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## PASSION PLAY

To Be Held Again In May

## STORY OF A WONDERFUL DRAMA

(By J. O'S.)

on in this column, and it contributes to the in his account, and the tense excitement which occurs only once in every ten years comes into the life of Oberammergau. But for what is all the excitement?

In 1950 the famous Passion Play will be revived. From May to September thousands from all over the globe will throng the little town high up in the Bavarian Alps to see one of the greatest spectacles on earth.

The origin of the Passion Play goes back to the Thirty Years War, when a terrible plague descended on the surrounding hamlets. And yet the black death had not reached Oberammergau. One night, however, a stricken man crept into his relations in the town and died on the following morning. Death followed death in Oberammergau until eighty had fallen victims. Suddenly the mourning people roused themselves spiritually and prayed to God to deliver them from the fearful scourge.

## GUIDED BY BENEDICTINE MONKS

They pledged themselves to play publicly the Passion and Death of Jesus should the plague disappear. The plague did go, and next year, 1670, the first drama of the Passion took place. Benedictine monks guided the production. These monks were from a local monastery.

Since then, through wars and hardships, the Play has been produced almost every ten years. It is now, unfortunately, sixteen years since it was last performed. So sixteen years have gone past and young men and women have, perhaps, never heard of the wonderful pageantry and religious fervour in which Oberammergau will be steeped in 1950.

At the local town hall the Play has already been cast by a committee of twenty-four townspeople, the Burgomaster and the Parish Priest.

## RULES AND TRADITIONS

Many rules and traditions have grown with the Play. For instance, in any one family cannot have major roles. Neither can a married woman take part, and thus it often happens that a young fiancée will postpone her wedding in order to be among the cast. Only residents of the town are eligible for parts. During the twelve months all dances and entertainments are dispensed with; nevertheless, a spirit of exuberance and jollity is visible.

In 1934 the village blacksmith played Calphas, the High Priest, while the milkman played lovable St. Peter. A humble cowherd took the part of Barrabas.

The name Lang is ever so common in Oberammergau. There are numerous families of that name, and one Alois Lang played the part of Christ in 1884. He was noted for his more aloof and kingly Saviour.

The local innkeeper has been cast for the part of Our Lord this year and, according to tradition, a former Christ will read the Prologue.

The prologue is the heaviest part because it introduces each of the sixteen acts.

## LASTS ALL DAY AND NEVER TIRING

The Play will begin at nine a.m. and end at five-thirty, with an interval for lunch. The roar of a cannon from a nearby hill marks the opening of the Play. With a cast of about five hundred it holds the audience all day and never becomes tiring. Truly a wonderful performance!

During the Holy Year pilgrims will have an opportunity of flying direct to Munich from Rome and thence by road to Oberammergau.

But to return to the danger of toppling over the balcony, everybody but himself saw that it was very real. In connection with this there was a somewhat amusing incident. "Two stout young fellows," says Mr. Macdonagh,

"seized his coat-tails, and by twisting them rope-like held on with desperate effort during the half-hour the speech lasted. It was a ludicrous spectacle in the room.

What was most surprising was that Parnell never once looked behind to see what it was that was tugging so violently at his skirts, as he twisted and turned in the throes of his speech. He seemed to be quite oblivious of anything out of the common was happening."

On his return to the room, it seems, Parnell looked exhausted. Soon however, he recovered "his customary state of mental and physical pliancy." He was followed, in Mr. Macdonagh's words, by Mr. John Reddan, a local working-man of ex-

## PARNELL IN LIMERICK

## Two Visits Recalled

## INCIDENTS AT CRUISE'S HOTEL

CHARLES Stewart Parnell's last three political views and remarks in the British House of Commons were in reference to a Limerick man. They were spoken on August 3rd, 1891—a little over two months before he died. "Chief" was supporting a motion by John Redmond asking for the amnesty of John Daly, the Fenian, and other dynamite prisoners convicted of treason felony.

## HIS LAST VISIT

A short time afterwards Parnell paid his last visit to Limerick. Although the unfortunate "split" had then been running its tragic course he got a great reception, being escorted to Cruise's Hotel by an immense crowd with bands and torch-lights. He addressed the huge crowd from a balcony on the second floor, access to which was obtained from the drawing-room by a window that opened like a door. The chairman, speaking slowly and with emphasis, replied: "I was advising you to keep within the Constitution." "An' what the devil might that be?" said the working-man in a tone of genuine surprise. The answer he got was a roar of laughter from the company, in which Parnell joined. Then, as he resumed his speech, a sudden whim took hold of Parnell, and approaching the chairman, he said with the utmost gravity: "perhaps it would be better for himself and for us all if you advised him to keep within the window."

Parnell had paid a visit to Limerick on a previous occasion and under much happier circumstances. This was in the year 1880, when he was in the height of his power and influence as an Irish Leader. On this occasion he was the recipient of numerous addresses from public bodies and political and labour organisations. One of them was from the Congregated Trades of the City of Limerick.

Parnell was concerned the warning

tell on inattentive ears. He was

the late Mr. Michael Macdonagh, distinguished author and journalist, who accompanied Parnell to Limerick on the occasion as a representative of *The Freeman's Journal*, says, in his very enlightening and readable book, *The Home Rule Movement*, that "so far as

Parnell was concerned the warning

was given to him by a friend

in the company, in which Parnell joined. Then, as he resumed his speech, a sudden whim took hold of Parnell, and approaching the chairman, he said with the utmost gravity: "perhaps it would be better for himself and for us all if you advised him to keep within the window."

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