

CHAPTER 13

*The Chapel of
St. Francis Xavier*

[1711]

BLACKBIRDS fluttered their red wings along the irrigation ditches and their gay chattering rose above the gurgle of the water. The sweet smell of a cottonwood grove in the spring sun came to Padre Kino's nostrils as his horse paced easily along the road toward Magdalena. This would be a pleasant trip, and a joyous occasion, dedicating the chapel there to the padre's patron, St. Francis Xavier.

In this year of 1711 spring work pressed as always, but the Pimas could keep it going for the few days Kino would be away. All the ranches were prospering and it was fitting that he pause to offer thanks to God for the celestial favors showered upon him throughout these years among the Pimas.

He turned in the saddle and motioned to Marcos to

ride up beside him. "It was at this very time of year I came here," he said. "Twenty-four years ago I rode for the first time through this pass we are approaching. The good padre from Cucurpe was with me. We established three missions before returning to Dolores."

He was silent once more and Marcos dropped back a little way. He too had been thinking. How long had it been since the padre took him over the long, exciting miles to the City of Mexico? More than fifteen. One of Marcos' own sons was as old as he had been on that momentous expedition.

Marcos thought proudly of that son. All the children were in school, but the oldest was brightest of all. He might even be governor of Dolores someday. After all, Marcos himself was a councilman.

As he so often did, Marcos wondered about his people in the old pagan days. Five years of age when Padre Kino came, Marcos remembered little of what went on then, but he had heard the old ones talk of famine, of freezing cold on winter hunts in the mountains. He fingered the sleeve of his woolen coat and thought with pity of the Indians who had lived little better than wild animals.

It was a proud thing to be a Pima. Look at Dolores and its ninety families, with every man trained in a

special skill. Marcos' brother was a blacksmith, one of his cousins a carpenter; another operated the water mill. The village had its own officials, ran its own affairs. They had built a beautiful church with bells and choir chapel, with ornaments and chalice of pure gold. There was a good house for Padre Kino, too, with plenty of room to entertain visitors. And the orchard was the talk of all Sonora with its pomegranates, peaches, pears and figs, its grapes hanging in purple bounty on vines trimmed each winter by another of Marcos' brothers.

Marcos looked ahead at Padre Kino, heart swelling with love for this man who had come not only to bring the Faith, but also to teach the Pimas how to live like civilized men.

"May he never leave us," said the Pima softly. "May the good padre live forever!"

A sudden exclamation from behind made Marcos look up. In the blue sky above the rim of mountain-side a buzzard tilted on widespread ragged wings, turned, soared and was joined by two more. As the little party climbed through the pass, Marcos' quick eyes saw a half-devoured carcass at the edge of the mesquite trees. A mountain lion had killed a deer and

the scavengers of the sky were cleaning up what was left.

An old man in the rear said with a note of foreboding, "When I see them, I think of Caborca."

Marcos grunted. Over and over he had heard the story of Padre Saeta, the massacre, the war. He seldom thought of it any more, there had been peace for so long among the Pimas. But the old ones remembered. This one did not like the buzzards.

Kino saw the black birds too, and remembered. But, like Marcos, he had too much to think about to dwell on that long-ago sorrow. He could not recall a time when the Jesuits were not under attack from someone. At the moment it was the Bishop of Durango who demanded their expulsion! What was worse, it was reported that the King had yielded to his demand. Padre Kino did not believe it. But now he sent a swift prayer heavenward.

"Most glorious apostle to the Indies, St. Francis Xavier," he said, "protect us, protect thy people, these good Pimas!"

Magdalena was in festive garb for the occasion and Padre Campos wasted no time in taking Kino into the

new chapel to show him the statue of the great St. Francis. Padre Velarde, who now assisted Padre Kino, was there too. That night the three Jesuits burned their candle down to the dish, recalling the past with its tragedies and joys, speaking with gravity of the uncertain present, about which Kino, at least, refused to be pessimistic.

Santa Maria, on the divide between Sonora and Arizona, was now equipped, he reported, and Velarde boasted proudly, "New vestments with which to say Mass, three hundred head of cattle for their ranch, one hundred head of sheep and goats, a drove of mares, a drove of horses, a house in which to live, the church half finished—why, the house is even furnished."

"What about Quiburi?" asked Padre Campos.

"One person offered five thousand dollars in goods and silver for the founding of the church, house and fortification of the great mission of Quiburi where Captain Coro lives." Kino had a pleased smile on his face. His friend Coro was appreciated, at last.

Velarde looked at him appraisingly. Kino himself had offered to finance new missionaries, if only they could be sent. And he continued to pour a flood of supplies into the California missions. There seemed no end to the bounty from this fruitful land of the

Pimas, Velarde thought, as there seemed no end to the achievements of Padre Kino. He was a great man, this humble padre. He had explored and opened to Christian settlement the vast lands from Dolores north to the Gila River, northwest to the Colorado, west to the Sea of California, and in the doing had discovered a land passage to Lower California. His Indian missions were models to be copied throughout the New World and his brilliant maps were prized both here and in Europe.

But his labors had taken their toll. There were shadows under the blue-gray eyes tonight and he had grown so thin he was almost transparent.

"Let us go to bed," said Velarde, "and for one night, Padre Kino, will you sleep in a good bed, instead of those calfskins on the floor?"

Kino shook his head. He was used to the floor, with a pack saddle for a pillow and a blanket such as the Indians used pulled over him for warmth.

The next morning, garbed in beautiful vestments, Padre Kino stood before the altar. The little chapel was jammed with Pimas, come from miles distant for the dedication. The statue of St. Francis Xavier had been carried in solemn procession around the plaza. Now it was installed in its place beside the altar.

Bells chimed and Padre Kino's thin brown hands raised the Host slowly, reverently, triumphantly above his head. The crowd hushed, scarcely breathing. The richly ornamented golden chalice was lifted, set again upon the altar. Then, in the very Presence of His Lord, Padre Eusebio Francisco Kino sighed and crumpled to the floor.

A little after midnight he was dead.

The gay decorations of Magdalena were swathed in somber black and the people mourned. He was buried there at Magdalena, in the chapel of St. Francis Xavier, on the Gospel side. "For it seemed," said Padre Velarde, "that the Holy Apostle to whom he was ever devoted, was calling him, in order that, being buried in his chapel, he might accompany him, as we believe, in glory."

That same day across the divide, at Quiburi, Chief Coro woke with a start. What had disturbed him? There was no sound, but someone had spoken in his ear to wake him.

He got up and went to the door of his house. The sky was beginning to lighten. A shadowy figure moved at the edge of the village, and another. Apaches!

Coro gave the war cry, snatched his quiver of arrows, his bow, and dashed boldly toward the nearest enemy. They grappled hand to hand, swaying back and forth across the cleared space just beyond the houses. All around them the fighting raged. Coro struggled vainly to loose the iron grip about his throat, reached for the throat of his assailant—

The men of Quiburi were gaining, forcing the Apaches back. There were cries of victory as the enemy broke and ran, to fall one by one under the arrows of Coro's men. But even as they returned from the bloody chase, chanting their count of Apaches dead, brandishing bloody scalps, they came upon the body of Chief Coro at the edge of the village, and the Apache whose bitter grasp had not relaxed even in death.

Chief Coro too had fought his last battle. And, as Velarde mused on Kino's passing, so Padre Campos when he heard of Coro's death, wondered if Padre Kino had not paused long enough, on his way to heaven, to take his old friend with him.

Kino's tomb with its statue of St. Francis Xavier became a place of pilgrimage. From Arizona, from Sonora and places far beyond, people came to pray. And al-

though the chapel crumbled and the Jesuits were banished, the good Franciscans took their place and built a new church at Magdalena.

Dolores, Mother of Missions, is gone, the place where she stood on a hill above the river marked only by a few crosses, a thicket of mesquite. The other churches Padre Kino built have long since been replaced. At the place that he called San Xavier del Bac, south of Tucson, Arizona, on the foundations Kino laid in 1700, a Franciscan church rises white, incredibly beautiful, out of the desert. Built by Indians, decorated with their finest art, it is Indians who are summoned by the bells of San Xavier to Mass. And in Sonora, to the south, the church bells also ring for them. So Kino's greatest gift to his children lives on.

And there can be no doubt in the minds and hearts of Pimas who are told of him, that together with St. Francis Xavier, the first great Jesuit missionary he was named for, Padre Kino still prays for them.

