

TORTURED ALMOST TO DEATH IN A PASSION PLAY.

The Annual Crucifixion Ceremonies of the New Mexico Indians and the Religious Frenzy of Holy Week.

How many Americans know that a passion play, far more real and much deeper in intensity and sincere in motive than that of Oberammergau, is enacted every year, but by persons who have citizenship with us, under the Stars and Stripes?

How many people realize that men who may some day be American lawmakers, each Lenten season willingly bear ponderous crosses along roadways strewn with broken stones and cheerfully receive buffets and spitings in the face, and at last are lifted up with a crown of thorns on the head and are nailed to the cross to suffer and bleed, often even unto death, as did the Saviour of mankind.

During Holy or Passion Week, the last week previous to Easter Sunday, the American passion play is performed in six to ten different localities in Southern Colorado, and throughout New Mexico. Years ago the drama was acted in twice as many localities in Colorado, Texas and New Mexico, but the influence of the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant missionaries has been brought to bear against the passion play to such a degree that in these days the scenes in the travails of Jesus Christ are enacted only in localities distant from the beaten paths of travellers and remote from civilization and the eyes of priest or missionary.

The actors are half Spanish descendants of the ancient Aztecs, the remnants of the people whom Coronado and his troops came to conquer in 1540. Their sturdy red-skinned ancestors learned from the Franciscan monks the lessons of Christianity, and, animated by a like zeal that moved the peasants of Oberammergau long years ago to subject themselves once a year as a pious duty to the agony and humiliation of their lord, they established the passion play in the New World. The Indian converts to the Church became in time a sort of religious organization separate from others of their race, who refused to abandon their Indian beliefs. The converts and their descendants have been known for three hundred years as the Penitents, the full name being "Los Hermanos Penitentes" (the penitent brothers), as given by the Franciscan fathers.

BANISHED BY THE PALE FACE. A half century ago the penitents were numbered by thousands, but the influx of white people into the Territories, the advance of civilization and the rapid progress of the pale faces nowadays, have been inimical to the fanaticism of the penitent brothers, who are now reckoned but a few hundred. The locality where the penitents are still strongest is about the little adobe village of Taos, on the northern hem of New Mexico. There are very few white people in that region to be inquisitive or to object. Nor are there railroads or stage coaches to carry tourists and sightseers to the scene of the religious frenzy.

Taos and its valley are hidden away among the Rocky Mountains, seventy miles from the nearest white settlement and accessible by rough roads through treacherous canyons. The number of penitents in and about Taos is 500, and they enact the passion play exactly as the traditions of their half savage forefathers have taught them. El Verde Valley, in which Taos is situated, gives one a very clear idea of the kind of civilization that the Spanish conquerors of the Southwest saw when they came across the Rio Grande.

The valley and the old town are a bit of the American Middle Ages dropped down in the mountain fastnesses. There are rude, clumsy one-story adobe and stone houses, built several centuries ago. A narrow roadway winds down the hillside through a struggling community, no building has been done there for several generations, the old mission church (the "Morada") stands as it did two hundred years ago, the cattle and sheep graze on the hills the same as in the days of Cortez, and the sole language in the village is a curious jargon of Spanish and Indian. During the Lenten season the penitents have daily services.

better luck they will have with their flocks and herds and crops, and the more likely will be their chance to inherit the kingdom of heaven. So every day during Lent the penitents meet in secret at the "Morada" and join in self-abnegation and in visiting pain upon one another. One day they will whip one another, on another day they go to El Calvario (the Calvary), a little hill away from the town, where they coat their bodies with ashes, and all the time call in lamentations for a witness to their sense of sinfulness. For several days at a time they go without food, and they spend whole nights in tearful prayer.

FANATICISM GROWN RAMPANT. When Holy Week comes the intensity of the observation increases and many penitents join in the fanaticism. Every afternoon and evening the penitent brothers march in single file from the crazy old adobe church in El Calvario. In the daytime they wear black hoods to conceal their faces. All of their customs are not known, and not one of the participants may be induced to speak on the subject. They have much mummy and silent acts of devotion. They have been seen to thrust cactus into one another's naked backs until the flesh swelled out of all proportion with inflammation caused by thousands of nettles under the skin. They have been known to crawl on all-fours, like a lizard, over hill and vale for miles at a time to prove the humility that possessed them. Self-lashing with short whips, similar to cats-o-nine-tails, is common, and reliable residents of Taos tell of young men they have known who have died from exhaustion and loss of blood during too zealous flagellations.

The Lenten observances by the fanatical penitents culminate on Good Friday. On that day nothing of the acts and services of the brothers is in secret. At early dawn the little cracked bell on the "Morada," or church, discordantly calls the people of Taos to worship. Every one in the place and the surrounding country is there on that day, if not again for a whole year. There are prayers and lamentations for an hour or two. The "Hermano" (the Mayor) names the ones who have been chosen to be the Jesus Christ, the Peter, Pontius Pilate, Mary, Martha, and so on, for acting that day the scene in the life and suffering of the Master. Murmurings at the choice of performers are common, for there is keen rivalry to perform the principal parts in the drama. Notwithstanding the dreadful agony and the possibility of death in the personation, many penitents are annually most desirous of being the Christ.

To have been the counterfeit of the Saviour during several years, even though they have left painful, life-long wounds, is the most sublime service in the eyes of the people of a little community where the penitents are supreme. During the morning hours the preparations are made, the annual passion play in the afternoon, and Taos is livelier than at any time in the whole twelve months.

BEGINNING OF THE CEREMONIES. At 2 o'clock the church bells ring and the population of the valley gathers about the "Morada." A procession, headed by the "Hermano" and the most devout members of the brotherhood, who are generally chief actors in the passion play, starts slowly on foot for El Calvario. All are barefoot and many are naked from the hips up. The spectators follow silently at a respectful distance.

Half-way out to the hillock, which is known in Taos as El Calvario, the procession halts at a tumble-down adobe house. While the "Pipero" blows a shrill, penetrating air on a flute, the man who is acting the part of the Saviour comes forth. His only garment is a quantity of cotton sheeting or muslin that hangs flowing from his shoulders and waist, as is represented in the pictures of Christ in Bible and Church histories. About the forehead of the man is bound a wreath of cactus thorns. The thorns have been pressed deep into the flesh, from which they stream of blood trickle down his bronzed face and over his black beard.

In a moment a cross of huge timbers that would break the back of many men, is laid upon the man's shoulders. He grasps tight hold of it, bending low under the crushing weight, starts on. The pipero changes the tune on his flute and the procession, with the mimic Christ near the head, moves on. It is a warm day in the semi-tropic valley, and the perspiration mingles with the blood from the thorns on the head of the chief actor and runs down his half-nude body. The man pants and gasps at times, but never looks up or speaks. On the way, a pathway of broken stones has been made, and the most devout penitents walk over these with bare feet and never flinch. The counterfeit

Christ is spit upon by any and all the procession. Little boys and girls run ahead that they may more deliberately spit in his face and to throw stones upon his bending form.

When El Calvario is reached the great, clumsy cross is laid upon the ground, the actor of Christ is seized and thrown upon it. The assemblage joins in a chorus of song, while several penitentes lash the man's arms, hands and legs to the timbers with cords and cowhide. The bonds are made as tight as the big muscular ranchmen can draw them. The ligaments sink into the flesh and even cut so that blood runs out. The arms and legs become blue and then black under the awful binding, but not so much as a sigh escapes the lips of the actor. He repeats in a mixed dialect of Spanish and Indian the words uttered by Christ at the true Calvary and bids his brothers to spare him not.

SUFFERING ON THE CROSS. When all is ready a dozen men lift the cross and the human burden and, carrying it to an excavation near at hand, they drop the base in the earth. The hole is quickly filled and the penitentes gather about the foot of the cross with uplifted faces. The women weep and the children look on dumfounded. Some of the men mock and jeer the man on the cross, others throw clods of sunbaked earth at him and still others, feeling that they must have some part in the physical agony of the afternoon, call upon the multitude to lash and beat them. The invitation is never in vain, as there are strong arms and hands ever glad to lay the lash on the backs of the fanatics and to provide lots of cactus to apply to the swollen and bleeding flesh.

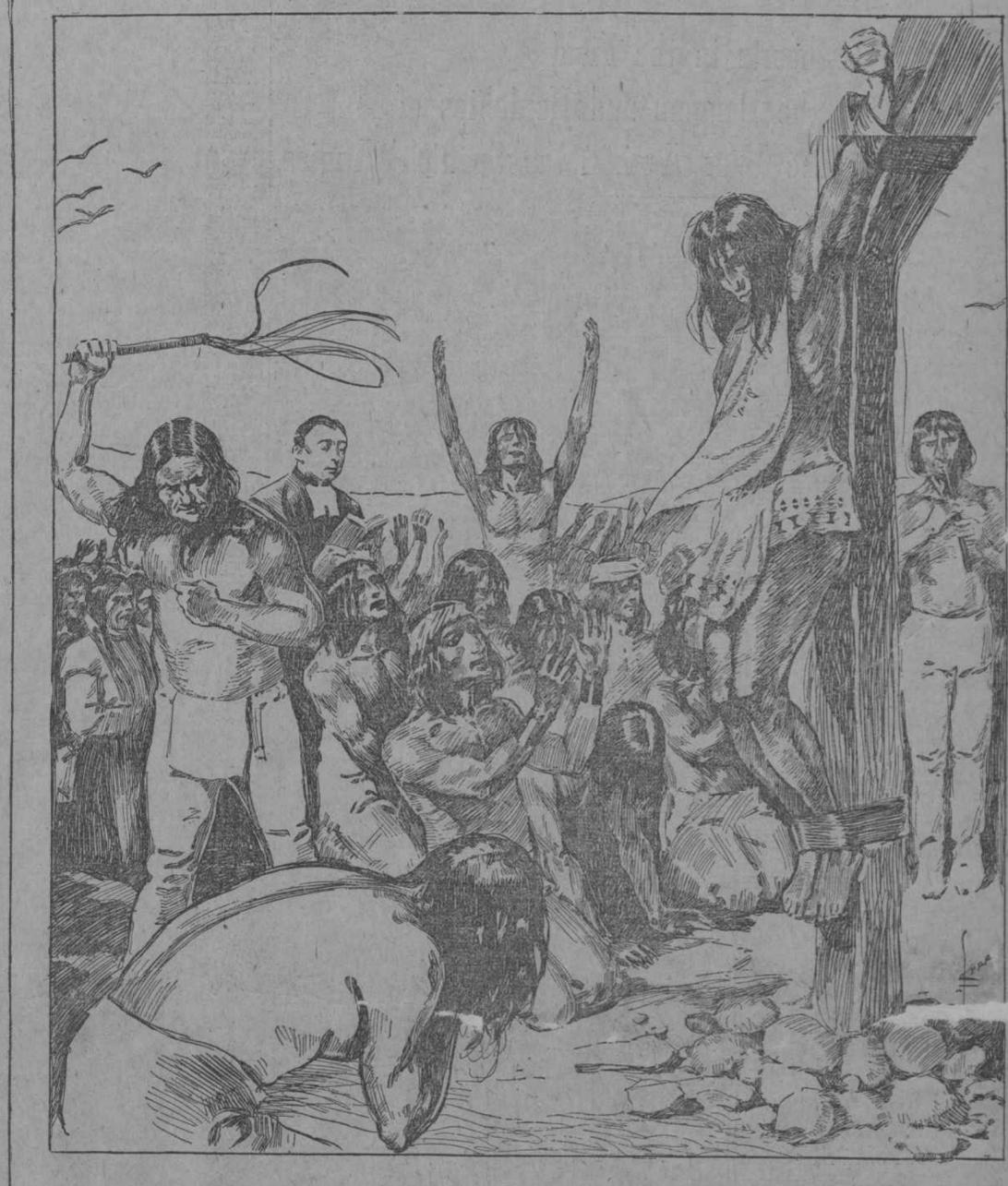
In several localities in Colorado and Mexico it was the practice to literally nail the hands of the acting Christ to the timber of the cross, but the Catholic priests of this generation put a stop to that. There is no doubt that people have died from tortures of the passion play. Only two years ago the Government Indian agent in the San Rita Mountains reported several deaths among the penitents because of poisoning by the cactus thorns and suppressed sobbing, moaning and weeping of the women, there is not now a sound. The wretched pathos of the scene is indescribable. The clear, mellow afternoon sun of that region pours down, the picture of that great male cross, bearing a semi-nude, bloodstained, agonized man stretched upon it, the groups of barefooted, weeping, disheveled men and women all about, the solitude of the rugged barren hills, backed by mountains towering in lonely sublimity, is one that will long abide with even the most prosaic or hardened onlooker.

ONLY MOANS AND SOBS HEARD. Save for the hysterical sobbing, moaning and suppressed sobs of the women, there is not now a sound. The wretched pathos of the scene is indescribable. The clear, mellow afternoon sun of that region pours down, the picture of that great male cross, bearing a semi-nude, bloodstained, agonized man stretched upon it, the groups of barefooted, weeping, disheveled men and women all about, the solitude of the rugged barren hills, backed by mountains towering in lonely sublimity, is one that will long abide with even the most prosaic or hardened onlooker.

As the sun slowly descends behind the loftiest mountain peaks and the first stand of twilight are thrown across the valley of El Verde, the pipero rises to his feet, and, blowing a long, harsh air upon his flute, leads a procession of the people back to the village. Some twenty of the leading penitents remain behind, and when the spectators and others have gone away they lift the cross from the earth and lower it to the ground. The cords of cowhide are removed and the pseudo Christ, who is now probably unconscious from long and dreadful bondage, is lifted from the timbers.

Then, following the narrative of the scenes on Calvary, the body of the actor is wrapped about with a mass of white fabric and is carried to a dug-out cave in the hillside near at hand. Several women who have been appointed to personate the Marys and the Marthas follow some distance behind, all the time violently weeping and lamenting.

In the cave the bleeding and tortured body of the chief actor is nursed to strength. If the man is of endurance and rugged physical strength he will probably be ready to go home to his family in the evening, conscious of having made ample atonement for long years of sin and having earned a reputation that numerous men in Taos have coveted many years. If his wounds heal and his inflamed and lacerated back resumes its normal condition he will be the central figure at the big dance that is always given Monday night following Easter. He will be the most envied woman in Taos, and he will be pointed out by youth of the village for many months as the biggest man in the country.



A CRUCIFIXION OF THE PRESENT DAY.

HORSES MADE OVER.

Some of the Tricks of Dealers to Restore Brief Youth to Aged Equines.

The bolstering of ancient horses has become almost an art. An expert in this practice can take the most decrepit street cur wreck, and in a short time so alter his appearance that the careless buyer would consider him a bargain at a fairly good figure.

The tricks employed to gain the ends of the owner of the time-worn horse are as numerous as they are cruel. One of the most recent and ingenious inventions of the unscrupulous is a treatment for filling out the eyes, which, as a rule, are sunk far back in the head. This operation consists in cutting an opening in each optic, in which the nozzle of a small air bellows is inserted. Wind is then gently pumped into and around the organ, puffing it out and giving it the appearance of a horse in perfect condition. Of course, like all other "fake" remedies, the apparently beneficial results last for a limited time only, after which the normal conditions return.

Another and favorite method of improvement is the injection of a large dose of whiskey into the animal. A hypodermic syringe being employed to pump the invigorator into the beast to be disposed of. Several secret compounds are also employed by various unscrupulous traders. In fact, there are many injections compounded with a limited amount of the five of youth. Then the broken-down animal is often fed on alcoholic essence of oats, while well-motivated hay will fill out an emaciated frame in short order. Add to these careful grooming and clipping, and judicious exercise, and it doesn't take long to bring about a complete metamorphosis. There are tricks in all trades, undoubtedly, but in none are there more than in that of horse dealing.

Dave B. Herrington, of Fleetwood, in fact, sold to a Journal reporter, one of the greatest difficulties I have to contend with in circumventing the efforts of the sharp who try to palm off on me apparently sound animals to train. As a matter of fact, these animals are "bolstered" for the time being, and I am supposed to receive them in first-class condition. Then, when the effects of their stimulants have worn off, the owners propose to come to me and purchase them with the proper caring for their animals and thereby ruining their constitutions.

A LIGHTED GUN.

Here's a Queer Invention That Will Enable You to Shoot Accurately in the Dark.

The shades of night are no longer a protection to game from the powers of the sportsman. An English Nimrod has invented an ingenious sight for use in a bad light. A tiny incandescent lamp, fed from a single storage battery concealed in the gun, is mounted within a shield at the muzzle of the gun, and a faint ray of light is projected to indicate the direction of the shooter's eye, and this is sufficient to enable him to obtain the required alignment of the back sight and with the target. The special application of the sight is for game shooting at night and for naval service, such, for instance, as the illumination of a machine gun used against torpedo attacks during the night. For the latter purpose it has been adopted in the English navy.

AN APRIL FOOL JOKE WITH A SOUND MORAL.

And This Shows Now Careless New York Business Men Are in Signing Petitions.

It has often been said that the average New Yorker cheerfully signs any petition that is handed to him without reading it. The Sunday Journal has found this to be entirely true. On April Fool's day—last Wednesday—a Journal reporter started out with a petition to the "L" railroad managers. The document began in the usual phraseology: "Whereas," etc., and went on to recite the well-known fact that the Ninth avenue "L" trains do not run all night. The petition further set forth the statement that this neglect to operate trains all night was a serious injury to the tradesmen, along the avenue and particularly to the butchers, marketmen and others who go to business in the early morning hours.

Then, right in the middle of the petition, came this paragraph: "If you cannot grant this request, we shall insist upon your taking measures to have the West Side bargers, marketmen, night porters and night watchmen confined in the penitentiary, that they may no longer be subjected to the inconvenience and unnecessary expense they now suffer, and we furthermore insist upon absolutely clear weather and pure politics along the line of said Ninth avenue elevated road." Now, of course, this paragraph of nonsense in the middle of this solemn petition would have astonished anybody who read it. Nobody who read the petition would have signed it with such an absurdity in it. And yet the Journal reporter succeeded in getting ninety-one names signed to this very petition in a very few hours. As a matter of fact, not one single person took the trouble to read it.

The petition might just as well have been a declaration of war against China, or a petition to re-establish slavery, or anything else. Nobody bothered to find out what it was all about, and without question all cheerfully put their signatures to this absurd document. Among the signatures attached to the petition are those of men whose reputation for shrewdness and careful action is almost

ever, the very people referred to in the petition enthusiastically signed the document that urged their own imprisonment. They hunted the opportunity with joy, and, seeming to read the pleas set forth, grew more and more earnest as they continued to read. These are some of the leaders among the market men whose names appear on the petition: George Bauer, John Syms, John Schmitt, Joseph H. Higgins, John McDermott, Edward Davis, Anthony L. Ruppel, Johnson & Brother, Ernest Fischer, George Blackburn, Charles Sobick, C. C. Seibert, Joseph Schmitt, A. F. Bidder, Louis Bahl, John F. Chandler, Arthur T. Bliss.

Every story is supposed to have a moral of some sort, but this one contains two. The first is that the present service on the Ninth avenue road is unsatisfactory. The second points to the fact that it isn't safe to sign a petition with reading it on the first of April or any other day.

THE BIRTH OF A PEARL. When the Oyster is Badly Nailed Produces a Precious Jewel. When an oyster feels something tickling his skin he does not—indeed, he obviously cannot—proceed to scratch the spot and apply counter-irritation, as a quadruped or a biped would. The only course left to a mollusk in such a plight is to fence off his enemy with a layer or two of mother-of-pearl, more soft, dically known under the term of "nacre." In consequence of this many things happen—inside the shell, among them pretty frequently the birth of a pearl.

It should be known, however, to start with, that all the shell-bearing-mollusks have the power of secreting calcite, which is a form of carbonate of lime, from the outer layer of cells which forms the cuticle or skin of their soft, not to say sloppy, bodies. In this way they build up their shells. The limit secretion which they give off is laid in extremely thin, semi-transparent films, and this is just the reason why the "nacre" is so beautifully iridescent, for very thin films have the property of producing what are scientifically known as "interference" effects and breaking up many light up into the colors of the spectrum. Now, if some tiny foreign body, such as a grain of sand, a "dust" or even a minute shrimp or other crustacean happens to get its way inside the mantle border of the oyster, it sets up a good deal of irritation, and in self-defense the poor oyster is obliged to cover up the intruder by a layer of nacre. So around the layer of sand, we will say, the mollusk goes on depositing thin layers of nacre one after the other, like the skins of an onion, until the point of irritation is completely encysted and a pearl has been formed. This process is carried out, or attempted to be carried out, whatever the intruder may be, so that little fish have been seen encysted in pearl within the bivalve's shell. The Chinese, who never seem to neglect an opportunity to improve upon nature, have long taken advantage of this habit to artificially induce the growth of pearls by filling up the oyster with all kinds of irritating things. Ordinary pearl-shap nacre is now excited by means of a U-shaped piece of wire thrust into the border, but it is not uncommonly inserted little metallic images of the "god Buddha," and subsequently obtain of the same in form. These are now used as charms. The finest Oriental pearls are those found within the mantle cavity close to the lips of the oyster, in the soft parts near to the hinge