

Home news

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HOME NEWS

Both the Federal Council and the Genevese authorities have tendered their apologies and regrets to the General Secretary of the League of Nations for the unwarranted attack on the building of the latter in connection with the Sacco-Vanzetti demonstration; an assurance has also been given that the necessary steps will be taken to prevent similar occurrences in the future.

Just over forty arrests have been made, amongst which are a good number of Frenchmen and Italians. The foreigners implicated are to be expelled. The Genevese police courts have already dealt with some of the minor cases by inflicting imprisonment of from 24 hours to 12 days; the more serious cases will come before a higher tribunal. Maître Dicker, the Communist lawyer who figured in the Conradi trial, is defending some of the accused and maintains that the excesses are due to the interference of the police, whose sudden mobilisation infuriated the processionists, who were bent on an entirely peaceful demonstration. The ringleader of the attack on the League of Nations building is said to be a 17½-year-old Vaudois student named Edouard Noverraz.

The Federal Statistical Office has just published the official figures for the year 1924; the population in that year was just under the four million mark (3,9 millions). Both the number of marriages contracted and the birth rate have suffered a considerable decrease as compared with previous years; on the other hand mortality is in the ascendant and the excess of births over deaths (the natural increase in population) has dropped from 29,568 in 1923 to 24,520 in 1924. Under the causes of death cancer and tubercular diseases are prominent; heavy alcohol consumption is said to be mainly responsible for the former.

The damage to buildings, orchards and roads in the canton of Lucerne caused by the severe hailstorm of August 2nd is officially estimated at between four and five million francs.

The accident on the Mont Blanc railway from Chamonix—which most of the English papers have described as a "Swiss" railway accident—has claimed a few Swiss victims. Amongst the dead are M. and Mme. Eugene Meroz from Le Locle, and on the list of the seriously wounded M. and Mme. Bolle, from Lausanne.

A car with five passengers shot through the railing of the Zihl (Thièle) bridge on the border of the cantons of Berne and Neuchâtel. The owner-driver, Mr. Louis Froidevaux, a furniture manufacturer in La Chaux-de-Fonds, was killed whilst his wife and a Mlle. Vuille suffered serious injuries. It is surmised that Mr. Froidevaux was struck with an attack of apoplexy and lost control of the car.

A thorough search has failed to establish any clue as to the fate of Mr. Karl Balsiger, age 32, an accountant at the Credit Suisse in Zurich, and it is feared that he has come to grief whilst climbing the Claridenstock.

NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

The Selzach Passion Play.

Two admirable articles on this subject have appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* (Aug. 18th) and the *Times* (Aug. 25th) from the pen of Mr. W. Hutcheon and we publish them in full in deference to the wishes of a correspondent who hopes that we will give this revival the same publicity as the festival in Vevey, though the two are in a different class.

Daily Telegraph:

This early morning the sky was clear, and the steadfast snows of the Jungfrau gleamed white and cool as the car slipped noiselessly along on its hundred miles' journey from the High Alps, through the flat and fertile midlands, to its destination at the Spielhaus at Selzach, under the shadow of the Jura mountains. The sun had not had time to concentrate its powerful rays, and the occasional pedestrian plodded peacefully along in a grateful shade. Skirting Interlaken one saw the Lake of Thun in its early

morning beauty, passed through Spiez before it was fairly awake, and reached beautiful Berne just as the moving pageantry on the famous Clock Tower heralded the hour of nine. Then again swiftly through the pastoral charm of the lowlands, where the figures of the harvesters dotted over the fields gave an added glamour to the waving corn; through the quaint cathedral town of Solothurn, with its ancient castle walls and bastions; and so at last to the village of Selzach, lying tranquil at the foot of the Hasenmatt, just as the trumpeters sounded their warning to the villagers that the representation of the greatest drama in the world was about to begin.

Passion Plays in Switzerland reach far away back into the dim ages. Neighbouring Solothurn was in those ancient days a place of note for their representation. The Selzach plays are a revival dating back only to the close of the last century; but already they are famous the world over, though not too famous for their soul's good. The village contains less than 2,000 inhabitants. They are simple country folk, about equally divided between quiet pastoral pursuits and the staple industry of watchmaking. That such a village should be able to produce a body of some hundreds of players—men, women and children—a large choir of trained voices, and an orchestra of twenty-eight instrumentalists; that for five hours each Sunday, for four months of the year, they should be able to hold a great audience spellbound; that in music and in acting they should reach and maintain the higher levels with such natural refinement and such depths of religious solemnity, and, incidentally, with such perfection of technique, is surely one of the marvels of the world. Yet that is what they are doing. A subtle influence pervaded even the streets. Something of the softening grace of the great Bible story seemed to have been communicated to even the humblest of the country people. It was as if the Christ lived and moved here among His people, sharing with them their joys and sorrows.

Inside the homely wooden Spielhaus over 1,000 people had gathered. They were curiously diverse—Americans, French, English, German and Swiss, but mostly Swiss of the countryside. Rich and poor, they had gathered to see the unfolding of the wondrous legend of Creation; to follow the Bible story from the Garden of Eden to the poignancy of the Crucifixion and the glory of the Resurrection. There is no need in these days to indicate the general lines of the Drama. Oberammergau has made them familiar to all. The staging was perfect; the colouring so rich and harmonious that only the Song of Deborah could adequately sing its praises. The living tableaux might have been carved in marble, so statuesque were they. At the Last Supper a falling leaf would have disturbed the still solemnity. A thousand people held their breath.

Of personal impressions one loves to think back on the Infant Christ, surely the youngest actor on any stage, certainly the one with the most human appeal. But a few months old, he gazed around with open wonder as he lay peacefully on the lap of the Virgin Mother. When he stirred happily and seemed to smile every face was illumined; and Joseph leaned over caressingly to toy with the little outstretched fingers. Nover was a fine touch of realism more wondrously conveyed.

There were, of course, lighter sides to the great Drama. The wooden Spielhaus was packed to suffocation. The audience sweltered in the heat. The overhead fans worked slowly and imperfectly. In the eaves the birds chirped merrily as the performance opened; as it progressed they sought a freer air. Yet not one persona in the audience moved. Through five long hours they sat under the spell of the old story that is ever new. Coats and waistcoats were removed, even collars; another hour and we should have been happily back in the scanty costumes in which Adam and Eve seemed to find a comfort that was denied to us.

True, there was a break in the performance for lunch, and it was good to see the Falstafian tenor soloist, Walter Loseli, in white shirt and trousers, manfully serving out the soup to the hungry visitors at the village hostelry. By a fruit stall outside the Spielhaus a child lay crowing in his perambulator. He grinned a happy welcome to the visitors as they passed, and gave a friendly grasp to an extended finger. He was, so his proud parents said, the cousin of the Infant Christ.

ANNIVERSARIES OF SWISS EVENTS.

Sept. 5th, 1597.—Separation of Appenzell in Outer and Inner Rhoden. The Reformation being the chief cause; but, nevertheless, both Half Cantons agreed to maintain friendly relations.

Sept. 7th, 1460.—Foundation of the University of Basle. Basle is the oldest University of Switzerland.

Sept. 8th, 1814.—End of the Helvetic Republic.

Sept. 9th, 1798.—The French march through Nidwald, burning and devastating the country, where many citizens lose their lives. The many orphans, as is well known, were taken care of by Pestalozzi.

At last came the final glory of the Resurrection morn, vividly memorable in a day of unforgettable impressions, and as the chorus rang out

Anbetung, Macht und Kraft und Ehre
Von Ewigkeit zu Ewigkeit.

Alleluja! Alleluja!

the perspiring multitude streamed towards the open air. A few moments later the car was bearing us swiftly, in brilliant sunshine, through the open country—where many teams of oxen were drawing homewards the ingathered grain—to the cooler snow-covered regions of the Monk, the Eiger, and the Wetterhorn that we had left some twelve hours before.

The Times :—

"Judas Iscariot betrayed his Master for 30 pieces of silver. To my mind the suggestion that there should be put on the screen in England the Story of the Cross as seen through the secular and sophisticated eyes of Hollywood, "featuring," to use its horrible jargon, some popular star as the Man of Sorrows, and with captions in keeping, seems a crime almost akin. The most insensitive must shiver at the thought. But—and in everything there is a "but"—it cannot be denied that there is growing up in our big cities a class that is ignorant of the meaning of the Bible Story. That class the Church seeks but fails to reach. The cinema enters where the Church cannot penetrate. Its pictorial message carries swiftly to a section that is deaf to the appeal of the preacher. The film might, and could, be a valuable adjunct to the pulpit. Is it then impossible for that Story to be retold on the screen in simplicity and reverence? I do not think so.

I have just returned from witnessing the Passion Play at Selzach, of which too little has been said in the English Press. That incomparable propagandist, W. T. Stead, when he visited Oberammergau in the summer of 1890—nearly 40 years ago—stamped the meaning of the Bavarian play on the mind of all English-speaking peoples. Selzach is Oberammergau in little. Sheltering under the shadow of the Hasenmatt, among the Jura heights, it is a peaceful pastoral village, whose nearest neighbour is the old cathedral town of Solothurn. The sacred drama has never lost its attraction for the Swiss countryman. In that summer of 1890 a little group of Selzach villagers visiting Oberammergau were so impressed by its message that, then and there, they vowed that what a Bavarian village could do they would achieve. In 1895 they built their homely wooden Spielhaus, and in it, at long intervals—the world war caused a break from 1913 to 1923—they have presented anew the sacred drama.

There are no professional actors among these villagers; they are humble farmers and industrial workers. Yet no one of the many thousands who have seen the play on any Sunday during the present summer can have failed to be profoundly moved by its lesson. The Bible Story is not enacted; it is lived. Selzach is Galilee. One feels the subtle influence outside as well as inside the Spielhaus. These simple players of the people—nearly one-fourth of the population of the hamlet, men, women and children, have their part—inspired by the greatness of their theme, have achieved a marvellous realism.

From beginning to end, the Christ grips the imagination. One sees Him first as a babe on the lap of the Madonna, now crowing contentedly, now gazing wonderingly at the passing pageant. Joseph of Arimathea bends over him with tender solicitude, and the Holy Infant rewards him with a smile. Here is no stage property figure, but a fascinating little bundle of happiness and love, the ideal Galilean babe. One follows breathlessly the Christ figure in