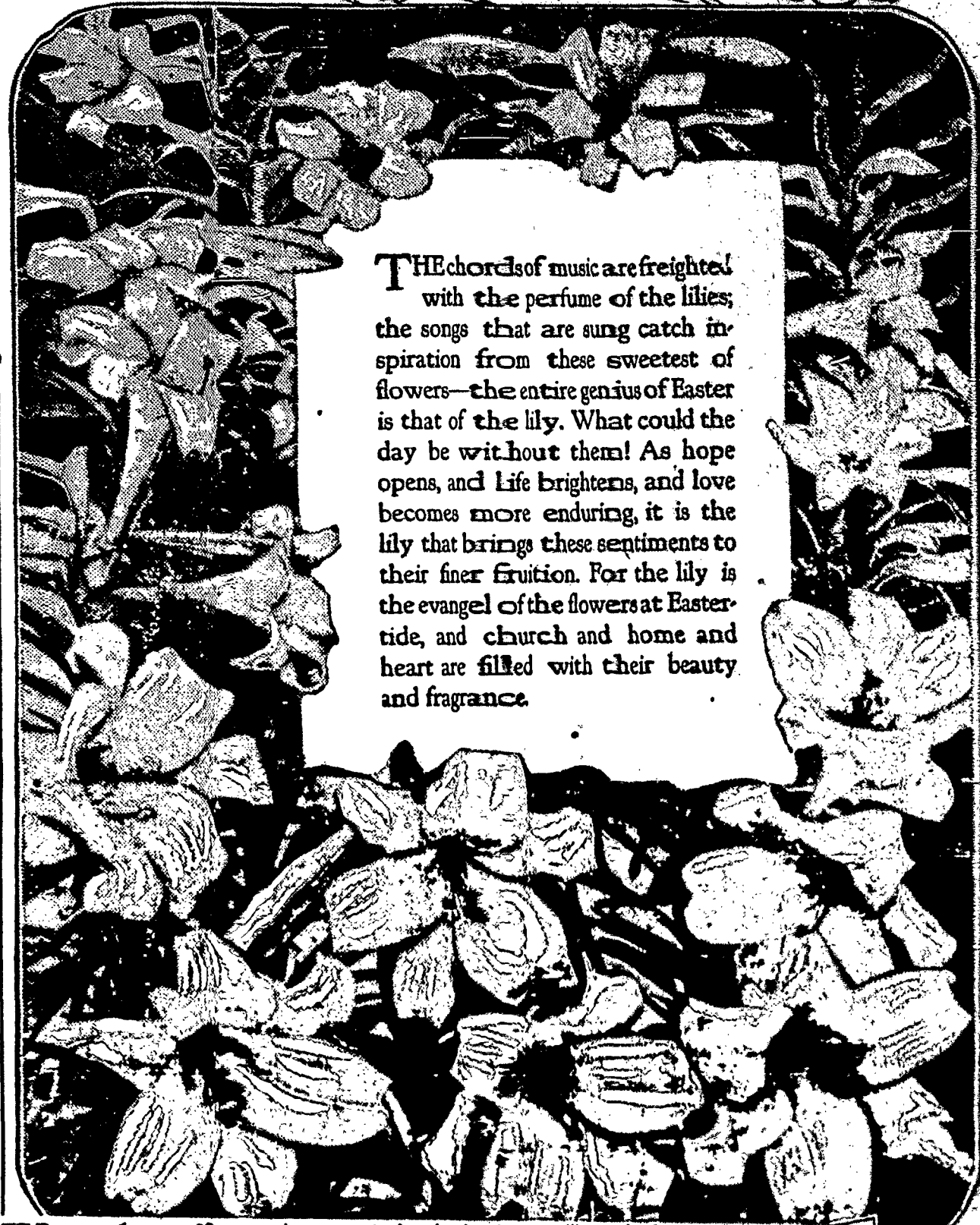


On Easter Dawn



THE chords of music are freighted with the perfume of the lilies; the songs that are sung catch inspiration from these sweetest of flowers—the entire genius of Easter is that of the lily. What could the day be without them! As hope opens, and life brightens, and love becomes more enduring, it is the lily that brings these sentiments to their finer fruition. For the lily is the evangel of the flowers at Easter-tide, and church and home and heart are filled with their beauty and fragrance.

Weird Easter Rites of the Penitentes

With the approach of Holy week, the Penitentes forsake the role of stupid peons and once more take up their yearly scourging. After the passing of Easter, because of the rigors, each brother has accomplished one more act to be used for his salvation, has taken another step that should bring him closer to heaven.

All the year around, the Penitentes are indifferent Mexicans, living in their adobe huts, which they have made with their own hands, existing in a land of manana, sometimes raising little fields of stunted corn, of chili peppers, or Mexican beans; sometimes tending their few scrawny chickens or goats. They are never hurried, never do anything yet have little time. If anyone asks them for something they invariably answer, "Hay poco tiempo"—"I have little time." Thus there is a life of poco tiempo, except during Lent.

Rarely at any other time during the year do the Penitentes become active. If they do, it is on All Souls' day, two days after Halloween time. Then they make a procession to their cemetery, whipping their backs as they go. Occasionally, when one of their brotherhood has died, they come to his house to hold prayer, chanting a strange, litanylike song, paying late into the night for the departed soul.

Lenten Observance.
All during Lent, though, they hold secluded praying, going in small processions in the night, indulging in some self-flagellation, but it is Holy Friday which awakens their zeal to the highest pitch. Raw, blustering winds of March or April blow, swaying the blackish-green pinon trees dotting the region where the Penitentes live; the land has been picturesquely named the Sangre de Cristo range—blood of Christ—by the Spanish explorers because of the red-stained rocks on the mountainsides, rocks showing a fierce composition.

On Friday afternoon the Penitente brotherhood hold the greatest of their spectacles. They have been staying themselves off and on all during Holy week; their backs are masses of congealed blood and outraged flesh. Nevertheless, they begin again with augmented fervor shortly after noon, coming out clad only in trousers and beginning the big procession, the enacting of the Crucifixion.

Gruesome Ceremonies.
One of the Penitentes is chosen to take the part of el Cristo and carries the cross, a heavy, crude symbol which he usually can barely drag,

spectacle; the sky towers like a clouded opal, and the raw, penetrating breeze fans the tresses of the Penitentes. These people believe that bad weather is synonymous with Holy week, that the weather must be bad because it is a time when every one mourns. And still they worship, oblivious of the cold winds, lifting their cries and chants, whipping vigorously. El Cristo hangs until he no longer shows much sign of life and then is taken down, wrapped in a cloth and carried away.

Deaths Not Uncommon.
Formerly, halting the victim to the cross was quite common; death came also as often to their tanks. The corpses were ferreted away and probably buried. But nothing definitely has ever been proved against the cult; in the past, rumors have circulated about this Penitente or that not being seen after Holy week; men have been known to die from the excessive fanaticism of their ritual. Now, the news that one of them has been killed during the crucifixion spreads, now, one has died from exhaustion and too rigorous self-torture, but these stories are short lived. Should a Penitente betray his brotherhood, then the penalty is to be buried alive. Consequently, no one has ever talked.

However, at present, the crucifixion is more guarded and merely takes the form of tying the victim to the cross with ropes. Even now, the spectacle of tying el Cristo is beginning to be eliminated, or else performed at night, on Thursday evening. Guards with guns are usually posted at the ceremonies in order to keep away the overcurious stranger. Any one approaching too close is duly threatened. Boys have taken hikes into the mountains, to behold the spectacle of the Penitentes whipping themselves. Many have crept behind a rock or a bush on a hill, watching the ritual closely, while expecting any minute to receive from their rear the shot of a dreaded and doubtful "baco wind." Such hikes provide great thrills for the youths and also material for a story which they can recount to their less fortunate comrades. A person not having seen the Penitentes is considered unwisely-wise and a "kissy."

Cult is Dwindling.
Thus does the cult flourish in New Mexico, southern Colorado, southern Utah and eastern Arizona. But each year this sect is becoming less and less conspicuous, withdrawing more and more into the fastnesses of the mountains.

Undoubtedly, tourists have beheld the Penitente miniature crosses erected along some highways as they have ridden over the rough, dirt roads in the neighborhood of the colonies. Piles of rocks hold these crosses upright. They are made three feet high. But the passing of the Holy week marks the cessation of their ceremonies and of their greatest activity. During the rest of the entire year, they are peaceful people who carry on their meager farming. As a people, they are superstitious, impressionable, and are commonly known as *mananitas*; that is, half-breeds of Indian-Spanish descent but, often, they are of Indian descent alone.

staggering under the weight. Behind him come the others, the singers and those who lay themselves with whips made from the yucca or "soap-worm." The plant is common throughout the Southwest and bears long, fibrous blades; it is used by the peons to make crude soap; the tough blades are also used as twine.

Usually, those scourging themselves take one step forward and then pause, bringing down the cutting fibers of the whip upon their already much bleeding backs with a dull thwack. The rhythm of the chant aids their regularity of motion. If any lag in his fervor of laying on blows or shrinks under them, then a master in charge will remind him, by bringing down a blacksnake on his shoulders, of his remissness; the leather whip cuts the air with a sharp whistling.

No Limit to Self-Torture.
Often these rigors are not enough; the cholla cactus, one needle of which has known to drive horses to fury, is packed about their chests, or, yet again, the Penitentes walk across these with their bare feet, or sting the branches of needles on their backs. The cholla needles are long and malignant; they stick in the flesh as if barbed and burn like fire, working their way inward, where they cause pustules. Imagine many of these needles in one's flesh! And yet the Penitentes, with searous cries, continue their way to the place selected as el Calvario, all their pain subjugated by their religious fanaticism.

Amid loud lamentation, the pilgrimage of the Cross is enacted, the man staggering under the weight of the symbol. He precedes the group; his back is now bleeding, now clotted. When he reels, showing signs of being about to fall, one of the elder members in rank helps him. Once attaining the spot chosen as Calvary, el Cristo is usually tied with ropes to his cross and raised. Indeed, what a

EASTER MORNING



What could be more in season than this spring maiden with her Easter symbols.

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