

# A Visit

By J. FOREST McGEE, O. F. M.

## TO LAMY, NEW MEXICO

**T**HE Santa Fe railroad, which runs across country and through the stock markets under the flowing title, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe, does not enter Santa Fe, and, incidentally, its main lines do not touch Atchison, and some of them pass up Topeka. Lamy, named after the first Bishop of Santa Fe, is the station nearest to Santa Fe. It is eighteen miles away. Busses meet all the trains. But we came, not from Lamy to Santa Fe but from Santa Fe to Lamy, and that by the Chevrolet route. Our engineer was the tall Sycamore of the West, Friar Leonard, just six feet, seven, a giant among men. He could carry an Austin to Lamy.

It was the patron feast of the Lamy parish, the feast of Our Lady of Light (*Nuestra Señora de la Luz*), that is observed annually on May 29th. The services always include the chanting of Vespers on the evening before the feast, followed by a procession with the statue of Our Lady.

A pastor in Mexican or Spanish-American parishes is pastor and a great deal more. He must be all things to his parish. We arrived about forty-five minutes before services began. Old Florentino, the sacristan, was waiting for us, as were two young men, live wires of the parish and aids of the pastor. "*Florentino, primero*" was the Padre's first order, and immediately the church bells announced the arrival of the Padres. Adjusting the gasoline lamps that illumine the church for the few evening services during the year, was next in order and the pastor filled them, aired them, lighted them and hung them, two in the body of the church and one in the choir-loft, for old Alfredo, an organist from Santa Fe, had come with us for the fiesta's opening services.

While "airing" the lamps, a parishioner, called with his young daughter to inquire about her first Holy Communion on the following Sunday. Ten years of age is the rule in the parish. The girl looked about seven or eight, but the father claimed that she was ten and just shrugged his shoulders and smiled when Padre Leonardo doubted his word. A hurried argument and a decided "*mañana*"—an order to see him the next day—and the pastor turned his attention again to the lamps. He would see Carmela's little playmates on the morrow and learn her true

age,—the little ones are not so far advanced in truth-extension as some of the older folks,—or he would consult the records on his return to the central parish. Autos carry everything nowadays and the one that brought us carried a chair in the back seat for the comfort of the visiting clergymen.

"*Florentino, segundo*" was the next order and again the bell sounded through the valley, calling the parishioners to the services as it rang in boisterous competition with the Santa Fe switch engine's bell on the tracks nearby. At the arbitrary "*ultimo*" the services would begin. A number of children, among them the four little girls, selected to carry the statue, were on hand at "*primero*," the first bell.



The Chapel at Lamy

The church began to fill up with parishioners, almost crowding the village shrine of Our Lady to capacity. The pastor hurriedly lighted the coals for the censer, and then all things being ready, the "*Florentino, ultimo*" and the services began.

The visiting priest, "*un ingles*" (an American or anyone who does not speak Spanish, on this occasion your correspondent), was the celebrant. With the pastor he formed one choir which alternated with the organist, who formed the other choir, chanting the Vespers of the Blessed Virgin in true ecclesiastical style, as is the custom at all the fiesta celebrations. At the *Magnificat* the pastor served as censer-bearer,—a capable altar-boy,—and the ceremonies proceeded. The

congregation were in admiration at the fine singing.

Vespers over, the pastor made a few announcements in Spanish, directing the evening's procession and telling about the morning services. Then the procession formed. Moving around the church, bonfires of piñon logs, kerosened for speedy lighting, illumined the path of the marchers. The little girls carrying the statue of Our Lady, dressed neatly in white—the Spanish-speaking people dress up their "*santos*" for their celebrations—led the procession, followed by the children's choir. The clergy walked next in line and the parishioners followed. Padre Leonardo, with his mighty voice, led in the chant of the "*Dios te salve, Maria*" (the Hail Mary) while the congregation and the choir chanted the response "*Santa Maria*," in divers tempos and pitches, as the spirit moved them. It is a simple, yet inspiring melody and is chanted in all Spanish-speaking parishes and processions. Entering the church the solemn "*Gloria al Padre*" (Glory be to the Father) was sung by priest and people. The statue, resting just outside the rail, was now incensed, a few prayers said and a powerful "*Benedicamus Domino*" ended the ceremony. The celebrant blessed the people from the altar and all returned to their homes with anticipations of a glorious fiesta on the morrow.

Services over, a gentleman and his *señora*, called at the sacristy begging to be released from his "envelopes"; he was "*pobre*" (poor) and had "*no trabajo*" (no work), and he argued for mercy. The pastor listened awhile and asked if he was sincere in what he stated. Father Leonard put his preacher's finger in the *señor's* face and said, "*Es la verdad?*" "*Seguramente, padre, seguramente*," the man insisted with the warmth of an injured saint. "*Mañana*," said the pastor, for he wanted to be sure of seeing the man at Mass the next morning, when he knew he would call again and be excused from his "envelopes."

Padre Leonardo is doing great things at Lamy. His giant form and powerful voice would frighten a pagan into Christianity and the people are conscious of its power, but it is his pleasant smile and hearty handshake and his consideration for his people that have won them all back to their duties.

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