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THE PASSION PLAY AT OBER-AMMERGAU.

NESTLED among the Bavarian mountains is the quaint old-world village of Ober-Ammergau. During the present summer, tens of thousands will make a pilgrimage thither; great numbers of English and Americans, as well as Germans, will journey to this remote spot. These will not be attracted chiefly by the beautiful mountain-scenery, or by the remark-

able palaces which the mad king Louis II. equipped in Southern Bavaria; but because Ober-Ammergau stands alone among the villages of Christendom as having a religious history which finds its appropriate expression in the world-famous Passion Play enacted every decade.

Now I must frankly confess that when, ten

years ago, I was invited to accompany a friend on a Continental tour which should include the Passion Play, I was in the first instance more attracted by other parts of the route suggested than by the actual representation at Ober-Ammergau; indeed, a Puritan of Puritans, I had some doubt as to whether it was quite right that the most sacred events in the



PERFORMERS ON THEIR WAY TO THE PASSION PLAY.

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world's history should be represented dramatically. But I soon found that, whatever might be the cause, the Ober-Ammergau representation had appealed to many devout souls of every section of the Church. And here I ought at once to say that the impression made on myself was so unequivocally helpful that I would unhesitatingly urge all adult Christians, and especially those who are called upon to teach others, to endeavour to gain the insight and inspiration which the Passion Play has brought to so many.

The Play can only be understood through its history, and in connection with the unique spirit of the villagers who take part in it. As is well known, in the Middle Ages, when books were rare, mysteries and miracle plays were largely employed as vehicles of religious instruction; many of these became vulgarised, grotesque and unworthy of their theme, and most of them were suppressed about the time of the Revival of Learning.

In 1633, largely as a result of the terrible thirty years' war then raging, Southern Germany was devastated by a plague. As in the visitations of the Black Death, whole families were swept away. In one village only two married couples were left. Ober-Ammergau enforced rigid quarantine and escaped the pestilence for a time; but one day a labourer, Caspar Schuchler, who had been working in a plague-stricken village, came home to Ober-Ammergau to see his wife and children; in two days he died, and in the next thirty-three days eighty-four of the villagers perished. It seemed as though the community was doomed to absolute destruction. In their deadly plight the inhabitants met, made solemn confession of sin, and vowed that, if spared, they would every ten years represent the Passion of the Lord; then, says the local chronicler, "from that hour the plague was stayed; those already smitten recovered; no others fell victims."

During the whole of the intervening time this vow has been most scrupulously observed. The only exceptions have been when, as in 1870, war has compelled a brief postponement. That the inhabitants of Ober-Ammergau should be allowed in the seventeenth century to signalise their devotion by a Passion Play is in itself an indication of the pure and lofty character they possessed, for in no town in Germany would such a play then have been tolerated. Through the two centuries and a half that have elapsed, the play has been safeguarded by the consciousness that its due performance is a sacred debt to Heaven. "To omit or neglect it would be a corporate sin; to repeat it for money or for fame, a profanation." As an act of worship it remains to the primitive-minded dwellers in this secluded village.

Prior to 1860, the Ober-Ammergau Play attracted but little attention outside its own district; very few foreigners had then visited it; but from that time the number of tourists greatly increased, culminating in the representations of 1890 which were seen, it is computed, by as many as two hundred thousand persons. It is chiefly due to the influence of the good poet-priest, Daisenberger, that the Play has risen to such wide-spread influence. For thirty-five years, until his death at the advanced age of eighty-four, in the year 1882, Daisenberger lived and toiled in the village. He was a man of simple piety, loved and revered in the whole district. He held liberal views. Thus he interred some Protestant strangers, who died, with every mark of respect and religion, incurring thereby the censure of his bishop. He was a good classical scholar and moreover able to appreciate the communion which exists between art and religion. Thus he set himself to ennoble the vow taken by the ancestors of the village; he re-wrote the Play, stripping it of the unworthy accretions

that had come to it; and, most important of all, he so re-kindled the feeling of devotion among the inhabitants of his parish that the humble villagers felt in their daily toil they were "the Lord God's wood-carvers," and that in their decennial representations of the Lord's Passion, they were to give to other Christians a spiritual revival. He himself superintended all the preparations, gave private instruction to each player, infusing into each the devotional spirit. I may quote a sentence or two from his exhortation to the actors as indicating his spirit:

"Dear friends, you are called upon this year to fulfil a great and holy vow; you will, as it were, in some measure take part in the apostolic office . . . We are not now to go forth in the world to make known the Crucified, but thousands this year will come to us, and ours will be the privilege to represent before them what the apostles preached . . . Dear friends, we can only hope for God's blessing if we undertake our work with pure motives and holy zeal, and not with selfish and vain-glorious motives. If with the latter, God will look down upon us and our work with displeasure; we shall be misusing and dishonouring the most sacred things; we shall reap to ourselves, instead of honour, blame; instead of gain, most bitter loss."

The greatest care is taken in the selection of the representatives of various characters in the sacred drama. It is plain that participation in it affects many lives for good. Thus we find a little girl replying with simplicity, "I must live up to it." The actors get scanty remuneration, the profits being mostly devoted to public ends. Before each representation all take the Sacrament, and prior to the rising of the curtain all kneel in silent prayer. For the last generation there has been a fierce light of world-wide celebrity upon them. Up to the present they have remained uncontaminated. This has been largely due to the nine recuperative years of silence and isolation which have followed the times of prominence. There is something sublime in the self-abnegation which carries these men and women at the close of the representations each decade back to their humble manual toil as wood-carvers and peasants. But there has been felt the natural fear lest a worldly spirit should gain admission to this primitive community, and many sinister prophecies have been repeatedly made to this effect. Happily they have been unfulfilled, and Dean Farrar felt able to testify in 1890 that so far the Play had been predominantly good. "It has deepened their religious character, stimulated their devotion, increased their knowledge, and marvellously developed all their artistic and intellectual gifts. It has done this without in the least spoiling the simplicity of their character or making them discontented with

"Their useful toil,
Their homely joys and destiny obscure."

From a village of some thirteen hundred inhabitants as many as five hundred persons are trained with such marvellous success that they hold spellbound from five thousand to six thousand onlookers for the greater part of a day. They sway the thoughts and emotions of many of the most cultured and critical scholars of Europe and America. From eight in the morning until five o'clock in the afternoon, with a brief mid-day interval, the representation lasts, and during that long period the vast assembly is often moved to tears as the events of our Lord's last days are made unspeakably vivid. The audience becomes a congregation. There is, of course, no applause, and the utmost reverence prevails.

To me the Passion Play threw a new light

upon the earthly life of Christ. The Gospel incidents came to be more real than I think they could become by visiting Palestine where the sacred spots have been so largely defiled by infidel feet. In this open-air picture one was transported back and seemed to be in the actual presence of the first disciples and foes of Christ. These gifted and devout villagers do not act their parts so much as live them, and thus "they set again the living Christ amongst the homes of men." I am fortified in my opinion by the verdict of that most stalwart Protestant, Dr. Clifford, a man utterly opposed to any ceremonial religion. After visiting Ober-Ammergau he said, "To me that day stands out with luminous distinctness as the one on which more than on all others I felt the reality of the Christ of the Gospels, the depth of His matchless patience, the greatness of the price He paid for the world's redemption. I was overcome by the sight of that serene spirit, insulted, wounded, suffering, obedient unto death, 'even the death of the Cross,' and wished to get alone to think and pray."

This sense of life-likeness is, to my mind, greatly increased by the fact that before and after the performances the actors discharge their ordinary household duties. It was my privilege to stay with the good woman who acted the part of Martha; she and others were most assiduous in seeing to the comfort of their visitors,

"Plying their daily tasks with busier feet,
Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat."

How much better thus to understand the lives of holy men and women in the past than to conceive of them as haloed with a nimbus and separated from the ordinary walks of life!

And here it should be noticed that the whole representation is absolutely scriptural, and hence unconsciously Protestant; the slight incident of St. Veronica is the only detail not found in the Gospel narrative. The Virgin Mary is a prominent character, but there is no trace of mariolatry; Peter is not raised to any position of pre-eminence; in the representation of the Last Supper the Scripture narrative is absolutely followed, the bread is broken and the wine distributed; there is no suggestion of the Sacrifice of the Mass. The whole is framed on a very careful study of the sacred record, and brings out the events and the motives leading to them with scrupulous fidelity. From beginning to end there is nothing which clashes with profound scholarship or devout feeling.

When the representation commences at eight o'clock in the morning, there is a vast hushed assemblage. The chorus exhorts spectators to a devout contemplation of holy mysteries. This chorus consists of twenty-four singers who are arrayed in richly-coloured robes, forming a harmonious chord of colour. Like the chorus in a Greek tragedy, they are idealised spectators, who tell us what we ought to see and point out the lessons; occasionally they take part in the drama.

The actual play consists of eighteen scenes from the last week of the life of Christ. These are preceded by tableaux, of which there are twenty-four in all. As Daisenberger explains, "Our main object is to represent the story of Christ's Passion, not by a mere statement of facts, but in its connection with the types, figures, and prophecies of the Old Testament." In most cases the tableaux are beautifully appropriate; thus, for example, we are shown Joseph's brethren conspiring to kill him before we see how the Sanhedrin plots the betrayal of Jesus. The giving of the manna precedes the institution of the Lord's Supper. The murder of Naboth prepares the way for the judicial murder advocated by Caiaphas: the accusation of Daniel for false charges made

before Pilate. These tableaux not only illustrate the Gospel history, but they relieve the tension which at times is more than a sympathetic nature can endure.

Very wonderful is the management of all the arrangements on the stage; there is never a hitch, never a pause, never the faintest sound of preparation, although in some cases great numbers of young children take part. Thus, in the tableaux of the return of the spies and the giving of the manna, there are four hundred persons grouped, including one hundred and fifty children; these remain absolutely motionless for about three minutes.

The first scene in the Play is the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. There is an apparently endless multitude with palm-branches singing—

“Hail to Thee! hail! O David’s
Son;
Hail to Thee! hail! Thy Father’s
throne
Is Thine award.
In God’s great name Thou comest
nigh;
All Israel streams with welcome
cry
To hail its Lord.”

Jesus is in the midst of this jubilant throng; we see His indignation as He gazes on the dealers haggling in the sacred courts; He denounces them, asking how strangers and Gentiles can perform their devotions in this tumult of usury. In spite of the protests of priests and dealers they are expelled. When Jesus has entered the Temple, a Sanhedrin orator seizes his opportunity, and calls upon the people to be faithful to Moses; he is backed up by the traders, who call for revenge and compensation; they are all urged to lay their complaints before the Sanhedrin.

In the Sanhedrin scenes we see the cold resolute craft of the unscrupulous Caiaphas, the bitter hatred of the older Annas, and the way in which the aggrieved traders are brought in; one of the Sanhedrin leaders says, “To track the fox to his lair will not be difficult; we shall find plenty of people to help if it shall please the high council to offer a suitable reward.” There are laid bare before us the three converging influences which led to the betrayal and condemnation of Jesus, namely, the hatred of the priests and scribes, the anger of the traders, and the disappointed avarice of Judas. Everything seems to be as near our own doors as a Dreyfus trial.

Some of the subsequent scenes are of the most pathetic character, *e.g.*, the farewell between Mary and her Son, when she pleads to be allowed to accompany Him to Jerusalem; “Mother, the will of the Father was also ever sacred unto thee. . . The Father calls me. Fare thee well, best of mothers”; and where “friend Judas” is warned of the danger besetting him. Judas harps upon the disappointment he has felt in that Jesus has not arranged for the future support of his disciples, if He is to leave them; and when the traders come with their bribe, he falls an easy prey to them, protesting in his soliloquy that he is no traitor but is



ANTON LANG (CHRISTUS).

only, as a prudent man, guarding himself against contingencies. When, later on, he appears before the Sanhedrin and clutches at the silver which clinks down on the stone table, we see him at the lowest point of his character. Still later he finds that the iron will of Caiaphas has determined the death of Christ; he returns with the bag of money, but is spurned by the council, whom he now curses as bloodhounds. The study of the character of Judas is a significant feature in the play; he is not without an element of repentance in his remorse and suicide.

The trial before Caiaphas, who is a mediæval pope, the awful hurrying to and fro on the night of the betrayal, the mocking by the Temple guards, the appalling spectacle of the crown of thorns, the satire of Herod Antipas as he makes Jesus "the King of Fools," the unanimous bitterness of the mob, stirred up by the priests to prefer Barabbas to Jesus, lead us on to the culmination in the crucifixion on Calvary. Here every detail of the Gospels is literally reproduced; nothing is omitted, altered, or added to. We hear the sound of the hammer strokes as the nails are driven in, we see the executioners going about their business, the centurion for a time immovable, we hear the ribald jeers of the onlookers and see the soldiers casting their dice for garments, and, dominating all, the Christ with arms outstretched in torturing tension with His words of comfort to mother, disciples, and penitent robber. When it is past there is felt by the vast congregation a sense of immense relief as from an ordeal of

pain. Great numbers are moved to tears and sobs, while some, like the late Dr. Reynolds, have felt that they could not remain to witness the Crucifixion. The physical strain on Josef Mayer was immense; often, from the feeling of responsibility as impersonating Christ, he has fasted during the whole day. In the final scenes of the Resurrection and Ascension the chorus, who had put on black mantles during the Crucifixion, reappear in their gorgeous costumes to sing their Hallelujah of Praise.

Such in briefest outline is the wonderful pictorial representation which these simple, art-loving, and earnest Bavarian peasants give of the Passion of our Lord. Probably in few other districts could such have been developed; certainly nowhere else could it now be initiated. To the men and women of Ober-Ammergau there has come the power vividly to reproduce the life of Christ in the light of recent scholarship and investigation, and thus to bridge over the chasm of 1900 years and to make it come home to the hearts and bosoms of all beholders.

As I hope that not a few readers of THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER will be able to visit Bavaria this summer, I may mention that the country around Ober-Ammergau abounds in interesting features. An effort should be made to journey through Partenkirchen to the village of Mittenwald. Not only is the latter interesting for its extraordinary houses and their decoration, but also because it is the cradle of modern music. It is asserted that the first violin was made here, certainly now it is the chief centre of the manufacture; one of

the large firms turns out 50,000 instruments each year. Every stage of the development of the violin and cognate instruments can be seen here, where for 200 years music has penetrated the soul of the villagers. We greatly enjoyed, too, the beautiful drive through the Tyrolese mountains to Innsbruck, which itself is full of historical memorials of kings and patriots like Andreas Hofer. Thence we were able to get round to Regensburg and to Nuremberg, "quaint old town of toil and traffic, quaint old town of art and song." Here the traveller seems to be carried back to the Middle Ages, and is in the centre of the work of Albrecht Dürer and Hans Sachs, the poet cobbler, the Shakespeare of Nuremberg. There is no more fascinating city in the whole of Germany than Nuremberg. I may add that in visiting the chief cities of Germany there is every facility given for those who speak English only; thus in St. Lawrence's Church, Nuremberg, a full description of its beauties, printed in English, is handed to visitors; the officials at railway stations quickly recognise British tourists and often anticipate their wishes by addressing them in perfect English. The Passion Play is, of course, spoken in German, but it is quite easy to follow the sentences with the aid of a parallel translation. Hence there is no barrier to the enjoyment of a holiday in Southern Bavaria, where art-treasures combine with historical interest and majestic scenery, and where the Passion Play affords its exceptional opportunity for devout souls.

F. W. NEWLAND, M.A.

CYNTHIA'S BROTHER.

By LESLIE KEITH, Author of "A Little Exile," "Lisbeth," "The Mischief-Maker," etc.

CHAPTER XIII.



CYNTHIA tugged at the window casement and gave a great gasp of relief as it suddenly flew open, and a rush of sweet summer air met her hot face. The shutters of the opposite house were still fast closed, so she pushed her curly head out and surveyed the silent street up and down. White houses stretched in a long row as far as she could see, with little dusty gardens in front of them, and at the end of the vista there were wooded slopes making a background for the Kursaal, where one or two early pilgrims were already going to drink the waters. The fresh air woke Kitty, who, after some yawning and stretching, flung off the *plumeau* and joined Cynthia at the window.

"Kitty, I thought you were never going to wake!" she cried. "I looked for my sponge, and then remembered

we were too sleepy and tired to unpack last night."

"I thought I never was going to wake, myself," said Kitty. "I dreamt I was one of the princes in the Tower. That thing"—she gave a withering glance at the bag of feathers humped upon the floor—"gives you as realistic an idea of suffocation as you need ever wish to have."

"Oh, it's German!" said Cynthia indulgently. "Kitty, I wish you'd pinch me! Can you take in that this is Wurtemberg, and that the sun is beginning to sparkle on the Neckar just down there, and that there are real live grapes growing on all the hills?"

"I wish they'd grow round the window," said Kitty; "a supper of sausage and raspberry vinegar—especially if you can't eat it—makes you awfully hungry next morning."

"I smell coffee!" said Cynthia, with a relishing sniff. "The Germans have one excellent virtue—they're not what nurse calls 'slug-a-beds.'"

"No, they're feather-beds tied round the middle with a string. There isn't such a thing as a waist 'made in Germany.' Look at Frau Rothmann! Observe that old woman down there leading that fragment of a dog by a string! Poor little bow-wow; it's hopeless to tug against that mountain."

"That's only two (I wish she'd let the

poor doggums loose!) and the population of Wurtemberg alone is—"

But Kitty had seized the *plumeau* threateningly.

"Statistics before breakfast!" she cried. "What next?"

"Let's unpack, then," said Cynthia good-temperedly. "It's horrid living in your box."

"You'll have to, I'm afraid. A drawer and a half each! And we can't divide the pegs, because there's only one! I'll make it over to you, Cynthia, as your wardrobe is so much more extensive than mine. Did you ever hear of a Christian country where they don't offer you soap to wash with?" She continued her investigations.

"Perhaps it's an 'extra.'"

"Water must be a double extra, then, if that milk-jug full is going to wash both our faces! If this is to be a 'parlour' boarder, I'd just like to know what a common or garden one has to put up with."

"If it's a conundrum, I give it up," Cynthia laughed. "Kitty, you've got up on your wrong side."

"Why do they make you lie under the bed instead of on the top of it, then?" demanded Kitty, beginning to dimple. "Eureka! here comes breakfast at last!"

The girls found the fresh crisp rolls delicious, and even the weak coffee tasted good. It was apparently a