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The  
Message  
  
of the  
Missions

Florence M. Mansfield



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## *Foreword*

**W**RITTEN after visiting the old Missions of California, built nearly one hundred and fifty years ago. They are now but picturesque ruins along El Camino Real—(the King's Highway)—pathetic reminders of early Spanish days, when the dry wastes of California were first transformed into fertile lands, through the faith, and untiring efforts of the Franciscan Fathers and neophyte Indians, led by that great soul, Fra Junipero Serra.

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# The Message of the Missions



## I

A NEW we traverse El Camino Real  
And from the past a wreath of mem'ries  
steal;  
Seek from the missions, built to live for aye,  
The message their mute ruins speak, today.

## II

From San Diego to Sonoma's dells,  
The highway still is marked by mission bells,  
By Spanish monks erected there, of yore,  
To point the trail along an unknown shore.  
No fairer road in all the land is found,  
By ocean laved, by misty mountains crowned;  
It is the "King's Highway" today, as then,  
When it was trod by Priest and Indian.

### III

**W**HERE once, o'er dusty stretch of sun-  
baked shale,  
Dotted with cactus clumps along the trail,  
The pious Padre toiled along the way,  
From shrine to shrine,—full forty miles a  
day,—

Bearing his torch to light the wilderness,  
To teach the savage, and to shrive, to bless,  
He's seen no more; his fleeting day hath passed.  
Change marks the trail; the scene seems all  
recast;

A smooth road beckons far o'er vale and knoll,  
Along which speeding autos swiftly roll,  
As roll the years; (a century, and more,  
Since Serra landed on our western shore).

Gay, laughing crowds flash by, with merry  
peal;

All, now, is joy on El Camino Real.

#### IV

**B**ELOW fair San Diego's sunny crest,  
Behold the mission in its sheltered nest,  
Hidden by trees, so cloistered and serene,  
By casual passerby is scarcely seen.  
Here came Fra Junipero, Priest of Spain,  
And founded the first mission; here remain  
The ancient walls of 'dobe; Time hath wrought  
Decay and ruin. Man's work, brought to  
naught,  
Holds yet a solemn beauty. Who hath seen  
Its faded portals, decked in living green,  
Must feel the touch Divine which lingers  
there,—  
A peaceful calm, like Saint enwrapped in pray'r.

#### V

Northward we turn, and follow where you lead,  
Junipero, upholder of the creed.

## VI

SPRING hath a mantle spread in fine array  
Of gorgeous colors, all along the way;  
Crimson and yellow, mauves, and azure blue,  
Cov'ring far ridges, meet the searching view.  
The horny cactus, in her sand-locked bow'r,  
Feels Spring's approach, puts forth a lovely  
flow'r;  
Great corrugated canyons, hewn from sand,  
Like masterpieces of some sculptor, stand  
Encrowned, where golden poppies bow and nod,  
A paying tribute mute unto their God;—  
And wondrous sight, as far as eye can reach,  
The fair Pacific laves a sunlit beach,  
With fleecy, foam-tipped waves of misty blue,  
Like lacy flounces, flung to flaunt at you.

## VII

Junipero, the way is very fair  
Which you found rough, and dangerous, and  
bare.

## VIII

THE road turns from the sea at Oceanside;  
We follow where the mission bells still  
guide

The stranger-traveler. 'Tis the "King's High-  
way,"—

The King of Kings, forever and a day!

A steady climb, a quick descent, and there

San Luis Rey invites to rest and pray'r.

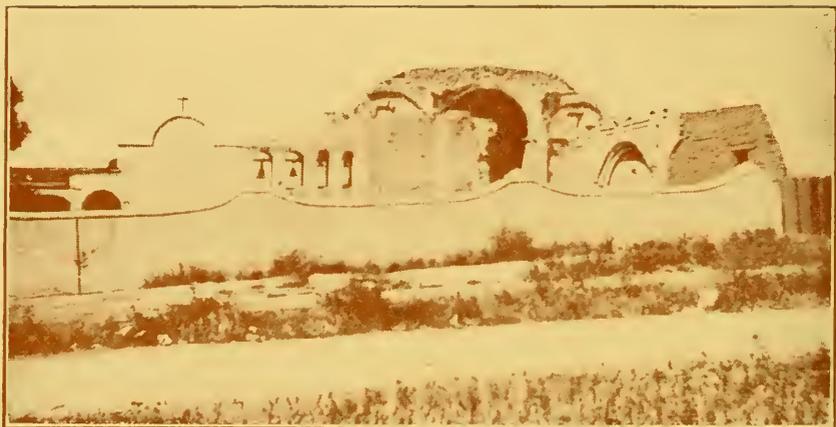
At one time richest mission in the land,

Still stands serene, defying Time's rough  
hand;

Rebuilt in part, is useful still.



SAN LUIS REY



JUAN CAPISTRANO

IX

Not So  
The ancient walls of Juan Capistrano,  
Whose bells hang mute in fast decaying arch,  
Accepting meekly Time's relentless march.  
No more the Padres grinding at their mills;  
No vineyards purp'ling on the rugged hills.

X

LOS ANGELES Mission sees a busy mart  
Grown to her doors, around her sturdy  
heart,  
But, like some patriarch from out the past,  
Preserves a dignity until the last.  
San Gabriel, her belfry tow'r uprears,  
A benediction o'er the passing years;  
Her outer garb of vari-tinted gold,  
Conceals the wrack within her bosom's fold.

XI

**W**HERE sea, and sky, and mountain blend  
as one,—

Where beauty reigns supreme beneath the  
sun,—

Where ravages of time lie scarce revealed,  
By art and friendly vine so well concealed,  
Saint' Barbara, restored to fair estate,  
Welcomes the wanderer within her gate.

## XII

**I**N ruins stand the walls of San Miguel;  
San Juan, and Santa Ynez, their vigils still  
Are keeping, like pale ghosts of life bereft,  
Gaunt specters of past glories, all that's left.  
How bravely they their tott'ring walls reveal  
To all who pass o'er El Camino Real.  
The herds that grazed upon the hillsides, and  
The Indians who tilled the fertile land,  
Have disappeared with all the prosp'rous scene,  
Leaving but barren stretches, parched and lean.



SAN JUAN MISSION

### XIII

**F**ROM San Diego to Sonoma's dells  
Each shrine the same old tale of ruin tells.  
A rosary of missions! One by one,  
We leave them crumbling 'neath the summer  
sun;  
Yet from the hand of Time some wonder-flow'r  
Of promise pluck, to deck Hope's age-worn  
bow'r.

### XIV

**T**HE western sky, in opalescent shades,  
Behind the starry veil of evening fades.  
We travel fast, but Time hath gone before;  
Hath laid his blight upon each mission door;  
Cold embers choke their sacred altar fires;  
No spark is left that kindles or inspires.  
All, all decay. Ah, Fra, could you review  
The proud and stately structures reared by you,  
'Twould break your kind old heart, so staunch  
and true.

XV

The spirit of Fra Junipero speaks,  
As if to quiet our regret, he seeks:

XVI

THE missions which we built in such fine  
pride,  
Have had their day, and like man, drooped and  
died.  
They dreamed their dreams, as haply, we dream  
ours;  
They bore aloft the torch, and plucked the  
flow'rs,  
And sang their song of hope. Incline thy ear;  
The song still lingers, if thou care to hear.

XVII

*Song of the Padres*

NO perfect summer day but hath its cloud;  
No life, however blest, but hath its grief;  
No damask rose but finds its autumn shroud  
Beneath the mould of sere and shriveled leaf.  
No darkling cloud but has an inner light;  
No withered rose but sheds a fragrance rare;  
A waiting sunbeam pierces ev'ry night,—  
God's love shines forth, victorious ev'rywhere.

### XVIII

THE message of the mission, then, is: Naught  
Endureth but pure *love!* Unselfish  
thought

Outlives the finest structure built by hand;  
'Tis simple truth, but hard to understand.  
The inner motive that inspires his deed,  
Is man's true measure,—not, alone, his creed.

### XIX

In the vast realms of Universal Mind,  
There is an essence that makes all mankind  
Akin to all, and all akin to each;  
This is the truest lesson Life would teach;  
No sinner but can claim the source of all,—  
No Saint but has resisted Satan's call.

XX

THE patient Padre, plodding on his way,  
With blistered feet, who paused anon, to pray,  
And prayed that all humanity might be  
Saved and rewarded in eternity;  
And the street gamin, urchin of the dust,  
Who shared with hungry dog his single crust,  
Have not in vain their sacrifices made,  
"Though all the land forget where they are laid.  
Although the missions crumble and decay  
Their spirit lives! In gen'rous service, they  
Gave *love*, nor can a greater gift be giv'n;  
'Tis love, alone, unlocks the gates of heav'n.

*Florence N. Mansfield.*



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