

THE PASSION PLAY.

SCENES AT THE OBER-AMMERGAU SPECTACLE—THIS YEAR'S PERFORMANCE AND PERFORMERS.—It is impossible to give an adequate idea of the contrast between the grandeur of the surrounding mountains and the quaint simplicity of the theatre in which the "Passion Play" is performed. As I sit writing, just after the termination of the play, the mountains are almost hidden by dark masses of cloud, and the theatre is deserted, and a thunderstorm is rolling along the valley with splendid effect. These constant flashes of lightening come strangely across the glow of sunset from the western horizon, and the tremendous voice which is heard booming overhead form a fit sequel to the tragedy which has but now been enacted. The simple wooden theatre at Ober-Ammergau has served for as wonderful and as stirring a performance as it is possible to imagine. To many who have watched it with breathless interest, the performance may have seemed a mistake in point of the length to which its grim reality is carried. But all must agree that the actors go through their parts with an earnest devotion worthy of their theme. The central figure, the *Christus* of the Ammergau Play, is singularly gifted by nature for the part which has been allotted him. He is a tall, handsome man, with long hair and crisp curly beard. His movements are very slow and graceful, and his voice is strong without being at all harsh. After watching him for a little while, the audience begins to realize the majesty of the part which he plays—a part which no other actor can take in modern times. The story, so familiar to us all, so grand and touching, however it may be told, is well brought out by the Ammergau performer. They have seized the Oriental aspect of the life around Christ with great skill, but have rigidly adhered to their traditional outlines of the play. No effects founded on recent discoveries, no scientific grouping according to the rules of the stage,

will do for them. Such as their acting is, it is to be quite their own. They enter into the spirit of the characters they represent, and rather live the characters—as far, as they can realize them—for the moment, then act them. Peter and Caiaphas, John and Judas, are as intensely themselves as the noble impersonation round which they appear. How strong the impression of it all is. Why, men are talking close about me of the crucifixion, as if it had been real. The deep, affectionate interest which centres in the *Christus*, and grows stronger as his death approaches, has been roused to almost fever point by that awfully vivid scene, when the living actor is fixed on the cross in presence of the whole assembly, and is raised aloft where all can see him. He must be some fifteen or twenty minutes thus raised, and must be very resolute and well prepared to go through his part. Of course he is not nailed, but he looks as though he were, and the blood which flows from his side, a little later on, is terribly well contrived. Well contrived? We have been seeing an actual event, not a mere play. We have to look up at the great mountains and the darkening sky, to shake off the spell of this performance in the wooden theatre by peasant amateurs. The theatre is open, as in ancient Greece; and there is, as it were, the classical proscenium which occupies but a small part of the frontage, and leaves side scenes for the entry and retreat of the chorus. The peasant amateurs sing very sweetly. They have frequent meetings in the long winter evenings, and practice together for the great work of their lives. Yet they are only actors once in ten years; for their vow is to give the Passion Play at that interval of time. They have other occupations as a means of livelihood. Some are wood-carvers, some herdsmen, and some farm the neighboring land. —*Cor. London News.*

Write injuries in dust, but courtesies in marble.