

**THE PENANCE OF
MAGDALENA: AND
OTHER TALES OF THE
CALIFORNIA MISSIONS**

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BY
J. SMEATON ^{o.c.}CHASE

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



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Foreword

AMONG the California Missions the southern group form a natural unit, just as does, geographically, Southern California itself — the region covered by the familiar California formula, "South of the Tehachapi." It is thought that this little set of tales, extracted from the larger work, *The California Padres and Their Missions*, in which Mr. Charles F. Saunders and the writer collaborated, may be welcomed by those many persons whose interest in Mission affairs is more or less limited to the five here included, which are, probably, the most notable, historically and architecturally, of the whole chain of these venerable monuments of Franciscan zeal.

J. S. C.


SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO



THE PENANCE OF MAGDALENA

SLOWLY, very slowly, the greatest and most beautiful of the Missions of Alta California had risen among the swelling *lomas* of the valley of the San Juan. Brick by brick and stone by stone the simple Indian laborers, under the tutelage of the Fathers, had reared a structure which, in its way and place, might not unfitly be compared with those great cathedrals of Europe in which we see, as in a parable, how inward love and faith work out in material beauty. Huge timbers of pine and sycamore, hewn on Palomar, the Mountain of Doves, many miles away, had been hauled by oxen over trackless hill and valley, to form the joists and rafters that one sees to-day, after the lapse of more than a century, firm and serviceable, fastened with wooden spikes and stout rawhide lashings.

In all these labors Teófilo had taken a principal part. As a child he had been christened with the name of Lucas, and had carried it through boyhood. But when about fourteen years of age, he had been transferred from the duties of a herder to learn the simple crafts taught in the workshops; and his industry and intelligence had so commended him to the overseers and Padre Josef that one day the latter, praising him for some task especially well performed, had said, half in jest, "*Hijo mio*, we must christen you over again. You are *excelentísimo*, as San Lucas said of San Teófilo in the superscription to his holy evangel; so I shall call you Teófilo, *excelentísimo* Teófilo, instead of Lucas; why not?" And Teófilo the boy became from that day, though Lucas he remained in



the record of baptisms kept in the tall sheepskin volume in the Father's closet.

So useful and diligent was the boy that the Father soon took him to be his own body servant, and many an hour did Teófilo pass handling with religious care the sacred vessels and vestments and books in the sacristy and in the Father's rooms. One day the Father noticed with displeasure that on the blank flyleaf of his best illuminated missal, lately sent to him by a friend in his old college at Córdoba, in Spain, there were some rough drawings in red and blue. Evidently the person who had drawn them had tried to obliterate his work, but had only partly succeeded. The Father could not help noticing, however, that, crude as were the formal floral designs and sacred emblems that had been copied by the culprit from the emblazoned letterings and chapter headings of the missal, the work showed undoubted taste and talent; and this gave him an idea. Why should he not adorn with frescoes, in color, the cornices, and perhaps even the dome, of the new church? It would be a notable addition, and would give a finishing touch to the beauty of the building, if it could be done. And here, evidently, was a hand that might be trained to do it — the hand, probably, of his favorite, Teófilo, for he alone had access to the book-shelves in the Father's room.

So when next he saw the boy he asked, "Teófilo, who has been drawing in my new missal?" The boy hung his head, and the Father, taking his silence as an admission of guilt, added, "That was wrong of you, Teófilo, and I must give you some penance to remind you not to do such mischief again. Do you know, boy, what that book is worth? Not less than twenty *pesos*, Teófilo, or even more. That is one year's wages of Agustín the *mayordomo*, so you can see such things must be left alone. But come to me this evening after the Doctrina, and I will set you your penance."

When the boy, with downcast look, came to him in his room that evening, the Father said to him, "What made you do it, Teófilo?" And the boy answered "I did not mean to do harm, Padre, but the pictures are so beautiful, and I tried to make some like them. Then I tried to rub them out, but they would not come off." The Father smiled indulgently. "No, my son," he said, "the wrong things we do, even innocently, do not come off. You must remember that in future. But they can be forgiven by the good God, Teófilo, and even so I forgive you for the book. And your penance shall be to come each evening at this time and learn to draw properly. What do you say?"

"Oh, Padre!" cried the boy; and he took the Father's hand and put it, Indian fashion, to his forehead in token of gratitude.

Agustín the *mayordomo* was, next to the Father, the most important man about the Mission. He it was who, under the priest's supervision, had charge not only of the labors and general governance of the Indians, but also of the business affairs of the establishment, even to the care and sale of the cattle, hides, and tallow, which, produced in enormous quantity, were almost the only, but a quite considerable, source of revenue to all the California Missions. Agustín was a half-breed, or *mestizo*, the son of one of the Spanish soldiers who had come to Alta California with Serra and Portolá. His mother was an Indian woman, to whom his father had been married by Father Serra himself. That was in 1776, the year of the establishment of the Mission, and Agustín, the oldest son of the marriage, had risen before the age of thirty-five to his important post, partly by natural ability, and partly by the fact of his mixed Spanish blood, which of itself gave him prestige and authority with the Indians. He had quarters adjoining those of the Father, on the main corridor of the *cuadro*.