

Blood of a Martyr

[1694]

SHORTLY after Kino's return from Caborca to Dolores, he made a journey north to Bac and beyond, to the Gila River, to see "the great houses." They proved to be amazing ruins of an earlier civilization, but Padre Kino was not as impressed by them as he was by the friendly Pimas who welcomed him wherever he went. Accompanied only by natives on this journey, he went back to Dolores in the firm belief that a padre could go anywhere in Pima country in perfect safety.

At Dolores he found that his request had been granted to establish a mission at Caborca and a priest was being sent there. In October, 1694, young Padre Saeta arrived at Dolores and Kino began at once to assemble supplies for him.

On the morning of October 19, Chief Coxi's young son hauled a heavily laden pack over the dusty plaza to-

ward his father, crying, "Where do we go? And why is Padre Kino so happy?"

"We go on a journey to the west, to Caborca again," said the chief. "Padre Kino is always happy when we prepare for a journey."

"But look," the youngster waved toward the black-robed padres watching a band of mares in a corral. Kino, his own dusty garment hiked up as usual about his knees, waved both arms as he shouted instructions to the Indian herdsman. "What does he do with those horses?" persisted the boy.

"The horses and cattle and sheep and goats and mules and much wheat and corn he gives to the young padre to start a mission," said Chief Coxi proudly. After all, these animals had thrived under his care, these grains had been grown in the fields around Dolores. It was his gift as well as Kino's.

"Why does he give away so much?"

"All padres share what they have," said another voice as Francisco, the interpreter, stopped to look over the pack animals. "Are you ready, Chief Coxi?" he asked. "Padre Kino wishes to start as early as we can. There will be many stops along the way, so people may see the new Padre Saeta."

Chief Coxi picked up the reins that trailed from

his horse's bridle and threw himself across its back. His son jumped on a box and from it to his own horse. Kino and the new padre had saddles, but most of the Indians rode bareback, or with a blanket cinched on the horse's back. For a people who had known horses only since the Spaniards brought them into the country, the Pimas were excellent riders. So were the warlike Apaches, unfortunately. Apaches were always stealing horses, and Pimas always getting blamed for it.

Chief Coxi spat into the dust and reined his mount around to look back at the bawling cattle, sheep baaing in their wake and village dogs yapping at their heels. It was fine stock they were giving the new padre.

Kino too was thinking of the stock as he rode along. He glanced at the handsome young Padre Saeta and hoped the animals would thrive under his care.

His heart was light as they rode along. Everything was going as he had prayed it would. Only two days before, the Father Visitor had left Dolores for the north with another new padre who, by now, was installed at Cocóspara. That made seven priests in the district of Dolores. This Saeta who rode beside him would make eight. Kino hoped all of them would stay.

"You may be able to plant a field of wheat right away," said Kino. "One good shower of rain in Novem-

ber and you will have a fine crop the following May."

"Only one rain during the winter?" asked Saeta.

"There may be more, but even if there is not, you will always find water in the sand. At Caborca, water flows the year round at some places in the river bed. In the packs are small trees for your orchard—peach, pomegranate and lemon trees. At San Ignacio walnuts do well, but I do not know whether they will grow at Caborca. Oranges should, however. If I go to the City of Mexico next year I will try to bring back some orange trees."

He turned to look back, but the horses were traveling at a good pace and all he could see were clouds of dust. He began to talk again of this wonderful Pima country, how the Indians here were raising corn, wheat, beans, melons and squashes when he came. He called the latter calabashes and said they were so common the Indians said, "Eat calabash," when they meant having a meal of any kind.

Saeta listened and tried to remember everything. He was as pleased to be here as Kino was delighted to have him.

"What about wild fruit?" he asked eagerly. "In the south the Indians eat delicious fruit from a cactus. They call it *pitahaya*. Does it grow near Caborca?"

“There may be some, I do not know. The fruit of the giant *sahuaro* cactus is also good. And do you know the vegetable called *bledo*? It grows wild on the flats along the river. When it is young and tender it is better than asparagus. Even after it grows up the cattle eat it. There will be plenty of forage around your mission, Padre.”

It took a great deal of food for the small army of Indians who assembled to build the church at Caborca. Within a week after Kino left, Saeta wrote that they had made five hundred adobe bricks. They were proud to think of having their own church, their own padre, and whole families moved into Caborca to help with the work—and share in the rewards for working. Padre Saeta soon discovered he would have to have help to feed them all and went off on an expedition to other missions, begging for corn, wheat and beef. His people were quarrying stone, cutting timbers and putting them in place. Men who work like that must be fed, and well fed.

Kino added sixty additional head of cattle, sixty sheep and goats to what Dolores had already given and sent with them a quantity of wheat and corn. Saeta had equally good luck wherever he went, due partly to the generosity of his fellow Jesuits, partly to his en-

thusiasm and engaging personality. Everybody liked him. Everybody was glad to help him.

He had been at Caborca almost four months when early in March, 1695, Padre Kino, no doubt remembering the kindness of his neighboring pastors during his first Holy Week in Pimaland, wrote to ask Saeta to come to Dolores for Easter. The young padre replied that he was too busy. “I am building a town, growing crops and enclosing pastures for my stock,” he wrote. “Later, perhaps we may meet midway at Magdalena.”

The letter was written on Good Friday, April 1. Before Kino received it, a rash of Indian troubles erupted in Pima country, starting at Tubutama, where Lieutenant Solís had hanged the two troublemakers the year before.

It had been quiet since at Tubutama, but not peaceful. The padre there, invited to Dolores for Easter, had no sooner left Tubutama on March 29 when one of his Indian foremen from another tribe abused a Pima workman. He yelled for help. Other Pimas came with arrows and killed the foreman, along with two of his friends. That roused the whole village and before the day was over they had set fire to the mission house and church, desecrated sacred articles from the altar and killed the mission cattle.

Padre Campos heard of the trouble at San Ignacio. The priest from Tubutama had not arrived and Campos was sure he had been killed. Campos started out with some of his Indians, hoping to rescue him and the two padres met on the road. There was no question of going back. Together they hurried toward Dolores and the meeting with their fellow Jesuits for Easter.

The Tubutama Indians, angry at their padre's escape, turned their faces toward the new mission downriver, at Caborca. They arrived at Padre Saeta's door very early on the morning of Holy Saturday and although he had heard of trouble at another mission, he seemed to have no fear of these strange Indians, but invited them into the house and talked to them for a while. On their way out he took them through the hall which he was using as a church. In the yard they turned on him, drew their bows, notched their arrows. Saeta fell to his knees and spread his arms wide. Two arrows pierced his body. He rose, ran to his room, picked up a crucifix and kissed it, then fell across his bed while his murderers shot a shower of arrows into his body.

His assistants were the next victims. Francisco, the interpreter from Dolores, and two more Indians from



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that mission reddened the sand with their blood. Then, as they had done at Tubutama, the Indians set fire to the house, destroyed the altar, defiled the sacred vessels and either killed or drove away all the cattle, sheep, goats and horses they could find.

Easter Sunday was drawing to a close when a faithful Caborca Indian staggered into the plaza at Dolores. He had brought his frightful news almost a hundred and fifty miles in twenty-seven hours. Shortly after his arrival, another messenger brought the Good Friday letter from the martyred Saeta. Then messages began to come to Padre Kino from everywhere: the east, where the Apaches threatened, the southeast, where rebellion flared again. If revolt spread among the Pimas, every mission in Sonora might be wiped out, as the Franciscan missions had been destroyed in New Mexico eighteen years before.

Kino sent an urgent plea for help to General Jironza and dispatched Chief Felipe, an Indian governor, to Caborca to find out exactly what had happened. Jironza got together a mixed force of soldiers and Indian warriors, and, joined by Lieutenant Manje and two priests, headed for Tubutama.

The village was deserted. They turned south along

the Altar River. Before they reached Caborca, they met Chief Felipe on his way to Dolores, to report to Padre Kino. According to custom in this hot country, he had burned the bodies of those who had been killed. He had brought the crucifix which Padre Saeta embraced as he was dying. Felipe knelt on the ground, bowed his head and held out the crucifix to the general.

Jironza was a hardened soldier, but the sight of this precious relic brought tears to his eyes. He took it reverently and exclaimed at the beauty of the workmanship.

Lieutenant Manje was not looking at the crucifix, but at the horizon, where a swarm of black-winged dots circled cloudlike above a certain spot in the west.

"Let me go ahead and reconnoiter, my uncle," he said. "I know the country." At Jironza's nod, he beckoned to his bodyguard and rode on.

As Manje and his escort rode into Caborca the hush of death was broken only by the thunder of an arquebus which Manje ordered fired to drive away the circling vultures. They did not disperse, but swooped down a little farther distant on carcasses of dead cattle, killed by the raiding Indians and left to rot in the hot spring sun.

Jironza rode up with the others. Caborca was de-

serted. Even innocent Indians stayed at a safe distance in the hills when soldiers came on a mission such as this.

Jironza and Manje gathered up the bones and ashes of the dead Saeta, placed them in a box and locked it. From the shambles that had been his room, they picked up twenty-two arrows. The soldiers searched for vestments, books, missals, any sacred vessels that might have been overlooked. Everything of value was gone, the roofless buildings empty, open to the sky.

General Jironza looked grimly at the fields along the river. Padre Saeta had obeyed Kino's injunction to plant wheat in November. It was a magnificent crop, heavy yellowing heads rippling in the warm breeze, standing almost tall enough to hide a man.

"Destroy it!" said the general harshly. "Do not leave one grain to feed the murderers!"

Swiftly his men obeyed, cutting the grain, then turning three hundred horses into the fields. The corn, not yet ripe, suffered the same fate. When the soldiers moved away, bearing the martyred Saeta in solemn procession, they left behind a scene of complete devastation.

Face drawn with sorrow, eyes red-rimmed with weeping, Padre Kino met them at Dolores, said a solemn Mass. Then the funeral procession wound slowly down

the valley to Cucurpe. General Jironza led the mule which bore the box containing Saeta's remains. Padre Kino, Manje and another Jesuit walked behind. From time to time the soldiers fired their arquebuses in volleys that reverberated against the rocky walls.

As they neared the hill at Cucurpe, the padres went ahead to put on their vestments. Jironza lifted the box on his shoulders, carried it reverently to the door of the church and delivered it to the pastor. Next day as one of the padres sang the requiem Mass the church was not large enough to hold the multitude of soldiers, Indians and sorrowing Jesuits. At the end of the magnificent ceremony young Padre Saeta's body lay beneath the Epistle side of the main altar and word went out to the most remote villages concerning the veneration which was paid even to the ashes of a dead priest.

Padre Kino turned sadly back to Dolores and behind him, Chief Coxi rode along with a worried frown on his brown face. He had not understood many of the things the padres said to one another.

"The blood of a martyr is the seed of the Church." What did they mean by that? In the midst of grieving for their dead comrade they said they rejoiced, that Saeta's death would bring many souls to heaven. How could that be?

He turned to a companion riding alongside. "One thing I do know, that none of the padres seem to notice. Our Padre Kino burns with fever. Did you see how he swayed on his feet in the church? The death of his friend has pierced his heart."

