

The Reverent Artistic and Impressive Staging of the Crucifixion—the Central Scene in America's Passion Play, Produced at West Hoboken, N. J. The Saviour Is Represented Here, as in Other Scenes, by a Living Actor with Great Effectiveness



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An Appealing Sacred Drama Under the Direction of the Passionist Fathers That May Succeed the Celebrated but War-Shattered Oberammergau Production

A NATIVE American Passion Play has been developed which bids fair to take the place of the celebrated Oberammergau production.

The war has put the future of the Oberammergau Passion Play in grave doubt. It has been given once every ten years since 1633, when the people of the little Bavarian village devoted themselves to its production in gratitude for their escape from the Black Death. In recent years hundreds of thousands of visitors from the whole civilized world have flocked to see this drama of unsurpassed beauty and sincerity.

The last production was in 1910, when there were 400,000 visitors at the series of performances. It is reasonably certain that there will be no production in 1920. The actors have been serving in the German army and how many of them have been killed is unknown. The play, it is felt, can never resume its old attraction, for the people of neighboring countries could not be expected to visit it as before the war.

The American Passion Play is entitled "Veronica's Veil," and is a version of the Passion and Crucifixion of the Saviour based partly on the Bible and partly on an ancient legend. It has been produced regularly for the past two years in the Parish of St. Joseph, West Hoboken, N. J., under the direction of two Passionist Fathers—Father Conrad and Father Bernard.

It is said to appeal equally to members of all Christian churches.

Last year no fewer than 40,000 persons travelled to West Hoboken to be present during Lent at the second series of performances of "Veronica's Veil." Thus encouraged, the members of the Parish of St. Joseph immediately began preparations to accommodate even larger audiences at this year's performances of the religious spectacle—which will begin on February 17 and continue four times each week until the end of the Lenten season.

They have built an auditorium for St. Joseph's Church which will seat 1,400 people; also a stage specially adapted for the production of "Veronica's Veil." And this year's production will be given under the auspices of a committee which will endeavor to give it national backing. This committee will have representatives from every section of the United States, besides, of course, Father Conrad and Father Bernard. Among those who have accepted the appointment are Justice Eugene A. Philbin, chairman; W. Bourke Cockran, the Right Rev. J. J. O'Connor, Bishop of Newark; the Rev. Mgr. P. F. O'Hare, and distinguished churchmen and others living as far away as the Pacific coast.

It is expected that before this year's series of performances has ended the national organization will be perfected and measures taken to establish a great national annual religious event, which Christians and lovers of pure art from all over America will attend.

The original play of "Veronica's Veil" was written by Father Bernardine Dusch, C. P., and was first produced in Pittsburgh. In connection with the presentations in

West Hoboken various changes have been made, improving the action, the lines and the spectacle.

"This Passion Play," said Father Conrad, "is a very large part of my ministry. The moment one season ends I am preparing for the next. I know the stage of the Passion Play as well as the pulpit in my church. The dressing rooms, the lights, the scenery, the music, the tableaux—yes, even the text of the play itself—have been reshaped, remodelled, gone over again and again, and we shall continue making improvements, even to the exclusion of members of the casts, until this sacred drama is stage-perfect in every detail."

"We have spent many weary nights with the players, rehearsing scene after scene with all the earnestness of professionals. No mechanical detail has been overlooked. We spent above \$5,000 for the costumes and scenery. The costumes are exact models of those worn in the Oberammergau production. We welcome the most searching criticism, whether the criticism pertains to the reverence with which the sacred drama of this character should be enacted or the use of the money charged for admittance."

The play is based on the beautiful old story of Saint Veronica, the woman who comforted the Saviour on the way to Calvary, wiped His face with a napkin on which the face of the Redeemer became impressed. The big, central, impressive scene is that of the Crucifixion. Audience after audience has been mystified by this scene. Some spectators thought it was a lifeless picture artfully handled so as to give intense realistic effect. But the fact is that all of the characters in this scene are human beings, and the central figure hanging on the Cross is a youth whose acting has left a profound impression on every spectator.

There are five acts, and from beginning to end, while the story of Veronica is unfolded, the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ are portrayed with all the intenseness of actors especially equipped for sacred drama. A synopsis follows:

ACT I.

Joseph Caiphas, the High Priest of Jerusalem, and the members of the Sanhedrin debate on the expediency of putting the Christ of Nazareth to death. Caiphas is resolved that He must die. They depart for the Court of Justice, Rebecca and her daughters, Ruth and Miriam, await the issue of the trial. Abenadar relates the scene of the betrayal. Caiphas and the Sanhedrin return from the trial. Judas protests in vain and



The Resurrection, as It Is Presented in Act III, Scene II, of "Veronica's Veil," Our American Passion Play.

despairs, Veronica pleads with her husband to have no part in the proceedings against the Nazarene, but in vain. Nicodemus prays that the Holy One be not put to death.

ACT II.

The home of Veronica. She awaits her husband's return from the trial. He brings the news of Christ's condemnation. Veronica's defense of the Saviour. Nicodemus relates the sufferings of Christ. Miriam's motive of hatred for the Nazarene. The Saviour, on His way to Calvary, passes the home of Veronica. She goes to comfort Him. Tableau of the impression on Veronica's veil. At sight of the miraculous veil Sirach and Ruth profess their faith in Christ.

ACT III.

The palace of Caiphas. Abenadar reports the death of Christ and proclaims his faith in Him. Ruth professes her faith in Christ. She is banished from home. Miriam swears revenge against Christ and His followers. Caiphas becomes insane.

ACT IV.

Rome. The garden of Fabius. Roman slaves discourse about the Christians. Grief

of Fabius and family over the serious illness of Claudia. Regulus recalled to the army. Death of Claudia. Veronica announced. The appeal to the gods of Rome. Veronica restores Claudia to life by means of the miraculous veil. Fabius and family converted to Christianity. The threat of Petronius. Miriam, detected as a spy, leaves the service of Fabius.

ACT V.

The Catacombs. Abenadar explains the doctrines of Christianity to Fabius. The consecration of virgins. The burial service. Soldiers, led by Miriam, surprise the Christians and carry them off to prison. The Mamertine Prison. The conversion of Cassian and his family, through the restoration of his wife's sight. Denounced to the Emperor by Miriam, they are cast into prison. The mocking of the captive Christians by Miriam. "Ye shall die as the Nazarene—hated and despised! Then my work is accomplished!"

The palace of the Emperor. The feast day of the Emperor. The festival dance. Fabius and family proclaim themselves Christians. Regulus's defense of his father. His conversion. His death. The condemnation of Fabius. Other Christians brought to trial. The destruction of Jupiter. Rage of the Emperor. Petronius, commanded to destroy the miraculous veil, is struck dead. Soldiers refuse to touch it. Miriam offers to do what Roman soldiers refuse and are afraid to do. Her conversion. Miriam's death. The Emperor condemns the Christians to be thrown to the wild beasts. The martyrs in glory.



The Remorse of Judas After the Supreme Treachery, Powerfully Portrayed by P. F. Koch in "Veronica's Veil."



Miss Marian Eehr, the Tender and Dignified St. Veronica in the American Passion Play.