm-hearted care was invaluable because of the generous and sympathetic kindness which accompanied it. She never failed to add encouragement to her gracious work. Her amiable gaiety instilled courage in those who suffered. It seemed as if the danger or pain of others renewed her strength. If one of the sisters fell sick or a

sudden danger threatened the buildings or their numerous children, Sister Martha would appear, having more than once left her sick bed to encourage and console those around her. People ran to her instinctively and indeed Mother Mathilde was not the last to seek the help of the devoted religious.

For thirty years, Sister Martha proved to be one of the most indefatigable of supporters, while at the same time fulfilling her charge of bursar in the Yokohama community, which indeed was a heavy weight on her shoulders. Even though Sister Martha shared the sentiments of Mother Mathilde in regard to supernatural confidence in Divine Providence, it would be difficult to imagine the patience, courage, and competency required to cope with the high cost of providing for six to seven hundred people.

At the same time as Sister Martha was community bursar, she was also responsible for the orphanage and guided the Japanese postulants and novices. Only her guardian angel could measure the religious and maternal tenderness that she bestowed generously on those beloved sections of the large family that Mother Mathilde had created. She was constantly thinking of her children and searching for ways of procuring what was necessary for them - religious instruction, a good education, sufficient nourishing food, clothing, rest and recreation.

God, who sustained Sister Martha in her laborious task, in His goodness, gave her a remarkable aptitude for the Japanese language. She who had so little time available and was more drawn to devoting herself to others rather than to study, nevertheless quickly made more headway than many others. Perhaps her Japanese was not very grammatical, but it was understandable, which was no small achievement. Her good humour, gaiety and frankness appealed to the Japanese people and they discussed some very intricate matters with her. In addition, she was well-known and esteemed by the general public with whom she had to do business, that is, tradesmen, suppliers, parents or friends of the large family of children, who, when they left the convent, spoke of her exceptional kindness. They repeatedly mentioned her solicitude for them, her desire for their happiness, and her concern for their future.

Once again there was proof that the heart knows how to find the way to other hearts. During their walks, if the children saw her in the distance they would exclaim with joy, "Oh! Look it's Sister Martha", "She is so kind, she is a real mother to us!" Because her unique devotedness came from a rare kindness, she never considered the cost or possible danger when someone was in need.

Sister Martha had frequently said that she did not wish to cause trouble nor anxiety to those around her when her last days would come. She hoped to die unnoticed. God certainly granted her wish. In 1905, the superior of the Tokyo house was dying. In spite of her own poor health, Sister Martha went to visit and give her some spiritual support. While there, she realised that she had overtaxed herself and decided to leave as quickly as possible. When descending from the train at Yokohama station she fainted. Fortunately, she managed to whisper the convent address to a helper and that was all. Death did its work. It took her far from her sisters while she was in the midst of those for whom she had left all, a little more than thirty years previously.

The sisters and children were overcome with grief. Mother Mathilde who was 91 years of age was overwhelmed by that unexpected blow. She had never thought that the kind and devoted sister would precede her to the grave, she who had always surrounded her with care and affectionate attention and for many years was her right arm in all that concerned the material administration of the convent and its missionary activities. As soon as the news of that sudden and terrible death spread, there was an explosion of grief in the city and neighbourhood. Those who attended the funeral, included the young women and girls whom Sister Martha had reared and towards whom she was always so maternal, the poor and afflicted that she had helped in the name of her

community, and the countless people who had heard of her. They were legion. They were there to show their love and respect for the servant of the poor and the little ones. For all of them it was a triumphal event. The Japanese governor of Yokohama had himself represented there, as a sign of the gratitude of his country that was due to the humble religious whose life was spent helping such a large number of his compatriots.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE TWILIGHT OF A BEAUTIFUL LIFE

Happily, Mother Mathilde counted on the mercy and support of God to be the reward for her life of dedication and charity. Great deception would have awaited her if she had hoped to be rewarded here on earth for her sufferings. Nevertheless, while in this world she had some beautiful days and touching experiences. In spite of her austere life, her love of silence and the care she took to hide her feelings and her achievements, many times those who shared her apostolate, the many children she reared, friends and acquaintances that she had assisted or edified, all had worthily and very magnificently expressed to her their attachment and religious veneration.

The first of those beautiful and touching events was the 50th anniversary of her religious profession, that is her Golden Jubilee. The celebrations took place in Yokohama on March 19 1885. The community journal registered every detail of that day, so as to preserve the memory as a precious family treasure. When reading those precious memories, what strikes one most is the honest and affectionate sentiment that seems to burst forth and flow in all directions. It speaks of family joys. Numerous congratulatory letters came from Europe, Singapore and Malaysia. There was great joy in the thought that sisters from many houses of the congregation were with them in spirit.

During the High Mass that was presided over by Reverend Father Midon, the Pro-Vicar Apostolic, the sisters sang with one heart and one soul of God's glory and their own gratitude. A gentle breeze from Heaven seemed to be passing over the earth as they sang. Mother Mathilde renewed her religious vows in a loud voice, penetrated with emotion, nonetheless strong and clear. From her tone and the energy used, one felt that her career was not yet near its end. In fact, she lived for another twenty-six years.

That Golden Jubilee Year of 1885 brought Mother Mathilde another event that filled her with joy and hope for the future of Catholicism in her adopted country. The Bishop of Northern Japan, Bishop Osouf, had been touring America for several months in search of helpers for his mission, when he was called to Rome by Pope Leo XIII. The Pontiff, who had heard of the Imperial change of opinion and attitude in regard to foreigners and religion, was on the alert to seize a favourable opportunity. He was determined to make contact with the sovereign in order to get more and more favourable conditions for the Christians. Bishop Osouf was chosen to be his deputy, and given a letter to present personally to the Emperor. To fulfill his mission, the Bishop returned immediately to Japan. Early in September of 1885, a solemn audience was accorded him by the Emperor. The court's ceremonial carriage went to Tsukuji to bring the Bishop to the Imperial Palace where the French Plenipotentiary Minister, Mr. Sienciewiez, presented him to the Emperor. The letter from Leo XIII was enclosed in a precious white silk envelope on which the papal arms had been hand-painted. The entire work of art had been beautifully executed by Mother Mathilde. The Emperor gave the deputy of the Sovereign Pontiff a most courteous welcome and he received the Papal missive with marked gratitude. In his immediate verbal reply, he promised to protect his Christian subjects in a manner comparable to that shown to his other subjects. When that statement was published it created a remarkable impression. The Christians were overcome with joy at the assurance that the religious persecution, which had crushed them painfully for two centuries, was to disappear forever.

The Emperor, flattered by the Pope's initiative, was not satisfied with having replied verbally. In turn he sent a missive to Leo XIII by a special ambassador, reiterating his promise to treat his Christian subjects with absolute justice.

Those first steps taken were followed by others, nonetheless promising measures. Permission was granted to establish a Catholic hierarchy in Japan. From then on, the bishops were no longer simple titular heads of former sees. Instead, they were heads of regularly established dioceses. In addition, their number was doubled. They were no longer considered as apostolic vicars of Northern Japan, Central Japan, or Southern Japan. From then on there was the Archdiocese of Tokyo, the Diocese of Nagasaki, the Diocese of Osaka and Sendai with the Bishop residing in Hakodate, on Yesson Island. It was Bishop Osouf who became Archbishop of Tokyo and the other bishops were his assistants. Finally in 1889, when the Emperor issued a constitution for his Empire, the Edicts of Religious Persecution which were still in existence, even though they had become dead letters, were suppressed and omitted. It was a magnificent triumph for Christianity, which must have caused the former persecutors to tremble in their tombs, especially the cruel "Shogun" (War Lord), who at one time had declared in a burst of anger, " if the God of the Christians himself were to come to Japan, he would be ruthlessly killed."

The astounding change in the policy related to Christianity must have caused Mother Mathilde to rejoice wholeheartedly. She who had first set foot on the Yokohama shore seventeen years prior to the change, she who had known martyred children and was aware of the edicts outlawing Christians and threatening them with death. Even though the saintly Mother saw the work of God grow and prosper unceasingly around her, the increase in Catholic bishops in Japan, however, required her to make a considerable sacrifice. She who had the highest veneration for zealous and pious priests and who greatly appreciated reserved chaplains, learned on March 8, 1888 that His Holiness, Leo XIII, had appointed Father Midon, as the first Apostolic Vicar of "Central Japan", later to become the Diocese of Osaka. That devoted missionary had been chaplain to the Yokohama sisters for fifteen years and at the same time served as deputy assistant to Bishop Osouf. He had experienced and shared Mother Mathilde's laborious beginnings. It would be difficult to enumerate, or even summarise, all the works of zeal and devotion that he undertook for the venerable Mother. There was never a chaplain more punctual, more careful in the execution of his duties. He was always there at the exact hour and minute for every function of his priestly ministry. He never missed a Mass or Benediction through his own fault. Once, he left his confreres and Christians to battle without him a terrible fire that had engulfed their residence and church, rather than delay mass for the sisters. On another occasion, he arrived in the middle of a typhoon that caused a convent ceiling to collapse. His piety and deep faith edified the sisters and children. They were greatly impressed by his intense and very tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin. He was never known to refuse a service to anyone. With all of that, he was extremely reserved, tactful and completely devoted to the welfare of people in particular and in general to the apostolate of the convent that was confided to him.

It can easily be understood from what has been mentioned above, the extent of the share Mother Mathilde had in the sacrifice that Bishop Osouf was obliged to make in allowing his devoted pro-vicar obey the voice of God that was calling him to another apostolate. Besides, Bishop Midon himself did not withdraw from his first mission without a heart-break which contributed, perhaps, to hasten his end. In fact, three years later he died unexpectedly while in Europe on his way to Rome. That very sad happening was certainly unforeseen, when on June 11 1888, Bishop Osouf consecrated the first Bishop of Osaka in the newly built Yokohama Church. It was a magnificent ceremony from every point of view. Mother Mathilde had most of the sacred vestments made and embroidered in the convent. Bishop Midon showed her a touching sign of his profound esteem in reserving for her group, sisters and children, his first Episcopal blessing, which in the case of the consecration of a bishop, is a favour to be envied.

The first act of the young Japanese Church established on its new base, was the organisation of a synod at Nagasaki. It was opened on Mar 17 1890 for the 25th anniversary of the discovery of the

descendants of the first Christians. The reunion of the bishops was celebrated in a wonderful manner.

All the villages and neighbouring islands sent their Christians to assist at the benediction of a magnificent church which had been completed for the occasion and dedicated to the 26 martyrs who had been put to death at that same place in 1597. It was there that the resuscitated Christians of olden times appeared full of vigour and life. The heroine of those celebrations was Rosa, the elderly lady who is extolled in the history of the first Christians. It was she, who on March 17 1865 visited with a group from her village, the church in Nagasaki that Bishop Petijeau had provided. It was she who said to him, " Father, in my village we are of the same heart as you. We love Seibo Marie (the Blessed Virgin) and her Divine Son."

For the 25th anniversary of that unique event in the history of the Church, Rosa was congratulated by all those present, bishops, priests and the faithful. Bishop Cousin of Nagasaki gave her the consolation of touring Japan in order to meet the new born Christians, to quote herself: "before dying"!

In the course of her tour, Rosa arrived in Yokohama, accompanied by one of her nieces, a fervent Catholic who was put in her care as a young child. Mother Mathilde and the sisters gave them a most cordial welcome for which they were most grateful. Rosa promised to maintain a faithful friendship with them. She asked the sisters to notify her if Mother Mathilde should precede her to Heaven. It was quite an unusual sign of affection that had the touch of the strong faith of the first Christians.

About the same time, that is between 1888 and 1889, there was another arrival for the general good, and that was a cause of great joy for Mother Mathilde. The Society of Mary (Marianist priests and brothers) came to Japan. It was the first of the many flourishing foundations of that Society in Japan.

Various events succeeded one another. The years passed and left Mother Mathilde healthy in mind and body, in spite of her great age which was beginning to surpass the normal age of that time. She reached an anniversary that was much more uncommon than that of ten years previously. It was the year of her Diamond Jubilee. The sisters and children offered her their congratulations and good wishes in various delicate ways. The Foreign Mission Priests celebrated with exceptional piety solemn masses that were worthy of the memorable occasion and crowned the joy that Mother Mathilde was experiencing. At that time, she was 81 years old but she was destined to experience other anniversaries more unusual and extraordinary.

A short time after the Diamond jubilee, on May 4 1895, the superior of Tokyo, Mother Domitille, left for Paris where there was to be a General Chapter of the Institute in the following September. At that gathering it was decided that a member of the Central Council should, for the first time, pay official visits to all the Mission Houses. The Superior General designated for that task, Mother Henri Derulle, who was later to become Superior General.

She set out on her long and useful voyage on November 10 1895, in the company of the superiors of Singapore and Tokyo who were returning from the General Chapter. She first visited the Houses of Malaya and arrived in Yokohama on board the "Sydney", a Messagerie Maritime ship, on April 22 1896. Mother Mathilde welcomed her in a deep spirit of faith and with much affection, as if she were welcoming the Mother General.

Mother Henri, on seeing so many children filling the houses, at once understood the beauty and importance of the apostolate confided to the religious in Japan. Immediately she fell in love with the country and its people, as soon as she became acquainted with them. During the three months

of her stay, she interested herself sincerely in all that concerned the sisters and their work. Her kindness, piety and maternal dedication in regard to all that was related to the Japanese mission won the hearts of those she encountered. She even took the time to visit a little country villa that Mother Mathilde had acquired in the neighbourhood two years earlier, so that the children could spend time there in groups with the sisters, especially during the vacations. It was beautifully surrounded by trees and green fields.

Many missionary priests wished to have Saint Maur Convents and works in their parishes. One of them, Father Tulpin, being aware of Mother Mathilde's apostolic spirit which was in harmony with his own, succeeded without much difficulty in getting the visiting Mother Henri, together with the Yokohama and Tokyo superiors to visit Nagoya, which was about 400 to 500 kilometres from the capital, in the hope that his wish would thus be realised. Mother Henri and Mother Mathilde were not discouraged by the long train journey. They returned convinced of the usefulness of such an enterprise. Unfortunately, however, it was not possible to undertake it at that time, but the idea of making a foundation in central Japan was entertained as a result of that trip. It was realised a few years later.

Mother Henri was very interested in another matter - it was the introduction of what might be called a Third Order of the Congregation for its former Japanese pupils who wished to remain with their teachers in order to help them with their external apostolate, without, however, adopting the religious life as such. The devoted cooperation and assistance of those wonderful former pupils was most useful in situations where the religious habit could have been a deterrent when visits to the hospitals had to be made.

A number of those future 'Tertiaries' had been practising their auxiliary roles for some time. It was only a question of regulating their situation and that was done during Mother Henri's visit. As an exterior sign of their commitment, they received a cross as a reminder. The presentation of that holy engagement was performed in a pious and ceremonial manner on June 21 at Tokyo and July 7 at Yokohama. It was Mother Henri, as the representative of the Superior General who presented the crosses to the 'tertiaries'.

At the same time, she presided over another regularisation concerning the lay sisters. When they were first introduced into Malaya and later into Japan, it was considered necessary for diverse reasons to require them to wear a different religious habit from that worn in France by the lay sisters. Later, however, experience showed that the linen bonnet and white kerchief worn in the latter country were more suitable for the very hot climates. In addition, it was believed that to achieve complete unity between religious called to do the same work there should be unity in both spirit and dress. The passage of Mother Henri served the purpose of modifying the religious habit in all the houses she visited.

Finally, the visiting Mother paid great attention to the question of classes being organised for young ladies of the nobility. She approved and seconded the good will that had previously been shown in regard to the new needs and the steps that had been taken with some hesitation to satisfy them. It was she, who on her return to France, secured the approval of the Superior General for separating the works completely from those of Tsukiji.

On July 12, 1896, Mother Henri left Yokohama on board "the Ernest Simons", a Messagerie Maritime steamer, bound for Singapore where she still had unfinished work to do.

CHAPTER TWELVE

A NEW FOUNDATION

The hour of eternal rest had not yet rung for the Venerable Mother. She was unable to let even one day pass without availing of the long-awaited permission to open a house in Shizuoka. From the time of Mother Henri's visit, she had hopes of making a foundation in central Japan. Diverse circumstances, however, delayed the project. In the meantime, Mother Mathilde heard of the Malayan foundations in Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, Taiping and Seremban. The news filled her with joy, but at the same time she bemoaned the circumstances that delayed the realisation of her desire to offer God a new foundation in the remote land of Japan. So strong was her faith, she would have made ten more foundations rather than one, in order to sow the "good seed" in the country of her adoption. Having only one house to open, however, she hastened to prepare all that was necessary in order to accomplish her goal.

Shizuoka was situated in a peaceful countryside which was remote from those upheavals that frequently disturbed other parts of Japan. Its name was suggestive of its privileged position. It signified "tranquility". The sisters were invited to go there in order to establish a boarding school for the upper class of that area.

On February 26 1903 at 7 a.m. the sisters, with their superior, Mother Ludgarde, left Yokohama where it was raining heavily. By the time they arrived in Shizuoka at 2 p.m. the rainfall had almost reached a typhoon stage. On the way, they even experienced a fire. A packing case in the freight wagon burst into flames. Fortunately, the train was not far from a station at that time, so the danger was averted. It was with much emotion that they eventually glimpsed for the first time their new convent. Father Rey, who later became Archbishop of Tokyo, was on the threshold to greet them warmly.

Right away the boarding school showed signs of much hope. A Japanese teacher from one of the big Shizuoka schools arrived to request prospectuses for several interested people, all of whom seemed to be well-disposed towards the new arrivals. The sisters were quick to notice that the people of Shizuoka were very gentle and affable. Politeness was all important to them. Even labourers had that distinctive mark. It was due, no doubt, to the fact that the city was formerly inhabited by the Japanese nobility.

Classes were scheduled to begin on April 15. Until then the sisters were busy organising the establishment and taking the necessary official steps for the inauguration of the boarding school. About ten pupils requested admission, among them was a young girl who had been with the sisters at Tsukiji. She recognised the religious habit on seeing the new arrivals walking on the street. Joyfully she ran off to bring her friends.

One day two young officers arrived at the convent, they had been studying French with Father Rey. They requested to see the chapel. One of them, a former pupil of the Marianist School in Tokyo, asked if the brothers and the sisters adored the same God. On receiving a positive reply, he said, "We do not know him but we shall salute him in the name of all Japan". So, on entering and leaving the chapel they gave a military salute.

The opening of the classes on April 15 was rather unofficial. The official inauguration took place with solemnity on the following June 6, in the presence of a delegate from the Prefectural Government, the Mayor of the city, a general inspector of Japanese schools and a colonel from the military garrison! The French and Japanese flags hung above the crucifix. Twenty-seven pupils were present. They sang a variety of songs and were considered charmingly simple and natural. Several of the guests made speeches and all left duly impressed.

A few days later, the sisters were invited by the Mayor to bring their pupils to meet the Crown Prince and Princess who were passing through Shizuoka. To the great surprise of those present, including the sisters, the prince bowed graciously to both teachers and the pupils. Times had certainly changed!! In the not too distant past "the son of the gods" was not beheld by any of his subjects.

The reigning Emperor Mutsuhito, while becoming more open to the point of achieving astonishing reforms in the Japan that was gradually being modernised, had not descended from his "divine" pedestal to the extent of deigning to smile at simple mortals! During official processions, the Empress Haruko herself, although usually so intelligent and affable, passed like the Mikado, massive and rigid in the midst of an eager crowd that was almost prostrate. And here was the heir to the imperial throne and his young wife bowing to the children and still more to the poor religious and foreign sisters who previously would have been considered as outlaws - disciples of that Cross for which the predecessors of their highnesses had shown only scorn! What a cause for astonishment and admiration! But the Master had said, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against God's Work".

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE SPIRITUALITY OF MOTHER MATHILDE

The foundation of the Shizuoka convent and school which was full of promise was the last important work that Mother Mathilde undertook. In order to follow her in her apostolic works, so numerous and so fruitful, the study of her spiritual life was put aside. At this stage, it is necessary to pick it up again.

Having followed the Venerable Mother during her long life, from childhood to an advanced age, what is most remarkable is that she was perpetually herself. She never deviated from her high standard. She proceeded without haste, without slacking, at least not in a noticeable manner. She kept to her straight path while always advancing at an unchanging pace. What then was the secret of her constancy, her strong and moderate equanimity that never wavered?

No human being lives without being penetrated and animated by a spirit, good or bad. The conduct of each of us can be explained in no other way. What then was the special spirit that animated for almost a century that extraordinary woman? It was God alone! At ninety-five while she knitted in silence between periods of spiritual reading and sisters asked, "What are you thinking about?" She would answer, "Of course I'm thinking about God. About whom else would I be thinking?"

Constant dwelling on God was the secret of that beautiful soul. From the beginning to the end, it was always the same. Contemplating God had become so natural to her that no effort was required to remember God within her. Every morning when some flowers were brought to her, as is the Japanese custom, the same cry of joy and love burst from her heart to the creator of such beauty. At other times, when a violent typhoon filled the atmosphere with its dreadful bellowing, when its violent gusts swayed the most sturdy trees, the eyes of the dear Mother would be filled with tears at the magnificent and tragic spectacle of the roaring tempest. When asked what was the matter, she would murmur, "Oh! How great and wonderful He is!" That was all. The "He" summed up her thoughts. She knew how to find Him everywhere, even in disastrous storms or terrible earthquakes that shook mountains at their bases. God was always present to her. She spent her life seeking Him. She was incessantly preoccupied with a desire to love and to know Him more and more. Whatever He wished from her, whether it was painful or not, she was ready to give without hesitation. Briefly, that was the explanation of her constancy and equanimity. It was the true spirit that animated every moment of her life.

She saw the will of God in the events of each day, whether they were big or small, happy or unhappy. She accepted them all as coming from God. Sometimes in the midst of hardships that came her way, she might have appeared to be sad or tired, but she never grumbled or lost courage.

Again, Mother Mathilde saw the will of God in the occasions that were presented to her to help even one soul. To let pass, through indifference, an opportunity to do one good deed, while she had the time and the means, would have been for her an unforgivable fault. For that reason, her charity was inexhaustible. It would be impossible to mention all the bodily and spiritual assistance she gave to others. Only God knows its true extent. For her there was no happiness to be compared with the joy of increasing the number of her dear children confided to her care. Suffering and devotedness, however, are associated. Often while practising charity, she inevitably made mistakes, but she remained untroubled. It was for God that she gave herself to people. Not only had she a generous heart, but she had the rare gift that excuses and forgives wrong. A person had to be very guilty for her to be unable to discover some good quality in him or her. An action had to

be really bad not to be excusable. She was often heard to say, "I love Japan, my whole heart is in it, although at times it requires me to make many sacrifices".

Practically speaking, her kindly attitude and charitable deeds were possible because she had herself constantly under control. Her mortification was never relaxed, neither during her life in France, Singapore nor Japan. As often as possible, she took care of her own needs. When she needed help, she requested it with a touching humility. She would say, "Would you be so kind as to do this or that for me? I regret having to disturb you. Please forgive me." No doubt, because of her humility, people were always very eager to help her. Once in Singapore, she was unexpectedly observed washing and kissing a leper, and then giving him some large alms. In a spirit of penance and poverty, she was truly scrupulous in regard to the use of things at her disposal. When she was questioned about the matter she asked, "Does the practice of religious poverty mean that we must always have what is necessary? We must economise in order to be able to give."

For herself, Mother Mathilde had no concern. In her dealings with the sisters and the children, she changed her way of acting without spoiling anyone. Following the example of Saint Theresa, she advised the sisters not to dwell too much on little aches, but rather to support them bravely without complaining. Nevertheless, when she perceived a more serious cause of suffering, she had her own special cure for all physical discomfort. She would say, "Take a cup of tea, there is nothing better". A cup of tea invariably showed her desire to relieve the malady. In the community it became proverbial!

When Mother Mathilde gave an order, advised or made an observation, it was with full authority and a sense of duty. There was no question of disputing the matter. It was accepted with submission and without annoyance because of the respect she inspired. She influenced people in authority and advanced in years. She followed with her heart each soul that was confided to her care.

On meeting Mother Mathilde for the first time, people sometimes were inspired with a certain fear because of her austere appearance. The mortifications that she practised while she had the strength to do so, and her sojourn in the tropics where she worked incessantly, were bound to affect a person so vigorous and to leave indelible traces. She had become just skin and bone but her every action reflected the energy of her soul. Beneath her severe appearance there was a depth of kindness and inexhaustible gaiety that appeared suddenly as a surprise, in an unexpected manner. Most often it had a humorous touch. Frequently, she had recourse to a vast amount of stories and anecdotes that she had accumulated here and there during her long life.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE DAWN OF ETERNITY

Nothing is eternal in this world. All life comes to an end. The most fulfilled life has its limits. In spite of her ninety years, Mother Mathilde remained young in spirit and heart. The body, however, that had faithfully supported her soul throughout the years began to fail. She became hard of hearing and her vision while still adequate for ordinary use, was no longer capable of undertaking fine or delicate work. Her hands and feet that had formerly been so active were gradually slowing down. There was conflict between her energetic desire and her age. She felt imprisoned by her limbs. In the meantime, however, the aging Mother's responsibility was increasing, and her anxieties were multiplying each year as her strength decreased. The experience that she had acquired, undoubtedly, assisted her. Nevertheless, it also made her realise the weight of her responsibilities. Alarmed at the thought of having to render an account of her stewardship, she frequently requested the superiors who had the overall responsibility of the Institute to find a replacement for her. Those in authority agreed with her reasoning, but out of consideration for her age and her ability, they waited several years before appointing her replacement. To be truthful, it was feared that it might be too painful for her to survive in her own community with a replacement. Finally, taking into account the wishes that she so often expressed and her serious reasons, the superiors judged it wiser not to prolong the delay.

On April 1 1907 Mother Ludgarde was named Superior of Yokohama convent and Mother Mathilde was relieved of her heavy burden. At that time, she was ninety-three years and two months. Whether it had cost her or not to relinquish her position, it was never known. She did not discuss the matter with anyone. It was remarked, however, that, as usual, she did nothing by halves. Prior to her retirement, she had promised to withdraw completely as soon as she would be relieved of her responsibilities. She kept to her word. From the day she was no longer a Superior, she remained in the background and never interfered in matters for which she was not responsible. She asked for nothing and did no complaining. When necessary, she approved modestly the decisions of the new Superior, without showing the slightest sign of holding on to authority or influence in the community. From the day she was no longer responsible, she left her room only to go to the chapel. No questions were asked about what was happening in the house, she was satisfied with whatever information was given to her. Finding that the new Superior did things better than she had done, she rejoiced that things were in such capable hands. What interested her most and filled her with happiness was to learn that a non-Christian had requested to be instructed in the Catholic Faith or that some sick person in hospital had asked to be baptised.

For the aged and declining Mother Mathilde there was no boredom in her daily life. She had close at hand those books that were most dear to her. In her latter days she needed a magnifying glass. From time to time, she dozed while meditating. On awakening, she would ask the Good Lord to pardon her weakness and loss of time with Him. Her principal occupation was knitting, however, in her declining years it happened that some stitches were dropped and she had not the eyesight to replace them. That fact distressed her, as she had to wait for some charitable person to come to her aid. Usually, she had not long to wait, for the sisters rarely passed her room without entering. In most cases, their motive was two-fold - the desire to brighten her day, and to be edified by some uplifting and unexpected remark that she might share with them.

Every year, on July 7, there was a joint festival in the Yokohama convent. It celebrated the feast of Mother Mathilde and honoured the 205 Japanese martyrs. Mother Mathilde received the congratulations and good wishes of the sisters and children. It was one of the much-loved events of the year. With foresight, from the beginning of 1910 it was agreed that July 7 would be celebrated with a previously unknown solemnity, because, judging from the appearance of the

venerable mother, it would probably be her last feast day in this world. Preparations began a long time in advance. Much thought was given to deciding on the most touching gifts to be offered and the affectionate manner of presenting them.

The feast began, as was customary, at the first vespers of the previous evening. Contrary to former years, Mother Mathilde was unable to go downstairs to receive the good wishes of the various groups of "children" so in turn they went up to her. She received them on the long veranda that stretched the length of that part of the building where her room was situated. First, she met the foreign children who were dressed for the occasion and carried bouquets of flowers. Going through the rows, she had a kind word and little gift for each one. Next it was the Japanese secondary school girls who presented themselves. They did so while adhering perfectly to their native culture. They bowed very slowly with their hands on their knees, and walked without appearing to move a muscle, beautiful flowers were offered with downcast eyes, the most touching words were uttered while faces remained stonelike. Their teachers were astonished to see the nonagenarian so valiant at ninety-six and that she was still able to knit without spectacles! Finally, it was the turn of those for whom the venerable missionary had a very special predilection, the school of the underprivileged, her "violets". Oblivious of her weariness and happy to be again in the midst of "her children", their dear Mother insisted on walking twice up and down the long veranda to see each one as an individual and speak with as many as possible about their concerns.

The following day, after the solemn Mass of the Martyrs, there was another reception, still more touching than the preceding ones. Each of the former "children" scattered throughout Japan had been invited by letter to come and participate in the festivities. Many accepted the invitation, while those who were unable to attend, because of illness or commitments, sent representatives or excused themselves. Among those who came, there were several who had been welcomed at the opening of the convent over thirty years previously. They wept with joy on seeing their beloved "Mother". This time the long veranda presented a rare spectacle - more than three hundred women and children, of all ages and backgrounds, were present. Each one brought a gift, because in Japan one never visits empty-handed. Whether the gift was costly or less so, it was accepted with even more affection than it was offered. The dear Mother did her utmost to be all things to all people. She was sincerely interested in their individual concerns. The greetings were followed by a fun-filled lottery that had a prize for everyone. Each person received a pious object as a souvenir of that very special day. At noon about three hundred Japanese lunch boxes, that contained rice and vegetables, were provided. Then a group photograph was taken. Each one took her place and Mother Mathilde who was carried in her armchair was given a central position. It was a magnificent group! Then there was "a silent movie" which transported the spectators to London to see the funeral of King Edward VII. Later they were shown the havoc caused in Paris by recent floods. Finally, when all had had a joy-filled and uplifting time the happy day ended with solemn Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

That final reunion seemed to have rejuvenated the happy Mother Mathilde. The last festive occasion on the threshold of eternity seemed to be a reminder of autumn days when the sun is glorious and suave, while threatening clouds appear on the horizon. From that time onward, Mother Mathilde withdrew more than ever into interior solitude in order to live more intimately with God. Even though she was bodily on earth, her spirit was already on its way to Heaven. The closer she approached the eternal light, the more its sharp rays penetrated her soul. That divine light seemed to bring into relief the faults and imperfections of her life. To her they appeared like a small cloud in a blue sky.

While being overwhelmed with gratitude for all the blessings that had been bestowed on her, she never ceased begging God's forgiveness for her faults and imperfections. Although convinced of His mercy, she frequently feared that her fidelity was inadequate, she who had given Him her heart and her life so generously! It was that supreme purification through which great saints passed and which was a harbinger of "the arrival of God" and a sign that the gates of Heaven were about to open for the exiled soul, seeking its Sovereign Lord.

Troubled by that mysterious anguish, she would frequently ask anxiously, "Do you really think that I shall be saved?" Those at her bedside knew that it was useless to reason with her, she already knew all that they could say. They realised that it was wiser to use another approach. Someone would say, "Have you forgotten the case of the Thief? Christ made it clear that he was saved!" "Have you a lesser reason for hoping for God's mercy?" Then she reflected and said no more.

Neither her closeness to God, nor her spiritual anxieties prevented her from retaining her natural sense of humour, amiability and gaiety. In a word, she remained herself to the end. During the winter that preceded her death, she was gravely sick and weak. The sisters feared that she would be taken from them very soon. One of her so-called "enemies", Father Ligneul, who previously had had many arguments with her (for matters concerning the glory of God, of course!), went to see her as a gesture of reconciliation, as it were, before her departure. He found her extremely weak, eyes closed and she was breathing with much difficulty. Making a great effort to be heard, he said, "Above all, let bygones be bygones. And when you will have arrived up above, will you pull your old acquaintance up after you?" On hearing those words, she opened her eyes slowly and in that half-amused manner that she employed when in a roguish mood, she looked at the top of her visitor's head and said without a smile, "It will not be by the hair of your head"! (He had none!). Straightaway she closed her eyes and continued praying, her end had not yet arrived.

A few days before the feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8 1910, without any particular malady, but because of her age, she felt weaker than usual. Fearing that she would be unable to assist at Mass or receive Holy Communion on that very special feast day, she asked the Blessed Virgin to procure for her that special privilege, and after that to do with her as she wished. Her prayer was heard to the letter, because on December 8 she was able to be present at Mass and receive Holy Communion. Later that morning she was confined to bed and never got up again. During the six weeks that she spent on her bed of suffering, she endured all her pain with heroic patience. She was never heard to utter a complaint, nor even to express a desire. When asked, "Do you wish this or that?" she would always answer, "Whatever you think". Whenever she took any relief, it was always with remorse. From time to time, she raised her eyes to Heaven and uttered one of her favourite aspirations, "O Infinite Beauty, when shall I see you? Come Jesus, come". Once, she cried out in a moment of great anguish, "O my God, what are you waiting for?" God was waiting for the long and laborious existence of His faithful servant to become still more beautiful through heroic suffering. Before being admitted to her joyful reward, she had to pass through the crucible of anguish. It was necessary to complete with dignity such a marvellous life. She was the disciple of Him who suffered in order to enter His glory.

Finally, the moment that she had long desired arrived. It was January 20 1911, at 1:30 a.m. She passed away without a struggle or anguish, while still trying to utter pious ejaculations that were being suggested to her. "Jesus", the name of Him whom she served and who was always in her mind, was the final word she uttered before drawing her last breath.

After the death of the departed one, her face, which had altered during her physical sufferings, recovered its natural appearance. It reflected a heavenly calm and peace. The suppleness of her limbs, especially her hands, filled with admiration all those who came to pray beside her remains.

The funeral of the saintly Mother Mathilde was celebrated with an exceptional and triumphant solemnity. Her life in Japan had brought renown to Catholicism. It was a reunion of people of many nationalities, backgrounds and religious denominations. The gathering was so great that many people had to remain outside the Church. France was well represented by several members of its delegation. Leaders of various Catholic Organisations from many countries deemed it an honour to pay their respects to the venerable deceased whose name was so well known. They insisted on shouldering her very precious mortal remains to her resting place. It was a duty they wished to discharge as several of them had reasons for being indebted to the dear departed one. A few of them had received from her some very frank advice, even "reprimands" and at that very important moment they nobly showed that they were grateful.

The numerous families, that Mother Mathilde had lovingly fostered, the children of the house who had squeezed themselves into the funeral procession, were lost in the crowd, as they tried to take up as little space as possible. The greatest sympathy, however, was felt for them. They had lost their Mother and were feeling the loss profoundly. The Japanese girls from the Boarding School were also present and were remarkable for their elegance and composure.

The Requiem Mass was celebrated by Reverend Father Eviard, Apostolic Vicar. The Marianist Brothers from Saint Joseph College in Yokohama did the appropriate singing which was soulful, inspiring and in perfect good taste. All in all, it was a most impressive service. Devout people of various religious denominations admitted that they had never witnessed anything so beautiful and touching. Penetrated to the depths of his soul by the experience, a Protestant Pastor went so far as saying out loud, "Go, good and faithful servant, you have served your Lord well!"

The simple white coffin, covered by a plain cloth, without decoration or flowers, and surrounded by six lighted candles was a remarkable contrast to the magnificent gathering of people. It was the apparel of the poor! There was nothing beyond what was necessary, which was the specific wish of Mother Mathilde. Consistent until death, she was buried as she had lived, in the simplicity, humility and austerity of her religious profession. Because of her close friendship with Mother Norbert, the first Superior of Yokohama Convent, who had died thirty-seven years earlier, she had asked to be buried in the same grave with her. Since they had greatly esteemed each other in life, it was appropriate that they should await their glorious resurrection in the same resting place.

True to her principles, Mother Mathilde would have chosen to withdraw from this world quietly. If she had had her way, her death would have remained unannounced. But because of the milieu in which she had lived, both in Japan and Malaya, and the responsible positions that she had held, she had numerous friends and admirers. Consequently, her departure from this world could not have been ignored. All the foreign newspapers of Yokohama paid her homage. They stressed that a woman of such merit was an honour to her religion, her institute and her country.

The remarkable achievements of Mother Mathilde were recalled, not just to sing her praises, because the results of her apostolic works were more eloquent than all the discourses. Above all, they were meant to show by example what can be achieved through perseverance and trust in God.

In Yokohama, her visible presence had disappeared. It can be said, however, that her shadow continued to linger in the convent. She seemed to be in every corner of the building. The memories of the lessons she taught the sisters and the example that she gave them were an inspiration to them. They reminded them that they should walk steadily towards the eternal home where she was enjoying the glory of God to whom her beautiful life was committed.

It can be said of a few saints who died young that they had lived full lives. Where Mother Mathilde was concerned, the longer God prolonged her life, the more careful she was to fill it abundantly. In her case, she was lovingly faithful throughout the years. What a magnificent commendation and example!

The End!

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MOTHER MATHILDE RACLOT

Foundress of the Infant Jesus Sisters and the Mission in Asia

Malaysia, Singapore and Japan

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