

THE SATURDAY
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POST

FOUNDED IN
1791 BY

Benjamin Franklin



The late Father Crowley and Dr. H. W. Deuker examining the famous gourd that played an important role in one of the novel publicity stunts staged for the benefit of Owens Valley.

CURTIS PHILLIPS

DESERT PADRE

By IRVING STONE

IN THE late fall of 1934, an automobile drew up before a church in the desert town of Lone Pine, California, with three men in it. Two of them lifted the third from the car and carried him, half stumbling, into the church, where he lay down in one of the pews. Another man riding along the main street of Lone Pine had watched the scene and had thought he recognized the afflicted one. He parked his car and entered the simple wooden church.

"Hello, Father Crowley. What are you doing here?"

The stricken man looked up. "They told me I was going to die, so I asked for permission to die in Owens Valley. I hear they say you're going to die too?"

"I don't pay any attention to it any more."

Father John J. Crowley lifted himself to one elbow, then smiled slowly. He had a nice face, strong but plain, perhaps even a trifle homely, with large ears, a

How Father John Crowley came back to Owens Valley to die, then survived long enough to restore life to a doomed California desert, and hope to its disillusioned settlers.

high and broad forehead topped by a thick shock of black hair shot through with gray, and bared by a stubborn Irish chin. His eyes were beautiful—light blue, with a piercing quality, yet kind—the kindest eyes, people said, they had ever known.

"I have an idea, Ralph," he said softly. "Let us both find some good fight. We'll forget the past and get well."

The condemned men shook hands on their bargain. Three days later, the friend saw Father Crowley again. He was able to walk a few steps unaided; there was a faint touch of color in his cheeks.

"You must have found a good one!"

"The best," replied Father Crowley with a quiet chuckle. "We are going to work for the rehabilitation of Owens Valley. With God's help, we're going to persuade the city of Los Angeles to let us buy back our property and use our water on it and own our valley once again."

He was not underestimating the enormity of the task, for he was no stranger to this 10,000 square miles of desert that lay east of the Sierra Nevada Mountains; it had been his first parish. He knew Owens Valley to be more fatally ill than he; that this once-abundant land, with its thousands of farms, ranches and homes, famous throughout the country as the producer of California's first-prize apples, grain and corn, would require a miracle to keep it from reverting to the rock, the sage and the sand of the desert.

By the end of a month he had gained sufficient strength to be driven slowly through the parish to which he had first come as a young man in 1919. Where before there had been alfalfa fields waving like a green canopy to the very base of the Sierras, now there were barren wastes. The home of the