

Peace on Earth.

THE LESSON OF THE PASSION PLAY.

By GEORGE GOODWIN in London Magazine.

"A LITTLE leaven leaveneth the whole lump." So ran my thoughts as I made my way from the great theatre of Ober-Ammergau to the house of Anton Lang, who, this year for the third time, played the role of Christ.

The theatre had disgorged its six thousand spectators, and the long, straight street of the village was thronged with a motley crowd drawn from all parts of the world. There were English, there were Americans, there were Germans, French, Italians, and, sitting among the sombre garments of the western world, I saw the gorgeous robes of Indian women; amongst the white faces those of the little yellow people of Nippon.

And so, as I made my way to the house of Anton Lang, I thought of the little leaven that leaveneth the whole lump. For here were peoples of all nations and creeds, and they had been subjected to the leaven of love divine as represented by this tremendous pageant. How would it work upon them when they were scattered to the four corners of the world?

I took my question to Anton Lang. As I grasped the hand he held out to me all thought that he was of the people with whom we had been so recently in deadly conflict passed from my mind. I saw before me a man with the face and head of the traditional Christ as the great masters have loved to portray Him. Here were the flowing hair and beard, the straight, sensitive nose, the eyes full of trouble and softness.

I told him of the thought that had flashed through my mind as I passed along the crowded village street.

He smiled, and extending a brown and slender hand still smeared with

people of the world; to heal the wounds of the war, the spiritual wounds of hate that make Europe an armed camp. If we could do something towards that."

I thought of the machinery of the League of Nations, of the International High Court of Justice, of all the man-made machinery for the averting of the scourge of war. And then I thought of the tremendous spectacle that had held six thousand people of all creeds, of all nationalities, for eight hours. And weighing the one against the other, it seemed not impossible that this Passion Play might well succeed where political measures have ever failed.

When I left, Lang gave me a Christmas message for the readers of the London Magazine. Here it is: "At this holy season the community of Ober-Ammergau send hearty greeting to all people, with the hope that their Passion Play may prove to be, by reason of its deep and eternal spiritual significance, instrumental in healing the wounds of the Great War and in bridging over the gulf made by hate in the hearts of men. If we contribute in any measure to this end, then are we indeed richly compensated for our labors."

The Passion Play of Ober-Ammergau is two things: It is an unique and very wonderful spiritual experience, and it is a stupendous spectacle. It has been said often enough that this play is the work of peasants. As a matter of fact, this is not so. These people are artists, craftsmen, wood carvers, workers in ivory, sculptors, painters, potters.

But they are more than that. They are actors to a man. This play has worked itself into their blood; it is the great central fact about which revolves the life of the community. From earliest childhood the Ober-Ammergauer is taught to aspire to some part, however humble, in the play. The little children, even, are taught to lip the beautiful words of the text made by the village priest, Joseph Alois Dalsenberger. Tiny tots are carried on to the great stage in the scenes where it seems to the spectator that he looks down upon the teeming life of Jerusalem. Therefore, it is not surprising that throughout the performance one is

members of the Lang family. It has been alleged that the play has become a source of wealth to the people of Ober-Ammergau. I asked Anton Lang as to this. He assured me that far from making money, the community is not yet out of debt for this year's production. Reports have appeared in the press that the Pope has looked with disfavor upon the Passion Play. When I mentioned this to Anton Lang he brought to me, with pardonable pride, a portrait of the Pope which had been carried by the hand of a nuncio who came to witness the play, and brought with him the Papal blessing.

Again, it has been said that Ober-Ammergau has become vulgarized. The charm of the village itself, it is true, has suffered. One sees on all sides advertisement of American papers, shops for the sale of souvenirs and bureaus for the changing of foreign money. And it all seems very much out of place.

Against this, there is the invincible charm of the mountain village, with its winding river, and quaint streets of pictorially decorated houses, its Benedictine monks, and its long-haired natives. It has resisted, as has the Passion Play itself, all outside influences making for decay. My last impression of Ober-Ammergau is of the village in the soft light of evening, thronged with the peoples of many nations. High above the village a peak stands out rugged against the evening sky, its summit surmounted by a great cross of stone which is silhouetted against the falling light.

And passing down the winding road which leads from Ober-Ammergau to the plains of Bavaria, I turned the matter over in my mind—the matter of the little leaven which leaveneth the whole lump.

How many thousands, I wondered, would be leaving that village, even as I, taking with them to homes scattered up and down the world a new conception of the meaning of the Great Ideal: Peace on Earth, Goodwill among men?

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"First Footing"
at New Year.

The New Year's observances in Scotland were in ancient times probably very similar to those of England; we have, however, no trace of the Wassail-bowl, save, perhaps, in the "Net-pit" with which the maidens of Edinburgh formerly paraded the streets on New Year's Eve or morning. The system of "first-footing"—the first to enter the house of a friend or acquaintance on the morning of the New Year, and present the inmates with a glass out of a bottle of whisky or other spirits, which is still practiced, though much on the decline—is probably another phase only of the Wassail Bowl. The party visited, as well as the visitors, produced their bottle, cheese and bread and bun, and mutual pledges of health and happiness for the New Year went round. The practice of "first-footing" was chiefly confined to youths, though they used frequently to be accompanied in their rounds by their sweethearts.

Guido Mayr, as Judas, gives an intellectual performance of great originality; he is always Judas; his eyes are consistently the eyes of the betrayer. It is a tour de force. During the off-years, when secular plays are produced in the village, Guido Mayr takes the part of the comedian.

Melchior Brittanter, as John, the Beloved Disciple, has the great advantage of personal beauty, to which he adds an emotional quality which fits him admirably for the scenes before and after the Crucifixion. Very beautiful is he as the comforter of Mary. Here, one surmises, is the Christ for the 1840 production.

The Lang family have been associated with the Passion Play for centuries. They are held in the highest esteem in the village, being charitable and pious folk. In this year's production there are no less than ten

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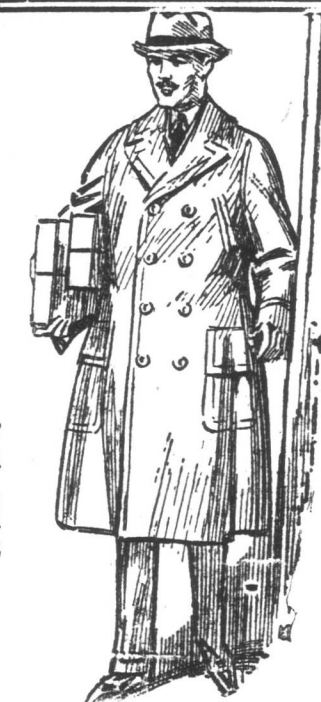
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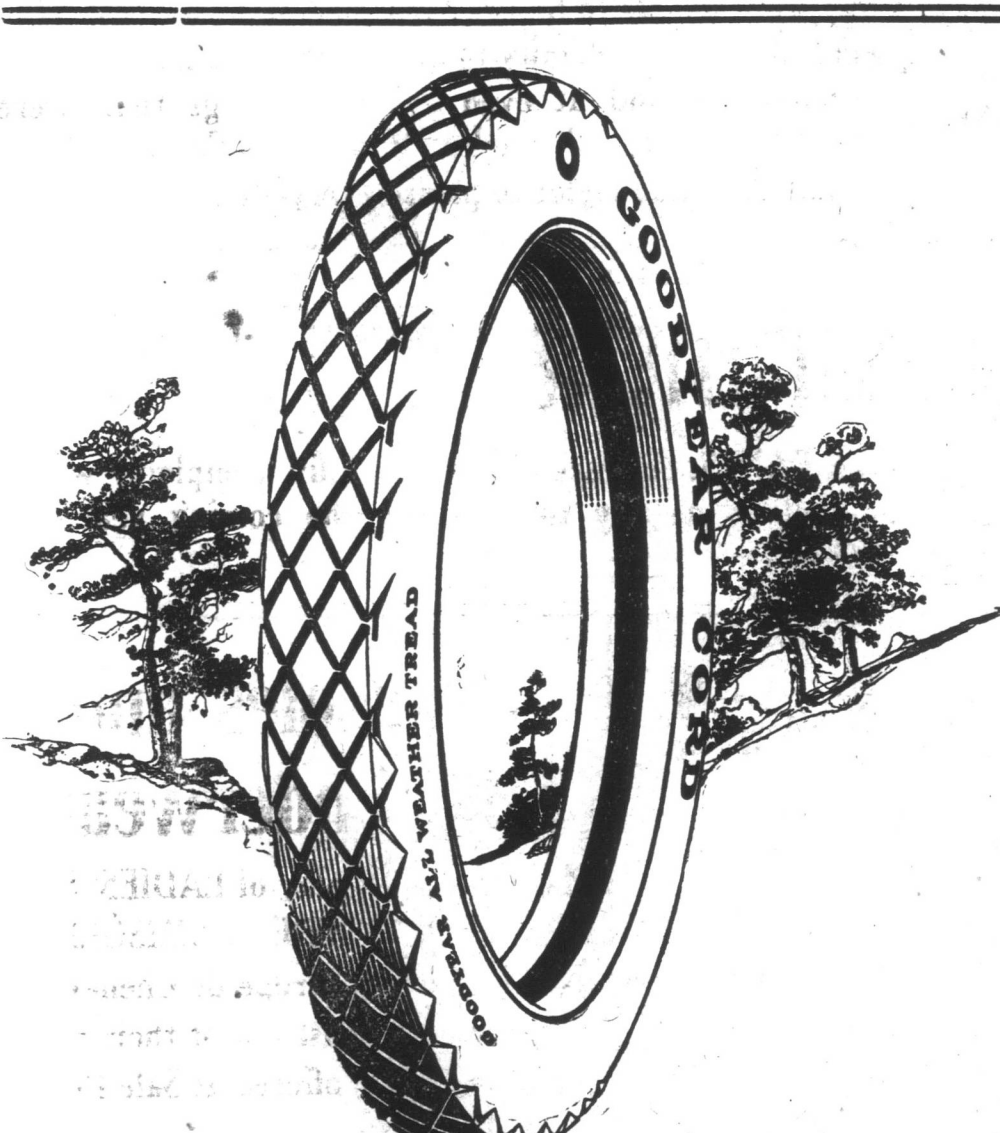
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