

Religious Intelligencer.

THAT GOD IN ALL THINGS MAY BE GLORIFIED THROUGH CHRIST.—Peter

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WHOLE NO. 2538

OVER THE SEA.

No. XVIII.

THE PASSION PLAY.

Times without number the pathetic story of the Passion Play has been told, yet even today there may be some who have still to hear it. After the wide, wasting war of thirty years in Germany, a great pestilence broke out in the villages of Bavaria, surrounding Oberammergau. It was a visitation something similar to the Black Death. It stalked through the Empire, north and south, east and west. Whole families were swept off, and it is said that in one village only two married couples were left alive. Oberammergau enforced a vigorous quarantine, and tradition says remained untouched until Caspar Schuchler, a German peasant who was in one of the plague stricken districts, evaded the quarantine and came to his wife and children in Oberammergau. A terrible retribution followed, in two days he was dead, and the plague which he had brought with him spread with fatal haste from house to house. Unless the plague was stayed there would be no one to bury the dead. It is said that curative measures were utterly useless. Where the plague struck, death followed. The four stricken people fell upon their knees, and vowed to God, "that if so be the scourge might fall no more upon them," when and every decade thereafter, they would set forth to the best of their ability, and with hearts purged of sin, and filled with devotion, a mystery play, which would show the life and passion of Christ, their Lord. The prayer was heard, and from that hour the plague was stayed, and even those who were already smitten of the disease revived; and today these people verily believe that since Moses lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, there has not been so single a deliverance from mortal illness. Thus it was that the Passion Play became a fixed institution. They regard the performance as a religious duty, and have for nearly three hundred years fulfilled their vow to heaven. Even the little children are taught that if they are good and pure, they may be permitted to act when the tenth year comes round. Every tenth year they had promised that a representation of the Saviour's mission and sacrifice should be given their method of showing gratitude for Divine deliverance.

The play is performed in a large building accommodating 4,000 people. The stage is open to wind and weather, but the performance goes on uninterrupted unless it rains so hard that nothing can be seen. We were very fortunate in having a day without either wind or rain. The play began at 8 o'clock in the morning, and the first part ended at twelve. After luncheon it was resumed, and continued until half past five. It was a marvellous performance. The utmost order prevailed, although the building was crowded to excess. The silence was intense, only sobs were heard here and there, at the scene in the garden, and the sound of the nails upon the cross. There were many women in the play, but the three most prominent ones were Mary the Mother, Mary Magdalene, who loved much because much was forgiven, and who brought the Alabaster box and anointed her Saviour's head, and washed His feet with her tears, and wiped them with her beautiful auburn hair. One of our party remarked that she looked as beautiful as a Rubens' picture. The third was Martha looking careworn and troubled. The costumes were all very effective, and were made in the fashion of nineteen hundred years ago. All the men as well as the women wore long robes and sandals. Twice the brilliant robes of the singers were exchanged for black immediately before and after the crucifixion. The singing was beautiful, and as the weeks and months go by, I can still hear the sweet music, and the wails of the Mother as she weeps over the crucified Son, her Saviour. Many little children were in the play; they strewed flowers in the pathway and cried, "Blessed be He who cometh in the name of the Lord."

The Christ of the Play was a man of the village, a poor boy by trade. He made his appearance in the first scene of the entry into Jerusalem and the cleansing of the temple. He appeared in a long garment of grey, over

which was cast a flowing robe, and as he rode in on the stage on the side of a colt, he looked composed and pensive. John, the best loved, led the colt, and carried in his hand a long staff. In cleansing the temple, he took a scourge of small cords and drove out the money changers and let loose the doves. The doves took to flight, amid the despairing lamentations of their owners.

The Play was given in 3 parts and seventeen scenes. The first scene showed us Christ's entry into Jerusalem, then followed the Conference of the Sanhedrin, Christ's farewell from His Mother in Bethany, The last walk to Jerusalem, The Last Supper, The Traitor, Jesus on the Mount of Olives, Jesus before Annas, Jesus before Caiaphas, The despair of Judas, Christ led before Pilate, Jesus before Herod, The scourging and crowing with Thorns. Jesus condemned to be crucified, Jesus on Golgotha, Jesus in the Grave, The Resurrection, and the Ascension. Each of these scenes were preceded by one or more tableaux, showing its Old Testament prototype. The first tableau was emblematic of the Fall. Adam and Eve were habited in sheepskin, and were flying from the Garden of Eden, where stood the tree of forbidden fruit, while from its branches hung the Tempter. An Angel with a sword painted to look like flames forbade their return. The 2nd represented the Adoration of the Cross. A cross of wood planted on a rock occupied the centre of the stage, some were kneeling at the foot of the cross, others carried palms, and around were grouped cherubs. All were pointing or gazing at the Cross. The 3rd showed us the children of Jacob in the Plain of Dothan conspiring how to kill Joseph, who, in his coat of many colors was approaching from behind. His brothers were lining against the well into which they had decided to fling their unfortunate victim. The 4th was taken from the Apocrypha, and represented Tobias taking leave of his parents, before setting forth with the Angel Raphael. The 5th showed us the Bride in the Song of Solomon, who was lamenting the lost and absent Bridegroom. The 6th typified the doom of Jerusalem for the rejection of the Saviour. It showed us the Court of Ahasuerus at the moment when Vashti the Queen was fallen before the wrath of her Royal Consort, who was welcoming Esther to the vacant throne. The 7th and 8th were marvellous displays of artistic skill in grouping hundreds of persons in a comparatively small space. The first was the gathering of manna in the wilderness; the second the return of the spies from the Promised Land with a bunch of grapes. Four hundred persons including 150 children were grouped on the stage in this scene. Moses had two gilt rays like horns jutting out from his head, the manna fell from above on the stage like snowflakes. The 9th brought us back to Joseph whose sale to the Midianites for twenty pieces of silver naturally led up to Judas's bargain with the Sanhedrin for the betrayal of his Master for thirty. With the 10th came a double tableau showing Adam under the curse and Joab's treacherous assassination of Amasa. Joab made ready while proffering him a friendly kiss. This tableau was remarkable. As the choir sang there came an echo from the rocks within, where a concealed choir sang in response to the eager enquiry of the chorus, "What happened? what happened?" The next showed the stoning of Naboth, and the suffering of Job, who was scoffed at, and plagued and derided by his friends, and servants, and even by his wife. Then we were shown Cain in a leopard's skin in the act of slaying Abel. In the 16th Daniel, denounced before Darius, stood forth before the King undismayed by his accusers. Samson avenged himself upon the Philistines by pulling down the Temple upon their heads. In the sacrifice of Isaac, his father's distress was very vividly expressed; while Abram was about to slay him with a bright falchion, he was restrained by an angel who pointed to a lamb in a thicket on the stage. The second scene in the wilderness showed Moses raising the "brazen serpent on high. In this tableau it was said there were seven hundred persons on the stage.

In the Garden of Gethsemane the scene was very impressive. The Christ and His disciples, and in ambush were those appointed by the Sanhedrin to seize the Christ. Judas was there and other traders, as well as the four priests sent by Caiaphas to see that all things went well. The Christ said unto his disciples: "Verily, I say unto you, ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy, etc., etc." After which He said, "Children, sit down here while I go and pray yonder." Eight of the disciples then sat down under the trees, while the Christ went forward with the three. He said to them, "Beloved children my soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death. Tarry ye here and watch with me." Slowly Peter, James and John fell asleep. As he moved forward he fell on his face, and prayed in bitter agony. Then he came and found the disciples asleep. "Could ye not watch with me one hour?" "The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak etc." When the Christ returned from the third season of prayer the torches of the advancing throng, headed by Judas, shone through the trees. With the apostles he went forth to meet them. Judas, a little in advance of the others, went up to the Christ and kissed him. He faced the armed band fearlessly and said, "Whom seek ye?" A loud and angry shout went up from the soldiers, "Jesus of Nazareth." After the Christ reproved Peter and healed the wounded man. They bound him and led him away to Annas and Caiaphas, and as they marched him along the traders derided him, saying, "Doth Beelzebub then aid thee no longer?" The disciples had all turned and fled. When he was condemned to death, then came the despair of Judas. The bitterest remorse indeed was his portion, and in great agony of conscience he fastened himself by a girdle to the branch of a tree and swung himself off.

The Christ after being scorned and mocked by Herod, was sent back to Pilate, then came the scourging and crowning with thorns. He was led again to Pilate and the efforts to mend matters by a choice between the Christ and Barabbas failed, and he was condemned to be crucified. Pilate presented the scourged and thorn-crowned man before his people, and while washing his hands condemned him to death. Then He was laden with the cross and led to Golgotha, but he exhausted beneath the load and Simon of Cyrene was compelled by the soldiers to help bear the Cross. The women of Jerusalem wept over the Christ, but looking upon them he said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but for yourselves and your children."

When they came in bearing his cross, and the thieves also, bearing their cross, and the crowd (on the stage) cried wildly "Up to Golgotha, to the cross with him! Hail to Israel! The enemy is vanquished! We are free! Long live the Sanhedrin! First they hanged the two thieves, each on his cross, the one on the left and the other on the right. Their arms were tied over the cross by the hands and their feet were tied to the beam with cords, but the Christ was nailed to the central cross. One nail was supposed to have been driven through the palm of each hand, and one through his feet, which were placed one over the other. On his head lay the crown of thorns, from which a little blood (or something representing blood) trickled on his brow. His hands and feet bled a little. There was a cloth cast around his loins. The Centurion stood on the right of the cross giving orders. The two hangmen raised the cross and planted it in the stage, and seated themselves at the foot of it, then the crowd on the stage mocked and derided him; finally he said, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." One of the thieves being convinced that the Christ was what he claimed to be, prayed him to remember him when he should come in His Kingdom. To him he lovingly replied, "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise. Then, in a hollow voice, he cried hoarsely "I thirst." The Centurion being near him said, "He thirsts and calls for drink." They took a reed

with a sponge filled with vinegar and hyssop and passed up to him, he turned away his head and would not drink. Then he cried in agony, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani." They imagined He cried for Elias, and Caiaphas laughed and said, "Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him."

Then raising his head with a great effort, and breathing heavily, he cried with a loud voice and said, "It is finished! Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit," and as he spoke these words his head fell forward. Then there came a great earthquake and thunder and lightning, and the crowd on the stage departed in alarm, but his own friends stood "afar off" and came and begged for the body. They took it down from the cross, wrapped it in linen cloth and spices and laid it in a tomb in a garden in the rear of the stage. In the next scene came the earthquake which rent asunder the stones that were rolled up into the mouth of the sepulchre. The Christ arose in white apparel and the soldiers who were on guard fell on their faces to the ground. In the ascension the Christ was robed in white holding a palm branch in his hand, and as he stood in the midst of his disciples, and others, he blessed them and slowly ascended into the air, and when he reached the company of angels the curtain fell, and the Passion Play was ended.

No doubt many of the readers of these columns look upon this play as a great sacrilege, and I must confess that I had thought of the Passion Play as a great violation of things sacred, and it was with no little hesitancy that I decided to visit it, but after seeing it and talking with many who thoroughly understood its origin, and knew the piety of these peasants, I now regard the Passion Play as one of the influences to make the world better. A personal contact with these simple people can not fail to do one good. They go from their knees to the stage, and seem as gentle as doves. From all parts of the globe people were there to see it. They see with their eyes that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." The large audience was a wonder and an inspiration, but as one of our party said, "I would not like to see it acted in any American city. A powdered, painted woman trying to act the Mary would be an outrage. A worldly, flippant actor trying to be a St. John would be sacrilegious. And who could be found worthy to be the Christ?"

We were all entertained in the homes of the peasants. You cannot get a ticket for the play without a room, nor can you get accommodation without securing a ticket for the play, and your ticket is in price according to the room you occupy. The tickets were from 4 to 10 Marks, and a small fee of 70 pennings (14 cents) for booking. It is said that it is really not a money making affair, and it is only quite recently that they have had a building for the performance, as it was for years played in the churchyard. It was eleven o'clock at night, and very dark and rainy, when we arrived in the village, but we were obliged to come in order to be ready for the play the following morning, as they are only given on Sundays and church holidays, thus keeping to the original religious character of the play. The people were kind and we had very good accommodation, but we could not enjoy their black bread, nor scarcely any of their cooking. Their soups, and fish, and meats all seemed to be flavored with something that we met with nowhere else in our travels. I suppose our appetites were not so good as they might have been for on our arrival we got a glimpse at the culinary department. This was unavoidable as Oberammergau has no front doors. You go in at a side door which nearly always leads to the kitchen; but I must say that the sleeping apartments were scrupulously clean, so we at least had good rest. The houses all stand the same distance back from the street, and on the outside they are plaster-covered, and painted with scrolls, etc., in colors. We were a little distance from where the play was performed, so we ordered a carriage to take us up. When the carriage came it was two-seated, but only one horse, and it was hitched to a poll the same as for a span of horses.

We, of course, thought the poor driver had been unfortunate in some way, and had only one horse for his team that day, but when we drove out the street we saw that all the one horse carriages had a pole straight in front and the horse hitched to one side. This is only one of the many novel sights seen in that quaint little town in the valley of the Bavarian Alps, nearly twenty eight hundred feet above sea-level.

Woman's Foreign Missionary Society

"Rise up ye women that are at ease Isaiah 32: 9.

[All contributions for this column should be addressed to Mrs. Jos. McLeod, Fredericton.]

FROM THE HOME SECRETARY

DEAR SISTERS:

In accordance with the request of our Cor. Sec., to make the column a medium of communication, I take my pen to talk a little with you. I was much interested in sister Sipp's letter. It would have been much better had Miss Gaunce come home last year, before her health gave away; yet it seems hard to have no missionary of our own in India. If we ask God persistently and in faith we are sure to get one or more, for His promises never fail. Let us recognize His goodness in giving us a Home Missionary, who is doing such faithful work among the churches. Our home work this year bids fair to be the best in our history. Let us "thank God and take courage." Our society is assuming larger proportions, and with it come greater responsibilities. The ultimate success of our missionary depends upon the sisters in our churches. It is of no use to organize, unless the organization is taken care of and kept alive. This means earnest, persistent work on the part of the leaders; not that they must do all the work, but draw others into it. When man fell God said, "in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread;" this is equally true in the spiritual realm. If we cease to work we will have poverty of soul. God could have saved the world, without any human aid, but he did not choose to do so. "We are workers together with God;" and if we would live spiritually, we must take hold of the work as it comes to us. He always gives us something to do, as he wants no drones in His church. It will draw largely upon our faith and patience, for there are always hindrances to be met, and difficulties to be overcome, but we will be richly rewarded for all our efforts.

Personally I would like that our missionary would form C. E. Societies where it is practicable. It is from those societies we expect our recruits, when we lay down our work. The M. Bands will furnish recruits for the C. E. Societies. The children in our churches should be cared for at all ages; even the Cradle Roll, as our sisters across the border have it, would be in order. God requires at our hands that the lambs are cared for. I would suggest that our missionary would furnish a list of the names of those who take charge of the M. Bands, to our Literature Committee, and such helps be sent them as will aid them in their very important work. It is lamentable that, even in one church, there was found no one to undertake for Christ, the church, and the children.

Before closing, I will add an extract from a private letter, written by my daughter concerning Ramabai's work, which she visited, with other parts of India, to gain information such as would aid her in her work, as with the new year she assumes the principalship of a school of three hundred girls. She writes:

"Perhaps you would like to know something of Ramabai's work. I don't think I told you about it in my last letter. She has a little town all by itself, covering fourteen acres, and containing seventeen hundred people of fourteen nationalities. Everything is done on a very large scale, and there are no drones in her busy hive. In the center of the village is a huge church, with a seating capacity of over two thousand. On week days

this is used as a school-room. It was there we found the famous Pundita about seven o'clock in the morning, surrounded by scores of classes. Some of the women in these classes had the toughest looking faces to be seen anywhere. We were told they were the late arrivals; they formed a strong contrast to the ones who had been there two years or more. It is nothing short of a miracle to see how such women's lives are transformed. The Pundita was friendly, but so deaf we could hardly make her hear. She is a little, chunky woman, with a mop of curly hair about her face. The nurse, Mary-bai, took us around, and answered our many enquiries. She said that one day Ramabai punished women that quarrelled was to tie them together hand and foot. When a woman did anything very wrong, she was put in a room alone, and paid in proportion as she sewed, and with the proceeds her provision was bought. We went into one room where six hundred and thirty girls were eating their breakfast. The girls are taught to weave their own saris, to sew their own clothes, and, in a measure, to raise their own vegetables. A few days before we were there, the nurse told us, a number of girls had been bitten by cobras. The principal remedy used in their restoration, was that they were made to swallow three full cups of kerosene. My daughter met Miss Hooper, our former missionary, in Bombay, where she is laboring in the interest of humanity, without support from any direct human source.

P. A. HART.

Jacksontown, Jan. 11 h, 1902.

A NEW SOCIETY.

Rev. Mr. and Mrs. J. N. Barnes organized a Women's Foreign Mission Society at Tracy Station Dec. 20th, 1901, with ten members. Although our membership is small, we trust that we will be able to do something to send the glad tidings of salvation to those in dark lands. We will meet at the home of Mrs. F. Seely the first Thursday in February.

LIZZIE STERN.

Sec'y.

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Received from, Mrs. King, Greenville, \$1.50.
M. A. VINCE.
Treas. W. M. S.
Woodstock.
Jan. 18th 1902.

HOW TO CONVERT HERETICS.

The marshal of nobility in the Russian province of Ord, M. Stakhovitch, described in a recent conference of orthodox missionaries the methods employed in his district for converting the Stundists to orthodoxy. Those suspected of being Stundists are locked into the village prison, the civil authorities consenting. On a table an icon is placed, and one by one the 'heretics' are taken to the table.

'Kiss'
'I shall not kiss your idols.'
'Ah, you won't?'
And the recalcitrant Stundist is placed forthwith on a bench, stretched at full length and beaten. Those who are weak confess their orthodoxy after the first few strokes; the stronger have to undergo as many as four thrashings before they yield.

In a certain village of the same province M. Stakhovitch asked the priest what had happened to the numerous Stundists who used to live there in former years. 'Ah,' said the priest 'by the grace of God they have all been banished to the Caucasus and Siberia.'

AMONG EXCHANGES

HOW TO GIVE IT UP.

By the time rich men get all they want, death comes along, and they are compelled to give up all they have.—The Telescope.

BETTER.

It is better to be wanted in a small place than to be tolerated in a large one.—Moral. Don't be in too great a hurry to leave a small country or village church for a large city charge.—Eko.