THE MISSION RUINS OF CALIFORNIA.

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The mission church buildings of California, the crumbling monuments of a mistaken policy, are picturesque in their decay. In a few years all will have disappeared, as will, also, the last of the aboriginal tribes found here by the missionary padres. At the end of the first quarter of the present century, when the twenty-one missions of California were in the height of prosperity, the friars estimated the number of Indians to be about 100,000, of which about 25,000 were mission Indians—that is, under the subjection of the Church. The others were styled “Gentiles.”

The coast line of the territory comprising California extended from San Francisco to San Diego—at least, that was as far north as the missions extended—a distance of 600 miles.

The jurisdiction of each mission extended half the distance to the other, each way, and thus they controlled the entire coast line. Their jurisdiction inland extended only about twenty miles—beyond were the mountains and the savage Indians.

These deserted buildings now serve as a reminder of the enslavement of a people who may have become civilised had the priests pursued a different policy and not degenerated from spiritual advisers to managers of vast estates. The spiritual welfare of the Indian was neglected in the enslavement of his body.

About the beginning of the eighteenth century the Jesuits planted a chain of fifteen missions in Lower California. Spain had, about that time, lost considerable of her territory, and shrewdly adopted the plan of invading and colonising the Californias through her mission policy and under the cloak of Christianity. The prime motive was to acquire territory—which is the underlying principle of all governments, just as the acquisition of property is inherent in mankind. With the extension of her do-
minions, the power was to civilise the Indians, make of them good citizens, and award to them a due proportion of the lands they already occupied, which ownership Spain never denied, and so recognised in the laws of the Indies.

The Jesuits were eager to extend their scheme of salvation to this western wilderness, and their services were accepted by the government. Donations were made by wealthy Spaniards for the cause of the "Holy Faith," the Government furnished the friars with a half-dozen or dozen soldiers as a guard for each of the missions as they were established, also giving to each church ornaments, vestments, etc. Unfortunately, the soldiers were placed under the command of the priests, and thus they had full temporal authority, and looked only to the prosperity of their mission property.

It may be argued that the friars were actuated only by the best of motives. True, no doubt; but, after an experiment of seventy years, only about one-fourth of the 50,000 Indians in Lower California had been "reduced to the missions," as they termed it. None of them had been educated, and the Spanish Government concluded that either they or the system were at fault. Some of these friars deserve great credit for their self-sacrifice in spending a lifetime in such a barren country; while some, very likely, preferred to rule in a savage land than to serve in civilisation. However, the interference of the order with political matters in France and Spain at this time, resulted in their expulsion from those countries and their provinces. The missions in California were transferred to the care of the Franciscan friars, who after having landed at La Paz and taken possession of them, found that the property, together with the "Pious Fund," did not exceed in value $100,000.

Spain now began to pursue a "vigorous foreign policy," and her energetic rulers decided to colonise "Alta" or Upper California, which Cabrillo had discovered in 1540, and Viscaíno had "rediscovered" in 1602, and which had remained undiscovered for more than one hundred and fifty years afterwards. Accordingly, the Franciscans were given permission to accompany the colonising expeditions of 1769, and from that time dates the "mission era" of the present California.

The Franciscans were anxious to leave Lower California, as they soon found that it was a very uninviting field—for worldly prosperity, and besides, the Dominicans, or Black Friars, had asked for a division of the field of labor, and spoils, perhaps.

Spain did not change the policy in reference to the powers of
the friars, but, as before, allowed to each mission a number of soldiers, who were under the command of the priest in charge, who thus became commander, priest, law-maker, executive officer. He could punish a crime in any manner that he chose, and could prescribe what constituted a crime.

Spain considered that this territory north of the Peninsula of Lower California was a portion of that peninsula, and that as it was inhabited by the same class of people, it was called Upper California, though according to an ancient Latin publication, dated 1579, it was called Quivera.

By the aid of the confiscated "Pious Fund" of the Jesuits, the Franciscans were soon established in their new field, and dotted the coast line of Alta (upper) California with missions. The friars selected the most fertile spots in the watered valleys, the missions being located on the sea coast. Their jurisdiction extended only a few miles into the interior, or to the foothills, where the wild or "Gentile" Indians held sway.

Spain never intended that the Indians should be dispossessed of their lands, or that the Church should own any lands other than necessary for buildings, gardens, etc. The expressed policy of the Government was that each mission should be converted into a pueblo (town) after it had been in existence for ten years, believing that period was sufficient for the civilisation and Christianising of the Indian. But, the Franciscan Friars, following the policy of the Jesuits whom they had succeeded, ignored these instructions, and settled down into the possession of the country.

The friars seemed to believe that it was necessary to separate themselves and their "children" from the world in order to be successful. They reasoned that civilisation came from within and not from without.

Had it not been for this mistaken policy the deserted mission church buildings of to-day would not be in ruins, and the 100,000 Indians the friars found here would not have decreased to the remnant of five per cent., who are neither civilised nor savage, having the vices of both with the virtues of neither.

For sixty years the missionaries had absolute control of California—temporal and spiritual. Had they sought to educate the Indian he would have become an industrious citizen. But, when the missions were abandoned, he became a vagabond.

The priests set themselves up in defiance of the expressed will of the Government in claiming the lands for their order, which they well knew to be the property of the Indians, and held to be
so by Spain. The priests argued that the Indians were "children," and constituted themselves as the guardians of the neophytes. Each mission in time became a feudal prinicipality; the priest was lord of all he surveyed, and he surveyed everything to the line of the next mission. They had possession of the entire country, and united to exclude settlers, fearing for their absolute power.

In those early days it would seem that the settlers would have been welcomed, and they would have been under any other system than this, which perhaps is the main cause of Spain eventually losing this territory. When a settler made application to the Government for land, it was granted to him provided the grant did "not interfere with the existing rights of others." As the chain of missions claimed the entire coast line of six hundred miles, the coveted grant did "interfere" with the "existing rights" of some one of the missions. This was the report generally made by the priests, to whom the petitions were usually referred. As the settlers could not well locate lands in the mountain districts, which were occupied by hostile Indians, the country was practically withheld from settlement, or colonisation, by the priests for more than half a century. The few people who did settle in the country when it was ruled by the friars, held their lands subject to the Church, receiving their titles from the priests, who took upon themselves the high-handed authority of deeding away the lands of the country.

Under a genial clime, and with the advantages of a highly productive soil, the missionaries cultivated the vine, the olive and the fig, and enjoyed all the conveniences and luxuries that slave labor could produce. Stock multiplied with amazing rapidity on the virgin pastures and rich valleys, and the exports of hides, tallow, and wine and other produce, swelled the coffers of the missions, for nothing was paid for labor—the Indian received only food and the coarsest of raient. As an illustration, the Mission of San Gabriel, one of the wealthiest, made from five hundred to six hundred barrels of wine yearly, and the others were not far behind in this product. Each mission averaged from 50,000 to 75,000 head of cattle, about the same relative number of sheep, and from 2,000 to 3,000 head of horses. And yet an Indian was not permitted to ride on horseback, unless first getting permission from the priest, and when he slaughtered cattle he was given a small allowance, the friars holding that too much food tended to make them rebellious.
As the missions waxed rich, they abandoned the Indians in the interior to their fate, and made no effort whatever to reclaim them to civilisation or Christianity. They made no effort at any time to explore the interior, so far as the establishment of missions was concerned. But, as the neophytes became lessened in numbers in consequence of the remarkable number of deaths, incursions were made to capture the Gentile or hostile Indians, as much for laborers as for Christianising purposes. They were hunted down by soldiers with lances and reatas, and were lassoed as animals, brought to the missions, flogged into subjection, and then baptised. As evidence of this inactivity of the friars, no mission was established north of San Francisco, the territory inhabited by wild Indians, until after the independence of Mexico. The friars never visited the interior to ascertain whether the Indian inhabitants were worthy or willing to be civilised.

The beginning of the present century saw California missions wealthy and prosperous to an enormous degree. For about twenty-five years the priests experienced the most halcyon days of a system which seemed to prosper the greatest only as they succeeded in benumbing the intellect of their spirit-broken subjects. They lived in patriarchal state, with almost royal revenues, and with no one to account to. But they neglected the mind of the untutored Indian, looked after their flocks, herds, produce, and lands, and beyond their routine religious offices they had degenerated from priests into managers of vast estates. Had they devoted their time to the education of the Indian, an empire and civilisation unexcelled awaited them, but they would not release their grasp upon the Indian’s body, and they lost, perhaps, the grandest opportunity ever offered a religious order.

Settlers made numerous complaints to the “Supreme Government” at Madrid of the cruelty to the Indians at the missions and of the opposition of the priests to the settlement of the country. This led to the secularisation act of 1813, but its execution was delayed by the Mexican revolution against Spain. Very soon after the independence of Mexico, that country changed the colonisation system which had not colonised California. Under a general law, grants of land were given to colonists, and the secularisation act of Spain was re-enacted. The “Pious Fund,” which now amounted to about a half-million dollars, was confiscated to the treasury of the republic.

The act was not enforced until several years after its passage, but the mission system began gradually to decay, and it was found
that it was a miserable failure, in that the Indians were not fitted for citizenship, and were too much broken in spirit to again become savages. They had been taught to depend upon the priests for everything, and when liberated, they were like the slaves of the South at the close of the Civil War, unfit for freedom. The Indians were permitted to remain upon the mission lands which they had so long cultivated, but the friars, having been devastated of their authority and revenues, refused to remain as mere parish curates, which shows that they had in view their own self aggrandisement above the welfare of the neophytes. Shorn of their temporal power, the friars left the Indians to their fate, rather than to labor in a depleted vineyard, merely to save savage souls.

Finally, seeing that the mission policy was a failure, and as many of the priests were royalists and refused to take the oath of allegiance, the Mexican government abolished the missions entirely, and gave the priests their passports. The majority of them left the country, and most of these did not leave empty handed. The vessels that carried them also carried leathern sacks of tallow and barrels of olives, ostensibly. These sacks and casks were filled with silver and gold, the contents of each mission treasure-room. The shipments had been going on from the time the friars read the "handwriting on the wall," and it is stated on good authority that a very energetic friar at San Louis Obispo succeeded in shipping out of the country about $100,000, and when the administrators took possession they found no gold to tempt their cupidity. This money, sent to—no one knows where—was the result of the Indians' labor. They had toiled for more than half a century, and not only their lands, but the accumulations of their labor, was taken from them.

Under the secularisation act, however, the Indians were entitled to one half of the accumulations of the missions, including seeds, vines, trees, orchards, etc., and half of the lands. They were made to believe that all had been taken from them, and, in some instances, the vineyards were torn up, fruit trees cut down, flowers uprooted, horses and cattle turned loose to stray into the mountains, and all of the available cattle were slaughtered at the command of the priests, who at once exported the hides and tallow. If this vandalism of the vineyards and orchards was not instigated by the revengeful priests, it was not prevented by them, and could not have been done without their knowledge.

A great deal has been written about the robbery of the missions by the mayor-domos and administrators in charge, but justice
should be done even at this late day to these Mexican officials. The missions were but skeletons when they took charge. True, the administrators wasted considerable of the remaining property, and dispossessed the Indians of the lands, which were theirs by right of occupancy, long before the missionaries came. But, had the priests remained in charge as curates, there would have been no despoilation. Instead, the priests set the example, and what they left behind the officials appropriated or wasted, and the Government received only a pittance for the buildings.

Seeing at last that the Indians were becoming even more degraded by the mission system, which had deprived them of the instincts that nature had implanted, and left them no independence but the will of the priests, the Mexican Government decided to change its policy of colonisation. Or rather, it decided to carry out the liberal policy of Spain, which granted to the Indians lands for cultivation and lots in the pueblos for homes. Much of the land on which San Francisco, Monterey, Los Angeles, and other pueblos and presidios, now stand, was granted to partly civilised Indians by the Spanish Government, but they were dispossessed by either Mexican or American settlers.

In 1834 Mexico inaugurated her new colonisation system. About three hundred colonists arrived from the City of Mexico in the brigs Moreles and Natalia, the latter being one of the vessels in which Napoleon and his battalion escaped from Elba. This should have been the policy from the beginning, but the friars strived to prevent colonisation even now, and when the first band of settlers arrived they were not permitted to settle in this immense country as a colony. The Church party held that they would in time become too powerful. In consequence the colony disbanded and the emigrants, after drifting around for several months, settled at various points, the majority of them at Los Angeles. The Governor, who was one of the Church party, actually refused the emigrants the necessary food when their supply became exhausted, and exiled the leaders from the country. As an evidence of the priestly opposition, the Natalia was scuttled one "dark, stormy night" at Monterey, by which the emigrants lost most of their household effects. This was charged to the Church party. It was certainly done by persons inimical to the colonists, who had become unpopular in consequence of the stories set afloat that they had come to take possession of the mission property.

The missions were secularised, or confiscated, by the Mexican Government in 1835, and in a few years all of the property of the
San Juan Cagistrano Mission.
vast estates was wasted by the administrators. The Government received little or nothing.

Then followed a series of revolutions: A Governor who attempted to enforce the degree of secularisation was deposed, and a "Church Governor" installed, to be in turn deposed. No sooner would a Governor arrive from Mexico than he found a revolution on foot to depose him. The "year of revolutions," 1836, witnessed five such changes in the gubernatorial office. The friars, who were loyal to Spain, and refused to take the oath of allegiance to Mexico, sided with the revolutionists when they happened to be "pro-nouncing" against an enemy of the Church. Finally, the priests were sent out of the country, and the decay of the missions, which had outlived their doubtful usefulness, soon sank into that decay and ruin which overtakes all institutions founded upon ignorance and slavery.

Prior to the arrival of this colony there were not more than about 7,000 settlers in California—about one-third of that number being Spanish and Mexican, exclusive of the soldiers, who were mainly convicts sent into exile and servitude. Within five years after the secularisation of the missions the population had increased about 100 per cent. Had Spain adopted this policy of colonisation half a century earlier, or before the Mexican revolution, she would no doubt have reared a magnificent and rich empire in the west. But her statesmen made the mistake when they permitted the friars to accompany the first colonising expedition under Portalla in 1769. Even had the expressed policy of Spain been carried out, which was that each settler should have lands, that the inherent rights of the Indians should not be disturbed, and that the missions should be reduced to towns after ten years' existence, the country would have become thickly populated within a comparatively short time, and might be now the home of Spanish-speaking people.

Gold and silver was found in the dry beds of streams and in the foothills as early as 1836, but the friars warned the people against digging for the precious metal, telling the simple-minded Mexicans that adventurers would flock into the country and dispossess them of both gold and their lands. This is exactly what did happen a decade later.

There are left only about 5,000 Indians now. They live on their ranches, in brush huts, near the missions, having been dispossessed of their lands. A small number cultivate crops, but the
Pala Mission, Upper San Luis Rey Valley. Photographed by Turner and Judd.
majority move from place to place, working on the farms of the paleface.

There are several schools for Indians in this State, Government and private, and the Indian pupils show a remarkable aptitude in study and a high degree of intelligence, capable of further development.

In order to defend their own conduct in holding the Indians in slavery for so many years the priests have misrepresented the physical and mental condition of the aborigines. They uniformly report that the California Indians, when the missions were established, were the lowest in the scale of humanity—inferior to the Australian Bushmen. Because the California Indian eats herbs and wild fruits, which his native land furnished in abundance, it does not follow that he was irredeemably sunk in sloth and idleness. He built huts of tules, because the mild climate did not demand anything more substantial, and he wore very little clothing because it was the fashion of his race, and furthermore the climate permitted it. Life was not with him a continual struggle for existence, and with no hopes or ambition, he got along with the least amount of work possible, just as the Spaniard and Mexican who took his lands did when they came, and just as they do to-day. The California Indian was not continually at war with neighboring tribes, as were other Indians, and for this reason they are stigmatised as cowardly. Living mainly upon farinaceous food, these Indians were less warlike than any other tribes in the West, but they were not cowardly, as their frequent rebellions and uprisings against mission authority attests. When the conquistadores came early in the seventeenth century they did not find weapons of warfare among the California Indians, and no indications have been found among the numerous relics excavated to show that they were a warlike people. Circumstances indicate that they were half-civilised when the missionaries arrived, and their complete civilisation could have undoubtedly been brought about just as our European ancestors were civilised. But education should have preceded the attempt to Christianise. The Indian should have been advanced to that mental condition by which he could be made to understand why it was better to adore the cross than his fetish. The friars reasoned with the lash, the dungeon, and when subjected physically he was baptised without knowing whether it was intended for a religious ceremony or for personal cleanliness.

No country in the world was so well supplied by nature with the wants of man as was California in the aboriginal days. The
hills, mesas, valleys, and streams were filled with abundance of game and fish, and the forests were full of trees, plants, and vines, bearing seeds, nuts, and berries that grew in profusion and luxuriance in this tropical clime. Being a child of nature, the Indian enjoyed the fruits of this ideal world of his in the most natural manner. He was not lazy, for it was his work that built the massive mission buildings and created the wealth of the missions. He was not so stupid as the friars paint him to be, for he became expert in mechanics, readily learned to till the soil, cultivate fruits, construct irrigating ditches, manufacture cloth, and even to make wine for the priests. Minds capable of receiving such instruction were not "incapable of being instructed," and all of their handiwork goes to prove that the California Indian was capable of civilisation, at least in two generations. They constructed irrigating ditches, the remains of some of which are still in existence, and they were skilful in the manufacture of various articles. True, they did this under instruction, but a mind susceptible of being so instructed is also capable of being educated to a point of civilisation.

These Indians had a religion and worshipped a supreme being. Their priests wore long robes of human hair, but these the missionaries burned, and finally drove their rivals out of the field. Their finely wrought ornaments of gold and silver showed that they were artisans and possessed inventive skill not excelled by the subsequent teachings of the missionaries who enslaved them.

The fact that they navigated the ocean for some distance in canoes, rudely constructed of bark (according to the statements of the Spanish conquerors) is proof that they were skilful and enterprising.

Navigators and scientists from France, Russia, the United States and other foreign countries who visited this coast in the early part of this century, all unite in stating that the Indians were held in bondage mental as well as physical, and that the methods used by the priests in obtaining converts was "little better than kidnapping," and that their treatment was worse than that accorded to the serfs of Russia, or the negroes of the Southern States.

Ethnologists and philologists who have made an exhaustive study of the Hindu, Chinese, and Japanese races, have discovered convincing testimony that the Indians found in Mexico and the Californias are descended from the Mongolian. Protius holds that the Peruvians are descended from the Chinese, and states that
After a model by Mr. and Mrs. A. E. Codere. Reproduced with the permission of the modellers.

Mission San Luis Rey de Francia as it appeared in 1857.
the "Spaniards found wrecks of Chinese vessels in the Straits of Magellan."

The customs of the aborigines go toward proving their Asiatic origin. They had no written language, but kept their records by means of bundles of strings with knots of various colors, as did the Chinese many centuries ago. Their system of notation, calculation of time, and ornaments are similar.

The Chinese now in California bear a striking resemblance to the California aborigines, where the type is found in its purity. And there is a similarity in their language, both in gesture and intonation.

Had not the Spanish priests destroyed all of the records at the conquest of Peru, and later of the Californias, there would have been more evidence, and of a conclusive nature, as to the origin of the native races. But enough is known, however, to establish the fact that the native Californians were a people susceptible of civilisation, even if they were not already partly civilised and educated.

The large stone houses, or casa grandes, found in New Mexico, Arizona, and California have their counterpart in Thibet, and they were built by Mongolians. History states that many of the Tartar invaders of this country were of the Christian faith. That much is certain, that the conquering Spaniards found the cross in Peru and among the aborigines in California.

The California aborigines did not offer human sacrifice, and were not savages. They were a peaceful and agricultural people, and had the missionaries educated them, Christianity would have followed. They had a grand opportunity, but failed to grasp it.