



Hope's Quiet Hour

THE OBERAMMERGAU PASSION PLAY

I am sitting outside of my boarding-house at Oberammergau, watching the crowds of people who are pouring out of the "Passion Theatre," which is just across the street. It is about noon now, and they have already been for four hours watching the great Passion Play, which I saw yesterday. It is too amazing for words to describe, and yet I want to give you some account of this representation of our Lord's sufferings, death and resurrection, some description of the drama which has power to draw hundreds of thousands of people to this little Bavarian town. For nine years, Oberammergau, nesting among its mountains, is quiet and secluded. Its habitants are busy with their wood-carving, or are taking care of the cows, which find plenty of pasture on the mountain slopes. Then comes the great tenth year, when the stream of tourists pours into the village for four months at the rate of from 8,000 to 15,000 a week.

For eight hours yesterday, 4,000 people were watching the play, and at 3 o'clock this morning the ticket office was open, and crowds waited for tickets. A very large proportion of these sight-seers come from America and England. To-day, a young man from Philadelphia said to me: "I have heard that an enterprising American is talking of bringing the Passion Play actors to perform in the United States."

If that could be done, the great drama would receive its death-blow. It would not, it ought not to be tolerated by any Christian country, under any other circumstances than form its setting now. Even if the whole village—mountains and all—could be transplanted, the deep religious fervor of the actors and their friends, which alone can make the play tolerable to those who reverence JESUS as Divine, would instantly vanish.

This is the history of the great Passion Play. About 300 years ago—so the story goes—there was a terrible plague in the district which swept off many of the inhabitants. The people of Oberammergau made a solemn vow that, if God would deliver them, they would perform the Passion Play every ten years. Later on—when acting of such dramas was sternly forbidden by both Church and State—the people of Oberammergau would not submit. Over and over again they pleaded to be permitted to fulfill the vow which was their inheritance from their forefathers. And their persistence won its reward. Generation after generation has grown up with all earthly ambition centered in "der Passion." Little children are allowed to have their places in some of the tableaux—where they stand as immovable as if they were carved in wood. As they grow older, it is their great hope to be chosen for some of the principal parts. As only men and women of blameless reputation can take part, there is a constant incentive to good living. Each young girl longs to be chosen to represent the Virgin Mary, or Mary Magdalen. Each growing boy has the hope of taking the part of St. John, or even of being chosen to enact the part of "Christus." Through the nine quiet years, the one topic of un-failing interest is "der Passion"—the one past or the one that is coming. The last day of the play is a day of sadness, for those who have lived their parts as priests, apostles, soldiers, etc., are forced to lay aside their gorgeous robes and return to ordinary life again.

Perhaps they may never again take part in their beloved play. But the waiting time is a time of preparation. The men of the village—with long hair curling on their shoulders—are a witness to the fact that no sham "make-up" is permitted. Even the long, Jewish-looking beards of the performers are all real. All the robes are made in the village—and made of good materials, too. Many are of silk or velvet. As a large part of the stage is exposed to sun and rain, and the play is repeated forty times or more during the summer, many of the costumes must be renewed during the interval.

About 1,000 persons are needed for carrying out the performance—including musicians, actors, singers, 60 men to show people to their seats, and 300 school children who appear in some of the tableaux.

In several scenes there are five or six hundred people on the stage at one time, yet there is no confusion. Each one knows his place, and the harmonious grouping of so many figures is marvelous.

The play begins about eight in the morning, and goes on without a moment's break for four hours. There is an intermission for lunch, and then the Story of the Cross goes on uninterruptedly for four more hours. There is no sign of exhaustion on the part of the players, and the last chorus of praise is rendered with splendid energy and passionate joy.

The play itself is terribly realistic. It represents the sufferings and death of Christ so vividly that the spectator sits in breathless wonder, marvelling at the daring of the actors, which can only be justified by the religious fervor which is evidently felt by all of them.

The most beautiful scene, in my opinion, was the Descent from the Cross. The tender care shown by the friends of the crucified, as a long linen cloth was drawn round the apparently lifeless body, and it was lowered into the arms of the sorrowful women, could hardly be excelled. But in some of the scenes I was very thankful that the words were in German, which I could not understand. The "Seven Words" from the Cross seem too sacred to be spoken in any "play"—even though the reverential feeling of both actors and spectators is very evident. Some scenes would have been more bearable as tableaux—such scenes as the "agony in the garden of Gethsemane," for instance, and the scourging.

But it is not my business to find fault, but rather to tell you what I saw.

First appeared a choir of about forty men and women dressed in white tunics, with outer robes of velvet, varying shades of green, blue and red, blending together harmoniously like a rainbow. These filed on or off the stage at frequent intervals, singing very sweetly. Then the curtain went up, showing a tableau of Adam and Eve flying from Eden. The story of the Fall leads up to the Redemption, so it was followed by the entry into Jerusalem and the cleansing of the Temple. This was not a tableau, but the most realistic acting. The cages containing the doves were overturned and the birds flew up into the sky. The great multitude of men, women and children shouted: "Hail to Thee, O Son of David." The priests consulted with the angry traders, using them to stir up the mob against Christ.

Then came a tableau of Joseph's brethren plotting against their brother, who was visible in the distance. This was followed by a long and excited debate of the priests, rulers and elders, as-

sembled in the council of the Sanhedrin.

Then follow two tableaux. The first represents Tobias, saying farewell to his mother, while the angel is waiting to lead him away. The second shows the bride in Solomon's Song, lamenting her absent bridegroom.

These lead up to the leave-taking at Bethany, the farewell to mother and dearest friends, which is wonderful in its pathos.

The next tableau represents the disgrace of Queen Vashti and the welcome of Esther, the former being considered typical of the Jewish and the latter of the Christian Church. This leads up to the weeping over Jerusalem and the temptation of Judas by the angry traders, which last is really wonderful both as regards the acting and the text of the dialogue.

Then follow two tableaux foreshadowing the Last Supper, the gathering of the manna, and the return of the spies, carrying an enormous bunch of grapes. "Four hundred persons, including 150 children, are grouped in these two great living pictures, and so motionless are they that you might almost imagine that they were a group in colored marble." The vivid representation of the Last Supper, with the washing of the disciples' feet, which followed, was one of the scenes which I felt would have been better as a tableau—if it had to be shown at all. And, again, I was glad that the words were unintelligible to me.

Then came the tableau of Joseph, sold to the Midianites, followed by the bargain with Judas—which last was a very animated dialogue.

The tableau of Jacob kissing Amasa, while preparing to strike him to the heart, and the tableau of Adam earning his bread by the sweat of his brow, led up to the scenes in the Garden of Gethsemane and the betrayal.

Other tableaux from the Old Testament followed. Then came scenes representing the various trials before Caiaphas, Annas, Herod and Pilate, the mockery of the Roman soldiers, the scourging and the bearing of the Cross of Calvary. The broken-hearted mother, meeting the procession, is comforted and upheld by the saintly looking youth who represents St. John, who says to her: "Be strong in faith, dear mother, whatever happens, it is God's will."

When the curtain rises on the scene of the crucifixion, the two thieves are seen on their crosses, and the central figure is fastened to a larger cross, which is lying on the ground. This is raised and dropped into a socket. That scene cannot be described—it is awful in its realism. It is terrible, yet beautiful.

The representation of the resurrection and ascension of Christ are much less impressive.

Now, I have tried to give you some slight idea of this Passion Play, which has power to attract hundreds of thousands of people—people who are already familiar with every scene in it. It is an amazing experience, one that I would not have missed—and yet I should be very sorry to see it again.

There was no inspiration to me in the "Christ"—the man who looked so like the conventional pictures of our Lord. But I was filled with a sense of deepest joy at the remembrance that the Story of the Cross is not a "play," but a great reality. I looked up to Him Who really passed through the Agony in Gethsemane, Who really suffered and loved and died, Who really rose again, and is always within reach when we need Him. One might well cross the ocean to see the Passion Play of Oberammergau, but it is a far greater privilege to be able to look up at any moment into the Face of the Real, Living Christ—and one can do that anywhere.

DORA FARNCOMB.

O, speed the moment on
When Wrong shall cease, and Liberty
and Love
And Truth and Right throughout the
world be known
As in their home above.

—JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER.

Whatever hath been written shall remain,
Nor be erased nor written o'er again,
The unwritten only still belongs to thee.

Take heed and ponder well what that
shall be. —LONGFELLOW.

CANADA'S GREATEST RESOURCE

The conservation of national resources occupies a front seat not only in the minds of the leading statesmen of to-day but in the interests of agriculturists and manufacturers, of workmen and capitalists. The problem affects not only demand and supply, but figures largely in the matter of transportation.

Great concern is manifested in regard to the rapidly decreasing timber limits, while the probable supply of mineral wealth is being closely computed.

The necessity for prompt and efficient measures in regard to the preservation of game was not too early taken into consideration. What would happen if the R. N. W. M. police knew that you or that I brought home a brace of prairie chickens before October first, 1910?

What should happen when a child—the prime resource of any great country—is subjected to such conditions of neglect and abuse that he ends his days or at least his period of usefulness in a penitentiary?

Opinion is varied as to what should happen. We know what does happen. An average \$2.00 a day workman earning say \$600 per year with a prospect of twenty years before him, is the direct producer of an asset of \$12,000 in his state. Incarcerate him in penitentiary for twenty years and his commitment, maintenance, etc., eats up \$10,000. This is a direct loss of his earnings and his maintenance—\$22,000.

The habitual criminal as a rule has considerable brain capacity, enough if legitimately directed to net him from \$1,000 per year, up, for twenty-five years, the term of working capacity of a man with a little education being slightly increased. In his case the state loses a producing factor of \$25,000 and \$10,000 in prison maintenance, which is \$35,000. The higher the grade of man lapsing into the criminal, the greater is the loss to his country.

Stop shouting "an ounce of prevention is worth a mere pound of cure!" It has been estimated by competent authorities that two per cent. of the amount required to restrain the criminal if invested in his normal development along law-abiding, industrious lines—in short, prevention, will not only save the 98 per cent. but also a life of happy utility instead of crime stained disappointment behind bars.

A few dollars will take a child out of conditions of neglect and abuse and place it in a good home, where it will naturally grow up as a result of its environment to be a useful, honest, industrious citizen.

In considering such a weighty matter as the preservation of national resources, do not lose the sense of proportion that childhood bears to this problem, in the perspective of ten or fifteen years. Time passes like the people of the mighty West—"with swift and flying feet." No, she does not drag her feet, except to the neglected child who has as a matter of pure accident of environment grown into manhood as a criminal and is paying the penalty of his sentence.

Many a man has gone to penitentiary for life, has gone even to the gallows for want of a little kindness, care and judicious help when as a poor, neglected little fellow, hungering after something better, he got the door in his face.

The Children's Aid Society is conserving the greatest wealth of Canada in guarding the interests of childhood. It is forming a nucleus of producing capacity which will expand into the million mark. If one neglected boy placed in a good home enters manhood and earns \$10,000 in his life time, what should one hundred neglected boys, given the same start and equal chances, accumulate in the same length of time?

In the matter of conserving national resources, the man or the woman who wishes to make his means accomplish the greatest good to the greatest number should give the Children's Aid Society a foremost place. Interested parties are requested to get in touch with the superintendent of neglected children for their province.

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