

## THE PASSION PLAY AT OBERAMMERGAU.

THE stir the Passion Play brings does not begin in Oberammergau till the Friday afternoon before the Sabbath of the play. Then, gradually, as a hum begins and swells in a disturbed hive of bees, begins and swells the bustle of the incoming of strangers into the little place. By sunset the crooked lanes and streets are swarming with people who have all fancied they were coming in good season, before the crowd. The open space in front of George Lang's house was a scene for a painter as the sun went down on Friday, September 5th, 1880. The village herd of cows was straggling past on its easy homeward way, the fifty bells tinkling even more sleepily than in the morning; a little goat-herd, with bright brown eyes, and bright brown partridge feathers in his hat, was worrying his little flock of goats along in the jam; vehicles of all sorts—einspanners, diligences, landaus—all pulling, twisting, turning, despairing, were trying to go the drivers did not know where, and were asking the way helplessly of each other. To heighten the confusion, a load of hay upset in the middle of the crowd. Twenty shoulders were under it in a twinkling, and the cart was rolled on, limping, on three wheels, friendly hands holding up the corner. Thirty-four vehicles, one after another, halted in front of George Lang's door; out of many of them the occupants jumped confidently, looking much satisfied at sight of so comfortable a house, and presenting little slips of white paper consigning them to Mr. Lang's care. Much crestfallen, they reëntered their vehicles, to be driven to the quarters reserved for them elsewhere. Some argued; some grumbled; some entreated; all in vain. The decrees of the house of Lang are like those of the Medes and Persians.

It was long after midnight before the sound of wheels and voices, and the cracks of postilions' whips ceased under my windows; and it began again before daylight the next morning. All was hurry and stir; crowds going to the early mass; still greater crowds, with anxious faces, besieging the doors of the building where were to be issued the numbered tickets for seats at the Play; more crowds coming in, chiefly pedestrians; peasant men and women in all varieties and colors of costume; Englishmen in natty traveling clothes, with white veils streaming from their hats; Roman Catholic priests in squads,

their square-brimmed hats and high black coats white with dust. Eager, intent, swift, by hundreds and hundreds they poured in. Without seeing it, one can never realize what a spectacle is produced by this rushing in of six thousand people into a little town in the space of thirty-six hours. There can be nothing like it except in the movements of armies. Being in the streets was like being in a chorus or village fair scene on an opera stage a mile big, and crowded full from corner to corner. The only thing to do was to abandon oneself to currents, like a ship afloat, and drift, now down this street, and now down that, now whirl into an eddy and come to a stop, and now hurry purposelessly on, just as the preponderating push might determine. Mingled up in it all, in everybody's way and under all the horses' feet, were dozens of little mites of Oberammergauers, looking five, six, seven years of age, like lost children, offering for sale "books of the Passion Play." Every creature above the age of an infant is busy at this time in other ways in Oberammergau, so it is left for the babies to hawk the librettos round the streets, and very shrewdly they do it. Little tots that are trusted with only one book at a time, all they can carry, as soon as it is sold, grab the pennies in chubby hands and toddle home after another.

As the day wore on, the crowd and the hum of it increased into a jam and a racket. By four o'clock it was a din of wheels, cracking whips, and postilions' cries. Great diligences, loaded down till they squeaked and groaned on their axles; hay-wagons of all sizes, rigged with white cloth stretched on poles for a cover, and rough planks fastened to the sides for seats, came in procession, all packed with the country people; hundreds of shabby einspanners bringing two or three, and sometimes a fourth holding on behind, with dangling feet; fine traveling carriages of rich people, their postilions decked in blue and silver, with shining black hats, and brass horns swung over their shoulders by green and white cords and tassels—on they came into the twist and tangle, making it worse, minute by minute.

Most remarkable among all the remarkable costumes to be seen was that of an old woman from Dachau. She was only a peasant, but she was a peasant of some estate and degree. She had come as escort and maid for four young women belonging to a Roman Cath-

olic institution, and wearing its plain uniform. The contrast between the young ladies' conventional garb of black and white and the blazing toilet of their guide and protector was ludicrous. She wore a jacket of brocade stiff with red, green, and silver embroidery. The sleeves puffed out big at the shoulder, straight and tight below the wrist. It came down behind only a little lower than her shoulder-blades, and it was open in front from the throat to the waist-belt, showing beneath a solid mass of gold and silver braid. Nine enormous silver buttons were sewed on each side the fronts; a scarf of soft black silk was fastened tight round her throat by a superb silver ornament, all twists and chains and disks. Her black woolen petticoat was laid in small, close flutings straight from belt to hem, edged with scarlet, and apparently was stiff enough to stand alone. It was held out from her body, just below the belt, by a stiff rope coil underneath it, making a tight, hard, round ridge just below her waist, and nearly doubling her apparent size. All the women in Dachau must be as "thick" as that, she said—and "lovers must have long arms to reach round them!" The jacket, petticoat, and scarf, and all her ornaments, had belonged to her grandmother. What a comment on the quality of the fabrics and the perpetuity of a fashion! She was as elegant to-day as her ancestor had been nearly a century before her. On her head she wore a structure of brocaded black ribbon, built up into high, projecting horns or towers, and floating in streamers behind. As she herself was nearly six feet tall, this shining brocade fortress on the top of her head moved about above the heads of the crowd like something carried aloft for show in a procession.

Another interesting sight was the peasants who had come bringing edelweiss and blue gentians to sell,—great bunches of the lovely dark blue chalices, drooping a little, but wonderfully fresh to have come two days, or even three, from home; the edelweiss blossoms were there by sheaves, and ten pfennigs a flower seemed none too much to pay to a man who had climbed among dangerous glaciers to pick it, and had walked three whole days to bring it to market.

The very poor people, who had walked, were the most interesting. They came in groups, evidently families, two women to one man—carrying their provisions in baskets, bundles, or knapsacks, worn and haggard with dust and fatigue, but wearing a noticeable look of earnestness, almost of exaltation. Many of them had walked forty or fifty miles; they had brought only black bread to eat; they would sleep the two

nights on hay in some barn—those of them who had had the great good fortune to secure such a luxury; the rest, and that meant hundreds, would sit on the ground, anywhere where they could find a spot clear and a rest for their heads; and after two nights and a day of this, they trudged back again their forty miles or fifty, refreshed, glad, and satisfied for the rest of their lives. This is what the Passion Play means to the devout, ignorant Catholic peasant of Bavaria to-day, and this is what it has meant to his race for hundreds of years.

The antagonism and enlightenment of the Reformation did not reach the Bavarian peasant; did not so much as disturb his reverence for the tangible tokens and presentations of his religion. He did not so much as know when Miracle Plays were cast out and forbidden in other countries. In Chester, England, one of their early strongholds, they were played for the last time in 1574, and a curious old chronicle, written twenty years later, and still preserved in Chester, says that this last performance of them took place:

"Sir John Savage Knight, being Mayor of Chester, which was the laste time they were played, and we praise God, and praye that we see not the like profanation of Holy Scripture: but O, the mercie of God for the time of our ignorance!"

But it was sixty-one years later than this that the Oberammergau people, stricken with terror at a plague in their village, knew no better device to stay it than to vow to God the performance of a Play of the Divine Passion of Christ. It is as holy a thing to the masses of them now as it was then, and no one can do justice to the Play, even as a dramatic spectacle, who does not look at it with recognition of this fact.

The early history of the Play itself is not known. The oldest text-book of it now extant bears the date 1662, nearly a generation later than the first performance of it in Oberammergau. This manuscript is still in possession of the Lang family, and is greatly amusing in parts. The prologue gives an account of the New Testament plan of salvation, and exhorts all people to avail themselves of it with gratitude and devotion. At this juncture in rushes a demon messenger from the devil, bearing a letter, which he unfolds and reads. In this letter the devil requests all the people not to yield to the influence of this play, asks them to make all the discordant noises they can while it is going on, and promises to reward them well if they will do so. The letter is signed: "I, Lucifer, Dog of Hell, in my hellish house, where the fire pours out of the windows." The demon having read the letter

aloud, folds it up, and addresses the audience, saying: "Now you have heard what my master wishes. He is a very good master, and will reward you! Hie, Devil! up and away!" with which he leaps off the stage, and the play at once begins, opening with a scene laid in Bethany, a meeting between Christ and his disciples. These grotesque fancies, quips, and cranks were gradually banished from the Play. Every year it was more or less altered, priest after priest revising or rewriting it, down to the time of the now venerable Daisenberger, who spent his youth in the monastery of Ettal, and first saw the Passion Play acted at Oberammergau in 1830.

In 1845 the Oberammergau people, in unanimous enthusiasm, demanded to have Daisenberger appointed as their pastor. He at once identified himself warmly with the dramatic as well as the spiritual life of the community; and it is to his learning and skill that the final admirable form of the Passion Play, and the villagers' wonderful success in rendering it, are due. He has written many biblical dramas and historical plays founded on incidents in the history of Bavaria. Chief among these are "The Founding of the Monastery of Ettal," "Theolinda," "King Heinrich and Duke Arnold of Bavaria," "Otto Von Wittelsbach at the Veronese Hermitage," "The Bavarians in the Peasants' War," "Luitberge, Duchess of Bavaria." He has also dramatized some of the legends of the saints, and has translated the "Antigone" of Sophocles and arranged it for the Oberammergau stage. A half-century's training under the guidance of so learned and dramatic a writer, who added to his learning and fine dramatic faculty a profound spirituality and passionate adherence to the faiths and dogmas of the Church, might well create, in a simple religious community, a capacity and a fervor even greater than have been shown by the Oberammergau people. To understand the extent and the method of their attainment, it is needful to realize all this; but no amount of study of the details of the long process can fully convey or set forth the subtle influences which must have pervaded the very air of the place during these years. The acting of plays has been not only the one recreation of their life, otherwise hard-worked, somber, and stern—it has been their one channel for the two greatest passions of the human heart—love of approbation and the instinct of religious worship; for the Oberammergau peasant, both these passions have centered on and in his chance to win fame, please his priest, and honor God, by playing well some worthy part in the Passion Play. The hope and the ambition for this have been

the earliest emotions roused in the Oberammergau child's breast. In the tableaux of the Play even very young children take part, and it is said that it has always been the reward held up to them as soon as they could know what the words meant: "If thou art good, thou mayest possibly have the honor of being selected to play in the Passion Play when the year comes round." Not to be considered fit to take any part in the Play is held, in Oberammergau, to be disgrace; while to be regarded as worthy to render the part of the Christus is the greatest honor which a man can receive in this world. To take away from an actor a part he has once played is a shame that can hardly be borne; and it is on record that once a man to whom this had happened sank into a melancholy which became madness.

When the time approaches for the choice of the actors and the assignment of the parts, the whole village is in a turmoil. The selections and assignments are made by a committee of forty-five, presided over by the priest and by the venerable "Geistlicher Rath" Daisenberger, who, now in his eightieth year, still takes the keenest interest in all the dramatic performances of his pupils. The election day is in the last week of December of the year before the Play, and the members of the committee, before going to this meeting, attend a mass in the church. The deciding as to the players for 1880 took three days' time, and great heart-burnings were experienced in the community. In regard to the half-dozen prominent parts there is rarely much disagreement; but as there are some seven hundred actors required for the play, there must inevitably be antagonisms and jealousies among the minor characters. However, when the result of the discussions and votes of the committee is made public all dissension ceases. One of the older actors is appointed to take charge of the rehearsals, and from his authority there is no appeal. Each player is required to rehearse his part four times a week; and as early in the spring as the snow is out of the theater the final rehearsals begin. Thus each Passion Play year is a year of very hard work for the Oberammergauers. Except for their constant familiarity with stage routine and unbroken habit of stage representation through the intervening years, they would never be able to endure the strain of the Passion Play summers; and as it is, they look wan and worn before the season is ended.

It is a thankless return that they have received at the hands of some travelers, who have seen in the Passion Play little more than a show of mountebanks acting for money. The truth is that the individual per-

formers receive an incredibly small share of the profits of the Play. There is not another village in the world whose members would work so hard, and at so great personal sacrifice, for the good of their community and their Church. Every dollar of the money received goes into the hands of a committee selected by the people. After all the costs are paid, the profits are divided into four portions; one quarter is set aside to be expended for the Church, for the school, and for the poor; another for the improvement of the village, for repairs of highways, public buildings, etc.; a third is divided among the tax-paying citizens of the town who have incurred the expense of preparing for the Play, buying the costumes, etc. The remaining quarter is apportioned among the players, according to the importance of their respective parts; as there are seven hundred of them, it is easy to see that the individual gains cannot be very great.

The music of the Play, as now performed, was written in 1814, by Rochus Dedler, an Oberammergau schoolmaster. It has for many years been made a *sine qua non* of this position in Oberammergau that the master must be a musician, and, if possible, a composer, and Dedler is not the only composer who has been content in the humble position of schoolmaster in this village of peasants. Every day the children are drilled in chorus singing and in recitative; with masses and other church music they are early made familiar. Thus is every avenue of training made to minister to the development of material for the perfection of the Passion Play.

Dedler is said to have been a man of almost inspired nature. He wrote often by night, and with preternatural rapidity. The music of the Passion Play was begun on the evening of Trinity Sunday; he called his six children together, made them kneel in a circle around him, and saying, "Now I begin," ordered them all to devote themselves to earnest prayer for him that he might write music worthy of the good themes of the Play. The last notes were written on the following Christmas Day, and they are indeed worthy of the story for which they are at once the expression and the setting. The harmonies are dignified, simple and tender, with movements at times much resembling some of Mozart's Masses. Many of the chorals are full of solemn beauty. A daughter of Dedler's is still living in Munich, and to her the grateful and honest-minded Oberammergau people have sent, after each performance of the Passion Play, a sum of money in token of their sense of indebtedness to her father's work.

The Passion Play cannot be considered solely as a drama; neither is it to be con-

sidered simply as a historical panorama, presenting the salient points in the earthly career of Jesus called Christ. To consider it in either of these ways, or to behold it in the spirit born of either of these two views, is to do only partial justice to it. Whatever there might have been in the beginning of theatrical show and diversion and fantastic conceit about it, has been long ago eliminated. Generation after generation of devout and holy men have looked upon it more and more as a vehicle for the profoundest truths of their religion, and have added to it, scene by scene, speech by speech, everything which in their esteem could enhance its solemnity and make clear its teaching. However much one may disagree with its doctrines, reject its assumptions, or question its interpretations, that is no reason for overlooking its significance as a tangible and rounded presentation of that scheme of the redemption of the world in which to-day millions of men and women have full faith. It is by no means distinctively a Roman Catholic presentation of this scheme; it is Christian. The Holy Virgin of the Roman Catholic Church is, in this play, from first to last, only the mother of Jesus: the mother whom all lovers and followers of Jesus,—wherever they place him or her, however they define his nature and her relations to him,—yet hold blessed among the women who have given birth to leaders and saviors of men.

This presentation of the scheme of redemption seeks to portray not only the scenes of the life of Jesus on earth, but the typical foreshadowing of it in the Old Testament narratives: its prophecy as well as its fulfillment. To this end there are given before each act of the Play, tableaux of Old Testament events, supposed to be directly typical, and intended to be prophetic, of the scenes in Christ's life which are depicted in the act following. These are selected with skill, and rendered with marvelous effect. For instance, a tableau of the plotting of Joseph's brethren to sell him into Egypt is given before the act in which the Jewish priests in the full council of the Sanhedrim, plot the death of Jesus; a tableau of the miraculous fall of manna for the Israelites in the wilderness, before the act in which is given Christ's Last Supper with his Disciples; the sale of Joseph to the Midianites before the bargain of Judas with the priests for the betrayal of Jesus; the death of Abel, and Cain's despair, before the act in which Judas, driven mad by remorse, throws down at the feet of the priests the "price of blood," and rushes out to hang himself; Daniel defending himself to Darius, before the act in which Jesus is

brought into the presence of Pilate for trial; the sacrifice of Isaac, before the scourging of Jesus and his crowning with the thorns: these are a few of the best and most relevant ones.

The Play is divided into eighteen acts, and covers the time from Christ's entry into Jerusalem, at the time of his driving the money-changers out of the temple, till his ascension. The salient points, both historical and graphic, are admirably chosen for a continuous representation. In the Second Act is seen the High Council of the Jewish Sanhedrim plotting measures for the ruin and death of Jesus. This is followed by his Departure from Bethany, the Last Journey to Jerusalem, the Last Supper, the Final Interview between Judas and the Sanhedrim, the Betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane.

The performance of the Play up to this point consumes four hours; and as there is here a natural break in the action, an interval of an hour's rest is taken. It comes none too soon, either to actors or spectators, after so long a strain of unbroken attention and deep emotion.

The next Act is the bringing of Jesus before the High Priest Annas: Annas orders him taken before Caiaphas, and this is the ninth act of the Play. Then follow: The Despair of Judas and his Bitter Reproaches to the Sanhedrim, The Interview between Jesus and Pilate, His Appearance before Herod, His Scourging and Crowning with Thorns, The Pronouncing of his Death Sentence by Pilate. The Ascent to Golgotha, The Crucifixion and Burial, The Resurrection and Ascension. The whole lesson of Christ's life, the whole lesson of Christ's death, are thus shown, taught, impressed with a vividness which one must be callous not to feel. The quality or condition of mind which can remain, to the end, either unmoved or antagonistic is not to be envied. But, setting aside all and every consideration of the moral quality of the Play, looking at it simply as a dramatic spectacle, as a matter of acting, of pictorial effects, it is impossible to deny to it a place among the masterly theatrical representations of the world. One's natural incredulity as to the possibility of true dramatic skill on the part of comparatively unlettered peasants melts and disappears at sight of the first Act, the Entry of Christ into Jerusalem.

The stage, open to the sky, with a background so ingeniously arranged as to give a good representation of several streets of the city, is crowded in a few moments by five hundred men and women and children: all waving palm branches, singing hosannas, and crowding around the

central figure of Jesus riding on an ass. The verisimilitude of the scene is bewildering. The splendor of the colors is dazzling. Watching this crowd of five hundred actors closely, one finds not a single man, woman or little child performing his part mechanically or absently. The whole five hundred are acting as if each one regarded his part as the central and prominent one; in fact, they are so acting that it does not seem acting; this is characteristic of the acting throughout the play. There is not a moment's slighting or tameness anywhere. The most insignificant part is rendered as honestly as the most important, and with the same abandon and fervor. There are myriads of little by-plays and touches, which one hardly recognizes in the first seeing of it, the interest is so intense and the movement so rapid; but, seeing it a second time, one is almost more impressed by these perfections in minor points than by the rendering of the chief parts. The scribes who sit quietly writing in the foreground of the Sanhedrim Court; the disciples who have nothing to do but to appear to listen while Jesus speaks; the money-changers picking up their coins; the messengers who come with only a word or two to speak: the soldiers drawing lots among themselves in a group for Jesus's garments, at a moment when all attention might be supposed to be concentrated on the central figures of the Crucifixion—every one of these acts with an enthusiasm and absorption only to be explained by the mingling of a certain element of religious fervor with native and long-trained dramatic instinct.

This dramatic instinct is shown almost as much in the tableaux as in the acting. The poses and grouping are wonderful, and the power of remaining a long time motionless is certainly a trait which the Oberammergau people possess to a well-nigh superhuman extent. The curtain remained up, during many of these tableaux, five and seven minutes, and there was not a trace of unsteadiness to be seen in one of the characters. Even through a powerful glass, I could not detect so much as the twitching of a muscle. This is especially noticeable in the tableau of the Fall of Manna in the Wilderness, which is one of the finest of the Play. There are in it more than four hundred persons: one hundred and fifty of them are children, some not over three years of age. These children are conspicuously grouped in the foreground, many of them are in attitudes which must be difficult to keep: bent on one knee, or with outstretched hand, or with uplifted face; but not one of the little creatures stirs head or foot or eye. Neither is there to be seen, as

the curtain begins to fall, any tremor of preparation to move. Motionless as death they stand till the curtain shuts even their feet from view. Too much praise cannot be bestowed on the fidelity, accuracy, and beauty of the costumes. They are gorgeous in color and fabric, and have been studied carefully from the best authorities extant, and are not the least among the surprises which the Play affords to all who go to see it expecting it to be on the plane of ordinary theatrical representations. The splendor of some of the more crowded scenes is rarely equaled: such a combination of severe simplicity of outlines and contours, classic models of drapery, with brilliancy of coloring, is not to be seen in any other play now acted.

The high-water mark of the acting in the Play seems to me to be reached, not in the Christus, but by Judas. This part is played by an old man, Gregory Lechner. He is over sixty years of age, and his snowy beard and his hair have to be dyed to the red hue which is desired for the crafty Judas's face. From the time when, in Simon's house, he stands by, grumbling at the waste of the precious ointment poured by Mary Magdalene on the feet of Jesus, to the last moment of his wretched existence, when he is seen wandering in a desolate wilderness, about to take his own life in his remorse and despair, Judas's acting is superb. Face, attitudes, voice, action—all are grandly true to the character, and marvelously full of life. It would be considered splendid acting on any stage in the world. Nothing could surpass its subtlety and fineness of conception, or the fire of its rendering. It is a conception quite unlike those ordinarily held of the character of Judas; ascribes the betrayal neither to a willful, malignant treachery, nor, as is sometimes done, to a secret purpose of forcing Jesus to vindicate his claims to divine nature by working a miracle of discomfiture to his enemies, but to pure, unrestrained avarice, the deadliest passion which can get possession of the human soul. This theory is tenable at every point of Judas's career as recorded in the Bible, and affords far broader scope for dramatic delineation than any other theory of his character and conduct. It is, in fact, the only theory which seems compatible with the entire belief in the supernatural nature of Jesus. Expecting up to the last minute that supernatural agencies would hinder the accomplishment of the Jews' utmost malice, he thought to realize the full benefit of the price of the betrayal, and yet not seriously imperil either the ultimate ends or the personal safety of Jesus. The struggle between the insatiable demon of avarice in

his heart, and all the nobler impulses restraining it, is a struggle which is to be seen going on in his thoughts and repeated in his face in every scene in which he appears. And his final despair and remorse are but the natural culmination of the deed which he did only under the temporary control of a passion against which he was all the time struggling, and which he himself held in detestation and scorn. The gesture and look with which he at last flings down the bag of silver in the presence of the assembled Sanhedrim, exclaiming:

“Ye have made me a betrayer!  
Release again the innocent One! My  
Hands shall be clean,”

are a triumph of dramatic art never to be forgotten. His last words as he wanders, distraught, in the dark wastes, among barren trees, are one of the finest monologues of the play. It was written by the priest Daisenberger:

“Oh, were the Master there! Oh, could I see  
His face once more! I'd cast me at his feet,  
And cling to him, my only saving hope.  
But now he lieth in prison,—is, perhaps,  
Already murdered by his raging foe—  
Alas, through my own guilt, through my own guilt!  
I am the outcast villain who hath brought  
My benefactor to these bonds and death!  
The scum of men! There is no help for me!  
For me no hope! My crime is much too great!  
The fearful crime no penance can make good!  
Too late! Too late! For he is dead—and I—  
I am his murderer!”

Thrice unhappy hour  
In which my mother gave me to the world!  
How long must I drag on this life of shame,  
And bear these tortures in my outcast breast?  
As one pest-stricken, flee the haunts of men,  
And be despised and shunned by all the world?  
Not one step farther! Here, oh, life accursed,  
Here will I end thee!”

The character of Christ is, of necessity, far the most difficult part in the Play. Looking at it either as a rendering of the supernatural, or a portraying of the human Christ, there is apparent at once the well-nigh insurmountable difficulty in the way of actualizing it in any man's conception. Only the very profoundest religious fervor could carry any man through the effort of embodying it on the theory of Christ's divinity; and no amount of atheistic indifference could carry a man through the ghastly mockery of acting it on any other theory. Joseph Maier, who played the part in 1870, '71, and '80, is one of the best-skilled carvers in the village, and, it is said, has carved never anything but figures of Christ. He is a man of gentle and religious nature, and is, as any devout Oberammergau would be, deeply pervaded by a sense of the solemnity of the function he performs in the Play. In the main, he acts the part with wonderful dignity and pathos. The only

drawback is a certain undercurrent of self-consciousness which seems ever apparent in him. Perhaps this is only one of the limitations inevitably resulting from the over-demand which the part, once being accepted and regarded as a supernatural one, must, perforce, make on human powers. The dignity and dramatic unity of the Play are much heightened by the admirable manner in which a chorus is introduced, somewhat like the chorus of the old Greek plays. It consists of eighteen singers, with a leader styled the "Choragus." The appearance and functions of these "Schutzgeister," or guardian angels, as they are called, has been thus admirably described by a writer who has given the best detailed account ever written of the Passion Play:

"They have dresses of various colors over which a white tunic with gold fringe and a colored mantle are worn. Their appearance on the stage is majestic and solemn. They advance from the recesses on either side of the proscenium, and take up their position across the whole extent of the theater, forming a slightly concave line. After the chorus has assumed its position, the choragus gives out in a dramatic manner the opening address or prologue which introduces each act; the tone is immediately taken up by the whole chorus which continues either in solo, alternately, or in chorus, until the curtain is raised in order to reveal a tableau vivant. At this moment the choragus retires a few steps backward, and forms with one-half of the band a division on the left of the stage, while the other half withdraws in like manner to the right. They thus leave the center of the stage completely free, and the spectators have a full view of the tableau thus revealed. A few seconds having been granted for the contemplation of this picture, made more solemn by the musical recitation of the expounders, the curtain falls again, and the two divisions of the chorus coming forward resume their first position, and present a front to the audience, observing the same grace in all their motions as when they parted. The chanting still continues, and points out the connection between the picture which has just vanished, and the dramatic scene which is forthwith to succeed. The singers then make their exit. The task of these Spirit-singers is resumed in the few following points: They have to prepare the audience for the approaching scenes. While gratifying the ear by delicious harmonies, they explain and interpret the relation which shadow bears to substance—the connection between the type and its fulfillment. And as their name implies, they must be ever present as guardian spirits, as heavenly monitors, during the entire performance. The addresses

of the choragus are all written by the Geistlicher Rath Daisenberger. They are written in the form of the ancient strophe and anti-strophe, with the difference that while in the Greek theater they were spoken by the different members of the chorus, they are delivered in the Passion Play by the choragus alone."

It is impossible for any description, however accurate and minute, to give a just idea of the effects produced by this chorus. The handling of it is, perhaps, the one thing which, more than any other, lifts the play to its high plane of dignity and beauty. The costumes are brilliant in color, and strictly classic in contour; a full white tunic, edged with gold at hem and at throat, and simply confined at the waist by a loose girdle. Over these are worn flowing mantles of either pale blue, crimson, dull red, grayish purple, green, or scarlet. These mantles or robes are held in place carelessly by a band of gold across the breast. Crowns or tiaras of gold on the head complete the dress, which, for simplicity and grace of outline and beauty of coloring could not be surpassed. The rhythmic precision with which the singers enter, take place, open their lines, and fall back on the right and left, is a marvel, until one learns that a diagram of their movement is marked out on the floor, and that the mysterious exactness and uniformity of their positions are simply the result of following each time the constantly marked lines on the stage. Their motions are slow and solemn, their expressions exalted and rapt; they also are actors in the grand scheme of the Play.

On the morning of the Play, the whole village is astir before light; in fact, the village proper can hardly be said to have slept at all, for seven hundred out of its twelve hundred inhabitants are actors in the play, and are to be ready to attend a solemn mass at daylight.

Before eight o'clock every seat in the theater is filled. There is no confusion, no noise, the proportion of those who have come to the play with as solemn a feeling as they would have followed the steps of the living Christ in Judea is so large, that the contagion of their devout atmosphere spreads even to the most indifferent spectators, commanding quiet and serious demeanor.

The firing of a cannon announces the moment of beginning. Slow, swelling strains come from the orchestra; the stately chorus enters on the stage; the music stops; the leader gives a few words of prologue or argument, and immediately the chorus breaks into song.

From this moment to the end, eight long

hours, with only one hour's rest at noon, the movement of this play is continuous. It is a wonderful instance of endurance on the part of the actors; the stage being entirely uncovered, sun and rain alike beat on their unprotected heads. The greater part of the auditorium also is uncovered, and there have been several instances in which the play has been performed in a violent storm of rain, thousands of spectators sitting drenched from beginning to end of the performance.

How incomparably the effects are, in sunny weather, heightened by this background of mountain and sky, fine distances, and vistas of mountain and meadow, and the canopy of heaven overhead, it is impossible to express; one only wonders, on seeing it, that outdoor theaters have not become a common summer pleasure for the whole world.

When birds fly over they cast fluttering shadows of their wings on the front of Pilate's and Caiaphas's homes, as naturally as did Judean sparrows two thousand years ago. Even butterflies flitting past cast their tiny shadows on the stage; one bird paused,

hovered, as if pondering what it all could mean, circled two or three times over the heads of the multitude, and then alighted on one of the wall-posts and watched for some time. Great banks of white cumulus clouds gathered and rested, dissolved and floated away, as the morning grew to noonday, and the noonday wore on toward night. This closeness of nature is an accessory of illimitable effect; the visible presence of the sky seems a witness to invisible presences beyond it, and a direct bond with them. There must be many a soul, I am sure, who has felt closer to the world of spiritual existences, while listening to the music of the Oberammergau Passion Play, than in any other hour of his life; and who can never, so long as he lives, read without emotion, the closing words of the venerable Daisenberger's little "History of Oberammergau":

"May the strangers who come to this Holy Passion Play become by reading this book more friendly with Ammergau, and may it sometimes, after they have returned to their homes, renew in them the memory of this quiet mountain valley."

H. H.

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### YEARS AFTER.

I KNOW the years have rolled across thy grave  
 Till it has grown a plot of level grass,—  
 All summer does its green luxuriance wave  
 In silken shimmer on thy breast, alas!  
 And all the winter it is lost to sight  
 Beneath a winding-sheet of chilly white.

I know the precious name I loved so much  
 Is heard no more the haunts of men among;  
 The tree thou plantedst has outgrown thy touch,  
 And sings to alien ears its murmuring song;  
 The lattice-rose forgets thy tendance sweet,  
 The air thy laughter, and the sod thy feet.

Through the dear wood where grew thy violets,  
 Lies the worn track of travel, toil and trade;  
 And steam's imprisoned demon fumes and frets,  
 With shrieks that scare the wild bird from the shade  
 Mills vex the lazy stream, and on its shore  
 The timid harebell swings its chimes no more.

But yet—even yet—if I, grown changed and old,  
 Should lift my eyes at opening of the door,  
 And see again thy fair head's waving gold,  
 And meet thy dear eyes' tender smile once more,  
 These years of parting like a breath would seem,  
 And I should say, "I knew it was a dream!"

*Elizabeth Akers.*