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THE PASSION-PLAY AT VORDER-THIERSEE.

WITH PICTURES BY LOUIS LOEB.

A PASSION-PLAY—and not at Oberammergau! So often has it been written that the decennial representation in the valley of the Ammer is a unique survival of the miracle-plays of the middle ages that to many the announcement of a passion-play in a sequestered vale among the Tyrolean Alps will come as a startling revelation.

My ticket was for Kufstein, a pretty little town and summer resort sixty-five miles from Munich, and just over the boundary line in Tyrol. Midnight was approaching before Kufstein was called by the conductor. I asked a porter to conduct me to a good hotel, and followed him into the darkness. My slumbers were brief, since it is a two hours' walk to Thiersee, and the performance began at half-past eight.

Sunday morning, though pleasant, was not perfectly clear. Groups of peasants and a few city people were strolling along, mostly toward the scene of the play. In an hour the summit of a ridge was gained, and beyond the brow of a little *col* we turned, and looked down into a beautiful valley. A white church and spire were seen on the opposite green hillside in the midst of a small cluster of houses, and in the foreground a little emerald lake quite filled the bottom of the valley, its gently slop-

ing banks dotted sparsely with houses, above which, at the left, towered the massive, rocky Pentling, four thousand feet high. Over the hilltop beyond the church and theater were still higher mountains, bald and bare, save for the snow still filling the deepest seams and wrinkles of their stony faces.

A signal-gun broke the stillness, announcing that a quarter past eight had arrived, and urging us onward. At length we overtook a crowd of visitors pressing up the lane to the theater beyond the church. The ticket-office was in the basement. Hurriedly asking for one of the best seats, which range in price from fifteen to seventy-five cents, we entered by a side door directly into the auditorium as the gun gave a final signal and the orchestra began the overture.

The theater is a barn-like wooden structure of the simplest possible fashion, without clapboards or plastering. It was erected in 1884 for the decennial performance. Like the old Greeks, the builders sensibly availed themselves of the slope of the hill, so that the seats rise toward the back without the trouble of a scaffolding, or danger of the flimsy structure breaking down. In front there are ten rows of wooden chairs, which turn up and down like those in our theaters. The less fortunate

or more economical who sit farther back are provided only with plain wooden benches, extremely narrow and very close together. Of these there are several sections, reached by different doorways, and many of the people come early to get the front seats in their section. This part of the house is best filled. A sea of black heads fades away into the darkness, but in front vacant places may be discerned. The stage is fairly lighted by a row of kerosene lamps, and perhaps through the side scenes some rays may fall. A few lamps also assist the orchestra. Otherwise the house is left in darkness, save for the knot-holes and crevices in the walls, through which the light glimmers, lessening in a small degree the otherwise total obscurity of the audience.

An account of the play at Thiersee must necessarily resemble the descriptions of the representation at Oberammergau. It must not, however, be imagined that the good people of Thiersee, hearing of the multitudes that every decade flock to that more noted village, have been tempted to establish a rival attraction, in the hope that their village, also, may become famous. So far from this being the case, it is a well-established fact that long before Oberammergau had been introduced to the world by the artist Edward Devrient, who chanced upon the scene in 1850, this play had been performed at Vorder-Thiersee, though it did not originate at this spot. The earliest text of the play dates from the latter part of the seventeenth century; but at that time it was presented, by a rather curious coincidence, at a place called Oberandorf, which must not be confused with Oberau, the station where one leaves the railroad to visit Oberammergau. This Oberandorf is a village on the railroad between Munich and Kufstein, only a few miles distant from Thiersee, though over the boundary line in Bavaria. Here, as in other mountain villages, the medieval custom of performing miracle-plays had lingered, and here the passion-play was presented until, having been repeatedly prohibited by the Bavarian authorities both temporal and spiritual, it was finally discontinued near the close of the eighteenth century, Oberammergau, as is well known, being the only community in Bavaria to secure exemption from the general edict. The story of the transfer of this drama from its original home to Thiersee, though somewhat similar to, is less romantic than, that of Oberammergau. Here the cattle, and not the people, were being decimated by a plague which occurred as late as 1800 during one of those enforced pauses at

Oberandorf. The good people of Thiersee, fearing the total destruction of their herds, vowed that if the remainder should be spared they would take up the performance of the passion-play, which their neighbors over the border had been compelled to discontinue. The plague was stayed. The text of the play, with the right to exhibit it, was purchased, and in 1802, with the help of advice and instruction from the former director at Oberandorf, the first performance at Vorder-Thiersee was given. For a while it was repeated every year; then at longer intervals, until finally, beginning with 1855, it has been performed every ten years, as at Oberammergau, in all its pristine simplicity, by peasants who have neither experience nor training of any sort from the outside world.

The overture, rendered by a brass band of thirty pieces, afforded us the pleasing assurance that we might expect to enjoy the music. The drop-curtain is decorated with a painting of the little valley, with the church in the foreground, and the lake and mountains beyond. When it rises there enter the proscenium, from draped doorways on each side, the chorus, nine in number, who stand before the main curtain while the leader, or choragus, calls upon all to behold the miracle of divine love and mercy which in Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection will be portrayed.

They fulfil to some extent the duty of the old Greek chorus, but they never, as in Greek tragedy, take part in the conversation. After the prologue, as the curtain rises, the chorus divide, and during this and all of the subsequent tableaux they remain standing at the sides, while one and another, in short recitation or song, explain the scene, or utter suitable reflections thereon. This idea of illustrating the narrative of the Passion by means of scenes taken from the Old Testament, and of introducing the chorus of Guardian Spirits, as they are called, was borrowed from the Ammergau version when that of Thiersee was revised in 1873. The text at present used, however, is a still later revision, made by Professor Robert Weissenhofer. The number of tableaux is fewer than at Oberammergau, and less time is devoted to the music, which is entirely original, and of excellent quality, the composition of the choir-master of Kufstein, John Obersteiner.

The first tableau, as might be supposed, shows Adam and Eve in the garden, already provided with aprons of fig-leaves, and standing near the tree of knowledge. Eve, tempted



DRAWN BY LOUIS LOEB.

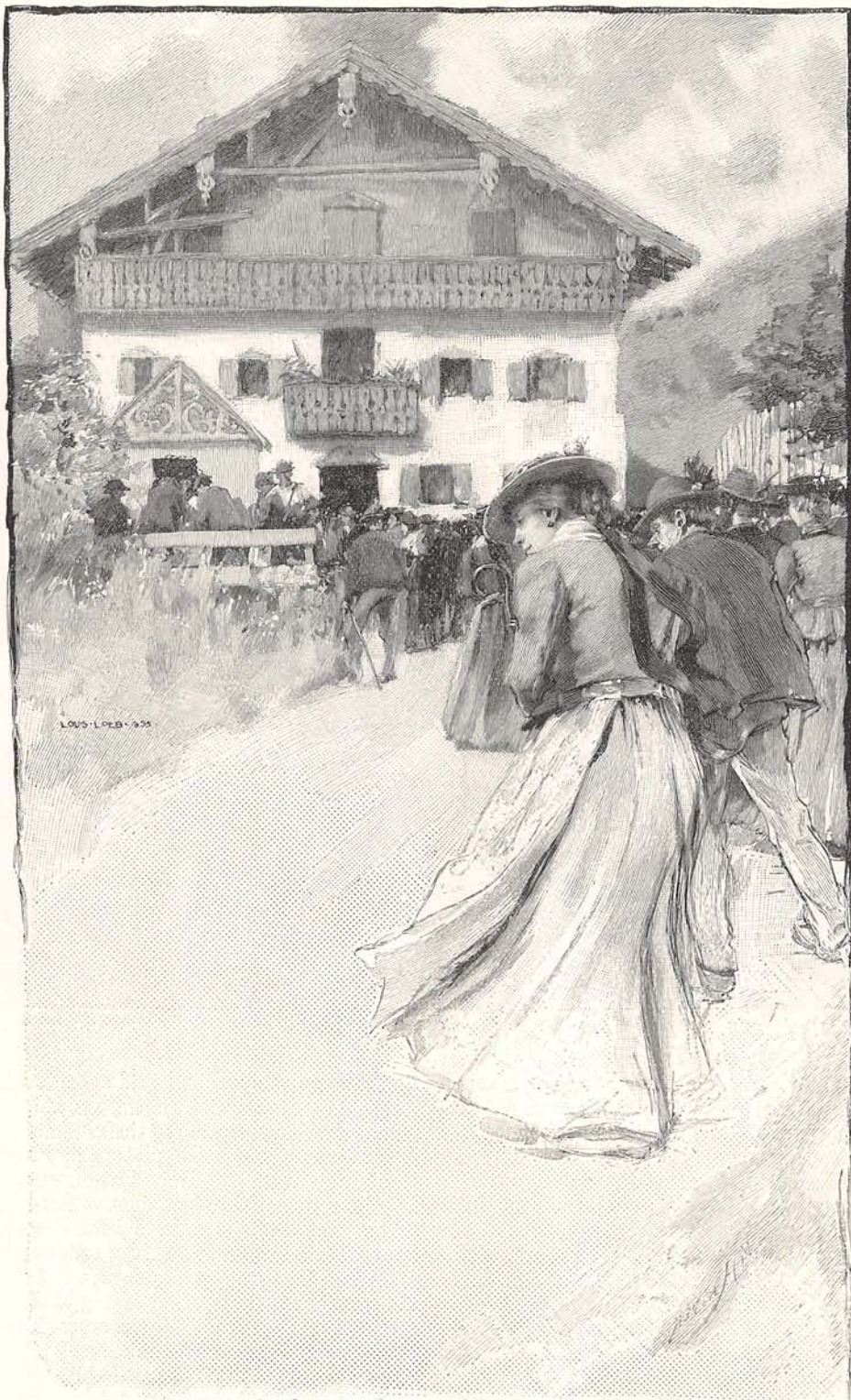
VIEW IN KUFSTEIN.

ENGRAVED BY H. DAVIDSON.

by an extremely artificial snake, takes a piece of real fruit, of which she and Adam taste. Immediately there is a flash of red light, a curtain rising in the rear discloses an offended God seated in majesty upon his throne among the clouds, while in the foreground an angel, sword in hand, drives forth the weeping guilty pair. This scene is the crudest of the whole drama. A maiden clothed in an ugly white gown, with plain waist and full skirt, holding out horizontally a small sword, is a rather ludicrous angel of wrath, in spite of the large white wings fastened upon her shoulders. The angels are altogether the worst feature of the performance, though probably to the uncultivated peasants they do not seem so absurd as to

the average stranger, who, if not more intimately acquainted with angels, has at least a more artistic conception of their appearance. A moment later another picture appears in the background: the Holy Virgin, standing upon the world, her foot on the head of a snake. These tableaux have been described by the Guardian Spirits, and are followed by a second prologue by the choragus, after which the curtain again rises, displaying little children robed in white adoring the cross. Thus in brief is typified the whole story of sin and redemption, now to be succeeded by a representation of the latter in greater fullness.

The entire play is divided into six acts, containing numerous scenes, among which are interspersed tableaux from the Old Tes-



DRAWN BY LOUIS LOEB.

ENGRAVED BY M. HAIDER.

AT THE TICKET-OFFICE.

tament. The first scene, Christ's entry into Jerusalem, is less impressive than might be expected. There are the children crying, «Hosanna to the Son of David!» women strewing garments in the way, and the shouting multitude, in the midst of which Christ advances, sitting upon an ass, and accompanied by his disciples; but upon the boards of the stage, with its humble setting, the action seems cramped and the scene artificial. The Christ has the conventional appearance, gracefully wearing a lavender robe with a mantle of reddish purple, which harmonizes well in fact, if not in words.

The chorus then rendered its first number in a very pleasing manner. The music in general was effective and appropriate, whether performed by orchestra or chorus.

The second scene, in which Christ drives out the traders from the temple, calls for more action, and here conversation begins. This comes more within the range of everyday life, and the participants display much vigor and naturalness, as also in the next scene, where the angry traders make an uproar before the high priests, inciting them to immediate action against this sacrilegious violator of their ancient and lawful customs.

Next comes a tableau of considerable beauty, the theme of which is taken from the Apocrypha: Tobias bidding farewell to his parents, foreshadowing the parting of Christ from his mother as he leaves her to go from Bethany to Jerusalem. During this tableau and the accompanying recitations by the Guardian Spirits, the orchestra, now composed mainly of stringed instruments, discourses plaintive music, which is concluded by a few sweet strains from the chorus. These tableaux serve the double purpose not only of illustrating from the Old Testament the story of the New, but also of affording a variation from what would otherwise be a tedious length of dialogue, furnishing a most agreeable diversion from the severe mental strain which uninterrupted attention to the play for so many hours would require.

The scenes now increase in interest. Simon's house in Bethany, where Mary Magdalene is at once so prominent and modest a figure, next appears before us; and Judas, who is one of the leading figures in the first half of the drama, here makes his *début*, appearing to be a thrifty, frugal-minded man, bold enough to criticize the conduct of his Master in allowing the apparent waste of ointment. Then follows, if one may judge from the manifestations of the audience, the most affecting scene of the whole drama:

on one side the mother of Jesus, accompanied by two women, who support her by their presence and sympathy; on the other, Jesus, with the three disciples Peter, James, and John. After greeting his mother tenderly, Jesus informs her of his departure for Jerusalem and his approaching death, seeking to comfort her as she laments over his bitter fate and her loss, and begs to die for him, or at least with him.

The house had long since been moved to tears, and a vigorous use of handkerchiefs filled the pause that ensued before the opening of the next scene. Here we see the Master and his disciples as they approach the suburbs of Jerusalem.

The meeting of the Sanhedrim, presided over by Annas and Caiaphas, is one of great interest. The death of Christ being resolved upon, Judas appears with the Sadducee. On the assurance from the high priests that only justice shall be done, and that if his Master is innocent no harm can befall, he promises that evening to conduct them to a place where Jesus generally resorts. In the minds of the audience Judas seems to be regarded as the comic figure of the tragedy, though he really does nothing to entitle him to such a rôle. It is, however, probable that the feelings of the audience are so strained by the tragic character of the greater part of the drama that they take the smallest chance for relief, and are amused on the slightest provocation, as here when the secretary who counts out the silver hesitates to give Judas the whole of the money in advance, and finally attempts to cheat him out of two pieces by miscounting. The character of Judas, based upon the simple outlines given in Scripture, has been well elaborated. He is represented as by no means altogether base and heartless, though self-seeking and avaricious.

A tableau—the sacrifice of Melchizedec—precedes the scene of the Last Supper, which closes the first act; but without any unusual pause the second act begins. The tableau, Samson derided by the Philistines, is one of the best presented. The scene in the garden of Gethsemane is watched by the audience with breathless interest, but its solemnity is marred by the angel that comes down from heaven to comfort Jesus in a manner so automatic that one feels hardly sure whether it is a dummy angel worked by machinery, or a creature of flesh and blood. The appearance of Judas with the soldiers, and the subsequent action, follow precisely as narrated, as is usually the case, though supplementary scenes are introduced and others amplified

from the brief outlines given in the New Testament.

Two hours had passed since the beginning of the drama when the side doors were thrown open, admitting fresh air and sunshine, and a recess of ten minutes was allowed for refreshment in the open air. At the farther corner outside there was a wooden booth, where beer, wine, bread, and pastry of various sorts might be purchased.

The third scene of the second act opens with Annas anxiously awaiting the outcome of the night's adventure, to whom Judas appears, bringing the glad tidings of his successful conduct of the undertaking—retreating, however, before the arrival of Jesus, who is brought to Annas for a brief examination, and then led before the Sanhedrim. A tableau showing Naboth accused by false witnesses and condemned to death precedes this scene. Caiaphas presided admirably over the assembly. You would never have suspected him of being the village baker as, with authoritative air and suitable gesture, he conducted the examination of the accused. The death-sentence is passed unanimously. As they are about to proceed to the house of Pilate the governor to demand the execution of their verdict, Judas rushes in, overcome with horror and despair, throws down the thirty pieces of silver, upbraids the high priests for their unjust sentence, and, cursing them and himself, goes out.

The scene changes. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea converse with the friendly Roman centurion whose servant was healed at Capernaum. He promises to seek an audience for them with Pilate, in the hope that they may persuade him to veto the death-sentence of the Jews. Now we see the servants standing without, warming themselves, and the denial of Peter occurs as recorded.

The seventh tableau, representing the despair of Cain, fitly precedes that of Judas, who is seen in a solitary place lamenting over his conduct, and tormented by the spirits of hell. Peter now enters, weighed down with sorrow, bewailing his falsity, yet mourning not as one without hope. He calls on his Master for forgiveness, lamenting that he can no longer hear his voice. Then a happy thought strikes him: there is Mary, the mother of Jesus; she can pardon him in her Son's name. Feeling that this thought has been sent by Jesus himself, he goes to seek her, rejoicing in the assurance of the pardoning love of Jesus.

This episode and that of Veronica are the only ones to which the most rigid Protestant

might object: not enough, it would seem, to interfere with any one's enjoyment of the drama. In any case one cannot help admiring the skilful and extremely natural manner in which the idea of Mary as a mediator is here introduced.

Again Judas comes forward, groaning over the contrast between himself and Peter, who can weep. To him tears are denied. His sin is too great to be forgiven, and his remorse can no longer be endured.

The third act should open with a tableau of Daniel in the lions' den, an excellent prototype of the situation of Christ surrounded by his enemies. Since genuine lions would obviously be out of the question, it is probably on account of the difficulty of procuring imitation lions that would look sufficiently real not to be ridiculous that this picture is omitted, and we come at once to the palace of Pilate. The several scenes before Pilate and Herod, though somewhat similar in character, are all of great interest, and are extremely well rendered. A tableau of Job precedes the scene before Herod, a man of fine presence and great dignity, who despises the Jews as much as Pilate does. Herod finally dismissing Christ and his accusers alike contemptuously, the cry again arises, «Death to the Nazarene! On to Pilate!» Again Pilate seeks to escape pronouncing an unjust verdict, though he is hardly prepared to risk his own position and prospects for the sake of protecting a blameless fanatic. He suggests to the people that they select this man as the one to be released at the Passover. Disappointed in this, but strengthened in his determination not to crucify the innocent by a message received from his wife, he decides upon a middle course, and orders the culprit to be scourged, hoping thus to satisfy the people. The next scene shows Jesus at the close of this ordeal, as the last blows fall. Released from his fetters, he sinks to the earth as if lifeless. In his helpless condition, being momentarily deserted by the soldiers, a Guardian Spirit enters, who laments over him in plaintive song, and bends down to kiss his brow. The guards, now returning, lift Jesus to his feet, place him upon a stool, and again mock him as king, adorning him with a scarlet robe, placing upon his head a crown of thorns, and in his hands a scepter. Thus he is led back to Pilate.

A variation from these scenes of persecution and mockery is presented by the appearance of Mary, the Magdalene, and John, who, having witnessed the sufferings of Christ, are overwhelmed with grief. Peter, meeting



DRAWN BY LOUIS LOEB.

CHRIST TAKING LEAVE OF HIS MOTHER.



DRAWN BY LOUIS LOEB.

A CHARACTER OF THE DISTRICT.

them, improves the opportunity to beg Mary's forgiveness, in the name of her Son, for his cowardly denial of his Lord. For the third time the crowd appears before the house of Pilate, loudly demanding Christ's crucifixion. In vain does Pilate seek to persuade them to ask for the release of the mild and inoffensive Jesus rather than the guilty murderer Barabbas. The moment when he places the two together before them, saying, «Behold the Man!» is perhaps the most dramatic of the entire representation. Accused of treachery to his emperor, and of responsibility for whatever outbreak may occur, Pilate seems compelled to yield, and, washing his hands of the whole matter, with evident distress he finally gives way. The death-sentence, preceded and followed by three blasts of the trumpet, is proclaimed by an officer who had recently played the part of Herod. The crowd, at last appeased, shout their thanks. The superscription for the cross is, however, received with disapprobation; but with an emphatic, «What I have written I have written,» Pilate disappears, leaving the multitude to go to Golgotha rejoicing in the final attainment of their wishes, yet with a slight sting of dissatisfaction over the title «King of the Jews.»

The first half of the drama occupied a little more than four hours, and the audience, with a sigh of relief, streamed out into the noonday for the intermission of an hour and a half.

At two o'clock the second part began. A prologue by the choragus preceded a tableau representing the serpent lifted up by Moses in the wilderness—perhaps the finest of all the tableaux exhibited, more than fifty persons appearing together on the stage. The grouping was particularly effective.

The fourth act opens with Mary and the Magdalene upon the stage, to whom John, entering, relates the sad tidings of his Master's condemnation to death. As the mournful procession approaches, they withdraw to one side, Mary eager once more to behold her Son. A trumpeter advances, followed by an officer of justice, a centurion, and four Roman soldiers. The four Jewish servants who have hitherto guarded Jesus, and taken such delight in the mocking and buffeting, still attend him as he staggers along, bowed down beneath the weight of the cross. More soldiers, with the two thieves, the priests, and people, follow. As they proceed the officer proclaims in a loud voice the death by crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth and two nameless evil-doers, in accordance with the command of Pontius Pilate, representative of Cæsar. It is not necessary here to repeat the whole of the mournful story—how the procession winds in and out, several times reappearing on the stage; how Jesus falls for the first, second, and third times; how his mother comes forward to weep over him; how Simon of Cyrene is compelled to help him bear his cross; the legend of Veronica; the lamentation of the



DRAWN BY LOUIS LOEB.

CATAPHAS.

daughters of Jerusalem. All proceeds in an intensely impressive manner till the arrival on Calvary, where, stripped of his purple robe, Christ kneels, embracing the cross, as the curtain falls. When the curtain again rises the thieves are already in position, their arms simply thrown over the cross-bar, and arms and legs bound to the plank with ropes. The soldiers are driving the last nails into the hands of Jesus, whose cross is in a nearly horizontal position. It is then raised by several attendants, and with wedges is made fast in the wooden floor. Meanwhile there was plaintive music by the orchestra, and the audience gazed in breathless silence upon the scene.

When all is ready the soldiers in the foreground cast lots for the purple robe, John and the several women take their position at the foot of the cross, Annas, Caiaphas, and others pass by, uttering derisive words, and all that is recorded in the various Gospels is enacted in a most realistic manner. With the words, «Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit,» at last the end comes. Thunder and lightning follow; the scene is wrapped in gloom. Soldiers fall on their faces in alarm, declaring that this was indeed the Son of God. People rush about in terror, or sink prostrate, imploring mercy.

The scene is at once transferred to Jerusalem, where Pilate appears again, standing on his balcony, astonished at the uproar of the elements, and wondering if it can have any connection with the Nazarene. Soon the people rush by in terror, not staying to answer his questions as to the cause of their alarm; Roman soldiers, also, pausing only at the second word of command to confess that in fright and terror they have fled from Calvary. Reproached that such words should fall from the lips of Roman soldiers, they reply that on the field of battle they will indeed stand like Romans, but to contend against unknown, invisible powers is terrible. Others rush in, shouting, «The dead, the dead arise; the graves are opened! Help! Help!» Upon Pilate, as he demands peace, they turn, accusing him of guilt and unjust judgment; then, with mutual recrimination and curses, they flee onward. Still others appear, crying that the veil of the temple is rent from top to bottom. Annas and Caiaphas now enter, calling upon Pilate to quell the tumult with soldiery, the whole city being in an uproar. This he refuses to do, telling them that they but reap the consequences of their own hate and injustice. When the high priests themselves attempt to still the tumult, they in turn are upbraided by the people, who, however,



DRAWN BY LOUIS LOEB.

THE VILLAGE BAKER (THE CAIAPHAS OF THE PLAY).

are finally persuaded to go to the temple for prayer, being assured that the apparitions of the dead are only some magic spell wrought by the disciples of Jesus. Pilate, left alone, mourns over the day's unhallowed work, over his own weakness and complaisance. He sees that the edge of his authority is dulled, that by yielding he has forfeited the respect of the people. Already is Jesus avenged on him. If in like manner he takes vengeance on the people, fearful will be their doom. The entrance of Joseph and Nicodemus forms an agreeable diversion to his thoughts, and he gladly grants their request to receive and entomb the body of Jesus.

Again we behold the scene on Calvary; but

the bodies of the two thieves have already been removed, so that the ludicrous action of breaking their legs with inflated india-rubber clubs, as at Ammergau, is avoided. In spite of the entreaties of his mother and the other women, the side of Jesus is now pierced by the centurion. Blood spurts out and splashes upon the floor. At this opportune moment Joseph and Nicodemus arrive with permission to bury the body. With the help of two ladders and a long roll of linen they succeed in lowering it more easily than appears in Rubens's «Descent from the Cross,» and they place it in Mary's arms. After music by the chorus the entombment is enacted in silence, save for the accompanying vocal and instrumental music.

As these scenes of the fourth act occupy an hour and a quarter, a short recess is allowed. The audience now seemed to have become somewhat weary, and there was a good deal of passing in and out after the intermission.

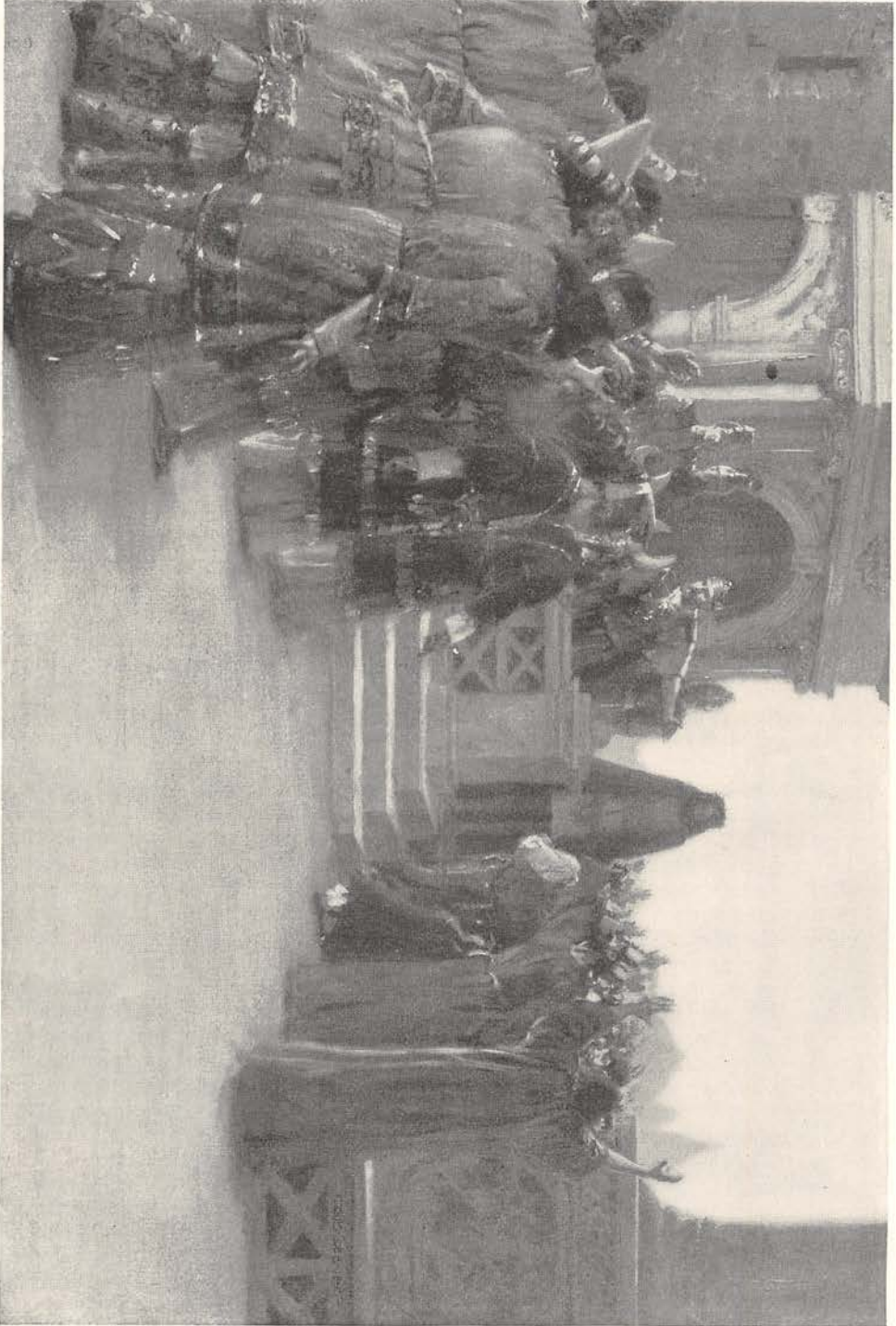
The fifth act begins with a tableau in which Christ, clothed in white, is dimly seen through a veil, presumably in the lower world among the departed spirits. Yet another scene before Pilate is presented, in which a guard and a seal for the tomb are demanded. In great wrath at the continual reappearance of the Jews, Pilate is nevertheless obliged to yield to their wishes. A soliloquy by Caiaphas follows. At this late hour a horrible suspicion arises that perhaps, after all, he has made a mistake. In spite of his outward contempt and courage, he has been greatly disturbed by the signs and omens. As he remembers the dignity and patience of Jesus, the terrible thought will come: Can it be that he has really crucified the Son of God? But this he will utter to no one. In that case his doom is sealed. If Jesus *should* rise again, as he has promised, it will be all over with him both in this world and in the next. He will be hated and reviled as the chief persecutor of his Lord. Even his office will be destroyed if the kingdom of God is established on earth. Such thoughts are interrupted by the entrance of the captain of the city guard, who reports that outwardly the city is quiet, but in their homes the people are still excited over the day's events, some cursing the Nazarene, some Pilate, and some Caiaphas. Alarmed by the earthquakes, the darkness, and the appearance of the dead, they look for the resurrection of Jesus. Caiaphas, allowing for the moment that such a thing might happen, declares that it must be made impossible, if not actually in fact, yet in the minds of the peo-

ple. Such a work of magic, if performed by Jesus, must be attributed to the disciples. Though too weak and cowardly to do anything of the sort, nevertheless they *must* have done it, and so the bargain is concluded that if the centurion will make such a statement, he (Caiaphas) will compel the people to believe it. Apart from the fact that the end is too long postponed, the night scene, with the soldiers guarding the tomb, is a good and natural one. To while away the time they talk of the wonderful works of Jesus. One who had witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus describes that occurrence. They wonder if Jesus himself may not have power to rise again. They look into the tomb, where all is dark and still. They rejoice that the morning is beginning to dawn; but just at that moment distant thunder is heard, there is a flash of light from the tomb, angels appear, then Christ, clad in spotless raiment, arises and stands for a moment, his right hand uplifted, a scepter in his left, but bearing the marks of the nails. Strains of joyous music proclaim the glorious tidings as the curtain falls at the close of the fifth act.

The last act begins with a tableau representing Joseph making himself known to his brethren, obviously in anticipation of Jesus disclosing himself to his disciples. Several scenes by the open grave follow in quick succession. The three women, John and Peter, and Mary the mother, in turn mourn over the deserted tomb, only to have their sorrow speedily changed into joy as they receive the glad tidings of the resurrection, or themselves behold their Lord.

The high priests, having heard the joyful news, which is spreading rapidly over the city, are filled with painful perplexity. They hear that the people are making threats against them. Caiaphas is on the verge of despair, but Annas is more hopeful. His plans are made, and his bait is ready for the Roman guard when these are announced. Accused of spreading lies in the city, the soldiers are filled with indignation. Finally one is induced to give an exact account of the events of the night, to which the others swear. Vain is the effort to bribe them to give a different version and to say that the body of Jesus has been stolen by his disciples. Spurning indignantly the offers of the high priests, they march abruptly out, leaving Annas and Caiaphas in despair.

A tableau follows, entitled «Jesus the Good Shepherd.» Surrounded by his disciples, he hands to Peter, who is kneeling, the keys of the church. In the last scene Jesus is stand-



DRAWN BY LOUIS LOEB.

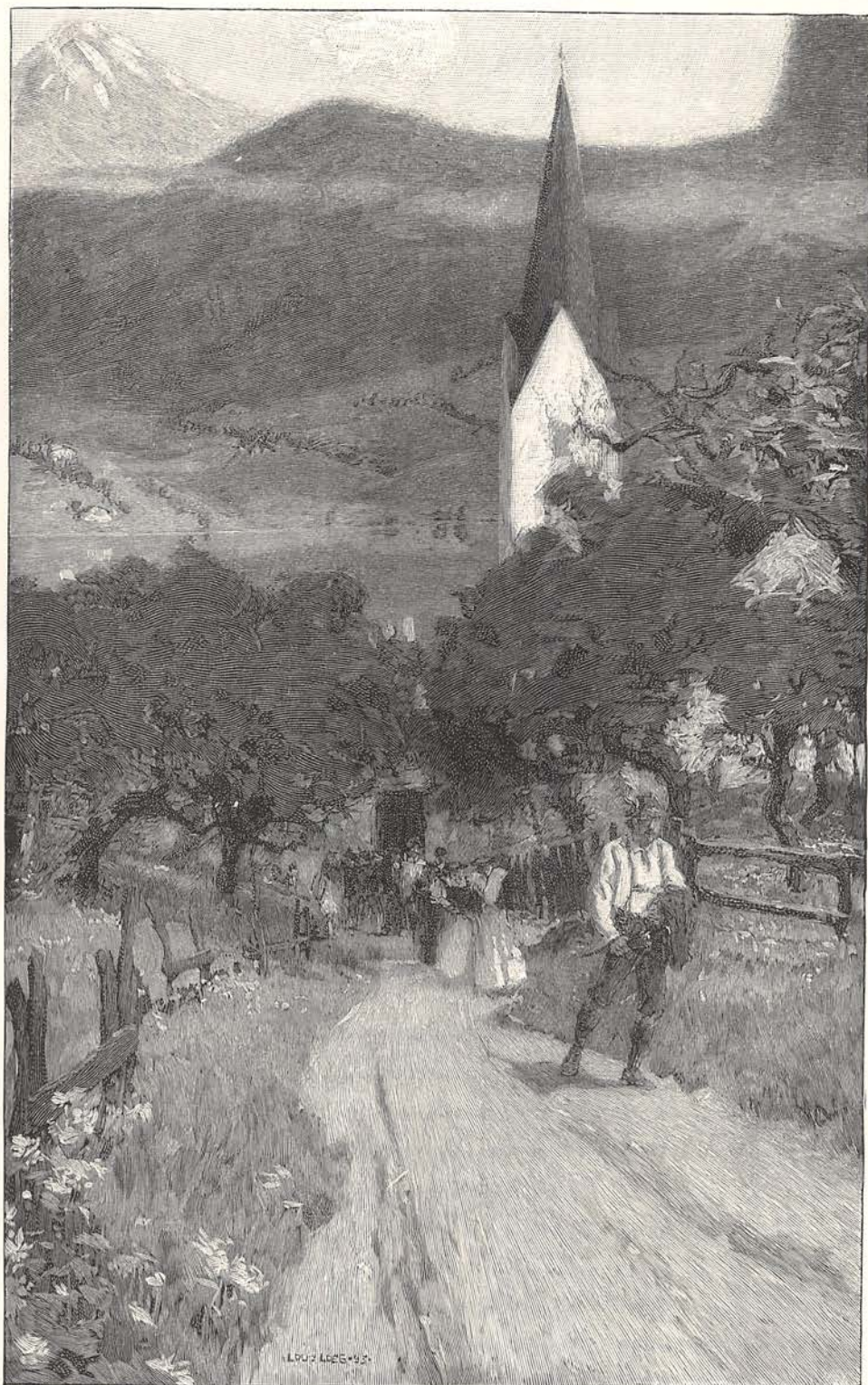
CHRIST BEFORE PILATE.

ing on a mound a few feet above his disciples, Mary, and several other women. He bids them all farewell, utters his last commission, and then, with hand outstretched in blessing, by no visible means rises out of sight. The dramatic effect is here again marred by the two angels, a too close adherence to the Scripture text producing rather an anticlimax. The chorus now sings a grand triumphal song, after which the curtain rises for the last time, disclosing in the background Jesus sitting in glory at the right hand of his Father, among the holy angels; the women and the apostles kneeling in adoration below; and Annas and Caiaphas prone in the foreground. One more stanza by the chorus, a grand triumphal march by the orchestra, and the passion-play is ended.

The first question which naturally arises is, What is the effect of the play upon spectators and actors? As far as the actors and the majority of the spectators are concerned, the testimony of the village priest should have the greatest weight. He declares that its influence upon all parties is beneficial. Two services are held in the early morning in the village church, which the actors and others attend; but during the summer the play takes the place of the services usually held at a later hour. If one were to form an opinion from a superficial acquaintance with the people, it would be that Vorder-Thiersee is a community of unusually kindly and well-disposed folk. To the spectators in general it seems probable that through this pictorial representation the story of the cross becomes more vivid than any amount of Scripture reading or sermons could make it.

Of almost as much interest as the play itself was the meeting afterward with some of the leading actors, and seeing something of their every-day lives. The village of Vorder-Thiersee, the scene of the play, contains between five and six hundred inhabitants, from whom all the actors and musicians are drawn. As there is no compact settlement, these are widely scattered, some living a distance of an hour or two from the little church and theater. It is therefore a matter of much greater difficulty for all to be present at a rehearsal than if they lived in a compact village like Oberammergau. The inhabitants are all farmers, or are engaged in simple, necessary occupations. Thus, Caiaphas, who is also director of the play, is a baker. The Christus, Josef Uffinger, is a farmer—fortunately an eldest son, inheriting the patrimony of his fathers, upon which he lives, with his five younger brothers, his aged parents, wife, and

two little children. He seemed to be a man of unusually amiable character, and he fortunately speaks very good German for one of the country-people, many of whom use a dialect quite unintelligible to the unpractised ear. A trace of this is visible on the stage, though here an effort is made to use the literary speech and to pronounce the best of German. One of the members of the choir is mine host of the Seewirth; and it is here, opposite the little lake and the tall Pentling, that when the day's labor is over, arduous for spectator, and still more for the leading performers, many of the natives and strangers gather; and over his pipe and glass of beer one may chat with the Christus and Caiaphas, Peter, John, and Judas, Herod and Pilate, not to mention a particularly obnoxious churl who, being one of the guards of Jesus, is especially forward in ill treating him. When pointed out as this disagreeable person, he said, «Ah, yes; but I have a good heart.» Judas, strange to say, married for his second wife a former Madonna, and the present Virgin Mary is his daughter. If, in witnessing the play, one is astonished at the excellence of the acting in so rural a community, still more is this the case when one meets the actors afterward. Mary, who takes her part with remarkable dignity and grace, and who displays great depth of feeling, is found to be a shy, rather awkward country girl of twenty, who at first hardly ventures monosyllabic answers when addressed. Her father, Judas, who is one of the best of the actors, is now taking his part for the *fifth* season, at the age of sixty-nine. Seeing his many wrinkles and his bald, gray head, one would never imagine the lightness with which he steps about in the play. Indeed the ease of manner generally exhibited on the stage is astonishing. A particularly noticeable feature is the excellence of their walk, which is free, simple, and utterly unaffected, as are their movements generally. Remembering the stiff angularity of some of the country students at a Western college commencement, the almost entire absence of it here seems the more remarkable. It appears, however, to some extent among the disciples, who, save Peter, John, and Judas, are the poorest of the actors. For this there are probably two reasons: one, that as they have little, almost nothing, to say, all of the best actors have been selected for the more prominent parts; the other, that it is much easier to be free and natural as a member of a gesticulating, angry crowd than to stand about and listen, to sit on a stool for the feet-washing, and to be meek and quiet



DRAWN BY LOUIS LOEB.

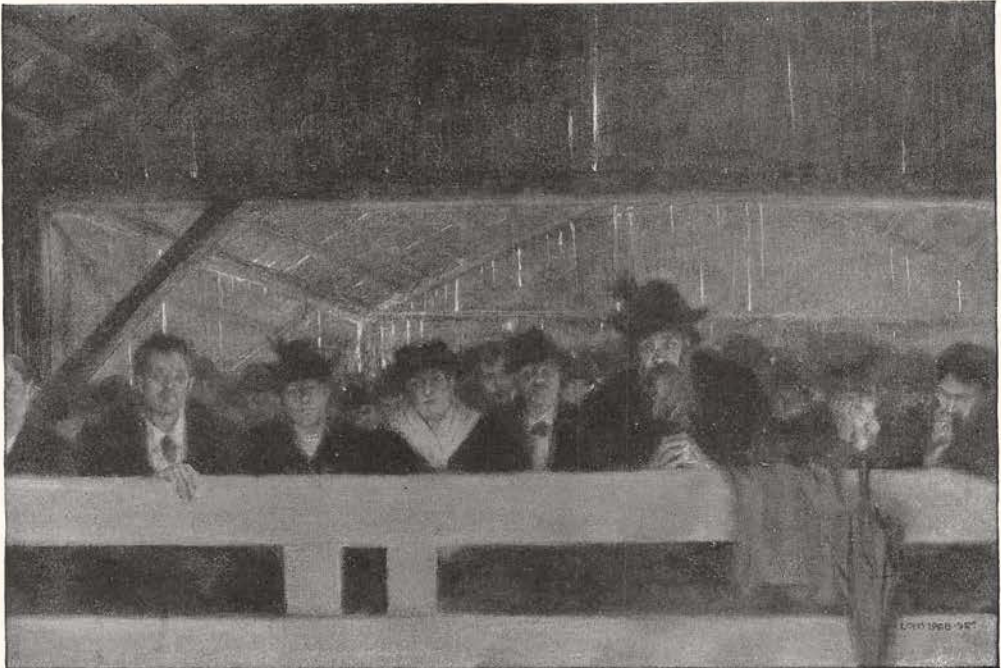
ENGRAVED BY CHARLES STATE.

VIEW FROM THE THEATER ACROSS THE LAKE AND VALLEY.

generally. John, however, who possesses these characteristics to a marked degree, and who has also a good deal to say, looks and acts his part excellently. In his wig of long hair he has quite the ideal appearance; but in the evening, as a round-faced, dark-haired rustic of nineteen, though one could still see a little of the expression, the change was marvelous. Pontius Pilate, who acted his part with great power, though he had no make-up, was never-

The actors take part entirely for love of the work, receiving no compensation even for the time devoted to rehearsals or performance. Whatever profits accrue are for the benefit of the community as a whole.

Between the decennial representations of the passion-play other dramas are every summer enacted, which are to some extent attended by outsiders, and serve as a sort of training-school for the greater performance



DRAWN BY LOUIS LOES.

DURING THE PLAY.

theless a wholly different person in the gilt vestments of a Roman governor and in his every-day dress.

The Christus, unfortunately, was obliged to wear a wig which was a little too dark to compare well with his sandy beard, and so lessened the beauty of his appearance. When I asked him why he did not let his own hair grow long, as they do at Oberammergau, he said, «Oh, it would not do for a farmer; it would be altogether too warm.»

of the passion-play. All of the participants, and indeed the whole community, greatly enjoy these representations, which form a most agreeable diversion in their otherwise monotonous lives. Whoever is a student of human nature or religion, and is interested in seeing what may be achieved by simple, honest-hearted peasants, practically destitute of contact with the outside world, will be well repaid for a pilgrimage to Thiersee in 1905.

Annie S. Peck.