

## DESERT PADRE

(Continued from Page 11)

of his home or business in thirty days. Los Angeles was careful never to take pecuniary advantage of the Owens Valley folk; the prices paid were consistently generous; but the settlers stubbornly maintained that a man's home could mean more to him than a profitable sales price.

There had settled over the people of Owens Valley the pall of bitterness and hatred which Father Crowley now found lodged deep in every last inhabitant.

As he rode on horseback through Long Valley and the mountains above it, as he studied the water-flow charts, he saw that if the Long Valley dam had been built exactly where the settlers had judged that it should be built thirty years before, Los Angeles could have had enough water to take care of a population of 5,000,000 and Owens Valley could have grown until it would have been a beautiful and prosperous community. Several times it had seemed as though the plans were coming to fruition, but always something intervened: politics, land manipulation, seasons of short water. In the end, Owens Valley had been unable to convince the Los Angeles engineers that even with the Long Valley dam there would always be sufficient water for both Owens Valley and the ever-expanding metropolis below.

The padre knew that the Long Valley dam must be built. But he perceived that the people had to wage the fight themselves, to regain their strength, to forget their bitterness. It was not the country alone that needed rebirth; it was the people as well.

Father Crowley assigned to himself the task of becoming the friend of every last man, woman and child in his vast parish. His eyes, which had always been a little severe, now twinkled as he made little jokes at every opportunity, for he believed that if he could start these people laughing, they might laugh the hate virus out of their blood.

He worked constantly for religious tolerance, and slowly his work became successful. Protestants forgave him for being a Catholic, and the Catholics forgave him for having so many Protestant friends. Somewhere along the line, the padre became The Padre, an understanding father to whom the weary, the frightened and confused could come for comfort and help.

He rarely had a dollar in his pocket. When he was near friends, he could eat at their tables, but many times when he was out alone he went without food because he had no coin in his pocket with which to buy it. When he was not sleeping in his car or alongside the road in his blanket roll, he slept on a little cot under the eaves of his church in Lone Pine. His worldly possessions were a few extra garments hanging on nails in the rafters. His entire parish being poverty-stricken, there seemed no way to raise money for his church work.

But he set to work vigorously to put his church on a solvent basis. He staged a street carnival, with many booths for eating hot dogs and drinking soda pop and gambling a few nickels into the till. This netted him two hundred dollars. He cast The Drunkard from among the valley people; folks came for hundreds of miles around to see the show and help out the padre.

When a Mexican woman deeded the church a lot, he sold it and with the money renovated the Lone Pine church property, so that he was able to rent out the basement to an undertaker, offices on

the ground floor to a doctor and a dentist, two living apartments for families upstairs, and the corner to a gasoline company. He found that he would have a hundred and twenty dollars a month with which to carry on his work.

He had been back for more than a year when he called together representatives of every tiny outpost of the country. Thirty men assembled—the editors of the local newspapers, the superintendent of Death Valley National Monument, the merchants, the leading miners, resort owners, cattle and sheep men from the surrounding mountains. They agreed that all work must be accomplished through communal co-operation. The men would contribute of their time, their energy, but not one copper cent. Thus the Inyo Associates were formed one evening in the little sitting room of a pioneer home.

By the following morning, opposition had already arisen. The Inyo County supervisors came out against the Associates because they feared it was designed to take away their political power. Trained on intrigue, the people feared the organization. Certain of Father Crowley's own parishioners criticized him on the grounds that he ought not meddle in economics and politics; a few members of the powerful Masonic lodge objected to having a priest lead them, while other Protestants claimed he was doing all this to strengthen the influence of the Catholic Church.

He was not disheartened by the obstacles. For sixteen hours a day he was in his jalopy, explaining to the people the aims of the association, trying to quiet their fears and suspicions, putting his shoulder against the dead weight of their torpor, their defeatism.

This was as magnificent a country as could be found anywhere in the world, with breath-taking contrasts; the trout fishing, hunting and skiing were superb. The country could have been a tourists' paradise, yet when the people of Los Angeles had

tried to come up for vacations, they had met with biting hatred.

"Look, you good people," the padre now cried to his neighbors. "It's true that Los Angeles made you sell out. But all that is in the past. We have to set our faces to the future, to make a new life for ourselves."

And so the Inyo Associates inched their way into the confidence of the people they were trying to help.

In spite of his continuous dashing about the country, he did not neglect any particle of his church work. But once his church work was attended to, his energies were canalized into the problems of reconstructing the valley. He began to write a column for the Catholic press, which was reproduced in other papers, called Sage and Tumbleweed, in which he brought to life for the outside world the beauty and drama of his region. He lectured often in Los Angeles to make people feel that they were wanted in Owens Valley. He said Mass at the top of Mount Whitney, the highest point in the United States on which Mass had ever been said, and took along photographers. The newspapers snapped up the pictures, largely because of their scenic beauty; people in Schenectady, in St. Paul, in Kansas City began to ask, "Say, where is this Mount Whitney?"

One evening he sat in a meeting in Bishop. The following day was May first, the opening of the fishing season.

Suddenly he leaned over to Bob Brown, who was writing publicity for the Associates, and murmured, "Do you think you can get a photographer to get up at three in the morning?"

"I guess so," replied Brown.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

## NEW DEALS

Reforms come from below. No man with four acres howls for a new deal.

—ANONYMOUS.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★