

SCOURGE WITH WHIPS

SELF-PUNISHMENT OF THE PENITENTS IN NEW MEXICO.

Practices of the Remnant of the Order of Flagellants Which Dwells in the Out-of-the-Way Sections of the Territory—Gross Rites of Religious Fanatics Described by Charles F. Lummis—Bearing Bundles of Cactus and Heavy Crosses—Sacrilegious Ceremony.

Those who read the history of this land as it is illuminated in books and newspapers will be surprised to learn that an oath-bound order of flagellants exists and has existed for generations in the United States. As late as 1891, under the light of day, a procession of voters of this great republic shredded their naked backs with savage whips, staggered beneath the weight of huge crosses, tied to their backs the maddening needles of the desert cactus all in the name of religion, and, as a culmination of their greswome rite, enacted the thrilling story of Calvary with a flesh and blood though unworthy representative of the Redeemer.

Nor was this an isolated horror. Every Good Friday for generations this scene has been enacted by the Order of Penitents in a section of America which, though remote, contains cities, towns, railroads, telegraph

vided with only the rude necessities and most primitive contrivances. Half a mile up the road is the morada, the hut in which a part of the penitents' rites are performed. It is as rude as the houses, measuring 40x20 feet, with one door and two small windows. The rough walls are unchinked; the floor is of earth; there is no furniture, but from pegs on the walls hang whips, their lashes stiffened with a coating of blood.

Against the outer walls on Holy Thursday, when Mr. Lummis arrived at the hamlet, four rude crosses leaned. The largest was twenty feet long and weighed 800 pounds. The smallest weighed 200. Further down the cañon a sugar-loaf hillock, known as El Calvario, elbows the road. Its top is crowned with another large cross, the scene of former crucifixions. There was a bustle and a stir about the village on the morning of Holy Thursday. But none went near these crosses and whips. The men who were to do penance had already vanished in the chaparral.

Beginning of the Rites.

At 2 o'clock the inhabitants of the settlement were drawn up alongside the road. Suddenly a weird, shrill, almost shrieking sound was heard. It reverberated through the cañon like the wail of a lost spirit. Every voice was silenced and every eye turned up the road. Over the ridge came slowly a tall New Mexican, producing the uncanny sound from a rude pipe. Behind him were six women, chanting monotonously a hymn of the penitents. After them came a man, naked to the waist, his head enveloped in a black hangman's cap, lashing his bare back with a heavy whip. His left arm was against his breast, his right, holding the whip, swung up and down mechanically, bringing the broad, plaited lash down with a fearful swish upon his macerated

He had a large stone crowded beneath the cactus, so as to press its spikes deeper into his back.

Effect on the People.

A hush was on the people. Even the women and the piper were stilled while the crucified wretch hung upon the cross. Beside the cross stood the Hermano Mayor and his assistants. Each bound about his brow a fillet of wild rose branches, whose claw-like thorns were forced deep into the skin.

At the end of thirty-one minutes the Hermano Mayor signed to his assistants and the cross was taken down and the victim unbound and helped into the morado, with his fellow fanatic who had lain at the foot of the cross. The procession was reformed. As it passed the cross the Hermano Mayor with a flint knife gashed the backs of the seven whippers, cutting deep lines up and down and across. This is the seal of the order and is renewed every year.

In the evening the order held "tinieblas," that is "dark services," in the little chapel of the hamlet. The services are intended to represent a soul in purgatory, and they lasted an hour. The trembling listeners outside heard within the chapel the sound of clanking chains, groans, shrieks, and muffled blows. When the penitents emerged they carried one of their number in a blanket. He had hugged a stake wrapped with cactus for fifteen minutes and had fainted. Behind him walked seven women weeping bitterly. Each feared it was her husband. The night service is the last of the celebration, and at midnight on Good Friday the Penitents scatter to their homes, perhaps hundreds of miles distant, each man believing that his sins for the last year have been fully atoned.

Rules of the Order.

This remarkable order has a book of rules.



THE PENITENTE PROCESSION.

lines, printing presses, and all the tremendous machinery of an enlightened civilization, and these self-scourgers and torturers are more or less in touch with it all. Hundreds of American citizens have witnessed their manifestations of a fanaticism against which Pope Clement V, in 1349 fulminated a bull and which Gregory XI and the Inquisition drove out of Europe as an institution. There were sporadic outbreaks for centuries later, but so strong an authority as the Encyclopedia Britannica winds up what is intended to be a complete outline of the history of self-whipping as a means of grace, with the statement that a procession of flagellants took place at Lisbon in 1820. Not a word about the Order of Penitents of New Mexico is contained in the article, nor does any other encyclopedia give a hint that such an order exists.

Few books have contained much information on the subject and newspapers have printed even less. It has remained for Charles F. Lummis, who has witnessed their rites, photographed them while engaged in the supreme act of their fanatical practices, and studied their own in, to describe it all. He has done so vividly in his book, "The Land of Poco Tiempo," which has just been published by Scribners.

flesh. His trousers were stained with blood, his flesh quivered, yet not a sound escaped his lips. With measured tread, led by his solemn guides, the flagellant walked around the spur to the morada and disappeared.

Then came another piper with more women and seven penitents, their heads hidden like the first. Four whipped themselves and three staggered under crosses of crushing weight. The cross-bearers got along as best they could, but the whippers had a strange step which they never varied. Each man shoved his right foot ahead and planting it firmly brought the lash down on the left side of his back, allowing it to remain there two full seconds. Then the left foot was thrust ahead and his right side struck with the whip. One of the retinue of attendants carried a tin pail containing a decoction in which every three minutes the whips were dipped, to give their lashes a sharper sting.

In the Graveyard.

The silent fanatics passed along the road to the graveyard, whipped themselves through the paths, kissed the foot of the central board cross, and filed out. One of the cross-bearers fell beneath his fearful load and lay in the road on his face, the cross resting on his neck. Thereupon one of the Brothers of Light, as the attendants on the self-castigators are called, took up a whip and gave the fallen man fifty lashes on his back. Two brothers then lifted him to his feet.

It is in manuscript, and no outsider can secure a copy. Some of their customs are known. When a brother is sick he is removed to the morado and cared for by a member appointed by the Hermano Mayor. If he dies the Brothers of Light wrap his naked body in a blanket and one hour past midnight bury him in a secret spot, feet downward. His clothes are then left at his house. No married man is allowed to join the order without the consent of his wife. The Penitents take no notice of sins against others outside of the order, but if a member injure a brother member he is severely dealt with. The Hermano Mayor sentences the offender according to the gravity of the offense. He may be scourged with a whip whose wiry ends tear particles of flesh away, or he may be buried to the neck all night in a gigantic wine jar, or he may be buried completely, alive and forever. For betraying the secrets of the order the standard punishment is to be buried alive. The law, says Mr. Lummis, does not trouble the executors of these extra-judicial sentences. The Brothers of Light merely give out that the victim has left the country, and they have taken care that it shall be impossible to prove the contrary.

TRANSMIGRATION OF THE SOUL.

An Illustration That Was Not Especially

The Order of Los Hermanos Penitentes, out of which has sprung the Order of Penitents, or the Penitent Brothers as they are sometimes called, was founded in Spain more than 300 years ago. Its members met for religious study and conversation. There was nothing of the scourge in its original plan. The Franciscan friars, who accompanied the Spanish Conquistadores, brought along and implanted the seeds of the order in the New World, first in Mexico and later in what is now New Mexico. They found there that certain tribal penances of great antiquity were part of the religious customs of the Indian inhabitants.

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CRUCIFIXION OF A PENITENTE AT SAN MATEO MARCH 30, 1888.

the Penitents slowly grew to include the whip and the cross as instruments of penance. A decade ago thousands belonged to the order. There were fraternities in towns in every county in the Territory. In three counties alone they numbered 1,800 persons.

Each town had its independent fraternity, ruled by a chief brother, called a Hermano Mayor, who was elected annually. He had no superior and was not obliged to hold counsel with neighboring Hermano Mayors. The Penitents became so important an element in politics that educated men sought to propitiate them.

In 1888, during a hotly contested campaign, a young politician, graduate of an Eastern university, who was deeply interested in the result, called on the Penitents for assistance. He was initiated into the order and received its seal—six gashes with a flint knife. There were women in the order whose severity of self-torture equaled that of the male members.

Under the Ban of the Church.

These bands of fanatics received a check about this time. The Catholic Church—to which all penitents claim allegiance—set its seal of disapproval on their practices. That was enough to dismember the order. Town after town dropped its Holy Week celebrations. Fraternities melted away, but the order did not entirely disappear. In remote strongholds it continued and continues now. In the rest of the Territory, though broken by the edict of the church, the order or brotherhood, says Mr. Lummis, continues to hold a balance of political power. Though numbering among its members some few deluded men, it holds many who are ignorant horse-taives and even murderers who believe that their extraordinary penances wipe out their transgressions for a year. Few care to offend them and there was none who dared stop their procession and the crucifixion to which it led up in San Mateo on Good Friday in the three years 1889, 1890, and 1891.

Character of San Mateo.

San Mateo is a hamlet of 400 inhabitants at the foot of Mount Taylor. It is the most unreclaimed Mexican village in New Mexico. Scarcely a dozen of its people speak the English language. The brown adobe houses which make up the little settlement are pro-

bellowing, over the plains until he falls of exhaustion. Neither of the two fanatics gave any sign of the agony which was caused by the thousands of thorns burrowing into his flesh. The whippers lashed themselves, the cross-bearers stumbled ahead, finally prostrating themselves before the graveyard cross, where they lay for ten minutes while the women chanted. Every hour the procession was reformed and went over the route, which measured more than one-third of a mile. In the afternoon the crowning impious horror of the lenten ceremony was enacted. It was a representation of the agony of the Savior of mankind.

Details of the Crucifixion.

The Hermano Mayor emerged from the morado leading a young man dressed only in white trousers and black head bag. In his right side was a gaping wound from which blood ran down to the ground in a steady stream. He walked firmly to the prostrate cross and laid himself full length upon it. A new half-inch rope was brought and the Brothers of Light proceeded to lash him to the timbers. The victim appealed to the Hermano Mayor to nail his hands and feet to the cross, that having always been done up to that day.

"Not with a rope, not with a rope," the victim cried. "Nail me!"

In perfect silence the Brothers of Light passed the rope around his body and bracing themselves pulled until it sank deeply into his flesh. In three minutes his arms and legs were black. A clean white sheet was next wound around his body so that only his blackened arms and muffled head were exposed. The rope was fastened to the arms of the cross and while others braced it, two stalwart Brothers slowly pulled it upright and allowed it to slip into a hole which had been dug to receive it. They filled in the hole with dirt and stones. The tortured victim uttered not a groan nor a cry.

A large rock was now placed at the foot of the cross and another penitent was led out of the morado. A huge bundle of cactus was lashed to his back in such a way that he could scarcely move his limbs. He lay down with his feet on the cross and his head pillowed upon the stone, while the mass of cactus kept his back eighteen inches above the ground.

Washington Post: If there is a good story born in Washington it is a two-to-one shot that its cradle will lie in the back parlor of John Chamberlin's. Dr. Edward Bedloe came over from Philadelphia last night and sat therein entertaining a choice group of friends with tales of the far East. In the edge of the group sat a man from Pennsylvania, who had come over from Pottsville on some government contracting business. He was all ears and eagerness. His name was Strauss. Finally the restraint became too intense and he broke loose.

"Toctcr," said he, "what is dot new relicuh I hears of apout China? My wife has got it ferry bad und I don'd understand it."

"Tell me the name," said Bedloe. "Is it

Mohammedanism, Buddhism, Shintoism, Tauism, Confucianism, or what?"

"No, it is no isms, but der name is like a tramp's migrashun of der soul, and it?"

"O, you doubtless mean transmigration of the soul."

"Yah, dot's it. Yust dell me about dot."

"Certainly. Transmigration of the soul is a very pretty poetic doctrine of metempsychosis which our friends of the Theosophical Society have borrowed from the far East—"

"Here, here, doctor, tell me vot dot means so I can understand what you was talking about."

"All right, I will tell you in plain language. Take yourself, for instance. You live to the allotted age of three-score years and ten, and then you pass away. Your soul goes into the body of a bird—a canary, we'll say—and from your gilded cage you fill a lady's boudoir with melody, living a life of luxury and fed from the dainty fingers of beauty—"

"O, dot is beautiful, beautiful. I like dot."

"And then you die again and your soul goes into a lovely flower in a garden, and you fill the air with fragrance and delight the eye with your exquisite color and delicacy of petals—"

"Ah, dot is fine. I like dot relicuhun."

"As I was saying when you interrupted me, you live the life of a flower, until one day a donkey gets into the garden, and attracted by your loveliness he eats you, and your soul passes into the donkey—"

"Yah, yah."

"When some former acquaintance comes along, strokes your long years, and says: 'Why, Strauss, is it you? How little you have changed.'"

Two Sets of Terms.

Subeditor—"What shall I say about Mr. Goodsoil, who is likely to be nominated by the opposition?"

Great Editor—"O, call him a reptile and a thief."

"But he is a man whose character is without a stain."

"That so? Well, call him weak and imbecile."

—Puck.

Many Envelopes.

The Western Union Telegraph company consumes 100,000,000 envelopes a year.