

SAN GABRIEL

PRIDE OF THE
MISSIONS



EDWARD BOWEN.

The Missions and Missionaries of California

New Series. Local History

San Gabriel Mission

AND THE

Beginnings of Los Angeles

BY

Fr. ZEPHYRIN ENGELHARDT, O. F. M.

*Author of "The Missions and Missionaries," "The Franciscans
in Arizona," "Mission Dolores," "Mission San Diego,"
"Mission Santa Barbara," "Mission San Juan
Capistrano," etc., etc.*

*"Colligite quae superaverunt fragmenta,
ne pereant," John, vi, 12.*



MISSION SAN GABRIEL
SAN GABRIEL, CAL.

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CHAPTER XV

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ON March 2, 1846, at Los Angeles, Pio Pico opened the sessions of the new legislative assembly which consisted of Francisco X. Figueroa, Francisco de la Guerra, Narciso Botello, Juan Bandini, and Santiago Argüello. Pico informed the members that, though he had in conformity with the authorization of the assembly drawn up the most prudent regulations he could for the Missions, he was confronted with insuperable difficulties, for which reason he had been able to lease only the Missions of San Fernando, San Buenaventura, Santa Barbara, and Santa Inés. The rest, among which were San Gabriel, San Luis Rey¹ and San Diego, had increased their debts to such an amount that it was not possible to lease them and pay the creditors who were justly clamoring for what was due them. "It is true," he continued, "that one-third of the rental has been set aside for paying debts, but since the condition of the missions is deplorable, one plain consequence is that their rental would be so small that it could never suffice for all the objects for which those revenues have been destined. For this reason, it appears to me more ra-

¹ Until this same Pio Pico started in to "administer" San Luis Rey, it was the richest of the Missions. After nine years of "administering" it, Pio Pico is obliged to make such a confession!

tional to suspend the action taken with regard to the others until the assembly, having examined and considered the obstacles, shall dictate a definite measure which, while it prevents the total ruin to which they are steadily proceeding, may show whether or not they may again become productive and augment the public wealth."

Juan Bandini was soon ready with a plan which he introduced on March 23, and which expressed the governor's ideas so exactly that we wonder whether it was Pico who prompted Bandini or Bandini who prompted the governor, as some believe. Confessing that at another period the missions were distinguished for a splendor which was quite visible, Bandini went on to say that "if it was painful to see the labors of many hands employed for more than seventy years rendered absolutely useless, it will be a shame to behold with a serene countenance the destruction of a great part, say we rather, of the mother of the territorial wealth. . . . I will not deny that the mission system was to have been the means of a gentle conquest, full of piety and devoid of the noise of deadly arms.² Nor will I conceal that, according to my mode of thinking, in the Californias it was the foundation of the prosperity³ to which the Author of nature⁴ invites us."

Nevertheless, Bandini continued, it was now necessary to devise other means than leasing in order to save the remnant mission property from entire ruin and to pay the debts. For

² Readers who may happen to meet with some of the wild mouthings of this fierce enemy of the friars, will do well to recall what he stated here in public session.

³ "Tampoco ocultare, en mi modo de pensar, que en Californias fue el cimiento de la prosperidad." Yet this same ex-vice-president of the colonization swindle (see *Missions and Missionaries*, vol. iii, section ii, chap. xii) was one of the earliest and bitterest foes of the "foundation of California prosperity."

⁴ "Autor de la naturaleza!" Like apt pupils of French infidelity, Bandini shies at giving his Creator the one incommunicable title of God! It reminds too strongly of being held to account some day. Pico was wont to use the infidel term of Supreme Being. This did not remind so readily of the Last Judgment.

that purpose he proposed the following articles to the consideration of the assembly. He then introduced a bill containing eight articles which provided for the sale of the missions. The bill was adopted on March 30, 1846; and on April 4, 1846, Pico published it in a proclamation.⁵

"Before anything had been done to carry this decree into effect," says Bancroft, "there arrived from Mexico, dated November 14, 1845, and submitted to the assembly on April 15, through Minister Montesdeoca, an order of the national government suspending all proceedings for the sale of the mission property. This, without recorded comments, was referred on May 13 to the committee on missions, and nothing more is heard of it for several years. In original archive records of later months of 1846, there is found but little to indicate that the Montesdeoca order was obeyed, at least to the extent of suspending the sales."⁶ This then explodes the tale that it was the Mexican Government which ruined the missions. The authors of that crime were none other than the native Californians, who called themselves Catholics, but acted like rabid atheists.

Pico and Bandini were determined. The suspicion is, therefore, well founded that both hurried their decree through the legislature *before* they made known the Montesdeoca order. It is probable that the order arrived before March 23, when Bandini offered his project for the sale of the missions. Had the assembly been aware of the Montesdeoca order, it is possible that a majority might have refused to do Pico's bidding. So they were not told until two weeks after the passage of the resolution.⁷

Instead of obeying the Supreme Government, Pico, on May 13, 1846, the same day on which the subservient legislators referred the Montesdeoca order to the Committee on Missions for non-action, called upon all the creditors of the missions

⁵ See *Missions and Missionaries*, vol. iv, pp. 495-497.

⁶ *California*, vol. v, p. 560.

⁷ *Missions and Missionaries*, vol. iv, p. 502.

to present their claims and proofs; and "in later years," as Bancroft relates the sordid operations of his former clients, "there were produced title deeds signed by Pico, showing the sale at different dates between May 4 and July 4 of twelve missions. These titles vary considerably in form. *In none is there any allusion to a sale by auction*, and it has never been claimed that the sale was of *that character as required by the decree*. The consideration, even where a definite sum is named, was in most cases an amount already due from the government for past advances,⁸ and, in the other cases, there is no evidence respecting the payment or use made of the money. Most of the titles require the purchaser to pay the mission debts, and to provide for the padre's support and the expenses of public worship, also reserving from the sale the church and priests's residence. Some of them make provision for remnants of the community Indians. Nearly all refer to a general authorization from the Supreme Government, *without naming any definite order of date*, or alluding in any way to the Montesdeoca order."

"In later years," Bancroft continues, "a Mexican order of March 10th, declaring the governor and general 'facultados ampliamente' to defend the country, was produced as legalizing the sales. I regard the document in itself as sufficient,⁹

⁸ This would seem to indicate that it was not the missions, but Pico who was being pressed by creditors, and that he had borrowed money expecting to return it from the proceeds of the mission sales! We have all along wondered who the mission creditors might be? to what amount and when they had advanced money or merchandise for the Indians or the missions? Pico being the debtor explains why he everlastingly talk of "clamoring creditors" of the missions, whereas under Micheltorena they kept absolutely silent!

⁹ "The 'ample powers,' it seems to me," Bancroft says, "must have included the power to raise funds by selling the only national property in the province." Bancroft assumes that the missions were national property, whereas they were Indian property and to be treated like any other private property, as Governor Micheltorena authoritatively declared in keeping with the mind of the Mexican government. It is for that reason the United States courts declared the sale of the mission lands illegal.

although the courts did not take this view of it; but the date of receiving this order is not known; it is improbable that it arrived before May 4th, when the sales began, or before the middle of June, when most of them had been effected; had it been in his possession, Pico would almost certainly have cited it; and during the period between the reception of the Montesdeoca order of April 15th and the unknown date when the Tornel order came to hand the governor had no right to sell the mission estates.¹⁰

"In the case of several missions," Bancroft goes on, "*it was proved clearly enough that the titles and corroborating papers in private hands had been written after Pico's return to California in 1848, or at least after the raising of the United States flag in July, 1846, and fraudulently antedated.* That the same was true of others is strongly indicated by various circumstances; notably, the absence of original archive evidence, the error in the date of the assembly's decree,¹¹ with other irregularities in the documents,¹² the mystery enshrouding the alleged payment of large sums of money, the delay of purchasers in making known their claims, and the failure to call certain witnesses in the resulting litigation."¹³

In an earlier chapter, Bancroft, after vainly trying to excuse some of Pico's transactions, writes: "The sales of the missions were effected in pursuance of a policy formed in earlier years,¹⁴ with the approval of the assembly. The price was

¹⁰ As subordinate official, Pico had no right to sell the missions at any time without the approval of the supreme government, which plainly would not grant such approval, as the unfaithful governor well knew.

¹¹ "A noticeable peculiarity is that the date of this act is generally given as April 13th, instead of 3rd (trece for tres)."—Bancroft, vol. v, p. 563, note 10.

¹² "The Mexican treaty commissioners in 1848 assured the United States representatives that there had been no land grants since May 13, 1846."—Bancroft, vol. v., p. 563, note 14.

¹³ Bancroft, *California*, vol. v, pp. 561-563. Italics are ours.

¹⁴ By Pico, Alvarado, and other oft-named confederates as far back as the time of Echeandia.

as large as could be obtained, and I find no reason to doubt that the proceeds were patriotically squandered in support of the government,¹⁵ and preparations against Castro. *It would be well for his reputation could we stop here;* but there is no room to doubt that some titles were written by the governor just before his departure, or even after his return, and fraudulently antedated. *Comment is unnecessary.*"¹⁶

Notwithstanding the prohibition of the Mexican Government, Pio Pico resolved to proceed with the sale of the Indian mission property. Three motives, apparently, impelled him to act without delay. He "was determined to do away with the mission system at all hazards," despite even Bandini's admission that it was the mother of territorial wealth. Next, he must silence the creditors clamoring for the money, which in some cases at least, they seem to have loaned to him rather than to the missions, some of which had not received a dollar. Thirdly, he must crush the hated rival, General José Castro, who was acting independently of the Los Angeles governor, and was using the custom-house revenues at Monterey against Pico, as the latter presumed. For all these purposes the income of one-third of the rent from the missions was significant indeed.

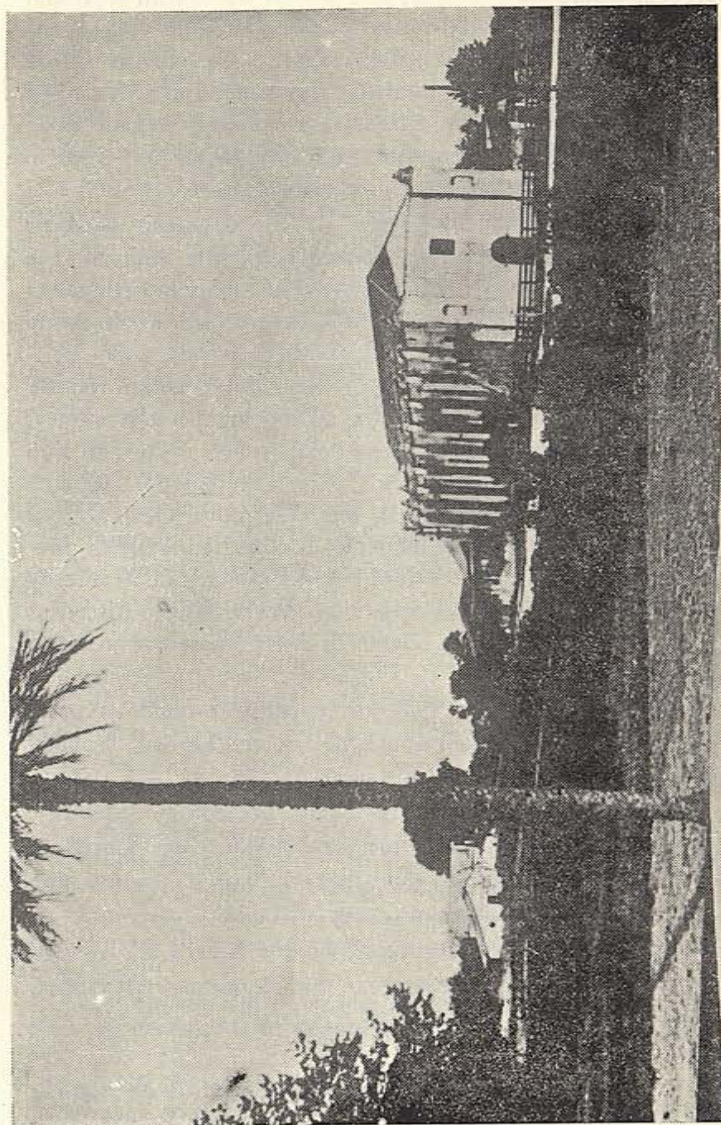
Accordingly, in disregard of all moral and religious principles, and of the catechism which he boasted he had "learned by heart," Pico began to sell missions on May 4, 1846. Three had already been thus alienated in the preceding December. On June 8, 1846, it was the turn of Mission San Gabriel to be disposed of to Hugo P. Reid and William Workman for debts, the amount of which was not stated.¹⁷

Thus Pico had at last accomplished his heart's desire and the ambition of his confederates, the Bandinis, Alvarados,

¹⁵ Pico's, of course.

¹⁶ *California*, vol. v, p. 277. Italics are ours. For proofs see *Missions and Missionaries*, vol. iv, pp. 550, 724-781.

¹⁷ *Missions and Missionaries*, vol. iv, pp. 507-508.



SAN GABRIEL MISSION CHURCH AND IMMEDIATE VICINITY ABOUT 1865

Vallejos, Castros, etc., since the year 1830, when these overgrown boys obtained control of the territory in consequence of the Mexican decree which banished all Spaniards under sixty years of age and forbade those over sixty years to hold office. He had at last effectually wiped out the famous schools of civilization, of mechanical arts, of agriculture, and of stock raising, which the zealous Franciscan Fathers, amid indescribable hardships and difficulties, and in the face of almost interminable obstruction, had established for the wild tribes of California in connection with their churches erected for the spread of the Gospel of Christ. However, the Avenging Angel already stood at the very door; but we must not anticipate.

In the deeds or "Escrituras de Venta," certain conditions were laid down for the purchasers' observance. They vary in form, but the essentials are similar, so that it will suffice to refer the reader to the "Escritura de Venta" of Mission San Diego in the volume on that mission, or to *The Missions and Missionaries*, volume iv, pp. 509-511.

No inventory is extant. However, it seems that Henry Dalton had been put in charge of Mission San Gabriel long before the sale. At all events, under date of February 4, 1846, he wrote to Pio Pico's secretary that he had received the Mission of San Gabriel; but that, since he encountered some obstacles in collecting the few cattle left, 29 or 30 head, he was compelled to leave in his place Bernardino Guirado and as mayordomo Andrés Duarte. "May it please you," Dalton writes to the secretary, "to bring to the knowledge of the governor that the property is in complete ruin. It has neither implements nor tools of any kind. Consequently it will be with much difficulty to make any improvement both for said lack as also for lack of hands. Nevertheless, I have left instructions that what is possible should be done to preserve the things from further ruin." Finally, on May 16, 1846,

Dalton wrote to Pico that he resigned the charge of the Mission of San Gabriel.¹⁸

Such then was the condition of the former "Pride of the Missions," when Pico sold it to Reid and Workman. Both the missionary and the neophytes were thus evicted from the home they had created by their labor. They were homeless. The missionary had to board with strangers, and the few neophytes might labor for the salaried mayordomo or go whither they wished. They were now "free" to shift for themselves, but without a penny, after having labored many a year for the Mission that now, in ruins, went into other hands for which it had not been intended.

On July 7, 1846, only one month after Pico had unlawfully disposed of Mission San Gabriel, Commodore J. D. Sloat ordered the United States flag to be raised at Monterey. That action proclaimed the death knell to the misrule of the Pico band which did not respect even church property. Five weeks later Pico and Castro fled to Mexico. On August 13, 1846, United States troops under Commodore R. F. Stockton, marched into Los Angeles, Pico's capital, to the tune of the Star Spangled Banner. There were some abortive efforts on the part of J. M. Flores and Andrés Pico to hold the territory; but on January 13, 1847, the last remnant of the Californians surrendered at Cahuenga. For details the reader is referred to *The Missions and Missionaries*, volume iv, pages 545-592.

In 1853, Archbishop Joseph Sadoc Alemany, O. P., of San Francisco, laid claim to the mission property in so far as it was Church property unlawfully alienated by Pio Pico. The United States authorities, using their common sense simply, had from the beginning judged the churches, priest's dwelling, cemeteries, and gardens to belong to the Church. General W. Kearny had already directed such property to remain in charge of the priests, as witness his action from the following communication:

¹⁸ *Cal. Arch., St. Pap., Missions*, vol. xi, pp. 884-885.

"Headquarters Southern Military District, Pueblo of Los Angeles, June 2, 1847

Very Rev. José M. Gonzalez Rúbio, Santa Barbara, Cal.
Esteemed Father:

The Proclamation issued by His Excellency, S. W. Kearny, Brigadier General and Governor of California, in virtue of the authority from the President of the United States of North America, dated March 22, 1847, having decreed that the Missions of Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, San José, and San Juan (Bautista) should stay in the care of the Fathers of the territory, I considered that all the rest of the Missions ought also to be under your charge in virtue of this decree. With permission of Your Reverence I represent that, since the death of the Father charged with the Mission of San Gabriel, said Mission has had no one to care for it except one called D. Olivera, who says that he was administrator since 1839. He paid me a visit a few days ago to ask me that I should oblige the alcalde to comply with his duties and make all persons not authorized to live there leave the grounds of the Mission.

I have complied with what he asked me, and my order is now being carried out. My object in writing to Your Reverence now is to advise you that this man (D. Olivera) in case he is a suitable person, unless some one else, be named regularly by Your Reverence to care for the interest of the Mission, because, as it is now, it is going to ruin entirely. If Your Reverence will make such appointment informing me of it officially, I shall assist to the best of my power to conserve this property. With deep respect I am Your servant
Q. B. V. M.

J. D. Stevenson,

"Colonel Commanding the District of the South."¹⁹

Let the reader take note of the Protestant military commander's regard for the property of Religion and compare it

¹⁹ *Santa Barbara Archives*.

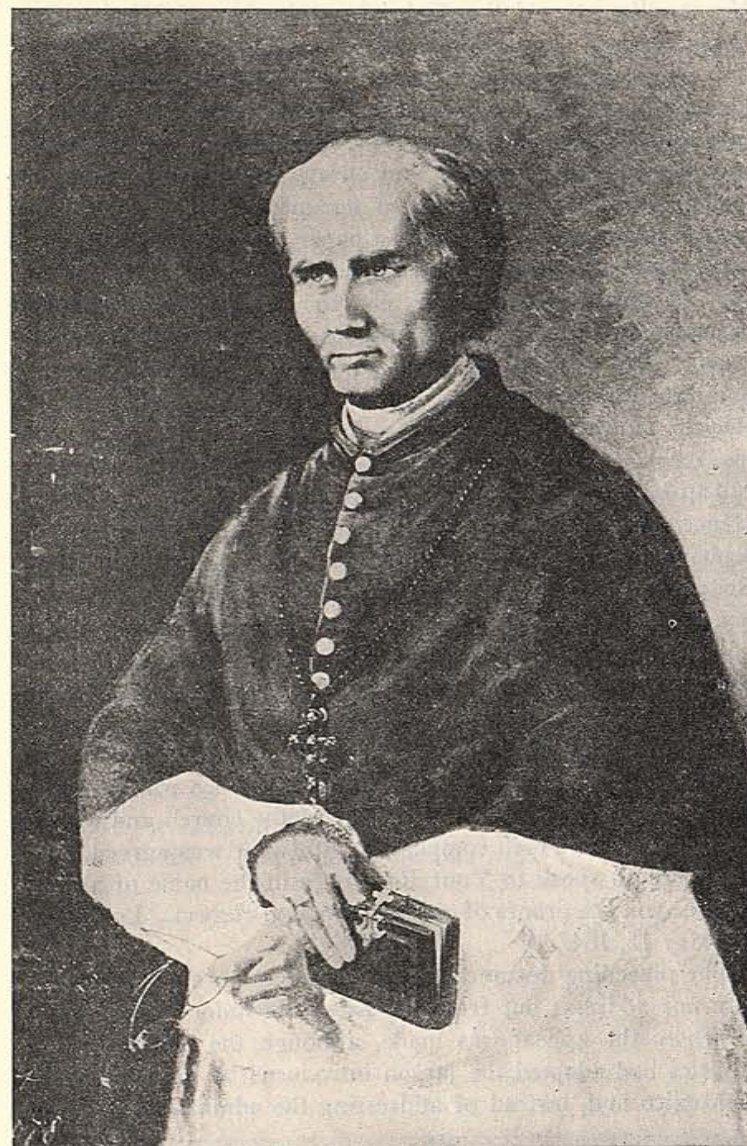
with the total disregard of the "Catholic" governor for that same property; and let him note, too, that the last notable action of the liberalized Mexican Pico was robbing the Church of her own, whereas the first action of note on the part of the United States Official was to restore to the Church what was her own. What a pity the United States flag was not raised fifteen years before! Church and neophytes would have been protected in their natural and legal rights.

Military Governor R. B. Mason, the successor of Kearny, on July 19, 1847, declared: "The United States Government fully recognizes and will sustain the rights of the priests at the missions, and to all mission property, against all those who cannot, in due course of law, show a just and sound title, and my instructions from the President require me to sustain him (the priest at the mission)." ²⁰ How different from the action of the paisano chiefs. From the day, therefore, that the United States flag waved over Monterey, Church property was safe.

Eventually, on December 18, 1855, the United States Land Commission decided the property claimed as Church property according to Spanish law; namely, the church edifice, the cemetery, the priests' dwelling, and for their support the garden, orchards, and vineyards, to belong to the Catholic Church. The patents were accorded to the Archbishop in trust, and the signatures of the President of the United States at last restored the property named. For details we refer the reader to *The Missions*, volume iv, pages 732 to 745. The Patent for Mission San Gabriel will be found in the next chapter.

Fr. Esténaga, who was twice deprived of the management of the Mission by the covetous mission enemies, enjoyed the peace succeeding the arrival of the United States troops but one year. He passed to his eternal reward from the Mission of San Fernando whither he had retreated to be cared for by kind friends, in May, 1847. It is singular that neither in the

²⁰ *Missions and Missionaries*, vol. iv, p. 587.



MOST REV. JOSEPH SADOE ALEMANY, O.P., D.D., FIRST
ARCHBISHOP OF SAN FRANCISCO

Mission Register of San Gabriel nor in that of Mission San Fernando any mention is made of his burial. Bancroft has him die at San Gabriel early in 1847, which is correct as to time, but wrong as to place. The Rev. E. Sugranes, C.M.F., of San Gabriel, lets him die at San Fernando in 1845 or 1846, which is correct as to place, but wrong as to time. The doubt may be settled by consulting two documents. "The town council of Los Angeles," says the first paper, "filled with the deepest consternation has seen that with the death of the parish priest, Fr. Thomas Esténaga, our church (parish) is absolutely orphaned, and always laments the loss of a worthy Father and friend. We may indeed in the midst of this affliction console ourselves for having here Father Don Antonio Jiménez del Récio. However, the chronic infirmity which he suffers and his feeble constitution doubtless do not permit him to give full attention to the complicated and laborious duties of a curate. Hence a parish priest is wanting and the populace laments its orphaned state. In order to fill the vacancy, this Illustrious Body met in session on the fifteenth of this month of May and unanimously directed me to assist at a general meeting of the inhabitants belonging to the parish; and they resolve that for the subsistence of this parish priest there be established a moderate parochial fee system in proportion to the circumstances and the poverty of the country. With this the tears of the settlers will be wiped away and Your Reverence will be recognized as the true pastor and Father of the church and apostle of Jesus Christ. I, in compliance with what was agreed, have the honor to speak to Your Reverence in the name of all and to offer you the proofs of appreciation and respect. Los Angeles, May 15, 1847."²¹

The preceding document in the Archives bore neither signature nor address; but from the *Libro Borrador* we can guess to whom the appeal was made, although the official of Los Angeles had adopted the jargon introduced by infidel Liberals in Mexico and, instead of addressing the administrator of the

²¹ *Cal. Arch., Los Angeles, Arch., Civil*, vol. ii, p. 1232.

diocese with ecclesiastical titles common the world over, he uses simply the initials V.S. (Vuestra Señoría), which may mean anything from lordship to mister. The Very Rev. Fr. José Maria Gonzales Rúbio, under date of May 22, 1847, replied to the petition of the alcalde of Los Angeles asking for a strong and robust parish priest, since the Rev. Antonio M. Jiménez was too feeble and infirm, and adding that he was at a loss to know what to do, as Fr. Esténaga had died lately. He thought of sending the Rev. Father Jiménez to San Fernando and of changing Fr. Blas Ordáz from there to Los Angeles. This is what was eventually done, for we find Fr. Ordáz baptizing at San Gabriel in May, 1847, and thereafter also at Los Angeles, whilst the Rev. Antonio Jiménez remained at San Gabriel.

Fr. Blas Ordáz has the distinction of being the last of the old Fathers who had come from Spain. He arrived at a time when the missions still flourished, in 1820, although even then, owing to the drain on their resources by the military, decay had already set in. Now Fr. Ordáz saw the neophytes scattered in every direction and scarcely anything left of the buildings but the church and the quarters of the missionaries, which his predecessor had to share with intruders, sometimes of the vilest class, as Santiago Argüello declared in 1841.²² He died in 1850. Father José J. Jimeno and Fr. Francisco Sanchez, the Father "Salvadierra" in Helent Hunt Jackson's *Ramona*, were stationed at the Mission till August 15, 1852, when Fr. Sanchez entered his last Baptism under number 9,287.

²² *Missions and Missionaries*, vol. iv, p. 641.