

Garden Recreation

Father Latour's recreation was his garden. He grew such fruit as was hardly to be found even in the old orchards of California: cherries and apricots, apples and quinces, and the peerless pears of France – even the most delicate varieties. He urged the new priests to plant fruit trees wherever they went, and to encourage the Mexicans to add fruit to their starchy diet. Wherever there was a French priest, there should be a garden of fruit trees and vegetables and flowers. He often quoted to his students that passage from their fellow Auvergnat, Pascal: that man was lost and saved in a garden.

He domesticated and developed the native wild flowers. He had one hill-side solidly clad with that low-growing purple verbena which mats over the hills of New Mexico. It was like a great violet velvet mantle thrown down in the sun; all the shades that the dyers and weavers of Italy and France strove for through centuries, the violet that is full of rose color and is yet not lavender; the blue that becomes almost pink and then retreats again into sea-dark purple – the true Episcopal color and countless variations of it.

Willa Cather, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*

Guided Commentary

- ▶ What does this text reveal about the time and place of the story? What can we gather about Fr. Latour's situation?
- ▶ What do we learn about Fr. Latour from the type of orchard he cultivated?
- ▶ How does the author help us to see the rich beauty of the hillside which Fr. Latour has planted with verbena? What new aspect of his personality does this paragraph allow us to see?
- ▶ Willa Cather calls the mantle of verbena on the hillside, "the true Episcopal color and countless variations of it"; how does this entire passage give us a broader and deeper understanding of missionary work itself?