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The Influence of Passion Plays on the Modern Revival of the Amateur Theatre

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THE INFLUENCE OF PASSION PLAYS
ON
THE MODERN REVIVAL OF THE AMATEUR THEATRE

Rev. Terence J. Seery, C.S.M.
OUTLINE

I. The Modern Situation. Evidences of a renewal of interest in religious drama and passion plays. The condition of the amateur theatre. The National Theatre Conference. Obstacles to the revival overcome. The place of the Passion Play.

II. Traditional passion plays that have continued in various countries. Their influence upon the revival.

A. Europe

B. United States

III. Modern revivals of ancient texts of passion plays by communities, universities, parishes. The increasing fervor for the amateur theatre.

IV. Innovations, New Texts that have been written and produced in the last thirty years. Their unprecedented success.

V. The possibilities of the future in the amateur theatre and its influence upon the professional stage.
FOREWORD.

The purpose of this paper is to point out certain features of the revival of the amateur theatre, a movement that is increasing in momentum at the present time. What has led to this revival, and what are the contributing factors that have made for its success?

To strengthen the contention that the stage owes a definite debt to religious drama as the progenitor of the revival we have first briefly outlined the influence that religion has had upon the art. By religious drama we understand that popular amateur theatre that has periodically risen under the tutelage of the Church.

This religious drama for the most part, at least in the beginning of the revival, consisted of passion plays. These continued to increase in popularity until they were taken up by many communities as a popular venture. For this reason and because students of literature and folklore, within the last decade especially, have evinced a special interest in the passion play we consider the plays as the most important part of the revival and therefore have treated them at some length.

The thesis is divided therefore, into three general
parts. These are, first, The Past and Present; second, Specimens of Celebrated and Popular Passion Plays; third, The Future of the Amateur Theatre.

In developing these headings the recent findings of scholars are set down. This has been done not only to strengthen the arguments, but also to gather together the scattered material on the revival so that, being seen united and connected, one can conclude that the new popular theatre is worthy of note.

As a secondary object of the thesis, it is hoped that the arguments set forth in these pages will convince the reader that this modern amateur theatre is worthy of study, and, without detriment to the art of the drama, can take its place as a branch of modern literature.
CHAPTER ONE.

THE PAST AND PRESENT SITUATION.

When the Christians of the first three centuries undertook to abolish the licentious drama of pagan Rome they were only partially successful. It was the invasion of the barbarians combined with five centuries of continual denunciation that finally did away with the pagan form of the theatre. Even then the stage was not entirely submerged for the history of the art has proven that drama is irrepressible, although at times it may be subdued. The clergy, finally realizing that the art could never be entirely eradicated, began to substitute other forms for the objectionable presentations that persisted in vogue. As a result the amateur theatre began to develop from these clerical presentations.

This amateur theatre was of short duration. Beyond the fact that parts of the Old and New Testament were made into dramatic forms very little is known about this popular movement. At any rate it is not important in the history of

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1. In this opening paragraph we have a brief outline of the exterior history of drama. From a low, often crude religious beginning it becomes secularized and professionalized. It develops until it offends the public taste and morals. Then it is denounced, subdued and takes a new lease on life from an amateur revival. Thus the cycle turns through the centuries.
the art except for one thing; it served to give the idea to the clergy centuries later of teaching their congregations the truths of the Church by means of the drama.

The seething unrest of the European races from the sixth to the ninth century effectively destroyed this revival and prohibited advancement in any of the arts. Yet the indestructability of the stage is evident from the fact that even in those dark ages of unrest the strolling minstrels, the independent mummers, the pantomime artists were in existence ekeing out a precarious livelihood.

Beginning with the ninth century the Christian leaders founded a stage of high religious character, wrote plays for it, trained the actors and made this revived amateur theatre an institution. The ritual and liturgy of the Mass was not then, as it is now, a very definite and decided process. It was rather elastic and so it was found that there were opportunities here and there for the insertion of small plays,

2. Apollinarius the Elder, a priest of Laodicea rewrote, in the fourth century, parts of the Old Testament history in Homeric hexameters.
3. The Plays of the "learned Nun Hroswitha" were Roman comedies rewritten with a religious tone predominant. This was done in the ninth century.
pantomimes, and dramatic choruses. From these crude begin­nings arose the mystery plays, miracles, and moralities that were to flourish from the tenth to the sixteenth century.

This revival in the beginning and for a long period thereafter, was truly an amateur theatre. This crude drama sprang from the living faith of the people, was written for the people, was acted by the people - truly it was an amateur theatre. Although of unfinished workmanship and guided by no set principles it was characterized by sincerity and en­thusiasm; with realism, allegory, and symbolism playing important parts in the presentations.

Begun by the clergy this revival remained under their guidance for some time. For this reason, while this amateur theatre was often boisterously vulgar, at times ludicrously ridiculous, it was never immoral. It was later, when the drama became secularized in the sixteenth century that ob­jectionable features began to creep in. The licentiousness became so rampant that it led to the abolition of the drama by the Puritans.

Two characteristics of this revival are to be noted. First, it was a clerical institution. The plays were written in the monasteries or convents. The actors were trained by their priests. In its inception, the altar boys were the actors but these in a short time gave way to adult male
actors, except in the female parts, which continued to be acted by the boys. In the second place, it was a popular institution. The amateur theatre of the ninth to the sixteenth century was truly of the people, by the people, and for the people. Professional actors were unknown. Likewise, operators, producers, directors, as we understand these terms, were not yet in evidence. It was a hobby for everyone connected with the stage. The butcher, the baker, the candle-stick maker, each was first a tradesman, and after that an actor. This is true even though they often became very proficient in portraying certain types and characters.

It is especially in these two ways that the early revival of the drama differs from what is usually termed the popular theatre of the modern laity. Today the amateur theatre is not a clerical institution although the clergy have encouraged it they have not taken the active interest that was taken by the clergy in the earlier centuries. Also, the theatre of the laity of today is a much more specialized art. Publishing companies, managers, directors, costumers, technicians, these we have today, and they devote themselves only to the amateur theatre.

In spite of these major differences the modern theatre and even the perfected art of the Renaissance and Romantic periods owe a definite debt to those crude beginnings. It
was necessary that drama, in its revival, should pass through certain clumsy, inartistic, ungraceful steps before reaching the perfection of the Shakesperian art. These steps were taken by the mysteries, moralities, and interludes. Katherine Lee Bates in *English Religious Drama* voices the opinion of competent historians of the drama on this point when she writes:

> The Miracle Play was the training school of the romantic drama. In England during the slow lapse of some five centuries, the Miracle with its tremendous theme and mighty religious passion, was preparing the day of the Elizabethan stage; for despite all crudities, prolixities and absurdities of detail these English Mystery and Miracle Cycles are nobly dramatic both in range and spirit.

These were the productions of the mediaeval guilds, universities, colleges, communities, and other corporate bodies. They included the passion play as a part of the Cycles. And this part was the only thing that was to remain. The passion play remained because of its undying popularity, but it was to retreat into the backwaters of civilization where it was for centuries to be carried on unnoticed by a materialistic world.

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4. Miracle plays usually dealt with the lives of the saints. The Mysteries portrayed biblical scenes. The two terms are now synonymous. A Cycle was a series of pageants leading up to the great climax in the life of Christ, His Passion and death.
This almost purely religious amateur theatre came to an end with the secularization of the stage in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The amateur theatre as an institution ceased to exist for over two hundred years.

After this long period of somnolence there was noticed a stirring of popular dramatics. About 1850 the stirring came to be recognized as a definite reawakening. One of the reasons for this revival was the fact that amateurs could present dramas which could never find a place on the professional boards. At infrequent intervals the professional stage had attempted the production of religious plays but without success. The dominant note in this revival of the amateur theatre became a religious one. The world famous traditional passion plays of Europe were the forerunner of the new popular theatre.

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A very important feature of the amateur theatre is the parish dramatic club. These are dramatic societies of amateurs organized in parishes in Europe and especially in America. So popular have they become that within the next two years it is expected that those in the Archdiocese of Chicago will be formed into one large organization under the auspices of the Catholic Youth Organization of Chicago.
The rising interest in passion plays then, began the revival which has gradually been gathering momentum until today the amateur theatre threatens to surpass the legitimate in popularity. This supplanting of the professional stage by the lay movement would have taken place before this but for certain obstacles. Chief among these was the Christian attitude toward the stage.

Seventy-five years ago the Christian attitude toward the arts in general and toward the stage and the novel in particular was one of suspicion. The stage was no fit place for a Christian. Then the Christian leaders began to realize, almost too late, that first, the stage could and did in some cases actually destroy faith, and second, that here, in drama was a potent field that could readily be used in Christian endeavor. This change of attitude greatly assisted in the revival of the amateur theatre.

At first the revival consisted in a slavish imitation of the regular drama. Gradually, as was to be expected, the religious motive was injected into the themes. It was soon found that not a great deal of the professional material available could be used by amateurs and so the cry went up "what can we use". Naturally, plays of a religious character were in demand.

Longmans, Green and Company seized the opportunity
offered by the new movement to conduct a religious play writing contest. As a result, some worthwhile plays have been published among them being *Pharaoh's Daughter* by Dr. and Mrs. Allison Gaw, and *Barter* by Brother Urban Nagle.

However, these contests took place a few years after the World War. For some years prior to the War the subject matter was almost entirely that of the Old Testament. After the War, because of the continually increasing popularity of passion plays, the subject matter of the amateur religious theatre adopted the New Testament as a source of dramatic material.

The amateur dramatic clubs found that religious plays were popular only at certain times of the year, notably around Christmas and especially during Lent. Other types of plays were needed and soon the supply far exceeded the demand. A host of amateur writers, whose works would never reach the public through the regular channels, took advantage of the lack of discreet criticism on the part of the amateur producers to unload on them very inferior compositions.

This caused another difficulty to arise. A difficulty that would delay the recognition of the new movement by competent critics. These hastily written dramas were far from being contributions to the art. Reliable critics looked upon them askance and, after brief but sufficient consideration, took no more notice of them. Unfortunately, this experience
made the critics shy at even professional dramas with a religious atmosphere.

This condition of the paucity of really worthwhile plays in the amateur repertoire remains today. Likewise, and for this reason, the attitude of the critics remains unchanged. When we find recognized critics making the following remarks about religious plays we must admit that there is room for improvement.

The critic in *Time* for April 2, 1934, writes:

> When Irish-Catholic playwrights experience the tug of pious inspiration, the results are likely to be more ennobling than entertaining. The *Joyous Season*, like Eugene O'Neill's *Days Without End*, is a serious and ambitious drama, celebrating Faith. It achieves its purpose smoothly but without that wit which, in plays condoning uncomfortable sophistication, gave Playwright Barry his authority.

More concerning the same plays as reviewed by the drama critic of the *Chicago Tribune*: "It's a time worn and frayed technique when the hero tries to resolve his own conscience through telling his wife--through a character in his book--of his own guilt."

The following week, however, in his column which he conducts in the *New World*, Father Lord states:

> Prophecy is hazardous, yet I'll attempt one. The critics who delighted in the pessimism and despair and black doubts and hopeless struggle of the old O'Neill, will be cynical, condescending, patroniz-
ingly contemptuous, and considerably put out at this new O'Neill of faith and hope. Modern cynical criticism is wedded so fast to its despair, that it will not accept a hopeful solution of life's problem even from its beloved O'Neill.

And in the issue of the same weekly for February 23, 1934, the same dramatist writes:

Everyone is commenting on it, and with intense surprise. Broadway, in a season when plays grow more and more indecent, shows this contrasting note of faith. In a melodrama, a Catholic bishop converts an atheist and gives him absolution as the curtain falls.

\textit{Wednesday's Child} is the story of a child torn to pieces through the divorce of his parents; a just Catholic protest against divorce. Maxwell Anderson's Catholic \textit{Mary of Scotland} is a sellout. Philip Barry, who strayed far from Catholic faith and morals in his dramatic past, offers Lillian Gish as a delightful nun in \textit{The Joyous Season}. And Eugene O'Neill's \textit{play} of returning faith that ends at the foot of the crucifix, has been steadily mounting in popularity and the size of the audiences. Can it be that the Catholic Revival in America has definitely started with the stage?

While hailing the advent of plays dealing with religious themes on the regular stage we must not be carried away by our enthusiasm. No doubt there are various breeches of technic in many modern religious dramas, yet we must be objective enough to admit this fact. While defending the authors and their works we must also criticize, and it is

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only through this criticism that religious drama will again come into its own.

The legitimate Theatre is not yet ready for religious drama but, because of the rising tide of enthusiasm in the amateur theatre, the regular stage will find it in time both profitable and uplifting to produce more and more plays of a religious character. For the present, however, we can only study the products of the amateur stage for any enlightenment concerning this branch of dramatic art.

The business of entertaining the people has become one of the most important, because so profitable, in the world. But the drama has become hopelessly commercialized as the photo-drama has become. The intellectual drama, the problem play, the psychological and analytical tragedy presented successfully by a commercialized stage earns money on some other ground than the intellectual. This plight of the professional stage is unwittingly assisting in the revival of amateur dramatics.

It is this hopeless situation, recognized by all men, that points the way of The Parish Theatre. It will be the refuge of the free drama; that is, a drama composed without thought of the cash profits, based on the life of man, natural and simple, void of the artificial and the stagey. It will provide a stage for the independent company. 9.

The popularity of the passion play, the changed Christian attitude toward the stage, the condition of the modern secular drama, and finally, the adoption by the religious bodies of the drama as an adjunct to the furtherance of their programs has resulted in a revival of the amateur religious stage. While this popular movement has not, as yet, in any appreciable way affected the professional stage, even there we may see traces of the revulsion that was bound to follow the atheistic, ultra-realistic, and real pagan dramas that have held sway for a number of years. It is however in the amateur theatre, in the colleges and universities that this revulsion of taste is most noticeable.

Another factor contributing to the popular revival has been the increasing interest among literary scholars in the movement. The art is indubitably indebted to these students of literature, to the men of letters who have encouraged this revival from the beginning. Students, like Caroline Frederick who has made known to the world many of the centuries old folk and passion plays of Europe, are to be congratulated for their patient research in this field. Allardyce Nicoll, in England, Mary Austin, in the United States have materially aided the new movement by their articles which have appeared in several literary periodicals, notably in The Mask and the Theatre Arts Monthly Magazine.
These and other scholars have capably considered the many difficulties confronting the revival which would have proceeded with greater celerity but for the lack of workable material. Mr. Allardyce Nicoll, in an article in The Mask for April, 1925, considers this problem and proposes a solution. He would assign to the Universities the task of providing those materials upon which principles of the drama can be based. Those materials in spite of immense bulk of literary matter, produced on Shakespeare and on Shakespeare's contemporaries, are frequently lacking for the student who goes out of the direct highway in the realm of drama. Not only have continental influences not been fully traced, the very influence of earlier upon later English drama has not been mapped out. One task of the University, therefore, ought to be to gather together all the materials which may be useful to the student of the drama or of the theatre, classify that material and make it generally accessible.10.

The Universities, however, are slow in taking up this challenge. In the amateur dramatic clubs, in the highways and byways of our national life the revival in drama forges ahead. As has been stated, this is due in part to the disappointing offerings of Broadway. The failure, in recent years, of the professional stage as a popular institution

10. Allardyce Nicoll, "The Universities and the Drama", The Mask, April, 1925, xi, p.67. 
The latest dramatic bibliography is, Blanche M. Baker,
has been recognized just as the vitality of the amateur theatre is accepted for

though the unseeing may cry "the Road is dead and Broadway dying" the Theatre is very much alive. Alive in the highways of its forty-eight states where theatres little, community, or local are giving back to an eager public a living theatre that had almost disappeared.

Not a small part of this revivified popular theatre is the producing of religious plays. Passion plays are springing up all around us. Old plays are being revived or copied, new plays are being written, all having as their motivating theme, the Passion of Our Lord. Twenty years ago the only passion play that was known outside of a small locality was the justly famous production of Oberammergau. Today the plays of Erl, Thiersee, and Fribourg, to mention a few, are widely known. Scholars have enthusiastically taken the texts for analysis. The results they have published, mostly in magazine articles, to the increasing delight of interested readers.

Glenn H. Hughes in his The Story of the Theatre has an excellent dramatic bibliography as an appendix.
Other communities, envious of their neighbor's popularity in this regard, have revived passion plays long since forgotten. Fortunately, the texts were treasured in the libraries of the town councils, the monasteries, and the universities. Stieldorf, Vaal, Erl, in Europe, and Santa Fe, and Union City in the United States are the outstanding leaders in this revival of old passion plays.

Organization and leadership have not been wanting. In the United States one of the most potent factors in bringing about the revival of religious drama is the Catholic Dramatic Movement with headquarters in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

The purpose of this well-established Movement is to provide and to support clean and wholesome productions in order to make the Catholic stage again what it was and what it should be, a place of decent entertainment, an educational institution, a part of the great program of Catholic Action, the handmaid of religion.12

As a means to this end the sponsors of the Movement have undertaken the publication of plays which are clean in words, actions, and ideas, interesting and wholesome in their plot, entertaining and elevating in their impression upon the audience. Art not for art's sake only, but submitted to the rules of decency and Christian principles and so elevated to higher standards.13

to higher standards. 13

Three other commendable activities of the Movement are the publications of books on practical stage work, the Bureau of Information which gives to members of the Guild advice on any branch of dramatics, and finally, the organization of Catholic stages in the Catholic Dramatic Guild. Already thousands of amateur dramatic clubs, Catholic and public libraries, and individuals have joined the Guild.

The Movement has carried on successfully for a number of years. At first the difficulties were almost insurmountable on account of the odium clinging to the professional stage and to actors and actresses. Yet the Movement has persevered and now sounds a hopeful note when the sponsors state that this attitude has now been changed and that religious plays and "passion plays are becoming more popular every year". 14

The Catholics are not alone in sponsoring the revival. On the contrary, the interest in the amateur theatre is being awakened by the most authoritative group of people who are recognized as of the most importance in the art. This group

13. Ibid., p.i.
14. Another important organization that is aiding greatly in the revival of the religious drama is the Catholic Actors Guild. It was begun some years ago in New York where it still has headquarters. Since its inception it has become nation-wide and includes members of the moving picture colonies in California.
was organized in 1932 and is known as the National Theatre Conference. It was, and still is, under the leadership of George Pierce Baker; the vice-presidents are Gilmor Brown of Pasadena and Edward C. Mabie of Iowa, and Edith J. Isaacs, of the Theatre Arts Monthly Magazine, is the secretary and treasurer.

In the summer of 1933 this Conference addressed a questionnaire to over four thousand individuals. The questions pertained to the state of the theatre in the country at large, the needs, opportunities, and future of the popular American theatre. The results of the questionnaire were published in a brochure The American Theatre in Social and Educational Life which presents "a series of interesting and provocative ideas backed by facts and figures and illuminated by a mass of modern instances which are always informative and often highly entertaining."

The beginning of this report is for us a favorable indication of the attitude of competent critics anent the present situation of the Broadway theatre. Quite definitely it is stated that "there was nothing in the history of the

theatre, nothing essential to theatre practice, which would make the form of the Broadway theatre, familiar to this generation, a desirable permanent form of the American Theatre". Since this is a repudiation of Broadway, our national theatre in its revival will at least be something different than the productions of the Great White Way. It is not being too hopeful to assert that when the national American drama does definitely evolve it will contain elements favorable to religion, and at least one phase of this national theatre will be passion plays.

The amateur drama of community, university, college, high school, and parish was given fresh impetus by this report of the Conference. These amateurs were made to realize that they were taking a very important part in the revival of drama. The report states, in this regard, that to foster the growth of a native drama and to develop a sound national theatre, the best policy was to stimulate dramatic enterprises in the various regions of the country-differing as they do in race, climate, history, and habit—to encourage them to develop their own theatres, their own playwrights, actors, and other theatre artists, in the belief that all these tributary sources would, eventually, serve to feed and strengthen the main stream of the professional theatre.17

16. Ibid., p.236.
17. Ibid., p.236.
This was the final stamp of approval which the amateur theatre needed, the approval of authority. The revival is started quite definitely, it needs only encouragement and then the history of the art is likely to be repeated in the ascension to perfection.

It seems quite evident from the preceding pages then, that a revival of religious drama is with us. True, it has not yet fully developed but it is clear that, if present trends continue there can be no doubt that the next twenty-five years should see a flowering of religious drama that will equal many of the best periods of religious drama of the past. Further, because of the awakened interest in passion plays, because of the enthusiastic audiences who attend them every year, because of the literary merit of at least some of them, the passion play has been the fore-runner of this revival.

In the following pages there are set down specific instances of this interest in passion plays. After a general discussion of traditional passion plays throughout the world with brief mention, in passing, of certain of the best known and most important of them, a few of the plays are treated individually. The treatment consists of a general description of the play and its history. This is followed by a criticism of the play, its plot, characterization, text, and literary values.
After treating traditional plays then modern revivals of old texts are considered in the same way, i.e. a general outline, then specific examples.

The third part of the thesis takes innovations. By this is to be understood new and, comparatively new passion plays, their texts and their production. Also, we have divided the plays geographically. First, there is a treatment of the European plays. Then, crossing the water, we take up a discussion of those in the United States.

We have catalogued each play into one of three classes, viz., scriptural, historical, or symbolical or allegorical. By "scriptural" is to be understood that a certain play uses only the passion of Christ for the plot, for characters it has only those of the Testament. By "historical" we mean a play whose plot while dealing with the passion of Christ as a motivating theme also uses other means as, the Romans at the time, or the situation of the Hebrew people. In an historical passion play, even though the characters may be fictitious they are placed in historical settings. Finally, there is the "symbolical" passion play. This is the type of passion play in which the characters represent other things, as virtues or vices. Another "symbolical" method is the portrayal of the passion of Christ in allegorical form, as in Father Lord's Fantasy of the Passion in which
the scenes are modern and the incidents in the passion do not at all appear on the stage.

This chapter then has shown that the present revival in religious drama and the popular stage is not something that has never occurred in the previous history of the drama. Furthermore, we see that history is repeating itself and the process of rejuvenation of the drama through an amateur revival is taking place in our day and passion plays were the prime movers of this revival. The following pages will endeavor to explain how the passion plays took such an important part in the modern amateur theatre by a description, history and criticism of them.
And yet, the literary research worker can find in these crude attempts at drama much that will be of assistance in understanding the history of the art. These plays have been passed down from generation to generation, holding much of their original content and plot and from them we learn that

The Miracle Play was the training school of the Romantic drama. In England during the slow lapse of some five centuries, the miracle with its tremendous theme and religious passion, was preparing the day of the Elizabethan stage; for despite all crudities, prolixities and absurdities of detail, these English Mystery and Miracle Cycles are nobly dramatic both in range and spirit. In verbal expression they are almost invariably weak and bold, but on the mediaeval scaffold stage the actor counted for more than the authors and the religious faith and feeling of the audience filled in the homely lines with an unwritten poetry. 18

While this citation refers to English drama, it is likewise true of the continental stage. This, their historical value, is one of the reasons for the revival of interest in these traditional religious dramas. The texts were often too verbose, frequently covering pages of mere cant and offsetting the effect desired by a frequent reference to the moral lesson contained in the text, or exemplified by the actors. In spite of their many shortcomings they are popular. In order to understand how they became so well patronized, we must recall that the reign of prosperity throughout the world during the first quarter of the twentieth century brought

about a great surge in travelling. People with more time for leisure began to look for interesting things; time and distance were no obstacles. As a result, the passion plays began to be more and more heard of, and sought out. Due to its long duration and a well planned advertising campaign, the Passion Play of Oberammergau became the most celebrated. This awakened interest in others. The World War put a stop to this rising enthusiasm for a time, but the wave of superabundance of material things in the conqueror nations again brought passion plays to the fore. Although the production of Oberammergau is the most famous of passion plays, there are many others in Europe hidden away in remote valleys, or, like Salzburg, on the road of tourists.

Passing from a general to a particular consideration of these traditional European passion plays one is inclined, not without reason, to treat first, those folk plays of the Austrian Tyrol and southern Germany. It is these that in the last fifty years have caught the attention of the world. As a consequence of their popularity the study of other passion plays has been taken up both in Europe and in America.

Throughout Europe, but especially in the Catholic territory of Tyrol and the Catholic province of Bavaria, are found
numerous Passion Plays, some of them as old, or older than that of Oberammergau. Among these little known centers of theatrical activity is the hamlet in the Tyrolean called Erl.

It is a sleepy village which for years reposes in somnolent peacefulness except for the occasional village celebrations. It really comes to life during the Spring, Summer, and Autumn every ten years when the Passion Play is produced. No record remains to tell how old the village or its Passion Play is but,

the village of Erl can look back upon an old tradition in its Passion Play. There is record of a performance at Easter in 1630, when the village was largely populated by blacksmiths and river boat hands. It had long had a stage on a threshing floor, and was known as a goal for pilgrims even when trade no longer supported its people and new roads of traffic took the place of the rivers, and forsook this peasant village. In 1792 the theatre was destroyed by fire, and again in 1809 the little church and the temporary stage were destroyed. "The Church needs money, we must act again," said the people. So in 1859 a new barn shaped theatre was built, and the Passion Play was resumed. It is given every ten years and draws thousands of pilgrims. In 1902 there were fourteen thousand, in 1912, 50,000 and in 1922, 70,000 visitors.

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as yet, has not been especially attracted to religious drama. This, and the Salzburg Festival are evidences of the vitality of the modern amateur theatre in other than religious fields.

During the writer's sojourn in Europe Erl did not produce the Passion Play. During the Summer of 1928 we visited the town and found it typical of Austrian villages. The description of Thiersee which follows could, in its general outlines, be applied to Erl. From what we could gather the Passion Play of Erl is a quiet, rustic affair depending more upon the sincerity of the actors and the good will of the audience for its success than upon any literary merit in the text itself, except perhaps its medieval phraseology. Nor is the histrionic ability of the actors to be especially noted but, what they lack in art and finesse, they endeavor to cover with an earnestness and sincerity that well becomes the characters they portray.

It is of the purely scriptural type of passion play. Practically nothing is included in dialogue or characterization which is not either explicitly or implicitly contained in the combined account of the four evangelists in the New Testament of the Passion of Christ.

The Passion Play of Thiersee is very similar to that of Erl. It is based on Scripture, its plot is confined to the historical events, its characters are those of the New Testament. We witnessed this production in the Spring of 1930.

About 10 o'clock on a Sunday morning we arrived in Thiersee in time to hear the reverberations of a small cannon.
This was the signal for a general slow movement of the crowd toward the entrance of the barn-like structure, which we had identified by the painting on the front as "Thiersee Passion-spiel Theater."

Another by far more capable pen than ours can briefly relate the history of this passion play. Caroline Frederick has translated from the German an interesting article "Folk and Passion Plays", from the magazine Tyrolia, which appeared in the June, 1931 number of the Theatre Arts Monthly. There she says:

Next to Erl, both in character and age, is Thiersee, lying in lovely seclusion not far from Kufstein. When the Passion Play was prohibited in Bavaria, the people of Oberaudorf lent their texts and stage settings to Thiersee, securing payments in measures of grain. Performances have been given there since 1801, and a play house was built in 1885, high above the lake. Showing the progress of the plays a new playhouse was erected in 1927.  

This may seem quite ancient yet other villages in the same part of the world can point with pride to much older performances than that of Thiersee. Botzen, which periodically, at the whim of the god of War, changes its nationality, alternating between allegiance to Italy and Austria, was, in the Middle Ages, known for its picturesque and elaborate pageants.

21. Ibid. p. 514.
Definite records describe these pageants as early as 1341. In the records of the city council around 1470 are mentioned Corpus Christi plays which are referred to as "community plays" denoting that they were performed not by any professional company but by the members of the commonwealth. These pageants were often Cycles, or Mysteries and as such contained a dramatic presentation of the Passion of Christ.

In 1514 this passion play of Botzen had a separate entity apart from the pageants, or mysteries. Its pretentiousness and splendour increased, not necessarily to its advantage as art, until it was prolonged to last a whole week. Nothing was omitted from the accounts of the Four Evangelists and many symposical characters were introduced until "the introduction alone had 110 speaking roles."

Not far from Botzen is the village of Brixlegg, where in 1868 was performed a passion play which attained much publicity and was the immediate occasion for the study of passion plays by competent scholars. The Romantic Movement was at the crest of the wave and such things as passion plays performed in out-of-the-way places by simple folk were found to appeal to Romanticism. After careful research and many years of discussion it was finally agreed that "The Miracle Play was the training school of the Romantic drama.

Had the Passion Plays become known at any other time except during the Romantic Movement they may have remained unknown but fortunately it was

Through the influence of the Romantic movement, and the delight in mediaeval institutions, brought to the educated by scholarly research, the old folk plays of Tyrol have again found favour. The rise of Oberammergau, more imitated than was wholesome, has also had its effects good and bad. For several decades a taste in poetry and stage craft was cultivated, not altogether in keeping with the simplicity and native candor of the Tyrolese Passion Players. 23

The traditional passion plays mentioned so far are all restricted to a comparatively small section of Europe. Strangely enough passion plays are usually more successful in mountainous districts. When one considers various conditions, however, this does not seem so strange. It is difficult for the people to visit the cities. It was, and in many places still is, an arduous journey to the outside world so that it was very seldom that the folk of the mountain enclosed villages had an opportunity to travel. In Winter snow made the roads impassable, besides the ever present danger of avalanches. In the Fall and Spring the melting snows gushing down the mountains make the paths mires and treacherously slippery the roads. Only for a couple of months in the heat of the summer was the way to

23. Frederick, op. cit., p. 513.
As a result of these obstacles to transportation the villagers were thrown upon their own resources for amusements and social gatherings. The theatre, as represented by the art of mimicry, being so much a part of man it was natural that the drama should develop among these folk. Their social life was so bound up with religion and so little time was left to them during the short summer that they must combine religious festivals with social gatherings. Every social gathering is characterized by some form of dramatic art and it was true in this case. Drama was as necessary for them as it is for the man of the city.

The subject matter of this folk drama was bound to be determined by the character of their gatherings which were always religious festivals. Their close association in their daily lives with nature, their almost daily witnessing of the elements unleashed in a destructive mood was bound to cause them to seek protection and divine aid. This tended to make them even more intensely religious. What more natural than that they should develop passion plays.

For centuries then, these simple folk found their one source of enjoyment in producing passion plays. This satisfied their inherent dramatic instinct while at the same time it served as a prayer.

So it is that living conditions would, in part at least,
explain why passion plays developed mostly in mountainous regions as the Dolomites and the Tyrolese Alps. Yet these districts are not alone in their love of this form of the drama. On the contrary, no less an authority than Sheldon Cheney tells us that

"Passion Plays are regularly given at points as far away from the Tyrol as Selzach, in Switzerland, and Höriritz, now in Czechoslovakia. I have found no list of the Tyrol plays that tends to completeness. The best known productions of recent years, perhaps, have been those at Brixleg in 1913, and at Erl in 1912 and 1922-----of the villages mentioned, Brixleg, Erl, Thiersee are all near Kufstein."24

This authoritative statement should dispel any doubt about the widespread popularity of the European passion play. Because of the world wide popularity of Oberammergau one is inclined to the opinion that other passion plays are merely copies of that more famous production. Nothing could be farther from the truth than that erroneous presumption. On the contrary, each of these plays is firmly rooted in local traditions and very often manuscripts of a century or more supply the texts used today. The players usually are not concerned with art but their purpose in the presentation is almost wholly devotional, or patriotic.

So much for their popularity and history. As to their form, various factors tended to shape the pattern of the productions. Since they were community projects everyone wanted a part. The village choir was always given consideration and this caused to be included in the plays the chorus, with the choir director as the chorus leader, or expositor. Others, for various reasons, being unable to carry speaking parts were included in tableaux and scenes of acted incidents, or pantomines. These were often taken from the Old Testament and had a symbolical meaning referring to the part of the passion play that followed them. Sometimes these tableaux were incongruously depicted with pagan gods, or other mythological characters mixed with those of the revelation. At other times these mute characters were included in the plot to represent the virtues and vices. The play then became a moralistic, or allegorical type of passion play. They were truly a popular institution composed by the people of materials at hand.

The acting was not concerned especially with rules, which is true of all really great portrayals. These rustic actors did possess the great secret--they lived their parts not only on the stage but in their daily lives. More, perhaps, than this, they were able to visualize, to become actually in their own minds while on the boards the characters
they represented. However, this would not be sufficient to supply that polish, finesse and finish that distinguishes the histrionic artist from the amateur and so they remain and will remain an amateur theatre.

What they lacked in technique they endeavored to cover with an "absolute sincerity, a sort of living truth of feeling, (which) was combined with perfect outward truth of character."

The pattern and the acting ability were not lacking but the building of atmosphere was woefully inadequate. The scenes of the passion, the entry into Jerusalem, the Ecce Homo scene, the crucifixion cannot favorably be enclosed in sets of cloth and canvas. The illusion is destroyed. This can be realized when one has witnessed the play in the completely enclosed theatre at Thiersee, and on the open stage of Oberammergau. Again we ask Mr. Sheldon Cheney to substantiate a statement with a quotation from his article already referred to. He writes:

In regard to the mise-en-scene, one may well feel that the Oberammergau players have been exceedingly wise to hold to their outdoor stage. There are effects and incidents that seem too large for roofed space and artificial lights. If one were pressed for a chief criticism of the Thiersee production, it would be that these peasant-actors have listened to bad advice about the backgrounds for their playing.

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25. Cheney, op. cit. p.266.
In spite of this deficiency in their art these passion plays, because of their history, form, acting, and settings are worthy progenitors of the revival of the amateur theatre. Further details will supply themselves in the later treatment of the Passion Play of Oberammergau. For the present we can give only a list of the best known of European passion plays. Unfortunately, as yet little information is available concerning the majority of them. It can be stated however, that they all follow the general outline which is natural since they use the same subject matter for material.

This list includes: Brixlegg (every 10 years); Inzig (no set interval between); Thiersee (every year); Erl (every 10 years, last performance in 1932); Hoeritz and Selzach (every 5 years); Innsbruck; Waal, Donaueschingen; Munzelsau, Eibesthal; Stieldorf (every 5 years, last performance 1933); Botzen; Meran; Einsedeln (last performance 1930); Abbey Weingarten in Wuertemberg (annually); Calcar in the Rhineland (last performance in 1932); Frauenstein near Wiesbaden; Weingarten in Westphalia (next performance 1935).

In the above list is not included the Passion Play of Oberammergau which is given as a rule every 10 years. This play stands out by itself. All other passion plays are compared with it. Every article on this type of drama sooner or later refers to it, no matter how remote the passion play
under discussion may be, as for example in an article on the Yaqui Passion Play of Arizona. Because of its importance we have left the Oberammergau Passion Play to be treated in a separate chapter which follows.
CHAPTER THREE
THE OBERAMMERGAU PASSION PLAY

Many thousands of people from all over the world and of every class of society have witnessed the Passion Play of Oberammergau. These have returned to their homes with the deep impression that the spectacle has made upon them. They have talked about it to friends and neighbors. They have told how it is purely a community project. Everything connected with the play to the minutest detail is taken care of by amateurs, the people of Oberammergau. Sooner or later the question arises, if those people can do that why can't we? And the reply is usually another amateur production, another passion play.

It is for this reason, for its influence in developing other passion plays that the production of Oberammergau is important in the revival of the amateur theatre of today. Once a passion play has been produced those connected with it feel the thrill of walking the boards and the fascination spurs them on to the production of other plays. The result is,—the amateur theatre, the popular theatre.

Its importance therefore merits a separate treatment of some length. This treatment is divided into a brief history of the play, then a brief outline of the changes which the text has undergone in three hundred years. This is follow-
ed by an outline of the play itself, its form, and pattern. Finally an analysis of the text with quotations, is given.

The first performance of the Passion Play took place in Oberammergau in 1634. It was the fulfillment of a vow made in the previous year. This is the first performance of the play of which there is any record. Despite the absence of written testimony, tradition tells us that the play is much older. This is quite probable since other villages in the vicinity had been producing passion plays since the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Of the Oberammergau piece the oldest extant text dates to 1662 and has the note "Newly edited and described in the year of the Lord 1662". This text is known as the Wild text and was used until 1740.

The play was enacted in the churchyard. This custom continued for two centuries although the form of the stage, and the text also, had passed through various changes during that time. In 1830 the Curate Aloys Plutz would not allow the play to take place in the customary setting. This, as it turned out, was fortunate for the play. Now, new and more spacious quarters were found. The old site of presentat-

27. For most of the information concerning the history of the play we are indebted to a book entitled Oberammergau and its Passion Play by Hermine Diemer.

tion had been narrow and so had cramped the style of the play. From this time on the play showed a steady increase in popularity.

The organization of the play is likewise kept as a community affair. Everything of importance connected with the production is decided by the town council, who are elected by the villagers. At times a question of such import will arise that the matter is put before the people to be decided by ballot. Truly it is a community and an amateur production. So much so that even the cast of characters is decided upon by the council.

Since 1850 the people of Oberammergau have had a comparatively easy time in preparing and presenting the play. Previous to that it was a continual struggle. The necessary funds had to be raised by taxation and by voluntary contributions. More than once the production meant the bankruptcy of the town treasury.

Only twice in three hundred years have the people failed to produce the play at the appointed time of every decade. The first occasion was in 1870 when, on account of the Napoleonic Wars, there were not sufficient men in the village to enact the roles. The second failure was in the year 1920 when men were lacking due to the ravages of the World War. But, even on this occasion the vow was fulfilled although the fulfillment came two years later in 1922.
This is a brief outline of the history of the play.

The text of the play has passed through various interesting phases. It has been altered with the changing times so that we may see Classicism, the Renaissance, Romanticism and Realism reflected in the words.

Originally the text was taken from a mediaeval manuscript written two centuries before the first performance of the play in Oberammergau. Hermine Diemer, in her book previously referred to, presupposes this when she writes, upholding the theory that the Passion Play itself is older than 1634;

If the Ammergauers had not had a passion play before 1634, it is not to be supposed that they would have adopted a text that had been written nearly two centuries before, a text that needs must have been obsolete in both language and conception.30

This first text was revised in 1750 and the new edition was used in that and the following decade. Father Rosner, a Benedictine, was the reviser and he used as a model the Jesuit drama of the time. He also changed the form from mediaeval rhyme to Alexandrines.

31. The original text was taken from an older one known as the St. Ulric and Afra Text. This was written in mediaeval rhyme. It has been edited by Dr. August Hartmann, and was entitled originally, Passio Domini in Lingua Vulgari.
32. This Jesuit drama was replete with moralistic bombast containing long monologues. The plays were much involved as was the
Father Rosner's text proved too confusing both for the simple folk of Oberammergau and for the audiences. As a result it was simplified in 1780 by Father Magurs Knipfelberger. It was not however because of the literary values that the text was changed but because the people felt that the purpose of the play would be better fulfilled with a more simplified version. This purpose is stated in the title page of the 1780 text, "zur Betrachtung vorgestellt".

In spite of the disregard for the literary values the new text reflects the influence of the literary movements of those times. Realism was becoming stronger and was the rival of Romanticism. The former is evident from a study of the text for a radical change toward Realism can be seen in the form, atmosphere, and dialogue. Still, the symbolical figures were allowed to remain but they were held in the background and were much depleted in numbers. But Realism would not concede this much and in 1810 Father Ottmar Weiss in his revision did away with the symbolical characters entirely retaining only the "prologus" and the chorus. A few of the dialogue the intention being to make of the drama a majestic and totally serious affair. Allegoric figures were present to superfluity. Death, Sin, Envy, and a whole host of characters cluttered up the stage almost continually thereby confusing the main plot. Music was introduced and the whole became similar to an Italian opera, reflecting the influence of Italian classicism. See E.K. Chambers, The Mediaeval Stage, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1905, vol.i, for discussion of Jesuit methods in drama.

33. From a facsimile of the text Das Passionspiel, gedruckt bei Johann Bernhard Stadlberger, Augsburg, 1780.
tableaux remained but were entirely separated from the plot itself. Another very important change in the revision was the writing of the play in prose.

Even this text was not to endure in its original form. In 1845 a new curate was appointed to Oberammergau, Alois Daisenberger, and it is his remodeled play that remains in use today. This last renovation was slight, and, as he said, he did "not alter anything in the idea of the text" but confined himself to shortening a few passages, eliminating obsolete words and improving the verses of the hymns. "His revised text has proved to be the best one until this day." 34

Containing evidence, as it does, of various movements in literature for the past three hundred years and more this text is of interest to the student of literature. In spite of the many favorable improvements, in spite of its historical interest it has not met with the approval of some critics as witness an article in the Literary Digest for August 16, 1930. Thus, in a summing up of various opinions we read:

As for the text, Germania's critic maintains that it seems to need a fundamental going over:

"It seems to have been put together by degrees in various past generations." 35

34. Diemer, op.cit., p.64.
By this statement the critic, quoted in the article, betrays his incompetency to criticize the play. A little research work would have assured him that it has been put together, or revised at various times. The same critic continues:

"Now it lacks all unity of effect. It either lacks power as pathos, or it is too sickly sweet. Recitations in sing-song are tolerable only when they accompany purely musical effects, as in Bach. Sing-song recitation is unendurable when the text, as at Oberammergau, travesties a loftily inspired original."[30]

These words refer to the hymns and poems chanted by the Chorus. The critic then attacks the text proper with these words:

"But this wretched doggerel lyric is scarcely worse than the text of the scene (left over, obviously, from a previous century) in which the soldiers, beneath the cross (which has just been raised) talk in this style:

"Faust: A sign with an inscription hung atop of the cross? Ha! this is doing quite royally.

Captain: Lay hold here and raise the cross higher. But don't let go."[37]

It would seem, however that only the German critics disapprove. The same article in the Literary Digest quotes the critic of the Liverpool Post, Vera Chapell, as follows:

"These Bavarian peasants have the artistry that springs from ancient tradition, from a long desired ideal realized at last, an artistry diverted from the daily labor of..."

36. Ibid., p. 263
37. Ibid., p. 263.
carving, of pottery, of bookbinding, of Inn-keeping, of typewriting, into a highly expressive channel. It is this spirit alone which makes the play possible. 38

This is taking a more charitable view of the matter for the play does not pretend to be a notable piece of literature. True, it contains many discrepancies, many irregularities, but it was never intended to be anything else than a popular piece that could be readily understood by its audiences who for the most part are not concerned with its literary values.

Most critics, while pointing out its failings in dramatic values, at the same time, praise it for its robust naturalness.

Rather drastic criticism has also been aimed at some of the mechanics employed in the production. The use of rubber clubs in breaking the bones of the robbers; the use of the hollow tipped spear which causes "blood" to issue from the side of the Christus; the collapse of the pasteboard and wood "sepulchre", these are a few of the more commonly noted mechanical defects.

However, the atmosphere that has been built around these faults is such that the illusion produced is very effective. These crude mechanical devices were intended, and are still intended to assist a rude, unimaginative audience of peasants who are still in the majority at the presentations, in spite of the continually increasing number of foreigners among the spectators. Crude though these devices may be they cer-

38. Ibid., p.263.
tainly are of invaluable assistance in helping the audiences to better understand, enjoy, and take home with them the Passion Play.

To expect that all criticism of the Play would be entirely favorable would be beyond reason. It is neither expected nor desired and endless pages might be written on both sides, favorable and unfavorable, about the Passion Play of Oberammergau. For the present then, we shall let the matter rest.

With this interesting history of the play and the text in mind we can better appreciate the third part of this chapter. This is a brief description of the parts of the presentation with quotations illustrating many of the points mentioned in the preceding pages. From what has been said so far it can readily be seen that this is truly an amateur production and worthy of being considered one of the most important causes of the revival of the amateur theatre today.

As regards the form of the play, it is divided into three parts. Each part consists of choruses, tableaux, and scenes, or "presentations", as the official text terms them. There are twenty-four tableaux.

The first part of the play opens with an introduction by the choir:
Wirf zum heiligen Staunen dich nieder.
Von Gottes Fluch gebeugtes Geschlecht!
Friede dir! Aus Sion Gnade wieder!
Nicht ewig zürnert Er.
Der Beleidigte. - Ist sein Zürnen gleich gerecht.
Ich will - so spricht der Herr -
Den Tod des Sünders nicht, - vergeben
Will ich ihm - er soll leben,
Versöhnen wird - selbst meines Sohnes Blut, versöhnen:
Preis Anbetung - Freudentränen,
Ew'ger Dir! 39

This is verse in alternate rhyming couplets. The first tableau is presented: Die Vertreibung aus dem Paradiese.
The chorus describes the scene in rhyming couplets:

Die Mensheit ist verbannt aus Edens Au'n,
Von Sünd' umnachtet und von Todes Grau'n.
The chorus continues, sounding a note of hope in the expectation of a Saviour and His Victory over Death.

The tableau closes and a poem of welcome is spoken by the Prologus, or Chorus Leader. This is followed by the second tableau, or lebendes Bild; Verehrung des Kreuzes.
It is accompanied by a supplicatory prayer sung by the Chorus:

Ew'ger Hör'e Deiner Kinder Stammeln!
Weil ein Kind ja nichts als stammeln kann.

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The first part or Abteilung of the passion play proper begins. It is entitled: vom Einzuge Christi in Jerusalem bis zur Gefangennehmung im Olivetengarten.

The chorus sings the "Hosanna" song of the Hebrew children. Toward the end of the song the cries are taken up by the crowd and the Christus enters as the chorus parts to left and right revealing the scene on the stage.

This is the first scene in the first act. The act is in four scenes and depicts the entry into Jerusalem, the driving of the money changers from the temple, and the return to Bethany in two scenes.

The form of each act is as follows: first the Chorus enters slowly. Then the Prologus, or Leader speaks a poem. A tableau depicting a scene from the Old Testament follows and is described in its symbolical and allegorical meaning with a song rendered by the Chorus. The Chorus retires and the scenes follow one another without interruption.

The scenes follow the order of the account of the Passion of Christ as related in the Four Gospels. Nothing is omitted, and practically nothing is included which is not in the sacred text. Beginning with the leave taking of Jesus from His Mother at Bethany, the play follows Him throughout His Agony and continues up to the Resurrection. An epilogue of the Ascension into Heaven ends the play.
The few excerpts that follow will give an idea of the intensity of the language wrapped in its simplicity. We must remember that the play is written for country people. While the words here separated from the entire text may seem cold and even inane, one must remember that spoken in the proper atmosphere they are productive of the desired results, the exciting and moving of the emotions.

Wo ist er hin? Wo ist er hin,
Der Schönste alle Schönen?
Mein Auge weinet, ach! um ihn,
Der Liebe heisse Tränen.
Ach, komme doch! ach, komme doch!
Sich diese Tränen fliessen;
Geliebter! wie, du zögerest noch,
Dich an mein Herz zu schliessen?

Whenever possible the dialogue is taken directly from the accounts of the four Evangelists in the New Testament. When not confined to Scripture the diction is sometimes flowery to excess, bombast, redundancy are not lacking. There are no lengthy speeches, which is an advantage for this allows the dialogue and action to flow along smoothly. There is no attempt to point a moral, or preach a sermon, the story is simply depicted.

The following scene of the farewell between the Christus and the Virgin Mother is typical of the diction. It is the fifth scene in the third act of the first part of the play:

Maria. Jesus! Liebster Sohn! Mit Sehnsucht eilt ich dir nach mit meinen Freundinnen, um dich noch einmal zu sehen, ehe du hingehest, ach!

Maria. Ach! Ich ahne es, was dies für ein Opfer sein wird.


Simon. Aber sein Entschluss ist gefosst.

Christus. Meine Stunde ist gekommen.

Alle Jünger. So bitte den Vater, dass er diese Stunde vorübergehen lasse.

Alle Frauen. Der Vater wird dich erhören, wie immer.

Christus. Meine Seele ist jetzt betrübt, und was soll ich sagen: Vater! rette mich von dieser Stunde? Doch dieser Stunde wegen bin ich ja in die Welt gekommen.

Maria. O Simeon! Simeon! ehrwürdiger Greis! Jetzt wird sich erfüllen, was du mir einst geweissagt hast: Ein Schwert wird deine Seele durchdringen!

Christus. Mutter! Der Wille des Vaters war dir stets heilig.


Christus. Was begehrst du, meine Mutter?

Maria. Dass ich mit dir in den heissen Kampf der Leiden, ja mit dir in den Todgehen dürfe!

Johannes. Welche Liebe!

Christus. Du wirst, liebe Mutter, mit mir leiden, wirst meinen Todeskampf mitkämpfen, dann aber auch meinen Sieg mitfeiern. Darum trüste dich!

Maria. O Gott, gib mir Stärke, dass mein Herz nicht breche!

Alle Frauen. Ach, beste Mutter!
Maria. So gehe ich denn, liebster Sohn, mit dir nach Jerusalem.


Christus. Ihr möget später dahingehen; für jetzt bleibt bei unsern Freunden Zu Bethanien! Ich empfehle euch, ihr treue Seelen, meine liebe Mutter nebst denen, die sie hierher begleitet haben.

Simon. O so lässet du uns das süßste Pfand deiner Liebe.

Magdalena. Nach dir ist uns nichts teurer, als deine Mutter.

Lazarus. Wenn nur auch du, bester Meister, hier verbleiben könntest!

Christus. Tröstet euch untereinander! Nach zwei Tagen aber möget ihr gemeinsam den Weg nach Jerusalem antreten, um auf den grossen Festtag dort zu sein.

Maria. Wie du willst, mein Sohn.


Maria. Mein Sohn. Wo werde ich dich wieder sehen?

Christus. Dort liebe Mutter, wo sich das Wort der Schrift erfüllt: Er ward wie ein Lamm, das zur Schlachtbank geführt wird und seinen Mund nicht öffnet.

Maria. Ach Gott! - Jesus mein Sohn! - deine Mutter!

This passage, and in fact, any of the text translated into English loses much of its native force and charm. The connotation of the words is frequently disappointing. We have nothing, for example, to signify the familiarity and intimacy of "du", in contradistinction to "sie". Many ex-
pressions in the native tongue lose their meaning and beauty when translated to another language.

The Judas scene contains the longest monologue in the play. The force, pathos and passion expressed so powerfully in the words are worthy of the best writers. It is a dramatic piece that stands out as a most effective bit of writing. The despair ridden and conscience stricken Judas, after the betrayal, occupies the stage alone, during the entire scene and dramatically renders the following monologue.

Wo gehe ich hin, die Schande zu verbergen, die Qualen des Gewissens abzustreifen?
Kein Waldesdunkel ist versteckt genug und keine Feisenhohle tief genug!
O Erde! Tue dich auf und verschlinge mich!
Wie gutig war er immer gegen mich! Wie freundlich trostete er mich, wenn manchmal mir finsterer Unmut auf der Seele lag!
Wie wunderselig Fühl'ich mich, wenn ich zu seinen Füssen sass, und Himmelslehre wie Königseim von seinem Munde floss! Wie liebreich mahnte, warnte er mich noch, als ich schon über schandlichen Verrat hinbrüttete!
Der gute Herr! - Und ich, ich hab' ihm so vergült! - - - - mich blind und taub gemacht!
Du warst der Ring, an dem der Satan mich erfasste, in den Abgrund mich zu der Bruder einem unter die Augen treten. Ein Ausgestossener, überall verhasst, verabscheut überall von jenen selbst, die mich verführten, als ein Verräter nun gebrandmarkt, irre einsam ich Innern.- Ach! Einer ware noch! O dürfte ich sein Antitz nochmal schu'n'. Ich wurde mich anklammern Ihm, dem einzigen Rettung-

Such, then, is the far-famed and justly renowned Passion Play of Oberammergau. In spite of many faults in values, dramatic and literary, it remains a monument to its authors, revisers, and producers of the last three hundred years. Its popularity and the many passion plays modeled after it prove its appeal and its influence.

This completes our treatment of traditional passion plays of Europe. We move to America for a further consideration of traditional passion plays.

At first one may be led to believe that because of the youth of the United States as a nation no such dramas exist within its borders. In general this is true, but research of recent years has proved that the Southwestern portions of the United States are rich in folklore not the least important
phase of which is the traditional passion plays that have been discovered. We pass, then, to a treatment of these passion plays of the Southwestern United States.

While they may not be of importance in influencing the revival of religious drama and the amateur theatre, they assuredly are a part of this movement. They have all the necessary requirements, acted by the people, often written in whole or in part by those same amateurs they have captured the imagination of audiences and students.
CHAPTER FOUR

TRADITIONAL PASSION PLAYS IN THE SOUTHWESTERN UNITED STATES

Research into the meager evidences of religious drama in the southwest portion of the United States reveals a treasury of discovered but almost wholly unexplored traditional religious pageants, festivals, and folk plays. These have proved of immense value in reconstructing the settings of early American literature. Their connection with European drama has served to shed new light upon them, their authors, origins, and mode of presentation. These performances have been going on for many years, in some cases for centuries, with little or no notice being taken of them except by the natives, the Indians, Mexicans, and Spanish.

Fortunately within the last decade interest among scholars and research workers has been awakened to such an extent that many of the beauties of this virgin field of literary research have been brought to light. Students must depend to a great extent upon the verbal traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation. Travel in the southwest, conversation with the descendents of the oldest families is usually necessary. Often, in some nook or cranny of a hacienda is hidden the text of a play. These are sometimes almost indecipherable yet the exultation of a Columbus awaits the patient, diligent student in working out a readable copy of the original.
The inspiration for this research work has been supplied by the Archaeological Society, the American Historical Society, the Historical Society of Santa Fe, and the American Folk Lore Society.

Mary Austin, an outstanding student in this field, has produced some of the most enlightening and interesting results concerning this phase of our American Literature. Some of her findings have been set down in an article in the Theatre Arts Monthly Magazine, for August, 1933, xvii, page 599 ff. Speaking of her adventures of discovery she writes, "It is always one of the thrilling expectations of searchers of records of that time, that one may yet come on a copy of that earliest American Drama."

This awakened interest in the folklore of the southwest has been further incited by the realization that the period of Spanish exploration in what is now the southwestern United States was also the period of distinguished flowering of the drama in Spain. Realizing this we can readily understand that the Conquistadores would carry many of the popular dramas with them to the New World.

Simultaneously with the period of exploration and settlement north of the Rio Grande in America, Lope de Rueda, Cervantes, Lope de Vega, and Calderon were producing the

Mary Austin, "Folk Plays of the Southwest", Theatre Arts Monthly, August 1933, xvii, p.599.
scores of comedias, autos, pasos, and entremeses in Spain and the interest in writing drama was such that the king and the common man equally participated in it. The teatro de corrales was a popular institution. The drama being so important for the enjoyment of life "It was natural that the first settlers to reach the banks of the Rio Grande sat down and, undaunted by their six months journey of privation and hardship, performed a play of their progress written by one Captain Farfan".

In this field of literature one of the first discoveries took place about fifteen years ago. It was the finding of the manuscript of one of the earliest, if not the first play produced. It was found not ten miles from the place of its first production in the plaza at San Juan Pueblo. If it was an unusual spectacle for the Indians it would be equally unusual for us because it was acted on horseback, soldiers and adventurous cavaliers being the actors. This staging was performed in celebration of the founding of the capital, under Oñate.

42 The teatro de corrales was subsidized by societies. It consisted of a troupe of travelling actors. Entering a street, they would blockade a portion of the pavement; set up a portable stage, and a few bits of scenery. In the corral the audience would gather to witness the Play. Hence the popular title teatro de corrales. The presentation finished the troupe packed up and moved to another section of the town where the same procedure would be followed.
43 Austin, op. cit., p. 600.
It was a drama of the Moors and the Christians which was very popular with the army; and, in fact, evidence has been found to show that it had also been enacted in Havana, British Guiana, the Philippines, and California. What seems to be the purest version of it is still performed occasionally in the vicinity of San Juan on Holy Cross Day. It is performed here on horse-back with all the traditional business.

How the play has changed its aspect in other parts of Mexico would at first deceive one into believing that it is an entirely different drama because Miss Austin has found that

In Mexico, owing to the prejudice against allowing the free use of horses to the natives, it degenerated into a dance, with sword play, and music. But at Alcalde and Santa Cruz, Mexico, although the text had been corrupted by being handed down these 300 years largely by word of mouth and occasional transcriptions by unlettered hands, it is still possible to make out a tolerable version of the dialogue, and the business appears scarcely to have suffered at all.44

It was natural that a tradition loving people like the Spanish would carry with them the customs of their traditional religion. One of the most important phases of the Spanish drama of that time was the producing of religious plays. Calderon reached the zenith of his dramatic career with The Great World Theatre.

The Spanish theatre transplanted to the New World brought with it many of these religious dramas among them being passion

44 Ibid., p. 600.
45 See Dr. Walsh's The Thirteenth Greatest of Centuries, for discussion of the arts and sciences up to the Reformation.
plays. One in particular about which some definite information has been found is related to the crucifixion. It is wholly allegorical and is based on the betrayal of Christ by Judas and is still performed by the organization known as Los Pastores Penitentes during Holy Week.

Pageants, mysteries, cycles were in abundance during the period of Spanish exploration. The passion of Christ had been seized upon as a separate dramatic spectacle and was divorced from the mysteries or cycles. The thirteenth century had been one of intense religious activity and its effects were still being felt two and three centuries later.

Another passion play which is known to exist but no manuscript has yet been found is a realistic version of El Pasion del Senor, The Passion of Our Lord. With characteristic nonchalance the characters, placidly chewing gum, enact the play. The Saviour, however, is represented by a life size effigy for whom the lines are spoken. This detail is unusual for the Latin races invariably have the Christus as a speaking, acted part. This play is usually performed at Tolpa by the Penitentes.

For several years now because of the surge of interest in this native drama of the Southwest and because of "the

46 For a description of the play Los Pastores see "Sanguinary Passion Play of the Penitentes" in Travel, December, 1927, p.29 ff.
advent of an intelligently interested audience these peculiarly interesting folk plays have proven to be of reasonably profitable pecuniary value." to their native producers. For this reason it is expected that they will attain to more prominence and that other similar plays will be revived.

The reason for the existence of such religious plays is well expressed in a paper read by Mrs. I. H. Rapp at a meeting of the Archaelogical Society and printed in El Palacio, December 15, 1921, x, page 151 and the following pages, under the title "Los Pastores is Gem of Plays."

It was the custom in Europe, in the early days when only a certain class of people could read, to teach the principles of religion and morals through the eye by the representation of these ideas by tableaux and plays. Only lately were found in old college libraries in England the manuscripts of several of these plays. One, at least, has been translated into modern English, keeping as much as possible of the old forms and quaint phrases and is now given to delighted audiences.

In the southern countries of Europe we find similar plays, the production of some of them continuing to the present day.

All this leads up to the fact that we have here in Santa Fe a play of much the same class. It is not exclusively our own, since we share it with other towns in New Mexico and other States of the Southwest. I refer to Los Pastores.49

48 Information on the same play is also contained in "Sanguinary Passion Play of the Penitentes" Travel, December 1927, p.29 ff.
49 Mrs. I.H.Rapp, "Los Pastores is Gem of Plays", El Palacio, December 15, 1921, x., p.151.
Research workers in this field must still in many cases speak without any absolute degree of authority. This is true especially of Los Pastores. So far there have been found no references to it in any incunabula, or manuscripts. The date of its first performance in this country is only surmisable and by whom it was introduced remains, up to the present, a mystery. Conjecture alone can supply its origin. Of one thing we can be reasonably sure and that is that the Franciscan Friars must have been the prime movers in adapting the drama of the Old Country to the needs of an audience so radically different in the New World.

In this adapting there was made a species of the drama which, while descended from the original in Spain, still became a species peculiar to itself. It is believed that Los Pastores was one of the first of this new mode of native drama. It was produced in the Pueblos with the Indians, coached by the Friars, as actors. According to tradition now existing the play has been given as long as can be remembered and the words and music have been taught to succeeding generations from the old transcriptions.

Naturally the polished drama of European civilization would be useless as a teacher of the barbarous tribes inhabiting Mexico. It had to be simplified and rearranged. There was neither the time nor the actors to portray a play as was being done in Spain. The conquered and converted tribes looked
upon the civilization of their conquerors with suspicious eyes. To make the imported drama more acceptable to them changes had to be made. These innovations consisted in incorporating into the business some of the customs, habits, even dances of the natives. Scenes which might prove offensive to them were omitted and others substituted. This is amply demonstrated in the play found at San Juan and already treated in the present chapter.

This play Los Pastores is considered of such importance that Mr. A.M. Espinosa, professor of Romance Languages at the Island University, California, is giving considerable time to its study.

In a letter of Feb. 14, 1914, he tells us that last year he wrote an article on the New Mexican versions that was published in a magazine in Santiago, Chile. He is working from fine woven manuscripts, Monterey, and Santa Barbara, California, and three New Mexico texts including one from Santa Fe. At present he is preparing a critical edition of the Santa Fe version for the Carmel Dramatic Club, and the California Writers Club. Mary Austin will translate it and it will be given at Stanford and at Carmel-by-the-Sea, by the Club. He is to write an historical introduction. 50

In our search for evidence of traditional passion plays in the southwestern United States we happened upon an account of one of the most unusual and amazing plays of the kind and

50 Ibid., p. 152.
deemed it of such importance that we have here given considerable space to it. It is the account of a passion play performed annually by the Yaqui Indians living on the outskirts of Tuscan. The account is in an article "A Yaqui Passion Play in Arizona," in Travel, written by Bernice Cosulich, lvi, March 1931, p.34 ff.
A mile north of the modern city of Tucson, Arizona, is a shabby, ugly hamlet called by those who know of its existence, Barrio Pascua. No map of the United States has yet deigned to recognize it, the Census Bureau has taken no notice of its ragged population of Yaqui Indians who are refugees from Mexico. Here they live as squatters in the land of refuge from tyranny. Barrio Pascua is the capital of the Yaqui Indians in the United States.

It is not on, nor even near, the paths of tourists or travellers and only by chance would one come upon it. It is made up of a few scattered shacks and a church built of railroad ties and flattened-out gasoline cans. During the whole year a passing glance would be more than enough to accord the village, except during Holy Week. It is because of the events that take place in the hamlet every year during Holy Week that Barrio Pascua sooner or later will receive national attention.

In the strange setting described above the Yaqui Indians give their play every year and it is one of the "most amazing depictions of the persecution, death, and resurrection of Christ which one may hope to see." Certainly it is not a
finished dramatic product, nor is it, except in its vague outlines, similar to anything that civilized people have heretofore seen on the subject. Here Christianity and barbaric tribal ritual meet and are portrayed with pantomime, chanting, weird music, and intricate dance steps that have been part of Yaqui folklore for untold centuries. All this goes to make up a Passion Play that possesses a startling beauty and savage force which one may not soon forget.

Here is an example of what has been noted in the preceding chapter. A play taken from civilized Europe and transformed to meet the vastly different conditions in the New World. This play was originally one of those transported from its native soil of Spain by the Friars. They were forced to make changes in the original. These changes became more and more predominant until the natives took the productions into their own hands and retained the mere frame-work of the plot. This is particularly noticeable in this Yaqui Passion Play as will be evident from a reading of the description of the play that follows.

Preparations for the play, a sort of preliminary tableau, are started the first week of Lent and

.....with the beginning of Holy Week the population of Barrio Pascua increases rapidly. The Yaqui Passion Play is the occasion for an annual homecoming and reunion of the Nacion. Those who work in cotton fields, men in copper mines at Bistee and Ajo, those in truck gardens
at Phoenix and Yuma, quit their jobs. Their families climb into rickety wagons drawn by mangy horses and, sitting on their few possessions, drive hundreds of miles to be present at their capital city.51

The first act, if it may be classed that, of the Passion play occurs late Wednesday afternoon of Holy Week. There is no definite time for any of these performances. The Yaqui mill about the plaza until slowly without a signal, as if by some central power gathered together, a procession forms before the church.

The visitation of the Via Crucis now takes place. This Via Crucis has been constructed during the first week of Lent. It consists of a series of fourteen crosses set in a semi-circle. They are some distance apart and, beginning at the north end of the town, lead back into the village.

Now, in this first act of the play, just as the procession reaches the eleventh station, or cross commemorating Christ's crucifixion, there comes from among the cacti and bushes of the desert an unexpected motley group. These are Fariseos, Nazarenos, and Pilatos. They represent the evil spirits and persecutors of Christ and are usually called mummers. The men are dressed grotesquely with masks on their faces. These masks serve also to hide the identity of the players who are usually criminals and must in this way serve their sentences which have been meted out to them.

51 Bernice Cosulich, "A Yaqui Passion Play in Arizona", Travel, March, 1931, p.36.
for some violation of the tribal laws. In the hand of each of them is a colored rasping stick or gourd which is filled with pebbles and is shaken continually; about their waists are strings of pebbles on buckskin thongs; about their legs are dried unopened seed pods. They prance and dance, chant loudly and try to break up the party of true worshippers.

Because of the presence in the drama of these allegorical characters the drama is classed as a symbolical passion play. Categorically this would place it in the class of Moralities, at least in this feature of symbolical characters. There is, however, a wide distinction to be noted. The Moralities of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries quite patently pointed a moral. In fact, often the dialogue was interrupted to tell the audience not to act like this character, or that, representing vice. An allegorical passion play never does this. The difference will be quite apparent as we proceed.

Not heeding the impersonators of evil spirits the procession continues past the other crosses and wends its way slowly back to the church. By this time the sun has set and dusk makes of the scene an unusual spectacle.

Accompanying the procession four women have carried the statue of the Virgin Mother from the church and now at the return to the edifice the evil spirits try to prevent the
entrance of the statue into the church. They throw themselves on the ground or howl like animals as they prance before the statue and the Compania de Jesus, which sorrowfully places the statue, after much hesitation, on a pedestal before the altar.

This first act now ends with a tenebrae service in the church while the evil spirits remain outside howling and dancing until suddenly without warning they cease and slink off into the darkness.

On the following day any time between sunset and midnight the second act is given. It is a representation of the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane. Sometime within these hours the audience gathers together, without any signal being given, at a spot not far outside the village. Then a party of Yaquis appear with young saplings on which are tender leaves and branches. These are set in shallow holes in a compact circle to symbolize the Garden.

The scene shifts. Again the assemblage begins the Way of the Cross. This time the evil spirits are present from the beginning, and they "prance and dance down the Via Crucis searching wildly for someone. There are no words spoken but the pantomine is effective." At each station the Compania de Jesus forms a circle around the cross but the evil spirits thrust them aside as they seek Jesus who is at the Last Supper. In this manner the group continues...  

53 Cosulich, op. cit., p.37.
around the fourteen stations and then returns to the church.

Here for the first time the character representing the Christus enters the play. He stands before the church with a crucifix in his hands. His head is bowed over a white shirt. He slowly walks across the plaza and the Compania de Jesus follows him.

No word is spoken as they enter the place representative of the garden. Silently the man with the crucifix parts the branches and walks alone into the circle.

The audience, although a better term might be worshippers, have followed along and now remain at a distance, bowed, sorrowful, waiting.

Then suddenly, springing with low growls from their desert hiding places, come the Nazarenos. Their masks take on a weird appearance in the half light of night; their rasping sticks and rattles echo loudly in the hush of the young eve. They dance with satanic glee toward the Garden, retreating and advancing in uncertain order as their shouts become louder. Their sticks beat more jarringly and their dance steps increase in tempo and intricacy. A drum beats and a flute plays sharply. One Fariseo carries a banner, symbol of Pilate's soldiers. Judas leads the dance. 54

With blood-curdling whoops they surround the Garden. For a moment, then, there is a deep, dramatic silence in which even the surrounding nature seems to indulge after the terrific din. The Compania de Jesus moves restlessly yet seemingly

54 Ibid., p.37.
unable to help. The noise again climbs into a wild crescendo and suddenly ceases.

The silent man still clasping the crucifix now emerges from the Garden's circle. All is still as, for the first time he speaks asking, "Whom seek ye?" The evil ones in chorus shout, "Jesus." Again there is a silent pause lasting but a short minute yet fraught with more meaning than if the actors were to engage in lengthy harangues.

Slowly, at first softly the Pilatos begin their chant, keeping time by dragging their sandalled feet along the ground. The rhythm increases with the volume, sounding now, a note of defiance. The last step of the dance ends with the song and the entire group howling savagely rush in and while some seize the Christ-spirit, others madly tear the Garden to pieces. As Christ is seized many of the mummers simulating unholy glee "throw themselves on the ground, howling like animals, barking like coyotes, giving the wailing calls of beasts and birds". Throughout the wild pandemonium the Compania de Jesus remains standing mutely in one spot.

What a scene is this. Dramatic, breath taking, horrible yet fascinating. Trained actors could hardly produce the effects that are brought about by these children of nature.

The evil spirits jostling and crowding with the Christus in their center move toward the church. Standing on a knoll

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Ibid., p.37
of ground, facing the on-coming procession, is the tribal maestro. In a deep, mournful, sonorous voice he intones the 50th Psalm, - Miserere Mei Deus. The Procession continues on and passes into the blackness of the desert. Silence like a pall settles over all as the second act ends.

On the following day, Good Friday, the effects of the dramatic presentation of the preceding evening still brood over the entire populace. The entire village is the stage, black is the only color visible, the people, men, women, and children become the actors and remain the audience. But this is not acting, this is real. Silence reigns. A very effective and appropriate atmosphere has been created for the next, the third act.

The third act begins in mid-afternoon with the making of the Via Crucis. As the procession nears the eleventh station four men dressed in white with crown of cacti thorns on their heads carry a shrouded bier to the station of the crucifixion. The bier is placed on the ground and the Compania de Jesus place the crucifix, which was carried by the Christ-spirit the evening before, upon the bier. This is carried by the four men to the church where it is placed on a table with four candles at the head and foot. Four men take up their stations as guards.

The scene shifts. Again the evil spirits enter the action. Now, fiendishly they dance, every exaggerated step
accompanied by the rattle of the seed-pods, pebbles, and the
gratingsound of the rasping sticks. They prance with glee as
they tear down the crosses, moving from station to station.
Worshippers follow in their wake and cover the fallen crosses
with green boughs.

The evil spirits return to the church and dance in mock-
ing abandon about the bier.

Here again the influence of ancient pagan rites enters
the play. After the scenes just related, the Fariseos and
their companions exeunt and a dance begins. It is an ordeal
that continues on from sunset Friday to sunrise Saturday with-
out intermission. It takes place chiefly outside the church.
The movement is slow and sorrowful and the only music is the
clapping hands and pounding feet of the dancers.

Thus ends the third act.

Now there is an intermission although the atmosphere
created by the play pervades all, like the lunch time inter-
mission at Oberammergau.

The fourth and final act of the play consists of one
scene, the burning of the effigy of Judas.

Bernice Cosulich in the article from which we have been
quoted describes this final act:

About ten o'clock Saturday the plaza is
again a mass of humanity. Everyone is
intent on preparations for the burning
of the effigy of Judas. The human Judas,
hiding behind his mask, appears with his
escort of tribal chief, council, teacher and dance governor. He carries a lance, about his neck is what represents a prayer-book, but is in reality, an old arithmetical: his evil rasping stick hangs on his belt. He looks somewhat a scarecrow in the queer habiliments he wears. His party is followed by the evil spirits or mummers, more than ever hiding their faces in shame at being persecutors of Christ even in this Passion Play.

A donkey is brought forward and Judas is prodded until he mounts. The beast is led about the plaza, Judas receiving the derisive comments of Yaquis and the scornful spit of children. After the ride he dismounts and is stripped of clothing. Just as modesty begins to protest, his mask is taken off and a cloth dropped over his head so he may not become known. His role finished, this Judas slips away to repent while the clothes he has left behind are placed on a straw dummy.

The effigy is stood, for this fourth act in the center of the plaza and it is filled with homemade skyrockets. A match sends the thing into flames, the rockets explode. The crowd burst into joyous shouts, general dancing and unrestrained happiness; evil has been conquered by good.56

Thus ends one of the most spectacular and unusual extravaganzas of the dramatic art. Unlike other passion plays there is not an epilogue or tableau either of the Resurrection, or the Ascension into Heaven.

It is difficult to determine the values of this folk play. As a monument of folk lore it is invaluable. The literary merit of the piece is doubtful. There is present

56 Ibid., p.38.
a plot, parts, or acts, and scenes are not wanting. A climax is reached, but there is lacking a denouement, unless we take the burning of the effigy of Judas as the aftermath of the climax. The movable scene, the moving audience following the action from place to place would have its counterpart in the mysteries of the middle ages when the carts with the stage were moved from place to place in a town and at each station another act or scene was performed. We might assume that this is one of the features of the play which has remained over through the centuries from the Spanish original.

The lack of dialogue is puzzling. The original must have been in great part in dialogue. But it is the nature of the stolid Yaqui to be silent when there is no necessity for speech. Then, too, there seems little need for dialogue here. The audience knows what is taking place without any verbal explanations. Even to the stranger the acting tells all that one may wish to know. Readily one recognizes that there is present the protagonist, the antagonist, and the conflict or struggle.

Considering these aspects of the play one is inclined to the opinion that there is here a species of drama perhaps unlike anything with which we are acquainted. Because of the presence of certain dramatic elements we can only lament that there is no written copy of the play, at least none has been found, to which a study might be given. No doubt the
results would be of interest in further reviving the awakened interest in religious drama.

It is hoped that those who are engaged in research and are actually on the scene of these traditional passion plays will continue their efforts. Perhaps it would result in a revival among the Spanish speaking peoples of play writing as it has resulted in a revival of interest in these folk plays in literary circles among the descendants of the Conquistadores. No evidence of such a revival is as yet evident "although the prevalence of acting ability continually suggests that possibility. It is possible that this latent capacity may be turned to English".

Not much hope is held out for such a revival among the natives for, where it is a question of keeping the old or attempting the new, centuries of following traditions is the deciding factor. The American spirit has not succeeded in breaking down this slavish devotion to tradition.

This is not the case among the Indians among whom

There is an explicit emergence of dramatic interest and power: Among the younger groups there is a disposition to adapt their existing drama to American understanding, although the cheap vaudeville quality of opportunities offered acts as a deterrent.... It is possible that the same thing that Thespis brought to pass in the Greek Dance-drama is about to take place in our native aboriginal performances.57

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57 Austin, op. cit., p. 600.
These then are but a few of the traditional American religious dramas. Unfortunately, too little has been made public concerning them. It is because of the popularity of such plays that the modern revival of religious drama has begun. The following pages treat briefly of some recent revivals of religious plays.
CHAPTER SIX.
MODERN REVIVALS.

It is interesting to note that in our present age of materialism there have sprung up in various countries revivals of Religious Drama. Austria, Germany, France, and Scotland are among the leading nations in the new movement. These revivals are not confined to parishes, or isolated congregations; on the contrary, they have been enthusiastically taken up by whole communities.

Veronica's Veil of Union City; The Light, the Masonic production of South Bend in the United States; the revival of Calderon de la Barca's Mysteries of the Mass in Vienna, are a few of the sign posts pointing to an increasing interest in religious drama.

The Stieldorf play in Germany and the Catholic Drama Festival in Glasgow, Scotland, are but a few of the revivals of religious drama which have been energetically produced within the last few years by communities and were of sufficient importance to gain public recognition in the press.

Stieldorf is a small village near Cologne and it's passion play is modeled on that of Oberammergau. It was originated in 1889 and, for a time, was successfully produced annually. However, for a number of years prior to 1928 it was forgotten but, in that year it was revived and proved to be of such popularity that it was again produced in 1929 and 77.
in this year, 1934. The cast is made up of 150 actors who receive no material recompense. The profits realized are used in charitable works in other parts of Germany. At Vaal is also produced a play which, like the majority of passion plays, is on the Greek style of Tableaux and scenes. The celebrated play of Fribourg continues to hold the attention of the press and here and there is given place or notice in literary periodicals.

The revival in Scotland is of particular interest because that country for many years has certainly neglected religious drama as such. This year, for the first time in the history of the country, a Catholic Drama Festival is being held in Glasgow and although as yet no definite information is forthcoming concerning the results it is to be hoped that it will be the beginning of a new era of Catholic dramatics in that country. France too is showing symptoms of a revival of Catholic influence not only in art and literature but also in the Drama. This influence is especially being aroused by the successful plays of Paul Claudel. His symbolical Tydings to Mary was favorably received. This awakening interest is to be noted in the fact that at Belfort for the first time in many, many years a passion play is being presented with extraordinary success. It is presented on a great scale and is

58. See Glenn Hughes, The Story of the Theatre, Samuel French, N.Y., 1931, for a discussion of the Greek drama and Greek tragedy.
truly a community undertaking for more than 500 actors recruited from the various parishes take part in the play. Unfortunately in all these instances definite materials that would help the research worker from a literary standpoint are lacking.

No less an authority than Allardyce Nicoll bewails the paucity of definite sources of information on not only religious drama but also on all the phases of the art. He says "that bibliographical and statistical records either have to be sought for laboriously by each individual student or else done without."

While it is true that at present no organized sources of material are at hand the near future is bright with possibilities. At Manchester in England there has been established a lecturship in dramatic art. London for centuries considered the world capital of the art has shown the way by establishing a few years ago a new Diploma in Dramatic Art.

Allardyce Nicoll advocates the furtherance of such movements among the schools and colleges. He maintains that the methods now in use in the extra-curricular dramatic societies, and even the class room work and methods are of no practical value. "It is useless for students to keep

ring the change on *Patience* and *Pinafore* and modern farce; but where attempts are made to perform hitherto unproduced works or to revive forgotten masterpieces of the past, the service done to the theatre may be inestimable."

The Folk Lore Society of Santa Fe, influenced by the revival of interest in the early Spanish, and native civilization of our Southwest, has taken a step in the right direction. A committee of the Society hopes that Professor's Espino's work may be finished and available so that his edition of the Santa Fe version (of *Los Pastores*) could be produced, made a feature of the Summer School in August. It is hard to imagine a more appropriate setting than the Patio of the Palace of the Governors.

The Community at the Monastery of the Society of the Divine Word at Techny, Illinois, encountered extraordinary success in their revival this year of Calderon's *Mystery of the Mass*. Enthusiastic audiences attended the Sunday afternoon performances. This success at reviving a religious drama that is in reality a passion play will lead others to emulate the community at Techny. If the emulation is carried on with

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60. Ibid., p. 67.

While it is true that the Malvern Movement in England is not especially concerned with religious drama still, if it continues in the plan that has been followed for the past few years then, we may expect that inevitably religious plays will grace the boards there. For six weeks every summer the Malvern players produce a period play. One play is staged every week and each play is from a different period of literary history.

due care to art, as at Techny, then another step will have been taken in the resuscitation of religious drama.

The translator of the *Mysteries of the Mass* in the preface of the text writes:

It is a hopeful sign that in many countries older mystery plays are revised and new ones are written to bring the beauty and comfort of religious truths home to our generation. The religious dramas of Calderon de la Barca are unsurpassed masterpieces. The *World Theatre* and the *Mysteries of the Mass* are among his best plays. During the Eucharistic Congress held in Vienna, Austria, in 1912, a modernized German version of the *Mysteries of the Mass* was written by Richard V. Kralik, the well-known writer, poet, and musician, and was performed several times with great success.

The play was given ten times in May and October to crowded houses, and to enable other thousands to see this inspiring play, further performances were given later. The English version is hereby given to the public in order that attendants may have an appropriate souvenir of the performance and that other institutions and parishes may be enabled to give this play.62

These are a few of the better known revivals that have taken place in recent years. Because of their success the next decade will see an ever increasing number of these revivals taking place.

Another and more important phase of the revival, and one that is closely connected with the modern amateur theatre is the increasing number of innovations and new texts of passion

plays that are appearing. Here we have not only actors but also writers engaged in the new movement. This interest of amateur writers is noteworthy for some of them have produced some worth while material.

These innovations in texts that have appeared in the last twenty-five years outnumber, perhaps, the number of traditional passion plays that have continued for decades. Although the revivals of other older texts and their productions on present day stages is a very hopeful sign, they are in reality few in number.

The real interest, as far as the popular fancy is concerned, is in the number of new texts that have appeared. As better and more definite information is to be had concerning these latest additions to the bibliography of religious drama we will treat them in a separate chapter under the heading of Innovations.
CHAPTER SEVEN.

INNOVATIONS.

One of the greatest obstacles to the revival of religious drama and the amateur theatre has been the attitude of the church toward the stage and, as a consequence of this, the answering hostile attitude of the stage toward religion. This enmity between the two seems to have been one of the results of the Reformation. Prior to that period such was not the case and yet this condition has existed since that time. In America we have inherited the idea from the Puritan conception of the stage as the ante-chamber of damnation.

Fortunately for both the church and the stage this feeling is slowly being eradicated. While the situation held, the stage, feeling an outcast, has strayed widely and sometimes has fallen into the pit. As E. Martin Brown in the *Theatre Arts Monthly* describes the situation:

Drama turned out in the cold was soon captured by the world, the flesh (chiefly the flesh) and the devil; sometimes slightly, more often grossly, it pulsated with their vigor, while the church, having withdrawn its former close contact with them, had anathematised all theatres as a lure to hell.63

All this is now changing. The church has accepted the stage, the stage as represented by religious drama and ama-

teur theatricals. The professional stage of today however, remains where it has fallen and only the continued rise of the amateur theatre will help it.

To such an extent has the Church entered the field of drama that in England the Protestant Bishop of Chichester has gone so far as to appoint an official court director of religious drama for his diocese. "All over England as also in America Churches are being thrown open to the producers of religious plays that once again the Christian stories may be set forth dramatically in the proper atmosphere of the place of religious worship."

Up to recently Christmas plays appear to have been restricted chiefly to primary school production. Ten years ago when every agency was seeking to enlarge its activities in shooting tentacles out into every crevice and cranny drawing to itself attention and broadening its influence, the Drama League first started among the church boards the idea of welcoming back the drama so long exiled. Instantly alive to the real value of this subject the different boards set about utilizing the re-found medium for revitalizing church activities. In church after church and group after group the use of religious drama was adopted. Edith Craig's

64. Ibid. p. 851.
production of The World Theatre the spectacular mechanics employed in the production of The Miracle by Max Reinhart, the staging of Gheon's Marriage of St. Francis at Briton encouraged others to undertake the production of a drama. This encouragement had the effect of producing an abundance of plays the majority of which were looked at askance by competent critics who branded it as unworthy of consideration as art. Later, however, because such men as Benson, Masefield, and Father Lord have written really good religious plays the interest of the critics was again aroused. One of the reasons for their aroused interest is the high quality of certain Passion Plays.

One of the plays that has had unusual success and has weathered the storms of criticism which, for it were never very violent, was that written by Robert Hugh Benson entitled the Upper Room. This has been produced again and again by communities, societies, parishes; and, though it has not been taken up by the professional stage, it could easily be done so. Msgr. Benson, a recognized author, has produced in this Passion Play a literary piece of high caliber. There are two particular points about the play that in a great measure have helped to make of it a success. The first is the fact that the Christus is not represented in any way; the part is entirely absent and the presence of the character is portrayed by suggestion either in the text or the mechan-
cal devices used. For example, standing at the window of the Upper Room, the Virgin Mother sees the procession with Christ carrying his cross on the way to Calvary; we hear the uttering and murmuring of the multitude; we see the point of the spears passing by the window; we hear the clanking of armor; then appears, showing just above the window sill, a portion of one of the arms of the cross. This suddenly disappears from sight and the Virgin Mother screams, Christ has fallen under the weight of the cross,-- she hears the sounds of leather thongs on bare flesh and the angry outcries of the centurians. Slowly the cross-beam again enters the view of the audience and continues on past the window. The second unusual detail employed by the author is the fact that the entire play takes place in one room, the upper room. It is the room in which the author has Christ bid farewell to His Mother; and where the scene of the last supper took place. The owner of the inn and his son are the chief narrators of events. They rush in or out of the room depending upon the circumstances to relate to the other characters what they have seen and heard.

Another modern treatment of the subject of the Passion of Christ is that written by Father Lord, S.J., A Fantasy of the Passion. This is decidedly in the new style of applying, by suggestion, the moral principles and lessons to be learned. No mention is made of the Passion but the author depends upon
the atmosphere created in the play and in the suggestive power of the piece to portray the Passion of Christ. In this "modern passion-play", as it is subtitled by the author, the events of the passion of Christ do not take place actually before the eyes of the audience but by symbolism. A modern business man injured and lying perhaps on his death bed in a hospital reviewing his life recalls to mind the passion of our Lord. The characters are symbolical. The nurses, doctors, friends, and relatives of the dying man represent historical characters in the passion of Christ. This, however, is done in an unusual and entertaining manner so that the audience is never sadly conscious of the fact that is witnessing just another worn and frayed abortive attempt at a religious drama trying to be art. For this, we believe, is art. It is the use of atmosphere, suggestion, symbolism hidden under a revealing cloak of realism.

Another passion-play which reverts to the use of the story of the passion as outlined in the New Testament with the insertion of one or two imaginative characters to carry on a connected plot is Barter. In this play, written by Brother Urban Nagle, we have portrayed the New Testament theme with utmost respect and with great vividness. The author has chosen to take the dramatic figure of Judas, treating him according to the modern interpretation of his
character and has shown most forcefully the terrific influences and re-actions of the great event of the betrayal. There are many unusual features in the handling of the material and Judas and his friends, his temptation, struggle, and remorse, together with their suffering are made human and forceful. It is the psychological study of a soul, the moral disintegration and final annihilation of the soul in its struggle with the forces of evil.

This play is original in its treatment of the passion of Christ and is a forerunner of several others of the same form. Here, by a combination of historical and fictitious characters, the tragedy of the passion is indirectly portrayed. What seems to be the main plot of the drama is in reality a slight covering for the real atmosphere which is ever present, and that is the all-pervading aura of tragedy. While the person of the Christus does not appear yet it is decidedly present and its influence on the characters and events is quite evident.

Faults are not wanting to Barter in spite of the fervour and sincerity of the author. The delineation of the characters is weak. Oftentimes they seem unreal, stilted and even mechanical in their actions. While it is true that they are victims of circumstances over which they have no control, they are too willing to give up the struggle. Con-
Conflict, struggle is essential to drama but here it is not sufficiently emphasized.

The dialogue is simple and transparent. Hidden meanings are entirely lacking, there are no long moralistic monologues. This is of great assistance in keeping the play moving. For modern presentation, however, it would have been better to couch the phrasing in the vernacular. Too many archaisms are indulged in. The "thou", "ye", "knowest", "doest", and such similar forms are more likely to distract an audience than assist in creating the necessary atmosphere.

These faults are not unconquerable. The original manner of treating the passion, the swift sequence of events, the interesting plot, and sub-plots make of the play one of the best of our modern interpretations of the theme.

Barter is not the first of the many passion plays that have been written and produced in the United States. Although there is no data sufficiently accurate to make positive assertions about this form of drama, at least among the first, if not the first, is the Passion Play of the University of Santa Clara in California.

For thirty years and more the Passion Play has been the outstanding event of Santa Clara life. Written by Clay M. Greene '69 at the request of Reverend Robert E. Kenna, S.J., it was his contribution to the Golden Jubilee being commem-
orated in nineteen hundred and one by his Alma Mater. Since its original production in that year, under the direction of Mr. Greene himself, the play has been reproduced four times: the productions of nineteen hundred and three, nineteen hundred and seven, and nineteen hundred and twenty-three were directed by Martin V. Merle '06; that of nineteen hundred and twenty-eight, as well as the present production of nineteen hundred and thirty-three, by Edward P. Murphy '27.

For more than a quarter of a century, hundreds of alumni of Santa Clara have planned and labored upon each succeeding production and have spent some of the proudest moments of their lives before the scenes of Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

"Behind the Passion Play looms the Passion." It is the central theme, the motivating interest, that dominates the entire play.

No actor, no group of actors, overshadow the unseen presence of the suffering Savior. From the opening of the prologue to the completion of the final scene, His presence is evident. Powerful though the connivings of the high priests and the greed of the merchants are, they alone are but the plottings of another ordinary play. But when they are made to do away with Him who inspired the love of the apostles and swayed the wealthy Jechonias from the tenets of his beloved religion, then they are molded into the Drama of the Cross. It is the story of Christ seen, not by his own actions, but in the light of the effects He produced upon men of different character - weak and strong, generous and avaricious, humble and proud.65

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The characters who thus reflect the power of the Savior are many. They are of all nationalities, of all classes, and of all temperaments. And the ways in which the presence of Christ reaches them are varied as their personalities themselves.

We have here atmosphere. It is created by the presence either actual or suggested of the Christus. It is His presence that pervades the entire play. The audience is conscious of the Christus, of His influence, whether He is Himself visible to them, or whether He is suggested by some effect He has produced on the other characters. Even the Judas is constantly building up that atmosphere.

The values of the play are various. Categorically it is entirely an historical passion play as is the modern production of Oberammergau. The related facts of the New Testament are the network for the plot. There is no sub-plot, no fictitious characters are introduced. Naturally the brief dialogue of the scripture had to be enlarged upon.

Realism is the keynote sounded in this production. Symbolism, or allegorical figures are entirely lacking. Of course there is present the spiritual symbolism, the atmosphere built up around the visible and spiritual presence and influence of the Christus.

This production of the Passion Play of the University of Santa Clara is a hopeful sign for a further revival of
interest in religious drama in the Universities.

Considered in this light, the future of the drama is, partly at least, in the hands of the Universities. The students who are being yearly turned out in their thousands will form a portion of audiences which will go to swell the theatres, and, because of their training, their influence will probably be greater than that of similar non-university sections among the spectators. The drama of every period and of every land depends ultimately upon the audience. It was a great audience which produced Aeschylus and Sophocles; it was a great audience which produced Shakespeare. The ruder elements among the spectators (and, in speaking of ruder elements I am not by any means thinking of social classes) assuredly always outnumber those of more cultured and imaginative tendencies; but that disparity is made up for by the fact that a strong body of cultured opinion, sure of its own purpose and self-consciously asserting itself, will ever have power over a heterogeneous body of unthinking, untrained, and mentally licentious minds. To help in preparation of this intellectual and imaginative leaven among the audiences of the future I take to be the first great task of the University.66

The University of Santa Clara has taken a step in the right direction for the fulfillment of this great task. It remains for other Universities to follow the example set by Professor Baker at Columbia University and the Passion Play of Santa Clara University.

Difficulties seem to exist. The fulfillment of this "great task" of educating an audience will not be brought about as long as the professional artists insist on looking

down upon the "amateur theorists" of the schools, and the schoolmen because of this attitude on the part of the professional men refuse to have anything to do with the modern drama.

The more the artist sneers at the University, the more the University will tend toward traditional and hidebound methods. Let the artist come into the University, let him take his place in the development of that cultured side of academic work, which, after all, is its chief task. The University itself, so far as my experience goes, is only too ready to cooperate. In America special study has been devoted, not merely to drama, but to the problems of the producers, so that Professor Baker's name is now of more than national import.67

With such favorable indications at hand it is not too optimistic to hope that the next decade will witness a revival in religious subjects as materials for drama. One of the factors that will greatly aid in this revival is the increasing popularity of the Parish Theatre.

A brilliant instance of the innate power of the Parish Theatre is the introduction of passion plays within the last thirty years. In the winter of 1917 a young priest in the diocese of Buffalo dramatized Father Klaman's novel, The Princess of Gan Sar, and introduced the Christ without offending pious eyes or ears. The omission of the Christ Character would never suit the Austrian, German, or Italian peasant, who has been brought up on homely but effective

67. Ibid., p.67.
parish or community passion plays.

The story is told of one of these imigrants who attended an American passion play, and who promptly after the first act left the theatre and demanded his money back on the ground that the play was fraudulent. "Where de Christo?" he asked, and to the explanation he replied: "No Christo, no good play." This criticism was valid. We are overcoming the idea that the Christus must not be represented. It was this fact alone that wiped out a passion play undertaken for production by Salmi Morse in 1890. A theatre was selected, the rehearsals began, but because public opinion objected to the presence of the Character Christ on the regular stage the production never saw the curtain rise on the first act.

Another result of the Parish Theatre was the play *Mary Magdalene*. The author is anonymous. The text was published by the Catholic Dramatic Company in 1924. Male characters, including the Christus, are represented by the ineffectual means of voices off stage. It is sub-titled "A Religious Play for Young Ladies in Three Acts."

The plot is the usual one about the conversion of Mary the sinner. The passion of Christ runs throughout but is not emphasized in any way.

This is the type of play which we can do without. There are long moralistic tirades. The dialogue is stilted
and in an effort to make it seem suited to the characters and occasion the author has only written garbled language. The characters are too weak to be noticeable. The portrayal of the change in the character of Mary is not convincing. It is efforts of this kind that have placed an odium upon the religious drama of our day.

Another passion play similar to *Mary Magdalene* in that it employs female characters exclusively is *Pilate's Daughter*. As far as we know this was the second presentation of a passion play in the Eastern States. Written by Father Kenzel it was produced in the parish hall by the community of Roxbury, a suburb of Boston.

It was staged during the Lenten season, and so beautifully presented that the *Boston World* went out to see it, and has done so every Lenten season since (1905). An enterprising manager undertook to interest the general public in it but failed. The play makes its sole appeal to the emotions, and is rather limited in characterization. It is therefore too simple for the ordinary play goer. 68

It is a simple, brief, and easily understandable drama. It has the life of Christ as historical background. The author does not employ the historical drama properly speaking, that is, with the principal character a true historical figure, but seems to believe that a fictitious main character

with merely an historical background widens his scope and affords him freer access to the exercise of his imagination. Hence the play is one which, while mainly fictitious, has an undercurrent of historical fact running through it.

It seems to be the author's tendency in portraying his characters to emphasize the main characteristic of the person to the exclusion of all other traits. This characteristic tendency results in a not too realistic delineation of character. The actors are not really human beings as we know them; they are rather the incarnation of one dominant trait. Claudia, the heroine, displays not a single characteristic but that of piety or goodness. She seems immune to human temptations and afflictions. For example, there is no evidence of the internal struggle she must have undergone before she determined to become a Christian and thus forfeit her wealth, her position, and her Roman citizenship.

The dialogue is at most times natural and spontaneous, not stiff and stilted. At times the author rises to heights in his dialogue, as in Leah's speech of defiance to Christ prior to His crucifixion.

Where the author fails in character building he supplies in the plot. There is struggle and consequently action is of prime importance. Although the situations are at times complex yet this very complexity holds the interest. With a
few alterations Pilate's Daughter has many possibilities.

The Passionists probably were the next to present a Passion Play, which by reason of the pains taken with it became the most notable of its class. As they were in possession of a fine auditorium, whose stage was spacious they had only to provide the play, scenery, and costumes. With the Santa Clara and Roxbury productions before them, it was not difficult to improve upon these predecessors. The result demonstrated what the Parish Theatre is able to do in dramatic production.

This play has become the most famous of American Passion plays and the "nearest thing to a U. S. Oberammergau is a grimy ugly town across the Hudson River from Manhattan called Union City". (Time, 2/26/34). The title of this play is Veronica's Veil and it is styled by its producers, not without reason, as "America's Passion Play". The following excerpts taken from a handbill distributed by the producers are, by their nature, bound to be enthusiastic encomiums.

The impersonation of Christ dominates the performances in the reverent manner that proclaims His Divinity and the Majesty of His Sacred Manhood.

The theme is treated with such rare delicacy, the play is presented under circumstances and in surroundings so peculiarly appropriate and has attained such universal and spontaneous popularity all over the country that the title given to the play by the Public, "America's

69. See John Talbot Smith, LL.D., The Parish Theatre, for a discussion of this phase of modern religious drama.
"Passion Play" is justly merited. It has reached such a stage of permanency that yearly during the Lenten Season pilgrimages are made to St. Joseph's Auditorium, Union City, N. J., the Oberammergau of America.

During the past eighteen years, *Veronica's Veil* has been witnessed by over one half million people.

Beginning as a parochial affair, it has attained to the proportions of a national institution. No other religious drama has received from the press of the country the extensive publicity both in text and picture which has been received by *Veronica's Veil* written and directed by Passionist Fathers.

Its appeal has reached not only the average layman but the clergyman, the artist, the dramatist and the theatrical critic. The high standard of artistry that characterized it from its inception has not only been maintained, but even elevated. Add to the sacredness of the theme, the grandeur and beauty of the scenery and costumes, the artistic electrical effects, the sincerity of the players, and *Veronica's Veil* is sure to merit the enthusiastic approval of its audience.

The technique and atmosphere employed in the presentation of the central character of the Christus in this play brings to the fore a much discussed question. There are three ways of portraying the Christus each of them effective. The first manner of presentation is that of Oberammergau in Europe and Santa Clara in America. In these productions the Christus is a character, the part being carried by an actor with spoken lines. The second technique of portrayal is that employed by the author of *Veronica's Veil*. The person of the Christus is actually impersonated on the stage.
but there are no spoken lines given to the Character. The third manner of treating the central character is used by Monsignor Benson in his *The Upper Room*. Here the figure of Christ does not appear throughout the play, nor are any words spoken backstage typifying the presence of the character.

Each of these techniques has its own peculiar advantages and disadvantages. If we may judge from the popularity of the respective plays mentioned above, although that is an unreliable criterion, we must admit that the first is the more effective.

The impersonation of Christus in *Veronica's Veil* is portrayed in silence. Appreciating the inadequacy of any characterization of that divinely human Nature of the Savior reverently the author of the play has attempted what he considers to be the nearest approach, a silent representation.

In this detail *Veronica's Veil* differs from its prototype of Oberammergau.

This play has become a community undertaking. It is performed by two alternating casts of 150 amateur players, many of whom have played various parts from the beginning. A salesman has been Caiaphas for twelve years. Costumed by women of the parish, paid nothing for their work, the cast of *Veronica's Veil* rehearses three months every year, goes to a retreat to prepare annually for the 25 performances.
The author of Veronica's Veil is Rev. Bernardine Busch, C.P. He adopted the use of alternate tableaux to carry on the action of the drama and to add to its splendor. The play opens with a tableaux of the betrayal of Christ, in three actions: the kiss of Judas, the prostration of the soldiers, and the binding of Christ. Immediately the scene changes to the palace of Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin is discovered in consultation. Christ is condemned to death. Then appear Judas and Veronica, the traitor to fling back the blood money, and the woman to plead for the Nazarene; but neither the remorse of one nor the pleading of the other can change the determination of Caiaphas and his party. The act is written with considerable power, enough to demand professional actors, whose attempt to portray the rage of Caiaphas and the remorse of Judas lands them in rank melodrama.

The second act shows the home of Veronica, while the trial of Christ is going on among the rulers of the city. The procession to Calvary passes the door. Veronica rushes forth to meet the Saviour, Who in gratitude causes the image of His Countenance to be reproduced on the towel, from which shines a mysterious light. At the spectacle Sirach and a daughter of Caiaphas humbly confess their faith in Christ. The scene is rather naive, and lacks any consideration for
people experienced in modern drama. The Face on the towel is the familiar Face of the art stores, its eyes now closed, now open, and too precise, too accurate for a modern drama. It would suit a medieval miracle play admirably, but not a modern audience. The portrait should be blurred, bloody, yet able to suggest the face of the agonizing Christ. This act is followed by a tableau of the crucifixion in three scenes: the gambling soldiers, the three Marys at the cross, and the death of Christ.

The third act takes place in the house of Caiaphas immediately after the burial of the Saviour. A convulsion shakes the household of Caiaphas. Ruth is banished forever; her mother dies suddenly; and Caiaphas under the stress of trouble goes insane.

For the third time the dramatist makes demands upon amateurs which would try the highest skill of a professional, with the usual result that some scenes approach the burlesque.

In spite of many inconsistencies and over enthusiasm the beauty of this play is remarkable. Its faults are common ones, looseness of structure, little regard for the unities, too great a demand upon the skill of amateurs, a lack of simplicity, too much wordiness. In the matter of staging it is too richly colored, giving an impression
that the life of the Jews was a daily pageant. But as an example of what the Parish Theatre can do it is a marvel. As an illustration of what the people want at times it served perfectly: twenty performances were not enough to satisfy the popular demand.

Father Hugh Benson, the distinguished English convert, wrote a Passion play called The Upper Room, which has for its keynote, restraint. A single scene, that small room in which the religion of Christ began its corporate existence, is the place. Here come all the characters connected with the tragedy of Calvary, with the latest details, or with their grief and despair. At each step in the agony of Christ, some character appears to tell what has happened. At times the window or opening at the back is thrown wide, and the spectator may see things that are going on outside. Thus the spears of soldiers are seen passing, the shouts of the mob are heard, the three crosses are dragged by and that of the Saviour falls to the ground and then appears again. At the close of the play the perspective shows three crosses on a far, storm-swept hill. It is not a drama of action but of suggestion. Its interest never fails. Its language is sweet, striking, the sentiment pitched in melancholy, so that the effect upon audiences is always profound.

Last year the city of Lawrence, Massachusetts, produced
a Passion Play. A distinguished member of the Augustinians, Father Palmieri, wrote it in Italian. It was translated into English and given its first presentation in the Italian parish. In construction it followed the method of Veronica's Veil, allowing the tableaux to complete what the text could not. The plot is almost identical with the Union City production yet, it is not as effective. This play, testifying to the popularity of passion plays and showing the readiness with which audiences will patronize amateur productions, was received with deep interest through the State, paid expenses which were high, and fairly recompensed its promoters.

Another translation from a German text is entitled The Passion and Death of Our Lord. It was translated by Rev. Joseph W. Berg and the English text was published by the Catholic Dramatic Company. In a foreward to the text we learn that

the Passion Play by the Congregation for Christian workmen of St. Joseph of Calasanz, Vienna, Austria, was produced in German in St. Joseph's Parish Hall, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, during Lent 1927. Eight times within ten days the house was crowded, though other plays had been drawing but slim houses for even a single night. 70

It is a scriptural type of passion play. The plot closely follows the New Testament narrative. The Christus

is present in a speaking part. A few of the historical characters in the story who are unnamed in the scripture are here given prominent parts. The dialogue is too literal and for this reason rather stilted. The play can hardly be considered as a piece of literature, but in spite of its many failings in values it is very popular with audiences who, being well disposed, are not inclined to criticism.

Professor William Mathias Lamers, head of the Marquette University School of Languages, has been another contributor to the growing category of passion plays. The title of the play is Calvary. It is of the historical type and fictitious characters as Joachim, a rich Jew and his son, Daniel are present in the usual settings. In a less important way there are introduced allegorical characters, voices, and spirits. The Christus is not represented "out of reverence". The dialogue often consists of long descriptions of nature. The opening speech of the play is made by the character Joachim and gives an idea of the turned-about phrasing.

Joachim:— Lo, overhead the stars in glittering panoply stream across the sky. Centuries ago when father David herded his flocks along the distant hills, then these were there. And these great lamps lighted our first parents along the streams of Paradise. They
have seen nations rise and fall; 
proud Nineveh, cloudwalled Babylon, 
and Persia, mistress of myriads rise 
from the earth and be again resolved 
to dust. But they remain and God, 
and God's high covenant, and fallen 
man to whom redemption now is nigh. 
And are thy hopes, 0 Israel, delusive phantoms? The days of Daniel are they 
not accomplished? And where is the ful-
fillment of thy prophecy, 0 Jehovah? 
The desecrating hand of Rome lies heavily 
upon thy sacred city and touches thy 
sacred hill. In these the silent watches 
of the night, thoughts fearful to daylight 
glide like shadows across my soul and 
doubt sits gloating over the sanctities 
of life. The city slumbers below me, with 
closed doors through which only life and 
death shall slip ere morning breaks. An-
cient almost as the hunched purple of the 
hills. So slumber my hopes and thine, 0 
Jerusalem, city of my soul. Is this the 
harvest of thy word? Has then the smoke 
of sacrifice curled unto an empty heaven 
and fallen into nostrils foreign to thy 
name? For behold, encompasses my soul 
and thy people, and in my heart there is 
a void such as the great emptiness of the 
universe when Thou alone art and nothing 
else was. O send forth to thy servant 
a sign that thine arm hath not been 
shortened.71

It remains for some present or future writer to revise 
this text just as the Oberammergau play has been revised 
to meet changing conditions. This is likewise true of sev-
eral of the other passion plays that have appeared within 
the last few years.

71. William M. Lamers, Calvary, Catholic Dramatic Movement, 
Milwaukee, 1928, Act., 1, scene 1.
plays are being written at all for it was many decades before new passion plays began to appear. As the texts and productions increase, the audiences also will increase, not only in numbers but, and what is more important, in discrimination and taste, so that by the time this revival in religious drama has reached its zenith really literary pieces will appear.
CHAPTER EIGHT.

THE FUTURE.

It is true that these religious plays, except that of Oberammergau and other European traditional passion plays, are popular only during the Lenten season. What of the amateur theatre during the remainder of the year? It is very active, active in the high schools, colleges, universities, parishes, little theatres, and community houses throughout the European and American continents. Nor are its champions to be found only among the small scattered groups. For some years Richard Dana Skinner, a recognized dramatic critic and reviewer, in the Commonweal has championed a popular theatre. He has unfortunately been too premature with his suggestions. In 1928 in the June 6, 13, and 20 copies of the Commonweal he wrote a series of articles entitled "The Challenge of the Theatre". This challenge, he says, is:

"I'm giving the public what it wants. If you don't like it, why not try something yourself." This is the real challenge of the modern theatre. 72

He then appeals to his public to take up the challenge but, as was stated, he was seeing farther ahead than the interested part of his audience could visualize. Therefore no


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results were forthcoming. Mr. Skinner in these articles suggested a plan that would be feasible but to no avail.

A few years were to elapse before the ideas expressed by Mr. Skinner were to be imbibed by others. The increasing decadence of the stage in those years, the bold challenge of irreligious producers, the woeful lack of worthwhile dramatic pieces, these conditions were to cause the increase in the popularity of the amateur theatre, and the founding of many little theatre groups.

Outstanding among those who have taken up the ideas of Mr. Skinner is Mr. William J. O'Neil. The latter had lately come to the assistance of his contemporary with an article in the same periodical, *The Commonweal*, of May 18, 1934. But Mr. O'Neil has gone farther than write, he has acted as he tells us in "A Planned Theatre",

six months ago, with crusading zeal at a new high and finances at a new low, I started to push this idea to what should be its rightful place in the theatre. With the constant and sympathetic guidance of Mr. Skinner, the ground has been broken. We aim to open the theatre in the fall of 1935.73

The author then goes on to appeal to the groups who will disagree with his plans. These he classifies as the

"Sophisticated", the "Hollywoodites", the "Intelligentsia", the "propagandists". He appeals for their support for the sake of the art of the stage and bewails the lack of the art on Broadway, or as he expresses it:

> For today, in spite of the periodic worthwhile adventures, the theatre as is has less to do with true artistry and more to do with avarice. Until the economic structure is radically changed, there will remain sporadic, diluted and for the most part unsatisfactory artistic development.74

Nor is the writer of those words alone in his opinion of Broadway. Such names as Joseph Wood Krutch, Lee Simonson, Stark Young, Brock Pemberton, Arthur Hopkins, and such periodicals of the art as Theatre Arts Monthly, and the Stage, all have been reiterating the same sentiments for some months past.

The major part of Mr. O'Neil's article is taken up with overcoming objections to his organized Catholic theatre. The familiar and common bugbear, namely the fear that a theatre under Catholic auspices will produce sickly-sweet, namby-pamby plays, is aggressively attacked. This fear, it is true, was at one time justified, and that in the beginning of the revival of the amateur theatre, but developments of the last few years hardly justify the objection now. Mr. O'Neil would like to know, "Since when have these two words, (namby-pamby

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74. Ibid., p. 62.
and Catholic) become synonymous?" In a list, given in the article, of the plays that it is proposed to produce none of the pieces could be termed "goody-goody" or "sickly sweet".

With his final paragraph Mr. O'Neil confidently announces that the revival of the amateur theatre is here, and not only here but it is a success. Who can doubt this when we consider the thousands of amateur theatre groups constantly arising, the popularity of the Little Theatre Movement at least one of which is to be found in every city and University.

The features of the modern revival of the amateur theatre are then, the unqualified success of amateur productions the condition of the professional stage, the breaking down of the prejudice on the part of the Church against the drama, and finally, the popularity of passion plays both traditional and new.

The two most important factors in the bringing about of the revival and contributing to its success have been the universal acceptance of passion plays and the seeming ease with which they can be produced by amateurs, and the acceptance of the stage by religion as an aid in its mission. It was the continual increase in attendance at passion plays that encouraged the amateur actors to attempt other productions. And these latter were not only permitted by the church authorities but were even encouraged.
It remains to say why the passion plays became popular. The stage had little of religion in it and the dramatic material became stereotyped. The passion play combined art and religion in a harmonious combination. The passion play was something different and for many audiences something new.

The critics came to accept the passion plays and this stamp of approval assisted materially in bringing before the general public the productions. The reviewers and critics wrote about the plays, this gave them the publicity that is so necessary for any production.

Another important factor for the success of the plays was the almost negligible cost of producing them. The players, being amateurs, received no salary. Very often the scenery and costumes were made by men and women who were glad to donate their services in time, labor, and money.

Summed up briefly then, our conclusion would be that a revival of the popular, the amateur theatre is with us and that this revival is due almost entirely to the success and popularity of passion plays. Furthermore, in answer to the final paragraph of the Foreword, when such eminent critics as Mr. Skinner and Mr. O'Neil have given much time and labor to the new movement, when such modern dramatists as Mr. Eugene O'Neill and Mr. Barrie are affected by it sufficiently to write plays of a decidedly religious character then we may
say, without fear of contradiction, that the revival is here demanding the attention of students of literature and the drama, and the new movement is entirely worthy of their labor and study.

What is the prospect for the future? It is bright with possibilities. The revived amateur theatre is bound to affect the professional stage more and more in almost every department of the art. And this will undoubtedly be for the betterment of the stage. Audiences, educated by amateur productions will expect Broadway to produce dramas of an artistic nature according to the formulae dictated by decency and true art, entirely devoid of grossness.

Playwrights will feel the influence and, in fact, they have already shown evidences that they have sensed the changed situation. They will write better, more finished products. For materials they now find an entirely new field, the vast, interesting, and intricate field of the life of the majority with its problems, trials, and joys. Instead of treating of isolated, particular groups, the dramatists can again use universal, general characters. These will be natural men and women, living their lives, engaging in the conflict, overcoming adversity, according to the dictates of right reason.

Yes, the future is bright with possibilities. It is not too much to expect that with this revival the drama will scale hitherto unattained heights of perfection. So wide-
spread is the amateur movement that soon we can truly say, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women in it, actors".
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The thesis, "The Influence of Passion Plays on the Modern Revival of the Amateur Theatre," written by Rev. Terence J. Seery, O.S.M., has been accepted by the Graduate School of Loyola University, with reference to form, and by the readers whose names appear below, with reference to content. It is, therefore, accepted as a partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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