

**THE PASSION PLAY  
AT OBERAMMERGAU,  
1890**

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The Passion Play at Oberammergau, 1890 by F. W. Farrar

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## Oberammergau

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BY

F. W. FARRAR, D.D., F.R.S.

ARCHDEACON AND CANON OF WESTMINSTER, ETC. ETC.



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WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1890

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## Preface

WHEN I visited Oberammergau to see the final rehearsal of the Passion Play on May 18, 1890, I had no intention of publishing in this form any record of my impressions. But on my return home I found that the interest in the subject was so widespread, that I accepted a request to write some account of what I had seen. I am so constantly questioned on the subject that I have here printed



what I had to say in a more permanent form.

In 1880 two friends of mine were so deeply moved by the doubt whether it was *right* to witness a play which represented the Lord Jesus Christ, that even when they arrived at Ettal, within three miles of Oberammergau, they were on the point of turning back, and yielding to the sense of misgiving which had haunted them throughout their journey to the place. There are not a few English men and women, of earnest and reverent minds, who denounce the play as blasphemous, and consider it a sin to witness it. I have

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endeavoured to indicate the reasons why such an opinion must be regarded as harsh and insular. Of course, if ordinary sight-seers go to the play as a mere idle show, carrying with them only the vulgarest manners and the vulgarest motives, they turn the whole scene into a profanation: but they carry the profanation with themselves. The actors, the population of Oberammergau, and the simple peasant spectators, for whom, and for whom alone, the play was originally intended, look upon themselves as taking part in an act of devotion, and their sobs and tears show the depths of their sincerity. Many of

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them kneel down and pray on entering the theatre as they do when they go to worship in a church. The religious teachers, who have for more than two and a half centuries given their warmest sanction to the Play, have simply been actuated by the principle expressed by Horace :

*Segnius irritant animos demissa per aurem,  
Quam quæ sint oculis subjecta fidelibus, et quæ  
Ipse sibi tradit spectator.*

That principle is as old as Herodotus, who says that "Men's ears are less trustworthy than their eyes,"<sup>1</sup> and it

<sup>1</sup> Herod. i. 8.