

Magazine Section of The Toronto Sunday World

CALIFORNIA'S OBERAMMERGAU



The Picturesque Mission Play, the Unique Pageant Drama at Los Angeles which Reproduces the Far West's Most Heroic and Romantic Times

THE old Mission days of California—that picturesque period like none other in history—have been reconstructed, and are being perpetuated by a remarkable pageant-drama called the "Mission Play" in a little theatre at San Gabriel, not far from Los Angeles, the very heart of the old Mission country. In its spirit and in much of its technique the "Mission Play" is akin to the famous production at Oberammergau.

It is, indeed, intended that it shall be California's Oberammergau, and it is the hope of the patriotic producers that they will be able to make it a permanent institution. The play enters its second season this year, and the increasing number of "pilgrims" has made the hope seem justified.

The play was written by Mr. John McGroarty, a native Californian. Senator R. F. Del Valle, of California, realizing the importance to his State of preserving for the present and coming generations a picture of its most heroic and romantic time, enabled it to be produced.

The "Mission Play" is given in a quaint building, which in itself lends atmosphere to the drama.

In the first act Fra Junipero, the founder of the Mission, a Franciscan whose character was startlingly like that of St. Francis of Assisi, is seen at the old San Diego Mission awaiting the arrival of Don Gaspar de Portola from the north, when he went to find Monterey in

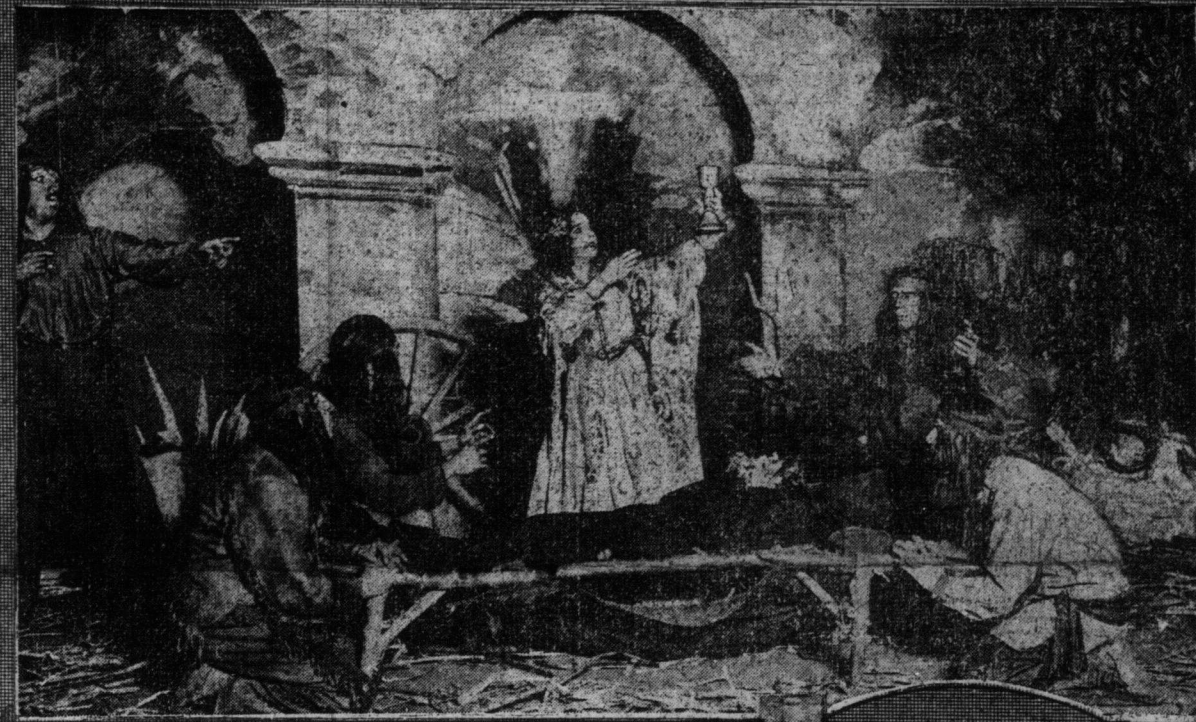
order to carry back arms and provisions. Portola did not find Monterey, but he did discover what is now the site of San Francisco. Discouraged, he tries to persuade Fra Junipero to return to Mexico. The Padre, devoted to his work of Christianizing the Indians, refuses. He makes an eloquent prayer to Heaven to change Portola's determination. At its conclusion the long-expected relief ship appears on the horizon, and Fra Junipero baptizes his first Indian convert.

In the second act Carmel Mission, near Monterey, is shown in 1784, the chain of missions has been established, and all are prospering. The contrast between the spiritual power of the padres and the military control of Spanish California is shown by what is claimed to be an historical incident of the brutality of Commandante Rivera, which is frustrated by the wit and courage of Fra Junipero. In this act faithful characteristic scenes of the lighter side of life in California are depicted by dances, singing and Indian sun dances.

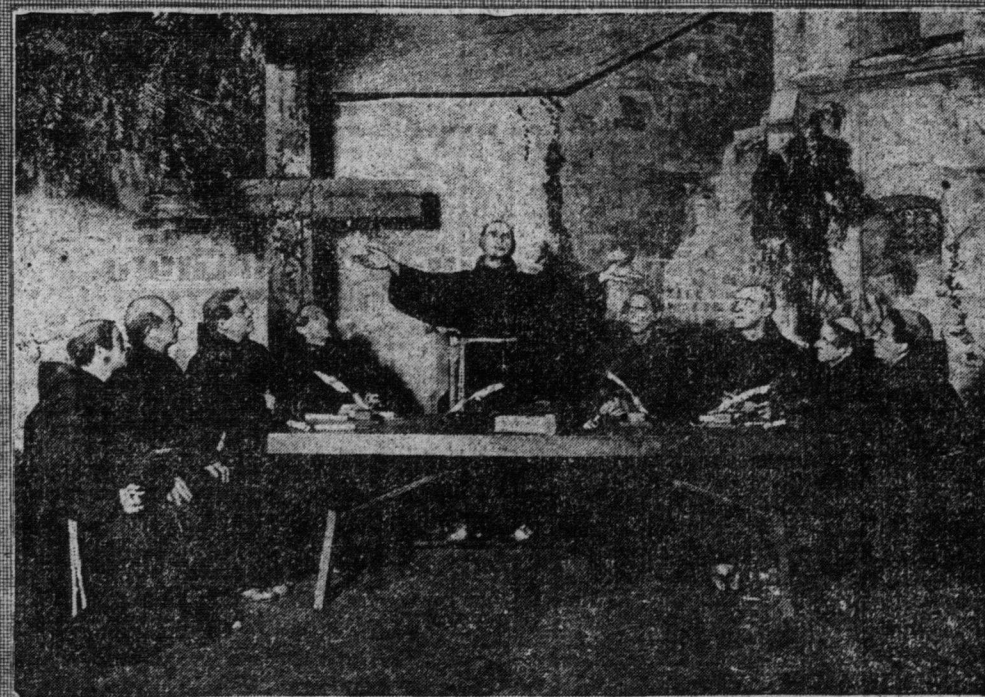
In the third act is shown the situation in 1847, when the Mission had, through greed and evil practices of corrupt officials and Americans regardless of all but gain, passed into decay.

Such in brief outline is the story of the "Mission Play." What words cannot convey is the true atmos-

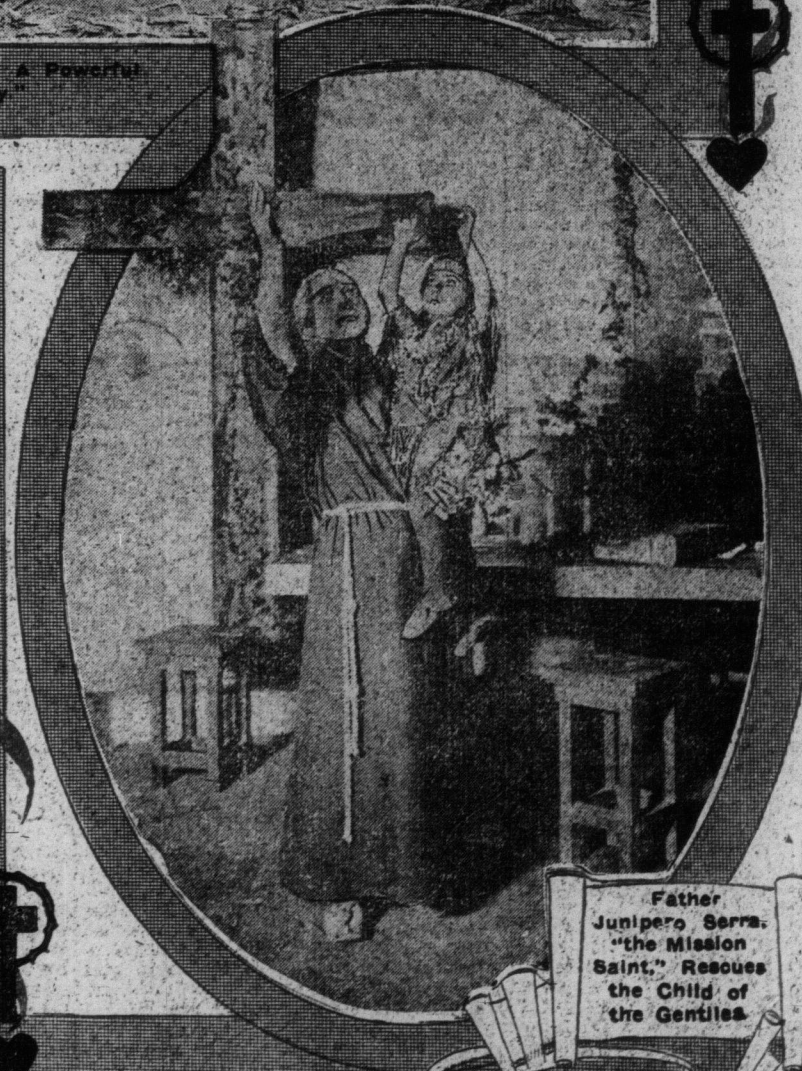
phere, the perfect historic detail, the pathos, nobility and sense of reality which permeate the reconstruction and which lead the Californians to believe that in the "Mission Play" they have a creation which will live on for scores of years to show the world the heroic drama of the birth of California.



The Finding of the Jewelled Chalice. A Powerful Incident in the "Mission Play."



The Convocation of the Fathers-Superior of the Nine Missions Before the Heroic Fra Junipero Serra, Founder of the California Missions—A Scene in the "Mission Play."



Father Junipero Serra, "the Mission Saint," Rescues the Child of the Gentiles.



Sighting the Return Off San Diego of Don Gaspar de Portola's Fruitless Expedition to Find Monterey Fort. The Remarkable Attention to Historic Detail in the Costumes of the Actors and the Stage Settings is One of the Features of the "Mission Play."