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Bushveld Messenger

WATERBERG PARISH MAGAZINE.

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Rector: THE REV. H. M. GAYLARD.

Lay Reader: MR. E. A. DAVIDSON.

Good Friday and Easter Services.

Good Friday :	10 a.m. :	Mattins, Potgietersrust.
	2 p.m. :	One Hour of Devotion, Nylstroom.
Saturday :	6 p.m. :	Evensong, Nylstroom.
Easter Day :	8 a.m. :	Holy Communion, Nylstroom.
	11 a.m. :	Holy Communion, Potgietersrust.
Monday :	7.30 a.m. :	Holy Communion, Twenty-four Rivers.
Sunday, 16 :	8.30 a.m. :	Holy Communion, Warmbaths.
	10.30 a.m. :	Mattins and Holy Communion, Settlers.

My dear Friends,

Above is a list of Good Friday and Easter services. I hope that these services will be well attended. At this time, when there is so much suffering caused by the War, it is more than ever fitting that Good Friday should find us at the foot of the Cross, sharing in the suffering of Our Blessed Lord. And at Easter we celebrate the great victory over sin and suffering which He won on our behalf.

This issue of the Magazine is a pleasant change for me as it will be, no doubt, for you. Usually I am the sole contributor, but this time I have been let off very lightly. I am most grateful to Mrs. Pegge for her account of the Passion Play, and I feel sure that you will all find it as interesting as I have done.

Your friend and Padre.

HORACE M. GAYLARD.

THE PASSION PLAY OF OBERAMMERGAU.

In a little fold of the Bavarian Alps lies the picturesque village of Oberammergau, where the famous Passion Play or "Passionspiel" is performed on an average of twice a week for a season—May to September,—every ten years. To understand better the origin of the Play we must go back three hundred years to the events which led up to its inception.

It was in the year 1632 that the terrible plague swept mercilessly through Germany, bringing with it death and misery. Owing to its secluded position in the Bavarian Alps, Oberammergau was free from the scourge for a while; but this dreaded disease was brought one night over the mountains by one of Oberammergau's own people who had been away in another part of Germany. He managed to pass, unnoticed, the guards at the entrance to the village and get home for the festival of Kirchweih—the anniversary of the consecration of their church—which was being celebrated at that time.

In a very short time the plague was rampant in the little Bavarian village and at last in July, 1633, a solemn vow was taken by the villagers before the altar of the church. If God would free them from this dreadful terror, they vowed to perform, every ten years, as an act of devotion, the Passion of His Son. From this time, it is said, not a single death from the plague occurred and the villagers busied themselves with preparations for the coming Passion Play, the first performance of which was given in 1634 in the church before the altar at which the vow had been made. In time the numbers of visitors to the Play made it necessary to have a special building—the present theatre with seating accommodation for 4,200 was erected in 1899 and reconditioned in 1930. The auditorium is roofed over but the stage is open to the sky; and the gentle slopes of the foothills beyond make a fit setting, and in rain or in sunshine the Play is carried on just the same. (It is interesting to note that in 1871 Queen Victoria attended a performance and was pleased to acknowledge her ancient tie with the village, for it had in its early history been a possession of the Guelf family).

The first view we have of Oberammergau shows it nestling in a flowery corner of the mountains in the friendly shadow of the Kofelberg. On the station platform as the train draws in we see hosts of porters all wearing bright red-peaked caps—they are dressed in the peasant costume of leather

knee-breeches, white shirts and gaily embroidered braces; with their shaggy beards and long hair they look very awe-inspiring—these men have a part in the Play. Men, and even small boys, grow their hair in the great hope that they will have the much coveted honour of being in the Play, for they are born and brought up with this object in view.

The porters swing our suitcases on to their shoulders as if they are nothing more than a feather weight and we follow up the main street and along the side of the Ammer river, marvelling all the while at the beauty of the surroundings—the wooded mountain slopes whence comes the scent of pines, everywhere alpine flowers of all kinds growing almost waist deep, and we feel a further thrill as a distant tinkle of cow-bells comes echoing across the hills. If we are fortunate we shall have secured accommodation with a private family and so get an insight into the customs of the villagers.

Trains have been arriving all day bringing, not hundreds, but thousands of people of every nationality. As darkness falls beacons are lit on the mountain summits, a reminiscence of the ring of watch fires lighted three hundred years before; they blaze brightly as if to remind us that this great devotional pageant is about to take place once more.

The streets are thronged with villagers and visitors and we hear the approach of the "Turkische Musik" provided by the village band (of drums, pipes and flutes) on the eve of the Passion Play. First come the small boys followed by the other musicians, then the players—John with his fair hair blowing in the breeze, Pontius Pilate with head held high, Judas with a mop of black curls and merry bright blue eyes and big-bearded Caiaphas striding out. Behind the players any villagers or visitors who care to attach themselves to this curious procession—peasants in their gay traditional costumes of brilliant colours with skirts swinging and ribbons flying.

The visitors crowd into the little shops, eager to see and buy the fascinating wood carvings and pottery all done by the inhabitants who for generations have been skilled in these arts. What a medley of dialects and tongues is to be heard! Alois Lang who takes the part of Christ is a striking figure as he talks unreservedly with total strangers; while in her mother's shop, Anny Rutz—the Madonna—enjoys a conversation with an English visitor. There is a wonderful fresh charm about Miss Rutz who speaks English fluently, as does Klara Mayr who plays Mary Magdalene, for

both girls have been to England and taken positions in domestic service there for the express purpose of learning the language.

As everyone is aware, the Passion Play is an act of devotion and each morning at six o'clock High Mass is celebrated in the picturesque little church and any visitors who care to attend are welcome. A few minutes before eight all steps are turned towards the theatre and at the hour the firing of a gun outside signifies the commencement of the Play. The chorus with Anton Lang (the Christus of previous years) at the head files on to the stage. Each set in the Play is preceded by a prologue which is taken by Anton Lang assisted by a chorus of forty-eight men and women, and a tableau from the Old Testament which has some bearing on the action to follow.

Many and varied must be the ideas with which people go to witness this world-famous play, but to all comes some feeling of emotion as shouts of "Hosanna" are heard and across the stage come the crowds in colourful attire waving palm branches; for the opening scene is Christ's entry into Jerusalem. There He is in their midst seated on an ass, and as He stretches out His hands to bless it all seems like a vivid dream in which we meet Him face to face.

There are six great emotional moments in the Play. The first and one of the most touching is that scene in which Jesus takes leave of His mother in the house at Bethany. The two sisters, Mary and Martha, do their best to comfort the Madonna whose heart is at breaking point, and one gropes for a handkerchief as the tears blur the vision. The Last Supper is so striking a reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's picture that one is almost surprised to see the figures move. This is followed by the Agony in the Garden, which scene brings home to us that Christ as well as being Divine was also human, for there is in His voice a very real note of despair. At eleven o'clock, after the capture in the Garden, there is a break of three hours and we emerge into the bright sunshine and disperse to the pensions and cafes for refreshments.

On the stroke of two the Play is resumed. We realize how tedious that trial must have been as Jesus is dragged from one judgement hall to the next, always followed by the rough, angry crowd, but never so much as murmuring against His enemies.

The crucifixion scene lasts twenty minutes and is well-nigh impossible to describe. The two thieves are already on their crosses when the scene opens and the third cross is being raised and firmly fixed

into position. The last words are spoken, there is a sound of thunder, darkness descends and, strange as it may seem, even the sun momentarily veils his face. As Christ is taken down from the cross and laid in His mother's arms the scene is brought to a close.

It is not an uncommon occurrence for the peasant Christ to be in a state of collapse after this scene. It is naturally a great strain physically, but there is a deeper reason, for these simple people are not only true artists but very passionate believers.

The Resurrection scene is very short, but none the less most impressive, and gives one some small idea of what that wonderful Resurrection morning so long ago meant—all the foregoing events were not in vain but ended in this glorious victory—a mixed thrill of awe and joy goes through the audience.

The Play ends with a magnificent tableau of the Glorification and, bewildered, we go out into the crowded streets to be brought back, as it were out of the past to the every day happenings and surroundings of the twentieth century; and within half an hour the players are back at their duties.

Apart from the subject of the Play and the reverent spirit which there is throughout, the production is amazing. These people prove themselves true artists and it is wonderful that all this talent is drawn from the little village of 2,000 inhabitants, for they have no outside help. The costumes are correct to the last detail; most of the materials are from the East and all the dresses are copied from drawings made in Palestine museums. A group of about eight village women do the sewing, but a few costumes are genuine oriental ones and have cost as much as eight hundred and even two thousand six hundred marks.

Few people outside Oberammergau have any idea of the amount of work each revival of the Play entails. Preparations usually commence two years beforehand. A committee is formed, and amongst its numerous other duties its work is to choose the players. Only people born in Oberammergau are eligible for inclusion in the cast, and after the first ballot those with the highest votes are placed on the list. There is voting and more voting until only two or three names are left for each role, then the final selection takes place in secret.

An incident in the life of one of the principal players may show how those taking part try to live up to the characters they portray. It was in 1901 after the close of one of the seasons that Anton Lang received an invitation from a friend

in Munich to attend a carnival ball there. He accepted, glad of the opportunity to witness such a spectacle. A little later paragraphs appeared in the various papers in which he was termed the "Dancing Christ." He realised then that he could never be free to act irresponsibly and ever afterwards regulated his life accordingly. This little story he impressed upon all those who have a part in the Play. Anton Lang played the Christ in 1900, 1910 and 1922, Alois Lang is the Christ of 1930 and 1934, while Anny Rutz is the only girl in history to have played the Madonna for two seasons—1930 and 1934—as no married women and no women over thirty-five are given this part. The performances are of course in German, but a book of the whole Play may be bought in any language.

Since the production in 1934 Anton Lang has died, Klara Mayr has married and gone to live in America and one wonders what are the scenes now in this once peaceful village. One thing is certain, the inhabitants will do all in their power to pick up the threads and be faithful to that sacred vow.

D.M.L.P.

On January 4th, Mr. and Mrs. A. H. Baber's little daughter, Jennifer Helen, was christened in S. John the Baptist's Church, Twenty-four Rivers. The service began with the beautiful old children's hymn, "Once in Royal David's City," being sung heartily by grown-ups and children standing round the prettily decorated font. Jennifer was a lucky girl. Her Padre uncle from Up North baptised her and her Padre uncle, Rector of the Parish, stood sponsor for her. One of the three godmothers was present, Mrs. Cooper, an old friend of the family.

After christening his little niece, the Rev. F. G. Clarke gave a beautiful address on the Christian home and its influ-

ence on children; more important than ever because such terrible things were happening in the world.

Many friends attended the service and in the congregation was a Damara woman who had nursed Jennifer's mother as a child. A jolly party drank the health of the new grand-child at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Davidson, so bringing a very happy event to its close.

M.D.

Prayer for the Parish.

Almighty and everlasting God, Who dost govern all things in Heaven and earth; mercifully hear our prayers, and grant unto this parish all things necessary for its spiritual welfare. Strengthen and confirm the faithful; protect and guide the children; visit and relieve the sick and afflicted; turn and soften the wicked; rouse the careless; recover the fallen; restore the penitent; and bring all to be of one heart and mind in the fold of Thy Holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.