



The Presentation of the Revised Bible to King James, by the Translators. To the King's left is Prince Henry. The Archbishop makes the presentation.



The Coronation of Edward VI. The other characters represented are Lord St. John, Earl of Shrewsbury and Marquis of Northampton.

The English Church Pageant at Fulham

By EMILY P. WEAVER

THE English Church Pageant, held recently in the grounds of the Bishop of London's historic palace of Fulham, was under the management of Mr. Frank Lascelles, the veteran Master of Pageants, whose name is familiar to Canadians in connection with the Tercentenary of Quebec.

Doubtless in many of its general features of brilliant colour, long processions and old-world costumes one pageant must bear a strong resemblance to another, but at Fulham Mr. Lascelles had a setting for his magnificent moving pictures of a character altogether different from the wide Plains of Abraham. The palace grounds are surrounded by a moat of about a mile in length, and in spite of the effect of distance given by open glades and groups of fine old trees, they contain little more than four acres of land. There was, however, no lack of space for the marching of processions or the movements of the thousands of performers, who frequently appeared at one time upon the scene, and the painted semblances of grey walls and gateways were particularly effective amongst the distant trees.

In one respect at least this church pageant was unlike most of its rivals, for its dominating idea was not the emphasising of local history, but the bringing out (so far as such an idea can be brought out in a form of the dramatic art that gains little from spoken words) of the vital connection between the history of English religion and that of the English nation. Necessarily this could only be attempted on broad lines, but it required many scenes even to suggest the course of events, and it was finally decided to present the pageant in two parts, one in the afternoon, the other in the evening. This in itself gives scope for an unusual variety of effects in the lighting of the scenes. The first part (shadowing forth a thousand years of history, from the days when the first Christian Emperor Constantine proclaimed in his vast dominions "liberty of religion" to the fourteenth century when miracle plays and pilgrimages were common features of English life), was played out in full daylight, under sunshine, clouds or pouring rain, as the case might be. The second part, beginning with John Wycliffe on trial at St. Paul's in the year 1377 and ending with the acquittal of the Seven Bishops in 1688, was begun under the last rays of the setting sun, but long before the magnificent funeral cortege of Henry V had made its slow way across the scene the twilight shadows had begun to gather, and the later episodes were given by limelight, which lent to the brightly-clad representatives of our forefathers—soldiers, nobles, martyrs, heroes or common folk—all the vivid unreality of a dream.

The earliest suggestion of a church pageant was made months ago by the Rev. Walter Marshall, Vicar of St. Patrick's Church at Hove, a district forming part of the notable old watering place, Brighton. It was intended, at first, to hold the pageant at Hove, but the idea of using this dramatic



Queen Elfreda.



King Oswald.

means to educate "the people of the country in the history of their Church" was taken up with so much enthusiasm that "the idea of the pageant grew." The Archbishop of Canterbury signified his approval of the scheme, and when it was suggested that it should be held in London, the Bishop of London generously offered the use of his palace grounds, though this meant that for months they would be largely in the possession of the workmen and officials of the pageant, to say nothing of the disastrous effect, upon the beautiful old turf, of the necessary building operations and of the trampling feet of horses by the hundred and human beings by the thousand.

The grand stand, built mainly of steel and concrete, covered an acre of ground and seated about 6,600 persons, but so large was the demand for seats that in addition to the six days performances originally planned, four extra performances were given.

In many instances, as was natural in a church pageant, the scenes were devised and the leading parts taken by clergymen, while the different episodes were represented as a rule by a single parish or a group of neighbouring churches. From a spectacular standpoint, the scenes with the exception of one or two, were admirable. The numerous processions were most effective. Very long and equally gorgeous were the funeral procession of Henry V (already alluded to) and the coronation procession of the boy-king, Edward VI. Perhaps the former was the more impressive owing to the number of mounted men and the solemn chanting of the "Dies Irae" but the little figure of Edward VI, overburdened with his royal robes, as doubtless the real king had been in his day, had more than a touch of pathos. Another procession—that of the white-robed Cistercian nuns driven by armed men from their convent, was extremely picturesque, and the outcries of the sympathising peasant women who crowded about and sought benedictions from them, were realistic enough. The scene, however, in which the human interest most decidedly overtopped the historic and the merely spectacular, was that in which the Saxon Archbishop, Dunstan, was represented as parting the married canons or priests from their wives and children, despite the piteous protest of Queen Elfreda.

At the close of the second part was an epilogue illustrating the work of the Church during the Eighteenth Century, consisting of a procession representing the Methodist Revival, the Crusade against Slavery, and the great Missionary Societies. These were followed by men bearing the banners of the different sees; and all ended with a wonderful torchlight procession, in which the figures of the performers moving to their own music were almost lost in light, till at last, advancing as it seemed with its own sea of light and fire, appeared above all the ship of St. George, to symbolise the Church victorious.

And so the great church pageant closed. With a shock the spectators of these beautiful old-world scenes must drop back into the practical atmosphere of the twentieth century. One could almost envy Mr. Lascelles the working out of his plans, so broad a scope did the early and eventful days of the Church afford him in his task.