

OUR LONDON LETTER.

(From our own Correspondent.)

This week I am sending you an account of the Passion Play at Ober-Ammergau. It is a thing which is just now the principal topic of conversation, and it may prove interesting to your readers.

The streets of the village of Ober-Ammergau were all astir early Sunday morning with moving crowds of country folk, many of whom must have left their homes in the night time, and long before six o'clock the theatre was besieged by an immense and eager throng—pockets and satchels well stuffed with humble provisions for the day—awaiting the hour which should admit them to the unnumbered seats. About five o'clock (says the *Times* correspondent) I was attracted by the firing of cannon and the strains of the village band, which had thus early begun to dispense its music and rouse the rest of the strangers and inhabitants from their unholy sleep. Sallying forth and proceeding to the parish church, I was in time to witness the ceremony of High Mass, which, as the chief introduction of the day, was a very impressive and crowd of deeply reverential, if not very intelligent-looking, peasantry, every pew and passage being crammed.

By eight o'clock the large auditorium of the theatre, estimated to contain about 6,000 persons, was crammed in every part, and precisely at that hour three cannon shots fired at short intervals roused the mountain echoes and hushed the vast assemblage, all the country folk reverently taking off their hats and straining to listen. Presently the orchestra, numbering about 30 performers, imperceptibly broke forth into a soft and sweet, solemn overture. The morning was genial and mild, and our theatre was roofed in only by the bright blue sky, flecked with fleecy cloudlets and perfumed by the healthful odours that were wafted down from the surrounding mountains. The bells of the browsing cattle might be heard tinkling in the distance, while the twittering swallows flitted about overhead and among the wings of the stage. It was a pleasant thing in itself to sit in such a playhouse so classically constructed, yet so thoroughly ventilated. Very soon the chorus, consisting of 19 members—ten maidens and nine men—came on to the proscenium from temple-like retreats on either side, forming up in line facing the audience, chanted an appropriate prologue.

The Passion Play is divided into two parts or acts, the first beginning with Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem and ending with his betrayal and imprisonment, while the second introduces the Redeemer before Annas and winds up with the Resurrection. Each scene is preceded by one or two tableaux vivants arranged from the Old Testament, as symbolising the various events in the career of the descendant of David. The sacred dramatist has supplied words where Scripture does not supply him with them. The entry into Jerusalem was preceded by two splendid tableaux of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise and the sacrifice of Isaac; and it must be owned that nothing more perfect of their kind could well be produced than all the historical groupings presented—and there were nearly 30 altogether of them—denoting as they did great training on the part of the mutes and accuracy in the *mise en scene*. Some of them, as for example the selling of Joseph by his brethren, the Bride's Lament from the Song of Solomon, the despair of Cain, Moses raising high the brazen serpent, and the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, were truly grand. Every man, woman, and child did their difficult duty. There was no looking up or aside at the spectators to note the effect, as is too frequently the case in Paris and London theatres, but all remained as rigid and stolid as statues.

The main dramatic scenes portrayed were the Sahehdim taking counsel to circumvent Christ; the parting in Bethany; the Last Supper, forming an almost perfect living copy of Leonardo da Vinci's well-known picture; then the appearance of Christ before His judges; the bearing of the Cross, after Paolo Veronese; the descent therefrom, patterned on Rubens; and the Entombment, after Raphael. It is needless to say that the most engrossing scene was the Crucifixion, which was regarded as the proper and natural denouement of the sublime and awful tragedy; and it must be confessed that better histrionic art and technical skill could hardly have been expected of the most celebrated actors. Every scriptural detail was car-

ried out to the letter (the nailing to the cross it is true, was done behind the scenes), and even with the aid of the strongest glass one could not have passively ventured to assert that nails had not been driven through hands and feet. A distinctly audible expression of almost terrified surprise ran through the vast assemblage, when the thrust of the centurion's spear produced a crimson stain over the heart of the crucified one. Mary Magdalene, who looked her part very well, and indeed acquitted herself much better all through than the Virgin, produced a good effect on the audience when, interfering between the brutal Roman soldier, who had with a hammer broken the limbs of the malefactors and the suspected object of his further inhumanity, she cried out, "Spare him! spare him!" It was a pity, as I overheard a spectator say, that this scene was not accompanied and intensified by the peals of natural thunder which threatened to interrupt the performance some hours earlier, when Christ was standing for the first time before Caiaphas. About that point the sky, changing from its beautiful morning look, suddenly became overcast, the lightning flashed once or twice over the heads of the awe-stricken audience, and the rain came pouring thickly down. Ultimately the play had to be suspended for about a quarter of an hour or so, but though comparatively few of the spectators were provided with umbrellas, they stubbornly stuck to their seats, and underwent a thorough drenching rather than relinquish the opportunity of seeing out to the end a performance which seemed to suggest them so very much. One of the most brilliant, if not, spectacular scenes in the whole play was the bearing of the cross, in which the Christ admirably performed his part, and in which the grouping of the Roman soldiers (one of them mounted and bearing a crimson eagle-topped banner, inscribed in white with the letters "S.P.Q.R.," and embodying all the majesty of the Empire), with the priests and scribes and the mothers and daughter of Jerusalem, made a very fine effect. Deeply impressive, too, was the scene where the populace, headed by the high priests, after having vainly tried before to procure ratification of the capital sentence from Pilate and Herod, once more crowd round the balcony of the Roman governor, and clamour for the blood of their victim. Beyond all praise was the mien of Pilate, whose character was probably better enacted than that of any other in the play by the humble woodcarver (Herr Rendl). It was a splendid picture when Christ, crowned with thorns and robed in royal mockery, stood confronting the gallant Roman, for in those two personages the historic eye could detect the embodiment of the two mightiest forces which have moulded the modern world. After Pilate the best acted part was unquestionably that of Judas. The scowls, the visible avarice, the shoulder jerkings, the stealthiness, and the suspicious face of this character were truly admirable, and his haggling for an increase of the bribe offered him could scarcely have been better than even by Shylock. His raving, resulting from a guilty conscience (typified previously by a tableau representing Cain moralising in solitary agony over the body of his murdered brother), were probably a little too long and wearisome, and there was a feeling of something like relief when the villain of the piece proceeded in apparent earnestness to hang himself, but up to that point he never failed deeply to interest the audience. Once or twice, too, a breezy ripple of subdued laughter at the eccentricities of this disciple might almost be discerned among the spectators, though it was instantly checked, as was also some incipient cheering, when the curtain once fell on an exceptionally fine tableau. On the whole, however, the spectators, of whom the greater part may have consisted of peasantry from the region round about, behaved themselves during the performance of the play with the utmost quietness, reverence, and decorum. St. John was fairly well portrayed, and for the rest, the 12 looked pretty much as if they had stepped from the fresco of Leonardo da Vinci, nor could anything have been better than their faces, grouping, and picturesque attitudes, as they lay slumbering in a rocky part of Mount Olivet, while their Master was enduring His bloody agony—an experience, I may here incidentally remark, which, by some technical device, was visibly presented to the spectators on the brow of the sublime sufferer. But, while referring to the disciples asleep in the garden, it may be

well here to observe, that as a rule most of the actors played their parts much better when requiring repose than motion or the exercise of the voice. When being scourged or otherwise passively enduring suffering and insult, Joseph Mair portrayed his sacred original with what must have seemed to the greater part of the spectators a wonderful degree of verisimilitude, and, indeed, no one could have seen him hanging on the cross without being fairly amazed at the accuracy with which the traditional likeness in all things had been copied to the very life; but, nevertheless, there was a decided want of some element in his speech and demeanour which a bolder and more intellectual actor would essay to supply. A word as to the female parts. They were enacted with great modesty and taste, but not much invention, and an inferior and subordinate character in all respects, Magdalene, was more successfully portrayed than the Virgin Mary. Probably, however, the rigorous abstention of all the players from anything like facial appliances was the reason why one or two of them, who ought now and again to have been the living picture of statuesque grief, failed to destroy their usual appearance of ruddy rustic happiness, dashed with just the very slightest streak of perplexity or pallor. But where pretensions are humble they ought not to be severely criticised, and it affords me great pleasure to say that, on the whole, the sacred dramatic performance which for about seven good hours engrossed the unlagging attention of about as many thousands of men from far and near was a perfectly marvellous phenomenon of its kind.

The Play was repeated on Monday, the performance lasting, as before, from eight in the morning until five in the afternoon. There were many vacant places in the reserved seats, but the rest of the house was crowded, although the weather proved wet and cold.

SUBSCRIPTIONS RECEIVED.

G. G. Carman, Musquash, N. B.; Charles Sulis, Fredericton, do.; D. W. Pilkington, do.; Hon Judge Fisher, do.; F. A. H. Stratton, do.; A. A. Sterling, do.; W. Carman, do.; J. A. McCallum, do.; Mrs. Jno. Jarvis, do.; Mrs. McElwain, Halifax, N. S.; Dr. Crane, do.; Mrs. C. J. Clarke, Sydney, C. B.; E. Murphy, do.; H. Davenport, do.; Mrs. Chailoner, do.; Abram Stone, Woodstock, N. B.; Mrs. Jas. I. Reid, do.; Jno. Jamieson, Victoria Corners, do.; Wm. E. Thistle, do.; Alfred C. Dibblee, Grafton, do.; Wm. Boale, do.; Jno. Appleby, Bentou, do.; Mrs. Thos. Day, do.; Rev. E. C. Parkin, Cookshire, Que.; S. C. E. McLaughlin, P. L. Asylum, do.; Fairville, N. B.; Mrs. Mills, do.; Rev. D. B. Parnter, Carleton, do.; Robt. H. Currie, Truro, N. S.; J. DeW. Spurr, Fairville, N. B.; Hurd Peters, St. John, do.; Mrs. B. Connor, Carleton, do.; Mrs. E. Belyea, Fairville, do.; Miss M. A. Gilpin, Annapolis, do.; Rev. O. J. Booth, Montreal, Que.; Mrs. C. E. Longley, Bridgetown, N. S.; Mrs. W. Richardson, Truro, do.; E. H. Solomon, Lunenburg, do.; Rev. F. S. Sill, St. John, N. B.; J. B. S. Raymond, Hayes' P. O., Norton, Kings Co., N. B.; Miss Hodges, Halifax, N. S.; Geo. Antworth, Greenfield, Carleton, N. B.; Mrs. John Green, do.; John Carpenter, Bloomfield, do.; H. Potty, St. John, do.; Mrs. Beard, do.; Wm. Prince, do.; A. Burnham, do.; Rev. J. H. Talbot, Springfield, do.; Miss Heller, do.; Samuel Gilbert, Sunbury Co., N. B.; J. H. Nickerson, Moncton, do.; Nyrion Silver, Chicago, U. S. A.; W. M. Jarvis, St. John, N. B.; Rev. Canon Scovell, England; J. A. Beckwith, Oromocto, N. B.; J. Clarkson, do.; Miss Matilda Wilson, do.; G. Clowes, do.; Jas. S. White, do.; R. H. DeVeber, Westfield, do.; Mrs. E. J. Ashworth, do.; Jas. A. Belyea, do.; Wm. Burgess, Mouth Nerepis, do.; Samuel Campbell, do.; Joseph Macbeth, do.; Thomas D. Macbeth, Green-wich Hill, do. Francis Chene, do.; Capt. J. W. Carter, Carter's Point, do.; William B. Waters, Mouth Nerepis, do.; Robert Britain, do.; Johnson Lingley, do.; Henry Nace, Nerepis Station, do.; David McKenzie, do.; Frederick Nace, do.; John Cunningham, do.; J. M. Nace, Mouth Nerepis, do.; Isaac Waters, do.; Mrs. E. Brundage, do.; Thomas Valentine, do.; Mrs. W. H. Waters, do.; Charles Hayter, Green Day, do.; David Ham, do.; F. Woods, M. P. P. Welsford, do.; Malcolm McKenzie, do.; Mrs. Heber Arnold, do. (2); Robert Bayard, do.; Josiah Perkins, do.; Thomas A. Graham, PETERSVILLE, do.; Thomas Hasteley, Jerusalem, do.; Richard Polley, do.; James Howe, do.; Robert Burgess, do.; Mrs. Williams, Round Hill, do.; J. A. Whelpley, do.; J. V. Hairland, Lily Lake, do.; W. F. Cronk, Greenwich Hill, do.; A. M. Maher, do.; James Day, do.; David C. Cronk, Carter's Point, do.; Mrs. Amos Crawford, Lily Lake, do.; James McLeod, Round Hill, do.; Mrs. Julia Frost, Nerton Station, do.; John Flewelling, Oak Point, do.; Edgar Brundage, Upper Greenwich, do.; Henry Walton, do.; John N. Adams, do.; Mrs. M. Berry, do.

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