THE FRANCISCAN MISSIONS OF THE SOUTHWEST: THEIR INTERIOR DECORATIONS. NUMBER VI.
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We can not to-day determine how the Franciscans of the Southwest decorated the interiors of all their churches. Some of these buildings have disappeared entirely; while others have been restored or renovated beyond all semblance of their original condition. But enough are left to give us a satisfactory idea of the labors of the Fathers and of their subject Indians. At the outset, it must be confessed that while the Fathers understood well the principles of architecture and created a natural, spontaneous style, meeting all obstacles of time and place which presented themselves, they showed little skill in matters of interior decoration, possessing neither originality in design, the taste which would have enabled them to become good copyists, nor yet the slightest appreciation of color-harmony.

In making this criticism, I do not overlook the difficulties in the way of the missionaries, or the insufficiency of materials at command. The priests were as much hampered in this work as they were in that of building. But, in the one case, they met with brilliant success; in the other they failed. The decorations have, therefore, a distinctly pathetic quality. They show a most earnest endea-
The reality of the Object of Worship. Hence the desire to glorify the dwelling place of their God and their own temple. The great distance in this case between desire and performance is what makes the result pathetic. Instead of trusting to themselves, or reverting to first principles, as they did in architecture, the missionaries endeavored to reproduce from memory the ornament with which they had been familiar in their early days in Spain. They remembered decorations in Catalonia, Cantabria, Mallorca, Burgos, Valencia, and sought to imitate them; having neither exactitude nor artistic qualities to fit them for their task. No amount of kindliness can soften this decision. The results are to be regretted; for I am satisfied that, had the Fathers trusted to themselves, or sought for simple Nature-inspirations, they would have given us decorations as admirable as their architecture. What I am anxious to emphasize in this criticism is the principle involved. Instead of originating or relying upon Nature, they copied without intelligence. The rude brick, adobe, or rubble work, left in the rough, or plastered and whitewashed, would have been preferable to their unmeaning patches of color. In the one, there would have been rugged strength to admire; in the other there exists only pretense to condemn.

As examples of interior decoration, the Missions of San Miguel Arcángel and Santa Inés are the only ones that afford opportunity for extended study. At Santa Clara, the decorations of the ceiling were restored as nearly like the original as possible, but with modern colors and workmanship. At Pala Chapel, within the last three or four months, the priest judged dead white preferable to the old decorations, and, greatly to the indignation of the Indians, whose wishes he did not consult, he has whitewashed the mural distemper paintings out of existence. A small patch remains at San Juan Bautista merely as an example; while a splashed and almost obliterated fragment is the only survival at San Carlos Carmelo.

At San Miguel, little has been done to
disturb the interior, so that it is in practically the same condition as it was left by the Fathers themselves. Figure I. shows the provided with a tape, I was forced to estimate by paces. Therefore, the following figures are only approximate. The church

interior of the church, taken from the choir gallery, which immediately faces the altar. In making my measurements, not being is one hundred fifty feet long by twenty-eight feet wide. Its walls are four feet in thickness, as is evidenced by the deep em-

Figure IV. San Miguel Mission: altar of the Virgin
brasures of the windows and side door. The floor is paved with rows of large flat, burned bricks, alternating with those similar in size to the ordinary building brick of to-day.

In this church there are five objects which immediately claim attention. These are: the reredos and its ornaments; the ceiling; the mural decorations; the old pulpit; the ancient confessional; all of which are worthy of somewhat detailed study.

1. THE REREDOS

This occupies the entire western end of the church reaching from the floor to the ceiling (Figure II). The altar, now in use, is modern; with the remainder just as it came from the hands of the Fathers. The reredos consists of three panels: the central one containing the wooden statue of San Miguel, and the side panels showing other saints. The San Miguel, representing the patron of the Mission, is a striking statue, about six feet in height, and much larger than the side statues. In his right hand he holds the scales and in his left a sword, on which is inscribed a Latin motto. The bracket upon which he stands is the original one cut and painted by the fathers. It is rude, heavy, and composed of simple members: namely, a slightly rounded base supporting a thick block with quarter-round, square and round molding.

Figure II. shows the statue at the left of the altar. It is clothed in the garb of the Franciscan, with beard, tonsured head, outstretched hands, and one foot upon a skull.

Figure III. shows the figure to the right. It is tonsured, shaven, and wears the Franciscan garb. The panels are divided from one another by coupled columns; those supporting the pediment of the center panel standing out about two feet in front of the others, and having two flat engaged columns at their back. The bases of these columns are simple, half rounded moldings, the shaft is a plain cylinder, and the capital a dual leaf, as if in rude imitation of the Corinthian. The entablature is simple and
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effective, its center bearing a large All-Seeing Eye, radiating beams of light. Above this and over each side panel is a bracket sustaining an ornament in the shape of a chalice, each connected with the other across the whole face of the altar by clusters of grapes and leaves. These chalices have each a cover and two handles. The rays issuing from the center piece bear evidences of having afforded a resting place for owls and other night birds during the days when the Mission was abandoned. Even now, as I sit writing, I hear the cooing of many doves that nest under the open eaves, through which feathers come floating into the sacred edifice.

The pillars are mottled in imitation of marble, and the altar and mural decorations are in colors, chief of which are blue, green, red, pink, and pale green. The base of the panelings is pink.

On the left, above the statue is an oval panel painted with the two crossed hands of the Christ, showing the nail holes of the cross. On the other side is a similar oval panel, decorated with symbolic figures.

There are two side altars, the one at the right sacred to the Holy Mother; and the other to Saint Joseph and the Holy Child. Figure IV. shows the former with some of the mural decoration. The figure of the Madonna is modern, but the painting is old and well illustrates the artistic ideas of the Fathers. A similar painted canopy covers the old figure of San José seen in Figure V.

II. THE CEILING

This can be studied in Figure I. There are twenty-eight rafters upholding the roof, and extending completely across the church. Each rafter rests upon a corbel which can be seen a little more distinctly in Figure VI. Both rafters and corbels are rough hewn from the solid trees of the mountains near San Antonio, over thirty-five miles away, and they have sustained unimpaired to the present day the heavy weight of the roof. This is estimated to be not less than two hundred thousand pounds. The rafters are each ten by twelve inches in the square, and fully forty feet long. They were cut in the mountains at Cambria, forty miles away, and carried by the Indians to their destination. These rafters protrude some twelve inches or so through the wall to which they are fastened or keyed with large wooden spikes, as shown in Figure VII.

Over the altar, the corbels are tinted a light green, and the ceiling and rafters pink. Other colors used in the mural decorations, are blue and white. Over the altar, there is also a further decoration of the ceiling in a leafy design in blue, by which
special honor is given to the most sacred portion of the church.

III. THE MURAL DECORATIONS

These are executed in three zones: that of the altar, and those of the church and choir. These decorations are generally called frescoes, but, as I believe, erroneous-

I may say that although crude and inharmonious they are exceedingly interesting, as they are so evidently a work of love and devotion. The desire to beautify the sacred house is there manifest, although the power adequately to accomplish the purpose was wanting. To the Mission Fathers the completed church was dear, beautiful and

ly. They are in reality distemper paintings on plaster. A true fresco is executed with mineral or earthy pigments upon a newly laid stucco ground of lime or gypsum: so that the colors sinking in, become as durable as the stucco itself. This, it appears to me, is not the case with the San Miguel decorations. As a general criticism sacred, because beautified to the best of their ability, and raised with the ardor of their whole souls to the glory of God.

In the altar space, the mural decorations on the sides consist of thirteen bands, alternating green and brown; the green being a design of pomegranate leaf, sprig and fruit; the brown a conventional design of
leaves arranged in a lozenge pattern. On each side, a painted panel is introduced for an altar, before described in Figure IV. In this same figure can also be seen, above the perpendicular bands a horizontal band about three feet wide; the design being of small squares set with a conventional pattern. There is a fringe or border, painted in blue to represent lace with tassels, both right side, the pulpit is located as seen in Figure VIII. This decoration comprises a series of bands in pink and shades of green, radiating fan-shaped from a green base, situated between three and four feet above the floor. This fan design is enclosed in a painted panel, outlined by fluted columns, in blue. These columns continue, at a distance of about twelve feet apart, along the above and below this band. Still another horizontal band, about three feet wide, in gray and pink, with a painted cornice connecting the wall decorations with the molded cornice above, complete the mural adornments in the altar zone.

Beginning at the altar, there is a zone of decoration extending on each side of the church, about eighteen feet. This might be termed the pulpit zone, for in it, on the body of the church to the choir zone, at which point an entirely different design is introduced. The columns are further decorated by a conventional leaf and fern pattern, as seen in Figure IX., which also shows the frieze and the painted balustrade, both of these extending from the altar zone to that of the choir. Above and below the choir loft, the design is the Greek key.
IV. THE OLD PULPIT

A peculiar fascination pertains to this little structure, with its quaint sounding board and crown-like cover, which could be let down as a protection when desired: the whole resembling a bird-nest fastened upon the right wall. It is reached by a flight of eight steps from the inside of the altar rail like a crown surmounted with a ball, on which rests a cross. The crown is painted green, gold, black and silver, with the scalloped edge in red.

V. THE OLD CONFESSIOINAL

The confessional shown in Figure X. is built into the solid adobe wall, with two swinging doors opening from it. One of these has been replaced by new material, as seen in the picture: the other, except for the insertion of a new panel of redwood, is as the Fathers left it. The old iron hinges, three pairs of which remain, are originals, and good examples of the iron handiwork of the time. The decoration of the old door is the continuation of one of the fluted columns before described.

At Santa Inés the original decorations of the altar zone still remain. Elsewhere they have been destroyed with the all-covering whitewash. In this church, the ceiling beams are painted (Figure XI.) with red, yellow and green into a portion of a circle with pendants at each point, and with a leaf design inside each arc. On the bottom of each beam is a conventionalized trailing vine.

The decorations of the side wall (Figure XII.) are of black and green around the window, and a rude imitation of marble in panels at each side. In each panel hangs a wooden bracket, painted in water color, and supporting oil paintings. About three
Figure XI. Santa Inés Mission: reredos, altar table, and painted ceiling
feet from the base is a border of yellow, green and red of a large conventionalized leaf, alternating with a chalice, or vase.

The reredos is pretentious and inharmonious. Indeed, were it not for the sacred furnishings, statues and altar beneath, it would suggest a rude stage setting hastily prepared for an emergency, rather than its sacred function. It is a series of marbelized panels, enclosed in columns, with bases and cornices. The archway leading from the sanctuary into the sacristy is somewhat elaborately, although rudely decorated, as shown in Figure XIII. This figure, also, gives some detail of the dadoes of the reredos, with its marble paneling and conventional figures in diamonds of differing size.

The most striking and pleasing mural decoration of the whole building is found in the seclusion of the sacristy. It is done in blues, reds and yellows, and is pictured in Figure XIV. The flower (rose?) and leaf below the Greek key, and the conventional flower and leaf above are the most artistic decorations that I have yet seen in the California Missions.

At San Luis Rey, some of the old mural decorations remain, as seen in the marbelizing of the engaged columns, the dadoes at their base, the wavy line extending about the lower part of the walls, and the designs in the doorways and arches (Figure XV). On the reredos of the side altar, also, there are remnants of decoration in distemper (Figure XVI).

The winged angels, carrying the crown, constitute a fair example of the ability of the Fathers in this branch of decorative art: the columnar design on the right and the left of the reredos, as well as the decoration of the lower wall on the right, deserve to be examined.

Figure XVII. shows the interior wall decorations of the Pala Chapel, a dependency of the San Luis Rey Mission. The adobe walls were plastered and whitewashed; then the rude columns and arches were colored.
in distemper to a reddish brown. When the Palatingwa Indians were removed from Warner’s Ranch to Pala, they were told that this chapel would be theirs, and that a priest would be sent regularly to minister to them. Imagine their chagrin to find it leased to the Landmarks Club, of Los Angeles, the president of which they hated bitterly for his treatment of them regarding their removal! Fortunately, in Bishop J. T. Conaty, the newly appointed Diocesan of Los Angeles, they found a sympathizing friend. He arranged that services should be conducted with regularity; sending a priest to reside among them. This latter, with a zeal for cleanliness and for making all things under his control conform to his own ideas; neglectful or unobservant of the irritated condition of the Indians under his charge, and without consulting them (so I am informed), ordered the walls to be whitewashed. The indignation of the Indians was intense, and were it not that high feeling has been common to them of late, they would have practically resented this desecration of the time-honored wall decorations. To an unsympathetic stranger, their anger might appear unreasonable and absurd; but when it is remembered that all the Indians of this region are responsive to the memories and traditions of Padre Peyri and other early workers at the Missions of San Diego and
San Luis Rey, their feelings appear natural and almost proper.

At Santa Barbara, all that remains of the old decorations are found in the reredos, the marbleizing of the engaged columns on each wall and the entrance and side arches, as shown in Figure XVIII. This marble effect is exceedingly crude, and does not represent the color of any known marble.

Here and there on the walls of the San Juan Bautista are a few remnants of the old distemper paintings. On the further side of the seventh arch on the left is a conventional leaf design in brownish red, illustrated in Figure XIX.

In the old building of San
Figure XVIII. Santa Barbara Mission: Looking toward high-altar
Francisco, the rafters of the ceiling have been allowed to retain their ancient decorations. These consist in rhomboidal figures placed conventionally from end to end of the building.

I HAVE thus given to the readers of The Craftsman a comprehensive survey of practically all the remaining mural decorations of the Franciscan Missions in California. They are not given as examples to be copied; but as matters of history and therefore of deep interest. Personally I have never recovered from my surprise that men of architectural ability such as the Fathers proved themselves to be, should have failed so utterly in these decorations.