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AN UNKNOWN MEXICAN SAINT

The disestablishment of the Catholic Church in Mexico on the downfall of the ill-fated Maximilian and consequent confiscation of Church property palsied the energy of the Church, and numberless parishes at once began to decay. This was particularly the case with the mission churches in sections remote from the capitals and more populous towns of the different States. For example, fine church buildings in the State of Sonora, such as those at Onabas and Tecoripa, that once were thronged with devout worshippers, are to-day in ruins, roofless and deserted, save by the lizard, the bat and the birds of the air who find shelter in the deep crevices of the broken masonry. The melodious bells that for generations chimed the call for matins, the angelus and vespers, now hang silent and sullen in the dismantled campanarios.

The condition of the towns or pueblos in the midst of which stand these moldering monuments of former glory is in keeping with them, for ruin and decay are written large in their plazas, streets and dwellings. It is only in palaces where foreign capital in recent years has become invested in abandoned antigua mines that evidence of a new life, thrift and energy is apparent, and which shows itself in a slow rehabilitation of the Church, in the scant performance of its functions by wandering padres, whose pay is a bare pittance coming as it does in most instances, from the poorest of parishioners.

The pueblo of Baroyeca, distant from the Mina Grande about four miles, was one of the earliest of the missions established by the Jesuit Fathers in the country of the Yaqui Indians, probably near the beginning of the seventeenth century. The annals of Sonora are full of the heroic deeds and indomitable energy of these knights errant of the Cross in supplanting the gross paganism of the natives with the Christian civilization of Spain.

Slowly but surely the Yaquis accepted not only the faith of their Spanish masters, but also their tutelage in the arts of civilization which in time was to prove so helpful in the exploitation of the rich deposits of gold and silver ores, so profusely scattered throughout Sonora, and more particularly in the region watered by the Yaqui river.

In those early days when mining was conducted in the crudest and most primitive of methods, with a patience and industry almost incredible, as now in this age of scientific mining, the labor of the Yaqui Indian was well-nigh in-

dispensable. He is to-day the best the most faithful laborer in Mexico, and yet is treated much like a ferocious beast, and threatened with extermination. The pity of it! The pity of it! when his labor is so sorely needed in the upbuilding of a region so richly dowered as Sonora! Somewhere and somehow, a great mistake, a great wrong has been committed, which should be righted and a great race be encouraged to persevere in the arts of peace for which it shows so marked an aptitude and in which it has been so successful.

The Jesuit Fathers were expelled from Mexico in 1767, and their prosperous missions handed over to the Franciscans, who faithfully carried on the great work of civilization so ably begun by their predecessors.

Among the most famous of these Franciscan Fathers was the Padre Don Francisco Joaquin Valdez of Baroyeca greatly beloved during life in all the Yaqui region and after death his memory revered as that of a saint, even to the present day. While he lived a poor man was unknown in Baroyeca, so benevolent was his nature. To his enterprise was due the discovery of the first bonanza in the Mina Grande, or, as it was first called, the "Dolores" in 1792, although mining had been conducted for generations previously on other lodes in its immediate vicinity. The Mina Grande was the richest and most extensive of all the mines in that portion of the district of Alamos, and remains so to this day. The great wealth produced from this mine at once made Baroyeca famous throughout Mexico and Spain, and gave it a position of commanding importance, becoming during its most prosperous days the capital of the district.

NWReview Unknown Mex Saint ctd W
The existence and prosperity of Baroyeca in the olden times depended solely upon the productiveness of the Mina Grande property, which gave employment to many workmen at the mines in transportation, and in the great lixiviation works at Baroyeca, whose ruins can be seen at the present day. They cover several acres, and are unimpeachable witnesses of the former prosperity of this interesting Sonora pueblo and of the immense mineral riches brought from the mines in the neighboring mountains. Great quantities of tailings are visible about these ruins, still containing some values which the old workers were unable with their crude methods to recover fully.

The first use which the beloved Padre Valdez made of the product of the

Mina Grande was to erect a stately church building, to take the place of the humble structure that had served as a sanctuary for the Jesuit Fathers for several generations.

This building, now a partial ruin, was remarkable, not only for its beautiful architecture, but also for its great dimensions. It is over 150 feet in length, and the walls five feet in thickness. Three spacious portals give access to the building at the nave and transept.

The massive campanario or bell tower is sixty feet in height and its walls ten feet in thickness. A chime of bells still hangs in the ruined belfrey, now bearing silent witness to the departed glory of Baroyeca. They ceased their ministrations in 1865, the year in which revolutionary bands completed the ruin, begun some years before by the Apaches and brigands.

The inscriptions on the bells tell the story of the old mission. About the base of the largest bell appears in Roman letters the legend, "MARIA PURISIMA DE LORETO," while about the upper part is given the date, "MARZO 16 DE 1646." The next in size bears the inscription, "SAN JOSE PATRIARCA SENOR," with the date, "MARZO 20 DE 1643." On the smallest bell an inscription reads, "SAN RAFAEL DEDICADO AL SANTISIMO SACRAMENTO," and the date, "MARZO 25 DE 1646."

The belfry is surmounted by a beautifully wrought metal cross of a composite design, a large star being a prominent feature, the whole executed in a highly artistic manner. Surrounding the belfry can be seen the indistinct traces of a Latin legend cut into the masonry, the only legible word remaining being "FORTIS."

Adjoining the church building proper, but forming an integral part of it are great chambers or chapels, some used as treasuries for the precious ornaments of the altar, and others for the work incident to an extensive ecclesiastical establishment.

Fifty years ago the building was still standing in its original perfection. In the Diccionario Universal de Historia y de Geografia, published in the City of Mexico, 1853, it is called una suntuosa iglesia, a sumptuous church building. In extent and design it was not far behind the present cathedral buildings of Hermosillo, and the largest church in Guaymas. In its furnishings it was one of the most unique church buildings in the world, the walls of the sanctuary and the altar being literally covered with silver plates, the product of Mina Grande bonanza mine, first discovered and worked by the old Padre Valdez.

The sacred vessels of the altar were of solid gold and silver, and all the embellishments and ornaments were also made of the precious metals. Velasco, the state statistician, in his report on Sonora, published in 1850, makes mention of these gifts to the Mission church, estimating their value at \$30,000. The building stands in the midst of a spacious plaza, una hermosa plaza, on one side of which can still be seen the residences of the ancient padres and their assistants. They are quite extensive and of a superior order of architecture, and all adorned with columns of some white material, producing a most dignified effect and adding greatly to the impressive character of the old Mission Church.

With the advent of American capital in this region, the belief has grown strong among the natives that the day is not far distant when Baroyeca will have a new birth and become again a

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flourishing town and successful rival of Alamos, now the chief city of the district.

Nor does it require a tropical imagination to picture the restoration of the old Mission Church at Baroyeca to its former grandeur and usefulness, to see it once more an edifice consecrated to sacred uses, to hear again the chime of bells now smitten with dread silence that seems an eternal, inseparable attribute of the desert, calling the faithful to their devotions; to see again the ample plaza, as of old, surrounded with handsome residences and substantial business blocks, and become the attractive rendezvous for a numerous, industrious and prosperous population.

Such a future for Baroyeca may confidently be expected, for the renaissance of Mexico is manifest in all its parts, in its green and fruitful valleys and in its ancient capitals, and Baroyeca cannot escape its mighty impulse, fortified as it also is with American energy and capital to develop its vast mineral riches. JAMES B. LAUX. Modern Mexico (in The New World) July 1.)

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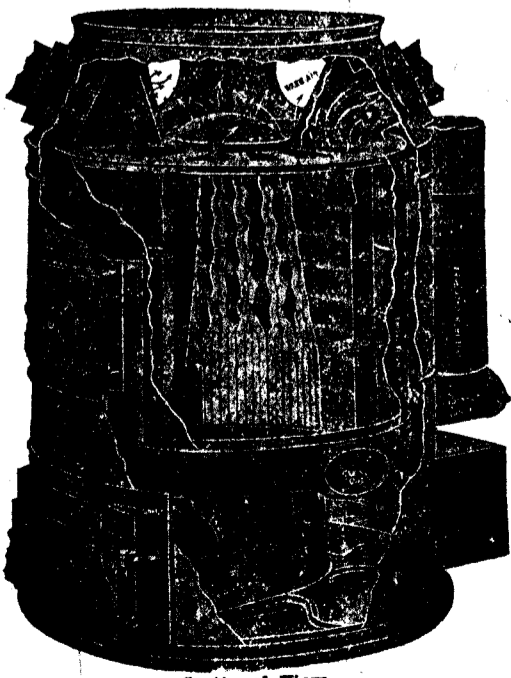
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