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# THE DAWN OF TEXAS HISTORY

BY THE REV. J. T. NICHOLSON.

An Account of the Labors of the Franciscan Fathers in  
Behalf of Civilization and Religion in Texas More  
than Three Centuries Ago.



HERE the peaceful sleepers in the valley of the Rio Grande are now awakened by the shrill whistle of the flying engine, their predecessors, nearly four hundred years ago, were awakened by the dreaded war whoop of the hostile Indian. The humble followers of the seraphic St. Francis, "the Poor Man of Ossisi," traversed the prairies and death lurking wilds of Texas, to bring civilization and Christianity to the savage Indian, more than a century before La Salle sailed down the Mississippi, and delighted the gay court of Louis XIV. by the recital of his adventures, and almost a century before the Mayflower cast anchor under the shadow of Plymouth Rock. Undeterred by the unfavorable rumors of the wild tribe of Texas Indians, then called Chichimecas, Rev. Andrew de Olmos, a Franciscan father, crossed over from Mexico in 1544, and although he did not establish any permanent mission, he found some Indians who gave him a favorable hearing, and followed him to Tamaulipas, where he was joined by a secular priest, Rev. John de Mesa. Here a settlement was formed and the instruction of the Indians completed. Father Olmos learned the dialects of four different tribes, and published grammars and books of instruction in those dialects.

When the Spanish authorities learned that La Salle had landed in Texas, they became fearful of French encroachment and incidentally solicitous for the progress of the missions, with the result that they gave authority and assistance to establish three missions amongst the Texas Indians. The missionaries proceeded in their work of civilization on a systematic plan. The mission usually consisted of two fathers and a lay brother, some families of civilized Indians from Mexico, with a supply of necessary stock and implements, and a small band of soldiers for the protection of the infant colony. One of the fathers attended entirely to the spiritual affairs, the other was busied in civilizing the Indians, teaching them methods of agriculture and the arts of civilized life. When an Indian joined the mission he was at once taken under instruction, his labor for a time went to the common stock, while he in return received food, clothing and all other necessaries. He was given a few years' probation, and when deemed capable of self-management was allotted a field and a house raised for him. If not married he was urged to select a Christian wife; in this way many of the Indians intermarried with the Spaniards and became confounded with them.

To the Franciscan father, Ven. Anthony Margil, of Jesus, the founder of the Texas missions, Texas owes much for his incessant labors and intellectual achievements among the Indians. He entered Texas in 1716, and for years traversed the unsettled country from the Rio Grande to the Sabine, and across the borders to Louisiana, living most of the time on nuts and

herbs, and sleeping in tents of the crudest construction, civilizing, teaching, building and directing missions. It was under his direction that Father Michael Nunez went to found a mission in honor of St. Joseph. When Father Nunez arrived at San Antonio he selected a populous rancharia and established in honor of St. Joseph the mission now known as San Jose. When he had finished the church and house, he began to instruct the Indians in the methods of irrigation and induced them to build those aqueducts that are so much an object of wonder to the travelers today.

In 1759 Rt. Rev. Francis San Buenaventura Tejada, of Guadalajara, traversed the whole of Texas and was the first bishop to visit the missions. When at San Antonio, he gave orders, among other things, for the maintenance of a proper school and schoolmaster. The white or Spanish population of Texas then consisted of 3,000 souls. The civilizing agencies of the mission flourished until 1812, when they were suppressed by the Spanish government and the Indians dispersed.

When we remember that the missionary period only lasted about a century, we might marvel at the work accomplished, even if the surrounding circumstances were favorable. Yet the missionaries complained of the slow progress, not so much on account of the treachery of friendly or enmity of hostile Indians, or even the bad example of the soldiers, whose conduct was often disedifying to the Indians, and who frequently appropriated the supplies sent to sustain the missionaries and the Indians; but the resistance or objection of the civil authorities to the reduction or reservation system, which is the system followed by the United States government today. The Franciscan wished the Indians to be placed on reservations where they could be taught the ways of agriculture and other industrial arts, instead of leading a nomadic existence, chasing the bison, and following the warpath against neighboring tribes.

The progress of civilization among the Indians was also much retarded by the multiplicity of tribes and dialects. During the flourishing days of the San Antonio mission there were no less than thirty different tribes in the immediate territory, and that Texas, which less than two centuries ago was unfit for the abode of civilized man, whose broad acres in days not so far distant bore no more flattering sign of progress than the gruesome wigwam overhung with the scalps of paleface and copper skin, now rears its prosperous and populous cities where industry and enterprise clasp hands and extend a welcome to the worthy stranger. Texas, which, less than two centuries ago, was an economic vacuum in the wealth of nations, now sends the product of her cotton fields to clothe the Japanese in the streets of Tokio, and give employment to thousands of willing hands in the looms of Manchester. The products of her fruit and vegetable gardens, acres in extent, are consumed by the shores of the Great Lakes and the banks of the Hudson. The fresh bosom of her exuberance is sending forth its abundance to minister to the cry of hunger in the crowded tenements of the East and the congested alleys of European capitals. Her soil is now honeycombed with railroads, those indispensable agents of modern progress, where once the traveler had to hew his way



PHOTO BY WHEELUS

"Pomelo" or Grape Fruit Tree in a Brownsville Yard.

through tangled woods and frowning forests. The pace of the turtle has given way to the swiftness of Achilles, and the flight of a hen to the soaring of an eagle, in the industrial progress of Texas. The mission fort, too, is replaced by graceful church and stately cathedral, unprotected from hostile bands, because hostile bands can no longer flourish within her borders. But Texas should never fail to revere the early heroes who strove in toil and blood to lay the foundations of her civilization, the sons of St. Francis, from fair Andalus'a.

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### WANTED IN WYOMING.

At the International Sunday school convention at Louisville, Ky., in answer to the roll call of states, reports were verbally given by the various state chairmen. When the Lone Star State was called, a brawny specimen of Southern manhood stepped out into the aisle, and with strident voice, exclaimed: "We represent the great State of Texas. The first white woman born in Texas is still living—she now has a population of over three millions."

There was a pause of bewilderment for a moment, and then a voice from the galleries rang out clear and distinct:

"Send that woman out to Wyoming—we need her!"

