CHAPTER 1

California Mission

[*1685*]

At an altar set up in front of a tiny unfinished adobe chapel, near San Bruno, in Lower California, Padre Eusebio Francisco Kino was finishing the saying of his Mass. His vestments were the red of a stormy sunrise and in them his sturdy figure looked taller, more commanding than usual as he turned to bless the Spanish admiral and his soldiers who knelt on the sun-baked earth.

During the rest of the day the good padre would bustle about in a rumpled black robe not seeming to care how he looked. But for the Mass all must be beautiful —embroidered vestments, white cloth of finest linen, the chime of silver bells at the Consecration, and the chalice held above his head, golden, sparkling with gems.

Did he think such things impressed these dirty Cali-

fornia savages? wondered one of the soldiers, edging into a patch of shade beside a thornbush. He felt half undressed without armor or weapons, but Padre Kino had ordered them laid aside when Mass was said. Of course, in this blistering sun it was as well not to wear armor. A man could bake inside it like bread in an oven. The wind that blew from the east across the Sea of California was dry and hot as if the long rolling swells were desert sand instead of water.

The soldier licked his cracked lips and tried to swallow, but his throat was parched. Would he ever taste good water again, he wondered, or have enough of it to drink? This was a cursed country. Spain would be better off without it. For a hundred and fifty years, ever since the days of Cortez, the Spanish had been trying to establish a settlement on this great "Island of California." Now, in 1685, it was still desolate, peopled only by savages and a handful of white men.

He edged closer to the thorn tree and turned a little to eye a sizeable group of Indians. Look at them, pretending to be devout! Some were even kneeling. There was Chief Ibo, who had come only yesterday from a village twenty leagues (about fifty miles) down the coast, and his tall son beside him, both as naked as the day they were born. How could Padre Kino trust such heathens? Calling them his children and going fearlessly among the wildest of them—it made your skin crawl just to think of it.

"Animals," gritted the soldier. "Kino may think they are human beings, with souls like his own, but they are nothing more than dirty, treacherous animals!"

As if his muttered words had triggered it, a scream sliced the stillness. The soldier leaped to his feet, snatching wildly for a weapon that was not there, jumped back as a black dog streaked past him into the thorn patch. He was almost knocked off his feet by the tall young Indian crashing after it, blood streaming from his slashed leg.

Indians and soldiers milled apart in two noisy, frightened groups. At the altar Padre Kino's vestments swirled in a cloud of red. He shouted, but no one heard. A rock hurtled through the air toward the soldiers and from somewhere came the explosion of an arquebus, the gun then used by the Spaniards. The Indians fled in a cloud of dust. Soldiers stood guiltily silent.

"Who fired that gun?" Padre Kino's face was white with anger. "You were ordered to come here without weapons. Admiral Atondo, find that man and have him punished!"

"I was wishing for a weapon of my own," muttered

The soldier was almost knocked off his feet by the tall young Indian crashing after the dog

the admiral, but he was careful to say it under his breath. Padre Kino was a brilliant mathematician, the only maker of maps in the New World and the official cartographer of his expedition. How could such a learned man be so impractical when it came to dealing with savages? the admiral wondered.

"Whose dog was that?" the padre demanded now. "The first time these Indians show reverence for God, what happens? One of you does not tie up his worthless mongrel. How often must I tell you that we have to love these people before we can expect them to love God? Kneel, all of you, while I pray that He may not permit all our work to be destroyed by one foolish accident."

As the soldiers went down on their knees, the one by the thornbush heard a whisper of bare foot on sand, saw a brown face peer through the dusty leaves. The soldier stayed where he was when the rest of his companions hurried off to their quarters and watched the young Indian move stealthily into the open as Padre Kino turned to fold the white altar cloth. The soldier looked for a stick, a stone, something to throw. But without looking up Padre Kino said, "Peace, my son. He means no harm."

"How do you know?" the soldier growled.

"His father is my friend," said Kino serenely and

went on smoothing the cloth until the boy was not two steps away. Then Padre Kino turned, smiling.

"So, young Hulo, you are hurt. Let me see." He spoke in Spanish, but no one could mistake his meaning. The boy stood motionless as Kino stooped to examine the leg.

"It is not deep, this wound. Come with me and I will wash it."

The boy edged away, but Kino's strong, square fingers gripped the bare arm. "Come," he said again, this time in the boy's own language. "I will give you food."

The black eyes widened. Food, this strange man said. No one from Hulo's village ever had enough to eat. He followed through a low doorway into a small adobe building. Padre Kino rummaged in a sack for a handful of dried maize, noting with a frown how little was left. If a boat did not manage to cross the stormy Sea of California within the next week or so, the garrison would be hungrier than the Indians.

The padre poured brackish water into a bowl and washed the bitten leg while Hulo chewed the parched corn. The bite was nothing. Village dogs were always biting. It was the suddenness of the attack that had startled him. His black eyes watched every move as Kino took off the beautiful red vestments and put them carefully in a wooden chest, set the chalice gently in another chest and locked it.

"Come," said Kino, "now both of us will eat," and led the way outside. Around the corner, in the shade of the rough adobe wall, a half dozen Indian boys of all sizes squatted around a bowl on the sandy earth, pushing pieces of raw fish into their mouths as fast as they could swallow. The smallest of them saw Kino, jumped up and threw both arms around the black-robed knees, jabbering a mixture of Spanish and Indian that Hulo could not make out. Kino seemed to understand.

"After we have eaten," he said, "I will tell you about Our Lord and you will help this new one learn the Ave Maria."

The padre's food was a mixture of raw herbs and seeds ground fine and he ate little of that. For two years he has fasted, worked and prayed with the Indians of Lower California. He had explored the mountains, drawn maps of the eastern coast line, and, as pathfinder for Admiral Atondo, had led the party westward across the peninsula to the shores of the great Pacific Ocean. They were the first white men to make such a crossing and Kino recorded it, as he did all his travels, by charting the course and making a map which showed in detail every place they visited. He enjoyed everything

connected with such an expedition, even the hardships.

But above all, he was a missionary, and his first care was the Indians. At San Bruno he had built a church and a small house for the Jesuits, planted fruit trees, maize and melons, all with the cheerful help of the Indians. His crops had flourished for a time, but the long drought and a rare frost or two had ruined everything. On his expeditions with the soldiers he had constantly been in search of a more suitable place for a permanent mission.

Padre Kino sighed. Yesterday the admiral had said there was no hope for a permanent settlement unless his divers found many more pearls in the California waters. Kino felt sure that they would never find enough pearls to pay the expenses of settlement and defense. It took great quantities of supplies to feed even a small garrison. At times in the last two years the soldiers had nearly starved when ships could not cross the stormy waters between Lower California and the Mexican mainland. Now the orchard trees had dried to brown sticks; no vegetables grew in the parched gardens; the maize had not even sprouted in the small dusty fields. And once again the supply ship was late in coming.

Padre Kino shrugged away his gloomy thoughts and smiled at Hulo. These Indian youngsters knew he

loved them. Why else would they leave their families and come to live with him? He could not go anywhere without a troop of them running alongside.

Hulo soon became the leader of the band of Indian boys. Within a month, when the ship finally made the crossing, he helped the soldiers unload bags of corn and wheat from the small boat that brought them to shore. When Kino saw that barely enough food had come for the soldiers much less for his Indians, he decided to go to the mainland himself in search of extra supplies. So when the ship sailed again the padre was on board and Hulo went with him. Despite the tossing, pitching waters off the coast which cast fear even into the hearts of the seasoned sailors, the Indian lad seemed quite unafraid of any danger so long as he was with his Padre Kino.

For three days the wind blew so hard out of the east, the ship bobbed up and down without making any headway. They could still see the mountains of Lower California on the morning of the fourth day, but then the wind shifted, the sails filled. They began to climb the towering waves, dip into the troughs between. Slowly the ship moved east toward Mexico. By afternoon the sea was calmer and Padre Kino, with Hulo beside him, sat on the deck, working on a map of California.

The captain disliked all Indians. He pretended Hulo was not there as he stopped to watch.

"How do you know where to put the bay?" asked the captain.

"I learned the making of maps as you learned the business of sailing a ship." The square fingers kept on with the painstaking task until "Bahia de La Paz," the Bay of Peace, was lettered in the lower left-hand corner.

Padre Kino straightened with a sigh. "It is too bad we did not keep the peace for which the bay was named."

"How can you keep peace with savages?" snorted the captain. "It will be well when we Spanish give up all idea of a California colony."

"Do not say that." Kino's blue-gray eyes darkened.

"Why not? In Mexico there is great wealth, with much gold and silver. California has nothing but savages."

"But each of them has a soul," reminded the padre. "There is nothing more precious than a human soul. If only I could baptize all these Indians!"

"You had better not," said the captain grimly. "Remember what happened when you baptized the old man at San Bruno, and he died? The Indians said you

were a bad doctor. They wanted to kill you, and the rest of us, too."

"But that man went straight to heaven," said Kino serenely. "If we find an Indian in danger of death we always baptize him. It is the strong young ones like Hulo here that we may not baptize until they are more fully instructed. And how can we do this until we establish a permanent mission among his people. How is he to learn about God and the Church?"

The captain grunted. "You think more of a dirty savage than you do of your own skin."

"Why, of course I do." Kino looked up in surprise. "That is the reason I became a Jesuit, so I could come as a missionary to people like these. I would give my life gladly for them. Is not that what Our Lord did for us?"

The captain sniffed, but was silent until Kino began to sketch a picture of two Indians in the upper left-hand corner of the map, then he said suddenly, "What do you do there? Oh, I see. It is the region north of California which has not been explored. You do not know what is there, so you make a decoration to fill that corner."

"Very good," smiled Kino. "No one knows what is to the north. When I was a student in Germany, my pro-

fessors taught me that California is a peninsula. Now everyone believes what the English explorer, Sir Francis Drake, said, that California is an island. But I am still not sure—"

He looked up at the white clouds sailing so smoothly across the blue sky. "It would be wonderful to find that my professors were right. Just think—if we could bring provisions overland to the California settlements, we would not have to worry about stormy seas and leaky ships!"

"You would like to see me lose my employment?" cried the captain. "Well, let me tell you, Padre, I would be glad to go elsewhere. And you think we make great profits bringing supplies to California? It is not true. The owners of these ships and every man who sails in them would be happy if they never heard the name California again!" And he stamped off to take the wheel.

For the rest of the voyage the weather was pleasant, the winds westerly and brisk. When they docked at the little Mexican port the captain was in a better humor.

"You brought us luck, Padre," he said. "It was the fastest crossing I have made in two years."

"Then perhaps you will not mind taking us back again," said Kino.

The captain's smile faded. "How soon do you want to go? You know these ships always have to have some repairs made between voyages."

"Will a week be long enough?" asked Kino and, at the captain's reluctant nod, "Then we will visit the padres who have missions nearby and see how much food we can beg for the poor Indians of San Bruno."

Kino and his young companion were back before the week was up. The mainland had suffered also from the drought. The priests of the Mexican missions were as generous as ever, but they had to consider their own native charges. All Padre Kino had been able to gather were five sheep in a pen, a few bags of corn. He looked at the captain, waiting with a small boat to take him out to the ship.

"Have you bought and loaded all the supplies the admiral ordered?" asked the padre.

"Prices are higher than ever," shrugged the captain. "Everything is aboard that I had money to pay for. And it does not look as if you had very good fortune, either, Padre Kino."

"We have permission to return north along the coast of the mainland," said Kino. "Perhaps the missions there have had more rain, can spare more food."

What he did not say was that he wanted to go north

anyway, to see how far the Sea of California extended in that direction. The next morning, while the sheep baaed unhappily in their little pen on the pitching deck, Kino stood at the rail, pointing out to Hulo the way the mountains of Mexico sloped steeply into the sky from the very edge of the sea, the rocky canyons, the rivers shrunken to a trickle by the drought.

Hulo had picked up many Spanish words by this time, but he did not understand half the padre said. He could read Kino's face, however, and marked the disappointment in it when he could bring back only meager portions of wheat and a few squashes from the next mission when he was put ashore.

They went on to Tiburon Island, landed there for a brief exploration of its coast and to give Padre Kino a chance to get acquainted with the Seri Indians. He won their hearts and they begged him to stay with them, but the padre knew he must lose no further time in returning to his post in California.

Although they could see that the sea ran farther to the north, when they resumed their voyage the captain missed the narrow passage around the island. So they cruised across the sea to the west, went south along the coast of California and by August were once more at San Bruno.

It had rained while they were away. When Kino hurried ashore he found everything green.

"Look," he exulted, "even the doorposts sprout branches. And yet they call this country a desert!"

But this could not change the fact that the long drought had been disastrous to the little colony. Fruit trees were dead. Gardens had been replanted, but they were not yet bearing. The Indians, hungrier than ever, had drifted away from the settlement. And to Kino's alarm, Admiral Atondo and his men were nowhere to be found. They might be diving for pearls farther down the coast, but he feared they had returned to the mainland. Padre Kino's orders were very clear. He must stay with the garrison, go where the admiral went. No padre would be allowed to remain here without military protection, no matter how eager he was to do so.

"We must go in search of them," he said to the captain. "South, to the Bay of La Paz, and if they are not there, then I shall have to return with you to Mexico."

He turned to the bewildered Hulo. "This time you cannot go with me. God knows when we will return. I must leave you with your people."

As the ship weighed anchor, he stood at the rail, calling again and again, "I will come back!" But the weeping Hulo waded out until the water lapped his chin,

holding out his arms, begging his beloved padre not to leave him.

His cries were still in Kino's ears that night as he lay sleepless on the deck, gazing up at the close bright stars. Ropes creaked in the rigging. The little ship smelled of tar and fish and the cattle, horses and mules that had been its cargo on earlier voyages, as well as the poor sheep that still swayed in their pen. Kino noticed the smells no more than he did the hard, unyielding wooden deck beneath the saddle blanket he had thrown down for a bed. When a late moon drew a path of light across the water, the man at the wheel heard him muring and turned to see the padre on his knees, clenched hands raised heavenward, the glint of tears on his upturned face.

"He is praying to go back to that desert, to those Indians, that Hulo," said the man when the captain came to relieve him.

"He is crazy," scoffed the captain.

The other shook his head and crossed himself. "I do not think so. I think he is a saint."