

Indians Perform the Sacred Passion Play

Imagine Indians, raw, uncouth American Indians, performing the "Passion Play!" Picture to your mind, if you can, the solemn scenes of Christ's passion presented in pantomime by ordinary redskins, and that, too, for the purpose of impressing the truths of Christianity more deeply upon their fellows!

Yet this idea was actually conceived by a missionary to the Siwash tribe in British Columbia a few years ago, and what is more, was actually carried out with great effect. Father Chirouse was the man who did it, and the play made such a success in 1889 that preparations are under way to repeat it.

When the priest, who is a French Canadian and a Roman Catholic, took up his work among the Siwash tribes he found them sorely in need of light. He labored early and late in the little chapels or the dingy, weather-stained tents which served for chapels, and after a time he found that his efforts were not bearing fruit of much promise.

It was comparatively easy to teach the Indians the verbal word of God, but when it came to an understanding of the real meaning of Christianity there was failure. It seemed as if the wonderful story of the Passion could not be brought clearly to them. In their own folk-lore they had many parables, many weird stories of strange doings, and it was not long until Father Chirouse began to see that the suf-

ficient, Father Chirouse had to find the costumes.

These had to be made in the village and by persons who did not know a tunic from a toga. Spears, uniforms, helmets, girdles and other paraphernalia were required, together with a cross, stage and divers sets of scenery.

At first there was some jealousy. Those given the minor casts were piqued because they had not been requested to take the more important, and those who had been left out entirely were inclined to find fault. Father Chirouse exercised diplomacy, however, and at the end of three weeks everything was in readiness for what in another walk of life would be termed a dress rehearsal.

The Program.

The first performance was to be held in Seachel, the date given out being June 9, 1889. The news had traveled far and wide, and for several days before the specified time the roads and trails leading to Seachel were thronged with both Indians and whites. Visitors came from Vancouver and New Westminster and from other places on the Canadian Pacific railway. All the clergy in that section of British Columbia found means to rendezvous in the little native hamlet, and by the 8th of June the place had assumed the appearance of a booming city.

The morning of the 9th found a stage or platform erected on the bank of the river



TABLEAU OF THE CRUCIFIXION IN THE PASSION PLAY OF THE SIWASH INDIANS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.



GATHERING OF SIWASH TRIBES TO WITNESS THE PASSION PLAY IN MISION JUNCTION, BRITISH COLUMBIA.

fering and death of the Savior was to them merely a tale, possibly told to illustrate a point.

Day after day he went among them endeavoring to impress the living truth upon their minds. He had had success in changing their moral views and had made them moral men and women as Indians go. But he was not satisfied. There came to him in time what the good father considered a divine inspiration. It was a happy thought that bore happy fruit, and perhaps the father was right in placing its source where he did.

How the Inspiration Came.

One Sunday after morning mass, which was held in a small settlement named Seachel, the priest entered into conversation with an old Siwash somewhat renowned as a medicine man. The language used was the Chinook, that universal tongue of the Indians and whites in the northwest.

Ever mindful of his absorbing ambition in life, the teaching of the Savior's passion, Father Chirouse repeated the old, old story to his companion, describing in detail the career of Christ and his ultimate crucifixion. When he had finally ended he glanced inquiringly at the aged Indian.

"Sah-a-le Ty-ee Klosche (Jesus good)," replied the Indian, rather indifferently.

"But you believe that He suffered and died for our sins?" persisted Father Chirouse.

The Siwash thought awhile, then with an inscrutable smile he answered:

"See-ow-ist, Pah-pah." (I have eyes, father.)

"Yes?"

"No man-ich." (But I did not see that.)

"My son, my son, how could you see it?" exclaimed the priest, fairly exasperated. "It happened almost nineteen centuries ago."

Then he went away to think. Within three days a perfected plan rested in the brain of Father Chirouse. It was the plan of a play to be enacted by Indians for Indians, a play with living actors, and with scenes typifying the Passion of Christ.

He sought aid in prayer, and for three days and three nights invoked divine assistance, neither sleeping nor eating during that period. Then after resting awhile he began his task with confidence. His first duty was to select the actors. In the cast, if it might be so termed, he needed at least a score. Besides the Savior there were the disciples, Mary, Pilate, the guards and others. It was necessary not only to train Indians to take the parts, but what was almost as dif-

ference of the heavens. It seemed as if nature smiled on the scene.

The program Father Chirouse had arranged consisted of an open air mass to be followed by nine tableaux. These were: 1. "The Prayer in the Garden;" 2. "Christ Before Pilate;" 3. "The Scourging;" 4. "The Crowning of Thorns;" 5. "Carrying of the Cross;" 6. "Meeting of Christ and His Mother;" 7. "Presenting Christ with a Towel;" 8. "The Crucifixion;" 9. "At the Foot of the Cross."

Each scene was to be in the form of a pantomime, none of the characters speaking a word. The allotted time was five minutes to each tableau, with an interval of two or three minutes. There was no arrangement of curtains, no sliding scenes, no artificial effects. None were needed, indeed. The performance carried a solemnity and impressiveness not found in the theater.

At 10 o'clock, the hour set for the first tableau, an audience of fully 5,000 people had gathered, and the space around the platform was packed. Father Chirouse, with his clerical assistants, acted as manager, directors and stage hands, and the opening scene took shape before the spectators.

It represented the Savior in the Garden of Gethsemane, accompanied by Peter and James and John, to pray. The latter parts were taken by three Indian youths clad in roughly-made costumes, but the character of the Savior was typified by a man of rather noble features and shapely physique. He was dressed with simple taste and wore a carefully made beard. His air was one of humility, and it was plain to be seen that the importance and sacredness of his part had impressed him.

Great Effect Produced.

The platform had been set with a few boxed trees and covered with fresh grass. The three youths took their places at one end, reclining as if asleep. The Indian representing the Savior knelt in the center

with his hands clasped and his face uplifted to the blue sky above.

A low murmur came from the Indians in the audience, and a woman broke into hysterical wailing. It was evident that the scene appealed strongly to them.

"Ne-si-ka pa-pa klax-to mit-lite ko-pa sa-hale." (Our Father, which art in heaven), cried one of the spectators, bowing his head.

In the background, partially hidden by the platform, Father Chirouse and his aids were preparing the next tableau. An assistant in the audience began to chant a passion hymn, and while the intonation swelled into a resounding chorus the scene was changed.

Pilate in flowing robes, his face rather benign than stern, was seated upon an improvised throne. A crown and breast plate indicated his high office. Before him stood Christ bowing, as if in token of obedience. In the rear were Jews and soldiers, some of the former evidently clamoring for Pilate's decision. A low ripple of applause came from the audience, and then came another change.

This time it was the familiar scene of the scourging. Pilate stood up and watched with gloomy air, while two of the Roman soldiers held their scourges over the bowed form of the Indian representing the Christ. To give added truth to the lesson, several red lines had been drawn upon the exposed back, and a number of the disciples prostrated themselves as if in an agony of grief.

Quickly following this without change of setting came the crowning of thorns, which represented the fourth tableau. Then the scene was changed to represent the procession to Golgotha. It was before that point where the cross was given over to Simon, and the heavy burden rested upon the shoulders of the pseudo Savior, who apparently staggered under the load.

By this time the emotions of the vast audience had reached a high pitch. Several

of the priests were chanting loudly, the majority of the Indian women and some of the old men were crying and wringing their hands. On the outskirts native dogs had begun to bark, the whole creating a pandemonium which Father Chirouse hastened to check before proceeding with the sixth tableau. This he did by starting a hymn.

The Final Tableaux.

The sixth and seventh tableaux, the meeting between Christ and Mary, and the presentation of the towel before the cross, were given to the apparent satisfaction of the spectators. Then came the most important scene—the crucifixion.

Until now the character of the Savior had been taken by an Indian, but it soon became evident that the two last scenes would be given with a wooden image of Christ. The Indian descended from the stage and removing the tawny beard and wig secured a point of vantage from which he could witness the remaining tableaux.

Father Chirouse and his assistants produced from behind the platform a life-sized figure of Christ. This they fastened to the cross and reverently raised it while the male choir chanted a hymn. The soldiers and the multitude as represented by the group of Indians on the platform, assumed their respective positions. Finally the young Indian woman who, draped in white and with long flowing hair, had been acting the part of Mary, knelt at the foot of the cross and clasped the wood with her arms. Thus she remained while the two Romans, one with the spear and the other with the reed bearing the sponge soaked in vinegar, stood one on each side.

It was a good climax. The choir chanted brokenly, the vast audience moved restlessly, and a hubbub of groans and a great wailing broke the quiet.

As if to impress the scene even more strongly upon the Indians, Father Chirouse mounted the platform and in ringing tones repeated the story of the passion. Then, at a sign from him, the greater part of the actors withdrew, leaving Mary at the foot of the cross and several soldiers standing on guard. This was the ninth and last scene.

Five minutes later the platform was empty save for a young Indian who intoned in a sonorous voice the Lord's Prayer.

Glorious Song of Old

Edmund H. Sears.

It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth
To touch their harps of gold:
"Peace on the earth, good-will to men,
From heaven's all-gracious King."
The world in solemn stillness lay
To hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come,
With peaceful wings unfurled,
And still their heavenly music floats
O'er all the weary world:
Above its sad and lowly plains
They bend on hovering wing,
And ever o'er its Babel sounds
The blessed angels sing.

For lo! the days are hastening on,
By prophet-bards foretold,
When with the ever-crescent years
Comes round the age of gold;
When peace shall over all the earth
Its ancient splendors fling,
And the whole world give back the song
Which now the angels sing.

Holy Voices

John Cawood.

Hark! What mean those holy voices,
Sweetly sounding through the skies?
Lo, the angelic host rejoices,
Heavenly hallelujahs rise.

Listen to the wondrous story,
Which they chant in hymns of joy:
"Glory in the highest glory,
Glory be to God on high!"

"Peace on earth, good-will from heaven,
Reaching far as man is found;
Souls redeemed and sins forgiven,
Loud our golden harps shall sound.

"Christ is born, the great Anointed;
Heaven and earth His praises sing;
Oh, receive whom God appointed
For your Prophet, Priest and King."



LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL, 1899 FOOT BALL TEAM. IT HOLDS A RECORD OF NOT HAVING BEEN BEATEN ONCE IN THE WHOLE SEASON.