

AN OASIS IN THE DESERT

IF we except the domain of the Soviets, where the schismatic church is in fetters, the small ancient dependencies of Portugal and France, the struggling missions in Japan, China, India, the Malayan States and Islands, Persia, and Asia Minor, nearly the whole of the vast and densely-populated Orient is still immersed in the darkness of error, still aloof from the Christian Faith. There is, however, one bright spot in this all-pervading gloom, one polity which can distinctly claim for itself the title of Christian, one centre in union with the Apostolic See which radiates the light of truth among the pagan nations surrounding it.

The Philippines, which are said to comprise more than seven thousand islands, though only some ten or twelve of these are of considerable size, possess more than eight million Catholics in a population of say ten million. The largest island, Luzon, about the size of Great Britain, is almost entirely Catholic and contains the famed harbour of Manila, capital of the islands and the seat of government. It was in March, 1521, that the Portuguese navigator Magellan on his way back from South America—he has given his name to the straits separating Tierra del Fuego from the rest of that Continent—disembarked at Mindanao, the second largest island of the archipelago, and caused the first Mass to be celebrated there on the 30th of the same month. He himself died on the following 27th of April in the island of Mactan. Forty years later Philip II, after whom the name Philippines, husband of Mary Tudor, decided to annex the islands to Spain and despatched a fleet which set sail from Mexico under the command of Miguel Lopez de Legazpi and arrived at Leyte, one of the islands, in the early spring of 1565. The Spaniards had always

Blackfriars

been friendly received by the natives, who were readily converted to the Christian Faith, and the expedition seems to have cemented friendship with most of the chieftains of the islands. Thus, assuming the overlordship, Legazpi inaugurated the city of Manila as his residence on June 24th, 1571, and became first governor of the province under the crown of Spain. From the beginning the colony seems to have been established without bloodshed, the natives rapidly becoming converted; and in a short period Fray Domingo de Salazar was nominated its first Bishop. Augustinians from Spain were the first missionaries, followed by the Franciscans, the Fathers of the Society of Jesus in 1581, and the Dominicans in 1587. St. Francis Xavier visited the island of Mindanao, probably on his journey to or from Japan, 1549-1551. At the present time the hierarchy of the Philippines consists of the Archbishop of Manila and eight suffragan bishops.

Among the glories of Manila are its Royal and Pontifical University of Santo Tomas founded on the 3rd of June, 1618, under Governor Alonso Fajardo de Tenza, as the Colegio S. Tomas, and solemnly inaugurated the following year. It has been under the direction of the Dominican Fathers since its inception, and now after more than three centuries of existence counts about four thousand students. Another scarcely less venerable foundation is the College of San Juan de Letran, also directed by the Dominicans as a seminary and college. This was established in 1640 under Governor Sebastian Hurtado de Corcuera. It may be noted, too, as of Dominican interest that Fray Juan de Archederra, O.P., Bishop-elect of New Segovia, who was *interim* Governor of the province in 1749, baptised the Sultan of Joló, one of the most powerful of the native princes who had hitherto remained outside the fold. The Fathers of the Society of Jesus

An Oasis in the Desert

have also very flourishing colleges and schools throughout the territory.

Among the educated, Spanish is almost the universal language and possesses a no mean literature peculiar to the province. Most of the natives speak also the language of the country, *tagalo*. Since the country was taken over by the United States (W. H. Taft was proclaimed first President of the Archipelago on September 1st, 1900), great efforts have been made to introduce the English language; it is now compulsory in all the schools and colleges, though the official documents are still set forth in Spanish as well as English.

Before closing this brief notice of the one Catholic nation of Asia it is well to record that missionaries have constantly gone forth therefrom for the evangelisation of the neighbouring nations even to the shedding of their blood. At the present time the Dominican province in the archipelago, whose headquarters are in Spain, maintains missions in China, Indo-China and the large island of Formosa. May the great apostle Saint Francis Xavier, who had so much at heart the conversion of the infidels in this region, remember that this field of his labours was not entirely ungrateful soil, and obtain blessings for it in even greater abundance than heretofore!

FRANCIS MONTGOMERY.