

THE PASSION PLAY.

fashionable fad of the hour; and it is to the credit of their soberness of mind and soundness of judgment that they have not been injuriously affected by the miasmatic heretical doctrines that are impregnating the atmosphere of some other ecclesiastical communions. I think I may venture to aver that there is not a Church of the Presbyterian family sounder in the faith or more zealously active in all departments of Christian work than our own little Irish Church.

If untouched hitherto by commotions that have agitated other churches, Mr. Clarke does not ignore the possibility of questions of a grave nature forcing themselves on the attention of the Irish Church. In view of this the ex-Moderator says:—

We see the Presbyterian Churches of other lands and the Anglican agitated by violent theological controversies in which some of the fundamental doctrines of our holy religion are denied or even scouted—aye, and in which the Bible itself, which contains these doctrines and is the only infallible rule of our faith and practice, is roughly handled by sacrilegious hands, and its divine inspiration, as well as its claims to be accepted as the Word of God, called in question. While we rejoice in the tranquility we enjoy, it behoveth us to remember that he who thinketh he standeth is bound to take heed lest he fall. The surging waves of heated theological controversies are sure to reach us sooner or later, and when they recede they will not leave us as they found us. Like men who have discernment of the signs of the times, and know what Israel ought to do, we should be busy in setting our house in order, so that when the day of trial comes it may find us steadfast, immovable and abounding in the work of the Lord.

The progress made by the Irish Presbyterians comes in for a share of attention. Mr. Clarke justly claims for his Church that though endowed with but comparatively little wealth, it is in the van of the Presbyterian Churches in the United Kingdom in the matter of contributions for the support of ordinances and the maintenance of Christian work at home and abroad. Several well-aimed and telling blows are dealt at sensational methods of endeavouring to promote congregational prosperity and carry on benevolent work by "sensuous music savouring more of the footlights and the concert-room than of the sanctuary of the Holy One," and such like. The most pacific Irishmen are not altogether devoid of belligerent propensities. The advocates of peace at any price are seldom found among the people of that nationality. They seem to be endowed with the power to make a dexterous use of the shillelah, that is metaphorically speaking. Mr. Clarke, while expressing sympathy with the desires expressed for closer union on the part of all Irish Protestants, speaks out manfully on the folly and injustice of the assumption that all concession and sacrifice must come from those who do not admit the binding validity of Episcopalian claims to pre-eminence. The exclusiveness and narrowness now and then coming to the surface is characterized with a freedom of remark that is refreshing. Mr. Clarke has not to go far a-field to find well-defined illustrations of the unworthy spirit on which he felt it to be his duty to animadvert. A recent circular addressed to his clergy by the Archbishop of Armagh afforded a suitable text.

Other topics touched upon in the address were national education and the efforts of the Roman Catholic dignitaries to secure control of the Irish Educational System. The retiring Moderator claimed that the Presbyterians ought, in present circumstances, endeavour to obtain a fuller representation in the Imperial Parliament, holding that "without a sufficient number of true blue Presbyterian representatives, we will not be listened to by our rulers, or if listened to at all, we will be bowed out with the politely bland and courteous official salutation." He concluded his address with a reference to the numerous removals by death during the year of several of the most distinguished ministers in the Irish Church, and a few personal remarks which were very well received.

The new Moderator is the Rev. William Park, pastor of Rosemary Street Church, Belfast. He is one of the younger ministers in the Church, having been ordained in 1866. His ministerial career has been steadily onward and upward. He holds the office filled with so much efficiency by the late Rev. William Fleming Stevenson, the Assembly's Conventor of Foreign Missions, and ministers to one of the most influential congregations in Belfast. His inaugural address was by no means a short one, ranging as it did over a variety of topics of present and timely interest. Like his predecessor in the chair, he is endowed with the gift of eloquence. After a wide survey of the field he closed with a few practical hints as to the method in which the business of the Assembly should be conducted. In the Irish Assembly as well as in those this side of the Atlantic there is evidently a growing impatience of long-winded and irrelevant debate. Apart from the regular and necessary business, it is evident that the chief interest of the Irish Assembly this year will be in connection with the jubilee celebration.

THIS is the year in which the Passion Play is performed at Ober-Ammergau. If advertising is necessary to the success of spectacular and histrionic attractions the Passion Play has this time been well advertised. Long before the time for the performance had arrived tourists of an observant turn had visited the remote village, interviewed the players and villagers and gave their more or less glowing accounts all the publicity they could obtain. Men of eminence in the literary world as well as prominent churchmen found their way to the Bavarian village and became enthusiastic over what they heard and witnessed. When men like Archdeacon Farrer and William T. Stead write in glowing terms of praise of the stage performances of the unsophisticated amateurs of a remote mountain village it is no wonder that a visit to Ober-Ammergau is one of the fashionable pilgrimages of the present season. Enthusiastic admiration of the play seems to be deemed the correct thing among the cultured.

Still all who go with unprejudiced minds, and not influenced by the inconsistent vagaries of mere fashion are by no means insensible to the incongruities that force themselves on the attention of calm and impartial onlookers. The simple men and women who form the dramatic corps at Ober-Ammergau also serve in humbler capacities. The influx of strangers renders it necessary that provision be made for food and shelter, and those who occupy exalted positions on the stage find it convenient and it is to be hoped profitable to act as waiters and waitresses in the hostleries improvised for the entertainment of the guests attracted to the village by the Passion Play. These dual functions somehow do not blend harmoniously, and it may be held as excusable that some merriment is indulged in at the expense of those who take part in a drama of world-wide significance, while in the intervals they are to be found dispensing the viands peculiar to the region in which the performance takes place.

The Passion Play is a survival of conditions totally different from those of the present day. It is a remnant of mediæval times, and as such no doubt has a certain interest for the people of to-day. It is difficult to conceive of it other than as a curiosity, notwithstanding the ecstasy of admiration it has evoked from men whose heads are supposed to be level. The artistic treatment of sacred themes is a subject on which no doubt much can be said. The most sacred of all subjects connected with the adorable mystery of redemption can scarcely be regarded by any whose reverence has not been hopelessly blunted as a fit subject for histrionic representation. True, the accessories may be all that good taste and reverent feeling can suggest, the players may or may not have a proper conception of the awful sacredness of the divine mystery they are engaged in representing, still the momentous work on earth of Jesus Christ for man's redemption is not a fit subject for theatrical performance. The thought of such a thing conveys a shock to a well-balanced religious nature.

Before the invention of printing, when education was something of which the people of Europe were profoundly ignorant, there might be a colourable excuse that the mimes and miracle-plays of those times were means of popular instruction. Even that, however, is open to question when the character of several such compositions as have survived are examined. Not to speak of the buffoneries and rude horseplay in juxtaposition with matters of deep solemnity, the frivolous and erroneous representations of scriptural events were of a kind remote from purposes of moral and spiritual instruction. It required loftier and more direct means to bring the popular mind into sympathy with divine truth. It can hardly be claimed that the mediæval stage, over which the Church had control, was one of the forces that helped to produce the Reformation.

What the moral and spiritual value of the decennial performance of the Passion Play at Ober-Ammergau is it may be difficult to determine. In minds familiar with the great facts represented and having a reverential apprehension of their significance there may be a proper conception of the higher meaning and purpose of the events portrayed; at the same time it will be difficult to exclude the fact that the whole thing as thus presented is neither more nor less than a spectacular illusion. Many of the sightseers no doubt witness the Passion Play with much the same feeling as they might listen to an opera of Gounod or Wagner, or go to see one of the stage productions of a modern popular playwright. Theatrical performances with sacred events for their subjects are not calculated to deepen in the popular mind that reverence for spiritual things in which many at the present time are sadly deficient.

Books and Magazines.

DOROTHY'S VOCATION. By Evelyn Everett Green. (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier.)—This neat little volume contains a good story, well, directly and clearly told, by the authoress of "Oliver Langton's Word." It is a tale of social life in which all but one of the members of the family, the heroine of the story, had the conventional idea about poor relations and country cousins. The hero, much to the chagrin of the others, turns out to be an accomplished, philanthropic and well-to-do young man, who weds the one girl of the family, who from the first discerned his worth though she knew nothing then of his wealth.

THE ENGLISH ILLUSTRATED MAGAZINE. (New York: Macmillan & Co.)—The July number of this finely-illustrated monthly is more than usually interesting. For frontispiece a full-page portrait of H. R. H. Princess Mary Adelaide, Duchess of Teck, who, along with Lady Wolverton, writes on "The Needlework Guild." Eton College comes in for literary and artistic treatment. Its history, athletics and educational functions are described by competent writers. Lewis Morris contributes St. Cecilia, a poem of some length and much merit. Lord Dunraven's residence, "Adare Manor," is described and illustrated. "Overland from India," by Sir Donald Wallace, is a good piece of graphic writing, and the "Art of Silhouetting" is entertaining. William Morris' story progresses in interest and attractiveness.

WALDO. By N. D. Bagwell. (Toronto: William Briggs.)—There are various ways of combating infidelity. The author of this work has in his own way possibly done more to show the cold, harsh, repellant nature of unbelief than if he had written a learned and argumentative treatise. The work is in the shape of a tale that has in it considerable elements of power. In a family where several of its members were hard and skeptical, one was a preacher of the Gospel. The children of one of the brothers were at his death confided to the care of other two, the boy was entrusted to the preacher and the girl to the one who was a skeptic. Under the loving care of the preacher the boy grew up and early came under strong religious impressions, devoting himself subsequently to the service of Christ in the Gospel. The unsatisfactory nature of unbelief is brought out in striking contrast when the soul is confronted with the trying and stern realities of life and death. The scene of the story is laid in New Orleans. The delineation of character is strong and distinct.

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM ILLUSTRATED. By Rev. T. L. Wilkinson. (Toronto: William Briggs.)—The ingenious author of a century ago was rather fond of crowding his title-page with a number of details of what the reader might expect from the perusal of his work. Though the old custom is far from being artistic it nevertheless had its uses. Mr. Wilkinson, though he has studied brevity in the treatise itself, has expanded its title-page. As however it is explanatory, it might be well to reproduce it here, as it will enable the reader to form an idea of the purpose and value of the work. "Christian Baptism Illustrated and greatly simplified by means of a number of ingenious charts and diagrams. The researches of years are thus placed within the easy grasp of all with great clearness and precision. A remarkably unique arrangement." A perusal of the work, which as might be expected, is polemic in its character, will lead the reader to conclude that what is here claimed for the author has been successfully accomplished. It is a valuable contribution to the literature of the Baptist controversy.

THE PROVINCIAL LETTERS. Moral Teachings of the Jesuit Fathers opposed to the Church of Rome and Latin Vulgate. By Blaise Pascal. (Toronto: William Briggs.)—Wide as has been the reputation of this classic work this is the first Canadian edition that has appeared. It is carefully and clearly printed and is an attractive volume. For Canadian readers its appearance is timely. Much as has of late been written on the doctrines and policy of the Society of Jesus, Pascal's Letters are not yet left in the shade. It is still the best and most complete work on a subject that has lost none of its interest. The "Provincial Letters" has become more than a merely French classic. It is one of the works of genius that holds its place in universal literature, as well as in the narrower sphere of polemics. The profound and subtle dialectic of its author is unique. The work is introduced in a brief preface of which the following is the closing sentence: The present race of Jesuits in this Dominion are the legalized and professed representatives of the proscribed society, in property, teaching and practice; this antidotal and admirable volume is respectfully dedicated to the cultivated intellect and ever-brightening intelligence of our national community. A well-written Life of the Author enhances the popular value of the work.

THE GOSPEL OF ST. MATTHEW. By John Monro Gibson, M.A., D.D., London. (Toronto: Willard Tract Depository.)—Whatever Dr. J. Monro Gibson undertakes to do he does it well. "The Expositor's Bible" is a splendid series. Men distinguished for their scholarship and prominence in various branches of the Christian Church have been called on to contribute to this great and important work. It is under the editorial supervision of W. Robertson Nicholl, M.A., LL.D. If some of the contributors may not be regarded as strictly orthodox, no suspicion can in this respect attach to Dr. Gibson. His work is enriched by his fine appreciation of evangelical truth. The clear, massive and strong style characteristic of all his writings is well marked in this volume. It is not a dry, formal commentary on the first Gospel, but a methodical exposition of the life and work of Jesus Christ, as will be seen from the following enumeration of the contents: The Coming of Christ, His Reception, His Herald, His Baptism, His Temptation, Beginning of His Galilean Ministry, The Gospel of the Kingdom, The Signs of the Kingdom, The King's Ambassadors, The Shadow of the Cross, The Parables of the Kingdom, The Crisis in Galilee, The New Departure, Last Words at Capernaum, Last Days in Perea, To Jerusalem, Conflict in the Temple, The Prophecy on the Mount, The Great Atonement Day, The Third Day, The Gospel for all the Nations through "All the Days." His object has evidently been to bring out into clear light the truth contained in the Word, and in this he has been remarkably successful. It is a work that is scholarly without pedantry, and is replete with what in old days was termed the "Marrow of the Gospel." It will be regarded as valuable and useful, and be highly prized by all into whose hands it may come.