

**THE SOCIETY OF THE SACRED HEART
IN THE FAR EAST**

1908—1980

by

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THE FAR EASTERN PROVINCE

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FUJI NOEN, 1952 - 1954

After the stormy closing of the House in Shanghai came a tranquil beginning in a rural setting, Susono. The year of the foundation, 1952, was the centenary of the death of Blessed Philippine, and Fuji Noen, as it was first called, was placed under her patronage. She whose outlook on the world had been shaped by Alpine horizons would feel at home here; on one side, across the valley, rose the Hakone Mountains and above the long slopes on the other rose Mount Fuji. One of the vast tea plantations which Mrs. Iwashita had deeded to her daughters at the close of the war had passed into the hands of the Society at her death in 1946, through Mother Kiyoko. The elder sister did not wish to keep her share and it was sold to the Society, which thus came into possession of the whole of the beautiful property.

Mother Duchesne would also have been pleased with the work already begun in these lovely surroundings. On a wooded space near the Kise river was a cluster of buildings: the elder Iwashita was a man whose ideal was "to serve heaven" by living in justice, peace and charity. He had built this school near his own home, and brought in teachers from Sano. His son, Father Soichi Iwashita, became principal, and under the lively guidance and advanced methods of this brilliant scholar the school reached a high standing and trained free-thinking citizens. Going about among the people, with a shabby old coat and a new camera, he was loved and revered by all for his witty wisdom, and the high moral training based on respect for persons. He died young, and was buried near his father in the cedar-shaded cemetery on the hillside above his home, while the school went on.

In 1950 the chuto grades were added to the sho, a kodo was built, and children from the town joined those from the farmlands. At this promising moment the school passed into the hands of the Society. Mother Sheldon's vision broadened like the view seen from Fuji-Noen, or from Sainte-Marie d'en Haut by Philippine before her. She wrote:

A third work in a somewhat middle-class milieu from a social point of view will not do us any harm, for in Japan we have a far too wide-spread reputation for being interested only in the well-to-do, rejecting the less

avored by wealth or rank.

Susono was an ideal opening. Climate, solitude and beauty were strong attractions; still more attractive was a simple way of life, open to Gospel values. The little school with its genuine Japanese grassroots offered a fresh approach to evangelization.

The eight members of the community* arrived in Easter-tide, 1952. Mother Sheldon presented them to the excited children and teachers. and family spirit was formed at once in Seishin Onjoshu. On April 19 the first mass was offered by Father Corvasier, and from then on the Paris Foreign Missioners came faithfully, on foot or by bicycle.

The first years were "the valley time", hard and happy. Mother Duff, as superior, grew young again after her experiences in China, and joined the property walks up the long slopes where the future buildings would rise. Much was lacking, and Fuji Noen was affectionately called "Fuji-No-Yen". But it grew quickly into its surroundings, helped by the kindly interest of Bishop Luke Arai of Yokohama. Mr. Sugiyama managed the farm; Oba San, whose baptism was the first major ceremony, smoothed the house-keeping; young Raphael Nakaya made himself "the indispensable", and so remained. There were few Christians in the Sunday School and night classes for women, but friendship replaced prejudice. A farmhouse was made into a guesthouse called St. Joseph's for hospitality was to become Susono's specialty. Groups came and went: teachers, students, holiday-makers known and unknown. Among them came Sister Stuck, then over ninety, in honor of her Golden Jubilee.

Mother Yoshikawa, in Sankocho, was the official kocho, while Mother Yoshimura did the work on the spot. Everyone helped in the school. Mother Duff rehearsed an English play to be given for her own feast, then took her place as superior - to be surprised and delighted by the performance! The first graduation from the chuto

*A. Atkinson, C. Camilleri, E. Duff, G. Guterres, L. Mifsud, U. Watanabe, C. Yamaguchi, S. Yoshimura.

was on March 23, 1954*. Then a Koto Gakko was added, leading to a full high-school diploma. It was promptly approved by Mombusho, and a new building, St. Michael's was constructed for its use.

As for the children, then numbering 136, they would have been a delight to Mother Duchesne. One little girl from town got up at five o'clock even on winter mornings. Bringing her breakfast with her books, she made her way alone under the stars across the bridge, in time for 6:30 mass with the community. Kazuko Terada was, later on, the first graduate of Fuji Seishin to enter the Society, and became a missionary to Kenya.

TURN IN THE ROAD September, 1952 - March, 1954

In September, 1952, Mother Sheldon, with Mother Thornton, set out for what she knew would be her last general council. The letters written as she flew over exotic eastern lands and familiar Europe showed wide-open interest in the beauty below her. The gathering at the Mother House was numerous, for several vicariates had lately been divided into two, and she met Dorothy McGuinness, vicar of Australia, and Evangelista Coen, vicar of New Zealand. In calling the Council Mother de Lescure had said:

Each of our general congregations, sometimes under difficult circumstances, has marked not so much a sudden turning to new ideas as a unanimous and more generous élan of a strengthened understanding by the Society of its own basic nature, conscious of its own spirit and resolute in its fidelity, and by that very fact open to the contemporary interests of the Heart of Jesus as he does his work in succeeding epochs.

The deliberations led to the rewriting of major documents of the Society "in the language of today"; the Decrees, the School Rule and the Plan of Studies. Recruitment in the school was widened, for an élite dirigeante could no longer be based on social privilege. Of special interest to the vicar of the Far East was a statement in the Spirit

*Kiyoe Katsumata, Mayumi Katsumata, Yoshie Nakagawa, Kimiko Nagata, Fumie Oshima, Mitsue Sato, Chiharu Suzuki, Kiyoko Takahashi, Kazuko Terada, Michiko Tsuchiya, Sayoko Uematsu, Ayako Utazaki.

and Plan of Studies:

In mission countries it is important that the program should include aspects of the national civilization and culture which are compatible with a Christian view of the world.⁸

And of great interest to all was Mother Thornton's conference on "The Christian Youth of Shanghai" already quoted.

Mother Sheldon was urged to return home by way of her own country which she had not seen since 1917. But, despite the pleading of her family and of the Australian vicariate, she declined. Mother McGuinness wrote: "Her coming would have brought untold joy and spiritual stimulus to our communities. I admired her detachment but it was a keen disappointment." "I have never met so definite a refusal," said Mother de Lescure. But Mother Sheldon would not use a privilege that could not be given to everyone.

Instead she went home through the United States, visiting Manhattanville College in its spacious new setting at Purchase with a view to making observations for her own college. She was in Saint Charles, for the celebration of the centenary of Blessed Philippine's death, saying: "There was a very wonderful atmosphere and a deep and quiet joy. Each person was filled with great and intimate thoughts about God's ways with the saints and their ways with him." At the airport in Tokyo she wrote on the declaration that asked the reason for her return: "Japan is my home!". Mother Thornton went from Rome to England and Scotland, then to New York where she picked up an honorary Doctorate in Philosophy from Fordham University, for future use at Shibuya.

The year 1953 went by quietly. Mother Sheldon had to say "no" to an offer of a new school at Matsue, requested by the government and seconded by the Jesuits. In July, she visited Obayashi where Mother Fitzgerald was now superior. In the fall she had time to take stock of her vicariate. Many old-timers had died since 1946*, and some had

*M.de Beauregard, C.Busutill, C.Cullen, M.Henderson, V.Ram, M.Stuck, M.Worthy.