

priate season of Christmas, Good Friday or Easter, was easily understood and vividly remembered.”*

But these sacred representations soon became subject to abuse. Droll characters, comic scenes, and ridiculous speeches, were introduced in order to excite mirth; and a flippant and irreverent treatment of the most sublime themes became a prevailing vice. Many of the clerical performers degraded themselves to the level of buffoons, and the Miracle plays, originally intended to communicate religious instruction, frequently degenerated into broad and indecent farce. The lower clergy adopted this vehicle for the abuse of their superiors: and the rude populace found in them both subjects for burlesque and caricature. Thus the most sacred associations of religion became degraded into objects of vulgar mirth. The language even of the female characters—who were generally represented by boys, however—was frequently exceedingly coarse, and gives us a low opinion of the manners of the age. The devils, especially, or “tormentors,” as they were called, were the clowns of the play, and caused infinite merriment by their rude jokes and buffoonery.

The stage was divided into three parts, to represent heaven, earth, and hell; and very intricate and ingenious machinery was often employed to produce proper theatrical effect. These stages were frequently on wheels, so that they might be drawn about. The gross ideas of the age concerning the material torments of the damned were faithfully delineated. The monks doubtless thought a very salutary lesson was inculcated when a man who refused to pay his tithes, or a woman who adulterated her ale, or sold too scanty measure, was dragged off forcibly by demons to Hell Mouth, from which belched fire and smoke. The devils wore flame-coloured and grotesque clothing, and carried clubs of buckram stuffed with sawdust, with which they vigorously belaboured each other and

* A Passion-Play is still represented every ten years at Oberammergau, in Bavaria, in fulfilment of a vow made on the cessation of a pestilence in A.D., 1633. As many as 500 peasant performers take part, and the spectacle is witnessed by thousands of visitors from all parts of Bavaria, Tyrol and more distant places. The rehearsal lasts several days, and, like the Greek drama, is performed in the open air. It partakes of a highly religious character, and the representatives of sacred persons are selected for their piety of life, and are set apart by prayer. Similar plays, but of inferior merit, are also performed in the villages around Innspruck.