

CHAPTER 3

*Among the Pimas*

[1687]

PADRE Kino had been at Dolores only about a month and a half when disturbing news came from a valley a hundred miles to the east. A ruthless Spanish officer had destroyed a whole Indian village and driven its inhabitants away. Condemned to death for his brutality, the officer escaped. Kino heard the Pimas talk about it. The white man was not punished, they said. He killed many innocent Indians and he was not punished. The soldiers let him run away.

Padre Kino shook his head sadly. That kind of wanton brutality could stir up a war of vengeance all along the border. That evening he went into the tiny church and stayed all night on his knees, face turned to heaven, asking God to bless these people, to help a humble padre save their souls, to permit him to work among them in peace.

Next day he found a heartening welcome at San Ignacio and Imuris and had almost forgotten about the Spanish officer as he rode beneath fragrant cottonwood trees toward Remedios. He intended to spend the night there, and return the next day to Dolores. But what was this? The village looked deserted.

Kino turned in the saddle and motioned to Francisco, the interpreter.

"Where are the people?"

Francisco shrugged. "I do not know. I will see if I can find them."

A little later Kino sat in front of the headman's hut and looked at the surly group rounded up by Francisco. At first they would say nothing. Then one of them spat out a few angry words.

"They do not want you here," said the interpreter. "They do not want to be Christian."

"Why?" said Kino.

"They say they do not want their village destroyed."

So, thought Kino, the people of Remedios have heard about the wicked soldier. He was a white man, so was Kino, therefore not to be trusted—that was the way they reasoned.

Two of the men began to talk at once. Presently Francisco turned back to Kino. "Even if you do not de-

stroy their village, you will make them work so hard for the Church they will have no time to plant their crops. And you pasture so many cattle the watering places dry up. That is what these people say."

Once again the first man spoke and this time Kino understood the words. He had heard them many times before, and it was easy to see why the Indians believed them.

"The padres kill people with their holy oils," said the man and Kino remembered a dying woman he had baptized and anointed in the last rites when he was here on his first trip.

"None of the things they say are true," Kino began slowly, using some of the Pima words he had learned.

"You lie to the Indians!" interrupted the man angrily and, to Francisco, "This padre said he had a paper from the King to protect the Indians. If he had such a paper he would show it to the soldiers at Bacanuche."

Swiftly Francisco translated and Kino threw up his hands. No use talking to people who felt like this. It had not been enough to show the royal order at San Juan two months ago. He would have to take it to the fort at Bacanuche also.

"We do not stay here tonight," he said. "We will return to Dolores."

That evening, almost before the packs were off the

mules, Padre Kino was giving orders for another ride. The next day he took Chief Coxi with him to Bacanuche, with other Indian officials, and all of them were present when Kino talked to the lieutenant at the fort. The officer was friendly, the reception more than cordial. There were Spanish mines near the settlement and Kino made sure their owners knew what was in the royal order. Then, hoping he had proved his good faith and honesty to the Indians, he went back to Dolores and settled down to work.

If the people of Remedios did not care to become Christians, they were in the minority. Indians began moving to Dolores from the country for miles around. By the end of June, 1687, Padre Kino had baptized sixty babies and several adults. His Indians had learned to chant the prayers, the Creed, and the Gloria, and they could say the Act of Contrition as well as those who had known it for years.

During the first months at Dolores, Kino managed to build a small church. The Pimas loved the holy pictures, the beautiful things on the altar, the small chiming bells. Now larger bells arrived from the capital of Mexico and the people listened with delight when they were rung.

It was no surprise when Chief Coxi came with his

wife one day to ask for baptism, but Padre Kino was greatly pleased. Coxi was an important man among the Pimas. He was not only chief of this village, but of other tribes living between here and the Sea of California. His reception into the Church must be a solemn occasion and Kino planned it carefully.

He made the chief wait for a month, until July 31. Then not only Coxi and his wife were baptized, but forty Indians with them. Spanish gentlemen came from Bacanuche to sponsor the new Christians and the padre from Cucurpe brought his whole choir. There were solemn vespers, a sung Mass, a procession. The Pimas loved it. Five chiefs from principal villages in the north and west came afterward to Kino and asked that padres be sent to them, too.

Were there mine owners among the Spanish from Bacanuche? If so, Kino welcomed them along with the rest, perhaps hoping they would consider their religion a little more and their pocketbooks less when they thought of Christian Indians in the future.

Kino now had more converts than he could care for and he sent letters to his Jesuit friends asking for anything they could send him. They responded generously, and six months later he wrote to one of them that he had been able to wash three hundred Indians in

the water of baptism and that five thousand more had come asking to receive the sacrament.

It was not altogether piety that brought them. Everyone who came was fed. The other missions had contributed cattle, sheep, goats and orchard trees when Padre Kino came to Dolores. The Pimas were natural farmers, some of them even using elaborate systems of irrigation in their fields. Kino introduced new foods and taught them to increase the yield of their crops many times over. Word spread all over the country that there was always food at Dolores. Other Pimas envied those under Kino's care and begged him to come and help them, too.

In January of 1689, Padre Gonzalez had heard so many splendid reports of Kino's work that he came on a tour of inspection. Kino sent word through Chief Coxi to the adjacent villages and many Pimas came to see the strange Black Robe as he rode with Kino around the little quadrangle of Indian villages and back to Dolores again.

Kino told Padre Gonzalez that he had questioned the Indians and what they said made him eager to explore new country to the north. First, however, he had to make sure that Dolores was solidly established. And while he was doing that, he begged that other priests

be sent to the region. Baptisms could be numbered in the thousands if there were priests to instruct the people.

It was a big country and the missions were far apart. Many of the padres suffered from loneliness. Padre Kino kept so busy he did not let himself think of his lack of congenial companions, but even he was delighted when Padre Juan Salvatierra came traveling through the region, sent by the Jesuit provincial on a tour of inspection of the missions in the north. He arrived at Dolores on Christmas Eve, 1689. Kino took one look at the square-jawed, hawk-nosed, weather-beaten face and knew that here was a man he was going to like. The new church was not yet finished, but a joyous Nativity season was celebrated in it just the same.

Like Kino, Salvatierra was a learned man and a fearless explorer. He had come from the war-torn mountains where two Jesuits had been martyred. Stories from this Pima country made him think the same troubles might be brewing here. In fact, the provincial had asked him to look into them. He was therefore puzzled by the cordial reception he received from the Pimas at Dolores. And when he and Kino rode out to the missions, accompanied by Chief Coxi, he was

amazed and delighted to see the amount of building that Kino had been able to do in less than three years.

At Remedios the Indians were still sullen and uncooperative, but at Imuris and San Ignacio, the Black Robes were welcomed by crowds of friendly natives. And as they traveled northward to visit four new missions it was a triumphal procession, with smiling natives lined up to greet the padres at every village. Far up the Altar River, in what is now Arizona, seven hundred Indians awaited the visitors, knelt before them and begged them to visit their village.

Who could resist such an appeal? The padres went on to the north, crossed a divide and descended to the Santa Cruz River where they found prepared for them three brush shelters, one in which to say Mass, another where they were to sleep, a third for use as a kitchen. There were more than forty houses in the village and Salvatierra was so impressed by the size of the place and the attitude of the Indians he promised to send a priest to this place as soon as he could.

That evening he and Kino sat in the brush shelter and looked out at the distant mountains. The pleasant smell of burning piñon came from smoke from the cooking fires curling into the dark blue sky of evening.

Salvatierra had been examining the houses. They

were built of upright ribs that looked like sunflower stalks, bound together with material from the giant cactus called *sahuaro*, then plastered with mud mixed with straw.

“They are roughly made,” he said, “but they keep out the cold.” Then he said slowly, “I must confess that when I came to Dolores I was troubled. There were many conflicting reports. Some said that priests were not needed, that there are few Indians in Pima country. Still another story which came to the ears of our provincial was that the Pima Indians are so stupid they cannot learn, so it is useless to send missionaries to them.”

“You have seen that such stories are lies,” said Kino.

“They were lies,” said Salvatierra.

Just then there were shouts from the edge of the village and Chief Coxi hurried toward them. “Warriors come from the north,” he said excitedly. “Come and see!”

The two followed him and came face to face with a band of Indians with painted faces, wearing brightly colored feathers, beads and blankets. They had lances in their hands, but they were far from warlike. When they saw the Black Robes, they fell on their knees.

“They wish you to come and visit them,” said Chief



*Warriors came from a great town called Bac to ask the Black Robes to visit them*

Coxi. "They come from a great town to the north called Bac. By comparison this is a small village."

Kino looked at Salvatierra. Regretfully the Father Visitor shook his head. "We cannot go. I have already been away too long."

"But I will come this way again," said Kino, using some of his newly acquired Pima words. "I will come to visit you at Bac." It was a solemn promise.

They turned south the next morning, riding through fine bottom lands and cottonwood groves that lined the sparkling Santa Cruz River. At Santa Maria, near the crest of the divide, they stayed to baptize babies and instruct their parents, then packed up their vestments and portable altar, and were off to Dolores, stopping at two other places along the way. They had traveled more than two hundred miles through beautiful country, among pleasant, welcoming people. If Salvatierra had had any doubts that Pima land needed more missionaries he had them no longer.

"I have never seen a more pleasant people, a more productive country," he exclaimed to Padre Kino as they rode along.

Kino's eyes glowed. "They are so indeed! And do you know what has long been the wish of my heart. It is to grow enough grain and raise enough cattle in

this Pima country to supply the poor people of California."

Salvatierra looked at him thoughtfully. Ever since they left Dolores, Kino had come back constantly to the subject of California and the natives he had had to abandon there. Although he had done so much good since, he seemed unable to forget them. He was very persuasive. From what Padre Kino said those missions should be re-established. Padre Salvatierra thought he would like to be the man to do it, but he knew the difficulties and did not like to raise false hopes. So he said nothing more.

As the friendly Salvatierra rode away from Dolores, Kino wondered how much the talk of California had meant to him, if he would really try to go there. Kino would not know for a long time. Shortly after Salvatierra's return from the expedition, he was appointed rector of the Jesuit College at Guadalajara. Once more California would have to wait.

During the next busy year, Kino recalled his promise to visit the Pimas at Bac, but time after time something occurred to prevent his going to them. When he heard that Indians in that area had gone on a rampage and stolen a herd of horses from one of the missions, he

feared he might be too late. The soldiers sent out to find and punish the thieves might massacre innocent Indians instead, perhaps even those of Bac. But the officer in charge this time was a level-headed fellow. He found the guilty ones, made peace with them and brought a band of their chiefs to Dolores. They had heard of the black-robed Kino and when they saw him they begged that a padre be sent to them.

After they had gone, Kino thought, "One soldier treats the Indians like wild beasts and all who hear of it become suspicious and angry. Another officer considers them his native brothers, with souls like his own, and as a result we can bring the Faith to their whole tribe and their neighbors."

But not everyone shared his pleasure in what had been accomplished. About this time two mine owners met in Bacanuche. One of them said, "What do you think of Padre Kino?"

"He is a wall of brass against us!" cried the other. "Until he came we had almost convinced the governor that the Pimas were rebels and enemies and should be given to us as slaves, for the good of the country. Now look what has happened! This Kino has baptized hundreds of them and built heaven knows how

many new churches. We must do something about him, and soon!"

His companion laughed shortly. "You will say nothing against Kino to the governor. Do you realize that for the first time since the Spanish came to Sonora, there is peace among the Pimas? I need slaves as badly as you do, but we will not risk an Indian uprising to get them. No, *mi amigo*, we will not interfere with Padre Kino. His friends are too powerful."

