

Passion Play at Oberammergau.

The Spectacle Not An Entertainment But An Inspiration.

(Church Times, London.)

As early as 5 a.m. the church bells were summoning the faithful to Mass, and services were going on continuously until 8 a.m., when the play begins. The Schutzgeistler enter from either side of the wide editorial staff of the Montreal Daily stage, forty in number, wearing girdled albs, with cloaks of varying hues, and golden coronets. At once we miss the noble presence of Josef Mayr, as Prologus. His successor in this part is Anton Lenner, a man of less stature and a voice less sympathetic than Mayr's, but on the whole he did his part well. Opposed to him, as leader of the chorus, we had happily a very old friend of the Play, Jacob Rutz. But alas, for the ravages of time and sickness, his fine voice is not what we had known in previous years, though still good enough to make one realize what it had been. The opening words are spoken by him, and he bids us contemplate the Mystery of Sin and its origin, and there is unfolded the tableaux of Adam and Eve driven out of Eden, followed by the picture of the remedy for Sin—the Cross of our Redemption, which we are bidden to adore reverently, and to follow the steps of the Atoning One along the path of His Passion until the victory is won.

Here let me say that on previous occasions, these Old Testament tableaux, of which there are, as a rule, two before each scene of the Play, are to many minds its most beautiful feature. The groupings are the work of Ludwig Lang, the director of the carving school, to whom the play on its artistic side owes its great success. I may also note here that the costumes, the stuff for which are, of course, obtained outside the village (some even at Jerusalem itself), are also planned by him and made up under his direction by his sister in the village. They are especially rich in color, and their design, as far as one could see, follows closely the pictures of M. Tissot. I detected several improvements in the tableaux. The Adam and Eve scene showed better posing of the figures. The Adoration of the Cross, which immediately follows, was, as usual, very pleasing to the eye, but it is one about which there are great differences of opinion. In the tableau of the farewell of Tobias, I missed the dog. This is a regrettable omission, because the scene, as a relic of the old mediæval drama, has an interest all its own, and Tobias was never represented without his dog.

WONDERFUL GROUPINGS.

Then the drama opens with the first great movement upon the stage, representing Christ's entry into Jerusalem. It is a wonderful scene, and naturally excites the curiosity of the audience to catch the first glimpse of the representative of the Savior. He comes slowly on from the depths of the great stage riding on the ass led by St. John, amid the plaudits of the people; and then he bursts into a fine chorus, "Heil, Dir, heil Dir." But the chorus is neither sung in time nor tune, as generally happens with the musical effect is spoiled. But the crowd is wonderful.

The appearance of the Christ, as represented by Anton Lang, was even more striking than ten years ago, when he was only aged 25. He is now of a more suitable age, and his beautiful face and majestic head agree with one's conception of the character he represents to a remarkable degree. How many of the Old Masters would not have revelled in such a model! His voice, too, is richer and firmer, and his general demeanor denotes more strength, and less of the weakness of suffering. The St. John was new. Alfred Berling is almost too young, being only 19, but made a favorable impression, especially coming after so notable a representative as Peter Rendl, who, by his own wish, is taking the minor part of Joseph of Arimathea; he is also the understudy for the Christ.

The interest of the Play, from a purely dramatic point of view, begins at once with the Saviour turning out of the Temple those engaged in an unholy traffic in His Father's House. The traders—four or five men who take a leading part all through the Play—seek revenge, and opportunity is given them for realizing it by the High Priests, who maddened by jealousy at the influence which Christ has with the populace, seek His capture and death. This, in brief, is the story of the plot in the first part. Its development is worked out in several scenes in which, of course, Judas is a prominent figure. When the plot succeeds and the capture of the Saviour in the garden is realized, a second plot in the drama is developed, and occupies the second part. This is concerned with the difficulty of the High Priests to persuade the representatives of the temporal power to carry out their sentence of death. When Pilate's scruples are at length overcome, and the Saviour is given over to His enemies, the second part ends, and the closing scenes are taken up with the Via Dolorosa and the Crucifixion.

TELLING SCENES.

In the first part the scenes which most tell with the audience are the trial at Bethany and the scene in which the

Upper Chamber. In the former we see the representative of the Blessed Virgin Mary for the first time. There is always a difficulty with this part, because owing to a rule at Oberammergau, no married woman is allowed on the stage. Consequently, the Blessed Virgin is, as a rule, taken by far too young a woman. This was specially marked on the last occasion. This year the part is assumed by Ottilie Zwink, daughter of Johann Zwink, the representative of Judas. Fraulein Zwink was very human, and spoke her brief lines sympathetically and without exaggeration. Of the latter scene, which to many is the most beautiful of the whole play, I can only say it is one to be seen and not described. Herr Lang was dignified in all his movements, and as there is more action than words in the scene, it will be realized that he was fully cognizant of the beauty of the act he was representing.

BEST TABLEAU OF ALL.

As we approach the Via Dolorosa, the finest perhaps of all the tableaux is shown—viz., the Serpent in the Wilderness, in which several hundred individuals are grouped, and the chorus sing the fine chorale already alluded to:

Pray now, and Christ we thank,
That He the cup of suffering drank.

The sun, which hitherto has not been seen, shone upon the stage, just as the Christ entered upon the stage bearing the Cross, and followed by the soldiers and the crowd. Here was room for mystical thought indeed. The light of the World led out to darkness and death by the ignorance and folly of the world, but Himself leading His people, as the Sun of Righteousness, by the only true way to health and life.

SINGERS IN FINE FORM.

Before I go further, I must say a word as to the music. This, it will be remembered, is all the composition of Richus Dedler, the village organist, who, with Daisenberger, the parish priest, about a century ago, revised the Play as we know it to-day. It is all extremely simple and characteristic of the music of the period, Haydn and Mozart, whose mass music is often heard to-day in the village church, being largely drawn on by the composer for his inspiration. The Schutzgeistler, who are responsible for its rendering, are excellent this year, and I would particularly commend the female voices, which, unlike their male companions, seemed influenced by the weather. The beautiful song of the Lament of the Bride, which comes just before the farewell at Bethany, was sung by a very fresh young voice. As usual, the hidden choir at the time of the institution of the Last Supper was very effective, and the fine musical introduction before the choice of the people for Barabbas, "Schi! Welch ein Mensch!" was given with great spirit. It is only fair here to give a word of due praise to the orchestra, who, scarcely sheltered from the cold and rain, pluckily stood to their task, and it would be ungenerous to pass criticism on some of their efforts. The players are all of the village, and are conducted by Herr Ludwig Wittmann, who is not an Ammergauer, but is the instructor of music in the village.

AFTER THE INTERVAL, which was cut short by half an hour on account of the weather, we behold the scenes in which the Savior is hailed before the Council of the High Priests, then brought to Pilate, by him sent to Herod, returned to Pilate, and eventually condemned to death, after the long contest between the Governor and the High Priests. It is a very prolonged series of scenes, but helps one to realize, perhaps better than one did heretofore, the terrible sufferings of the night endured by the Savior. In the course of these scenes we get, perhaps, the most striking of all the wonderful crowds seen in the Play. Pilate has refused the death sentence required by the High Priests, unless he is persuaded that the people demand it also. Messengers are despatched to stir up the city, and presently we see emerging from different parts of the stage groups of men and women who are being worked up into a frenzy of passion by the leaders, until they all assemble outside Pilate's house, and it is only then that he acquiesces, after he has given them their choice—Jesus or Barabbas. The shout for Barabbas was terrific, coming from five hundred voices. The fury of the mob was well depicted, but the instruction to all to shout together as one voice is surely a mistaken one, even from a dramatic point of view. It spoils the realism of the moment, and does not help the audience to take in the precise words they utter.

CHANGES IN PERSONNEL.

To the scenes which follow the condemnation, too fearful for some eyes to behold, yet necessary if one is to contemplate with fidelity those early hours of the first Good Friday I need do no more than briefly refer. The denial of St. Peter is excellent—well told with the audience are the trial at Bethany and the scene in which the

and the fury of Peter at being suspected are very naturally shown. But why has the cook ceased to cook? It was the last remnant of the old mediæval play, and was quite harmless, and as it is Scriptural it might have been retained. The Peter was new to the part, and, if comparisons must be made, was not equal to the fine character study of Thomas Rendl in 1900. The latter had, however, become too old to resume so heavy a part, and has been given the lesser one of Simon of Bethany. I have said nothing yet of the Cataphas and Annas. Everyone who witnessed the last Play will recall the majestic presence and overpowering force with which Sebastian Lang, the church sacristan, presented Cataphas. Again, the Committee decided that his length of years precluded him from repeating that fine performance, but gave him the lesser role of Annas, and put Gregor Breitsanter in the more important position. The change is not a good one. Lang, instead of being the secret instigator and evil-counselor of Cataphas, is really the dominating character of the two. He cannot help it. His personality is such that he must take the lead, although he is quite unconscious of the fact. Breitsanter has not the commanding presence required of a good Cataphas, and he is overshadowed by his companion.

then sing "Alleluia," and the Play is over.

As we leave the theatre, the sun shines upon us, and upon the great cross standing erect upon the snow-clad Kofel. As we lift up our eyes to this unique sight, we lift up also our hearts in thankfulness to Him Who hath done so great things for us, and in gratitude also for that He hath given such gifts unto men to show us so vividly the marvels of His love.

NERVOUS SYSTEMS

Always Follow a Run Down Condition of the Blood.

It is an old story now that nervous people tell of how the blood becomes poor and thin, and then the nervous symptoms followed. How many really know that the thin blood was responsible for the nervous disorders? The nerves get all their nourishment from the blood, and as thin blood is deficient in nerve-building material, the nerves become starved and pain and nervous breakdown is the result. Dr. Williams' Pink Pills are a tonic for the blood that supply it with the necessary elements to nourish and tone up the nerves and the cause being removed, nature does the rest and health is fully restored. Mrs. Harry Patterson, Dauphin, Man., tells how she was cured of nervousness and general debility through the use of Dr. Williams' Pink Pills. She says: "A few years ago I was all run down and my nervous system apparently all broken up. I was weak, tired, and nervous all the time. When I got up in the morning I seemed to be more tired than when I went to bed. I could not walk up an ordinary flight of stairs without sitting down panting for breath, and my nerves trembled like a leaf. I got so that it was almost impossible to do any housework, and so nervous that I wanted to cry about everything I did. I took several different medicines without the least benefit; then I read of Dr. Williams' Pink Pills and decided to try them. After taking two boxes I felt a little better and I got a further supply which I continued taking for about a month when I was as well as ever; could do all my housework without difficulty, and could walk for a long distance without being all tired out. In view of the wonders Dr. Williams' Pink Pills have done for me, I sincerely recommend them to all weak, nervous, run-down people."

LASTING IMPRESSION.

Then follow the closing scenes. Prologus and his companions, return in their robes of splendor, and we see the tableau of the Passage of the Red Sea by the Israelites, followed by the incidents at the grave. The one incident which is inherited from the old Play is the actual scene of the Resurrection. This might very well have been omitted, for it is quite unconvincing. The empty tomb, and the visit of the Maries, is all that seems called for. Last scene of all, which is even less justifiable, is the apotheosis of Christ. Who is seen ascending, with His enemies crushed beneath His feet, and all the Old Testament prototypes gazing up into the heavens as He slowly rises from their midst. The Prologus then in triumphant tones bids us rejoice, and return to our homes full of love for Him Who has loved you unto death, and now in Heaven loves you still." The chorus

THE CRUCIFIXION.

The crowd disappears, the Schutzgeistler returns to the stage, now clothed in black mantles, and, in the most impressive of all his addresses to the audience, he bids us contemplate the Crucifixion:

Come devout soul, with thoughts
That glow,
With mingled thanks, and ruth, and woe,
With me to Golgotha, and see
How there thy Savior bled for thee.

We hear the hammer doing its cruel work behind the curtain, and when the curtain is drawn aside, the crosses are before us with their burdens, the centre one not yet in position. It is raised before our eyes and the incidents around the Cross as known to us follow. The soldiers here, as in the early scenes of the scourging, etc., are more subdued in their manner. I cannot help thinking, and the crowd in the preceding scene was less fierce than I recall in 1900. It may be my fancy, but it seemed to be designedly so. Here is, in fact, a still further departure from the old mediæval Play. The words from the Cross are given full of meaning in each case. The "Eloi, Eloi" is placed fifth, between "I thirst," and "It is finished," not without justification. It is uttered with full strength of voice, as is also the last. The scene closes with the deposition from the Cross, which is beautifully shown in every detail, the picture of Reubens being taken as a model.

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Life's sweetest moments come unexpectedly, we have said. Of course, what pleasures there are carefully planned have ever come up to those which are the result of chance or happy accident?

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The Sorbonne.

The recent lecture of Mr. Roosevelt, as well as the lectures of American educators in the Sorbonne, in Paris, has brought the name of that famous institution prominently before the American people.

The Sorbonne is often considered identical with the University of Paris. It is the most important part of the university, but the latter institution is several centuries older and has law, theological, medical and pharmacy schools outside the Sorbonne.

The Sorbonne, however, has approximately 10,000 of the 12,000 students in the university, and to a very large extent it is the university. American students never have flocked to it as they have to German universities, but in the last few years their number has increased.

The Sorbonne was founded in 1257 by Robert de Sorbon, from whom it derived its name. He was born Oct. 9, 1201, near Reims, and became a famous priest, the chaplain and confessor of Louis IX. He established the school in the district which has long been known as the Latin Quarter.

It was a place of residence and study for a long time, rather than a school where systematic instruction or lectures could be had by students. Shortly before his death in 1274 Sorbon added a college for philosophy and the humanities.

As the growing body of the seat of theological learning throughout the Middle Ages the Sorbonne faculty took an active part in the great questions that because of the times concerned both the Church and the State.

It demanded and supported the condemnation of Joan of Arc, says the American Ecclesiastical Review, it showed great hostility to unbelievers, censured many noteworthy books and writers and opposed the Cartesian philosophy.

But among the glories of the Sorbonne is its record of having encouraged printing in France and trained many illustrious men.

Cardinal Richelieu early in the seventeenth century reconstructed the buildings of the Sorbonne, and was so liberal a patron that he became virtually a second founder. From being the theological school almost wholly, the Sorbonne passed into a seat of the broader field of learning that included science and literature. In the revolution it went down with other French institutions of learning and in 1808 it became part of the University of France.

The scheme of enlarging the Sorbonne originated early in the nineteenth century; the new buildings have been constructed under the republic, being virtually completed in 1889. A vestibule 200 feet long and 12 feet wide leads to the principal entrance of the amphitheatre, the entrance being closed by a gate of bronze and forged iron. Three thousand persons can be seated comfortably in the amphitheatre, and the acoustics are so good that the lecturer can be heard clearly in every part of the hall, which is 157.5 feet long and 137.8 feet wide.

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