

A RABBI'S IMPRESSION OF THE OBERAMMERGAU PASSION PLAY.¹

How many thousands and even millions migrate at the end of every decade to Oberammergau to witness the famous Passion Play performed by the simple Tyrolese peasantry of that retired village! It is a survival of former years, and we enjoy its performance as a remnant of the times in which Christian faith was more vigorous, less critical, and extraordinarily fervent. But those who go and enjoy the grand drama are mostly Christians, and look at the spectacle with sentiments which see nothing but nobility, greatness, and an elevation of mankind in the several scenes that are enacted before their eyes. How welcome should be the report of a man who, although friendly to Jesus of Nazareth, yet calls attention to a gross violation of justice done to the nation from which the hero of the Passion Play originated.

Rabbi Krauskopf went to Oberammergau in the expectation of seeing the Passion Play as one would be interested in any other performance,—a drama of Shakespeare or of Goethe, or a performance of Hiawatha in Canada. But while he listened, the traveller turned theologian, the cosmopolitan, Jew.

He felt the stinging reproaches against Judaism as directed against himself, and the nations that worship Jesus as a god revile the people to whom he belongs. The Romans have been exonerated from the crime of having executed an innocent man; and the motive is obvious to the historian. When Christianity grew, it could succeed among Romans only by proving that it was not an anti-Roman religion. Thus, Jesus is represented as hostile to the Jews, and the Jews alone, a race offensive to the Romans, are made to bear the whole blame of the Crucifixion.

Rabbi Krauskopf enters into details and shows how utterly impossible are some of the features of the story of the trial of Jesus. He claims that the story of the Jews having persecuted, betrayed, condemned, and crucified Jesus is historically untrue, and the invention, partly of an excited imagination, partly of policy, and partly of malice. He adds:

"I have built that statement on textual criticism and on historical fact. I have studied sources. I have searched motives. I have weighed arguments. I have balanced authorities. But to no other conclusion have I been able to arrive than that Jesus, the gentle preacher and healer of Nazareth, the enthusiastic lover of his country and people, felt himself called, as did many another unfortunate enthusiast, before him and after, to deliver the Holy Land from the hand of the cruel Roman, who at that time held Palestine as his tributary province. His enthusiasm was not only heartily seconded by a number of faithful disciples and a host of followers, over whom he exercised a powerful spiritual influence, but also begot in them the thought that their inspired Master was in truth their long-expected Messiah, the Deliverer of the people, the Saviour of the nation. Their delusion deluded him. He threw himself into the current of his people's delirious hope, and, like many another enthusiast and revolutionist, was swept by his ardor into destruction. They acclaimed him in public procession, in the capital of the tributary nation, "King of the Jews!" and he accepted their acclamation. It might have been a harmless delusion, had not Rome, at that time of constant seditions among the people, been especially vigilant against would-be deliverers of the

¹A series of six lectures.—With three supplemental chapters bearing on the subject. By Rabbi Krauskopf, D. D. Philadelphia: Edward Stern & Co. 1901. Pages, 226.

tributary province, and especially severe against agitators, prophets, and Messiahs. That acclamation was heard by the garrison in the fortress of Antonia, close to the Temple. It meant the doom of the acclaimed. He was seized in the dead of the night, and made to pay the penalty of his love for his country and people by a traitor's death upon the cross, at the hand of the cruel Roman.

"This is the summary of one of the saddest lives of history, of one of the noblest sons of Israel, which I have told at greater length in the preceding discourses of this series. Thus stripped of mythical accretions and ecclesiastical falsifications, it is the Jew's story of the life and deeds of Jesus, the Rabbi and patriot of Nazareth.

"I submit my argument to the world's Highest Court, the Supreme Judgment-seat of Reason."

The story of the trial of Jesus has produced many persecutions of the Jews. Innumerable Israelites have been slain, burned, and maltreated in various ways because they are said to have crucified Christ; and almost 1900 years ago a Jewish mob is reported to have shouted before the tribunal of a Roman governor at Jerusalem: "His blood come upon us and upon our children!"

Rabbi Krauskopf argues: "I ask for disproof of this sad and simple story; or for historic and scientific proof of the miracles told, of the myths narrated, of the contradictions disclosed in connection with the Gospel stories of the Virgin-born, miracle-working, vicariously-crucified, death-resurrected, heaven-ascended, only-begotten Son of God.

"I ask for disproof of Jesus having been a Jew, and a lover, and the beloved, of Jews; or for proof of his having been a god, and a hater, and the hated, of Jews.

"I ask for disproof of the Jews having had no motive adequate to the bitterness of their persecution of Jesus, as portrayed in the Gospels and as enacted in the Oberammergau Passion Play; or for proof of the guilt charged against Jesus, constituting capital offence, according to the Law of Israel.

"I ask for disproof of Jesus never having preached a doctrine, performed a deed, advocated a reform, that was not strictly Jewish, of his never having had a thought of separating himself from his people and of founding a pagan-blended anti-Jewish creed; or for proof of Jesus having ever declared himself an immaculately conceived, Virgin-born, David-descended, Son of God, and one of the Trinity of the threefold God.

"I ask for disproof of the impossibility of such marvellous miracles as earthquake, eclipse, Temple-Veil rending, grave-resurrection, heaven-ascension of the dead, occurring at the moment of Christ's death, without the slightest trace of them to be found in contemporaneous Pagan and Jewish literature; or for proof of such unprecedented and unequalled miracles as Christ's resurrection, his conference, after his death, with his disciples, and his ascension to heaven, taking place in the presence of witnesses, and yet of the four different Gospel records of these greatest of all miracles that have come down to us, no two of them agreeing."

The book before us is a strong appeal to our sense of justice, and it would be wise to read it carefully, and if there be any reason in continuing to preach the traditional hatred of the Jews, let us abolish the Christian claim that we act according to Christ's saying, "Love your enemies." And suppose the hostility to the Jews ostensibly upheld in the performance at Oberammergau be officially endorsed by Christian Churches, let us at least justify the claim and prove that the present Jews deserve the hatred and contumely so freely bestowed upon them.

Among the materials introduced into this book for controversial purposes we find some useful and valuable references explaining the meaning of Jewish institutions, partly shedding light upon the roots of Christianity in the soil of Talmudic Judaism. We quote the following comparisons of a list of quotations from the New Testament and the Talmud, which prove that many of Christ's sayings are Jewish and go back in their historical origin to rabbinical teachings.

NEW TESTAMENT.

Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, not one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

Whosoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.

Whosoever is angry with his brother without cause shall be in danger of the Judgment.

Leave thy guilt before the altar and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

If any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.

Take heed that you do not your alms before men to be seen of them.

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

But when ye pray use not vain repetitions as the heathen do, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,

TALMUD.

More acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice is the humble spirit.

Three things there are that bear fruit in this world and yield reward in the world to come: First, honor of parents and fellow-men; second, hospitality to strangers and wayfarers; third, the making of peace between contending parties.

Whoso maketh peace among his fellow men enjoyeth the fruit thereof here, and shall reap his reward also in the world to come.

Whoso is merciful toward his fellow-creatures will be mercifully dealt with by his Father in Heaven.

Be rather of the persecuted than of the persecutors.

Even heaven and earth shall pass away, but the word of the Lord shall endure forever.

The least of the commandments demands as much of thy observance as the greatest.

Whoso lifts his hand against his neighbor, even though he strike him not, is guilty of an offence, and is adjudged a sinner.

Sins of man against God the Atonement Day expiates, but sins of man against man the Atonement Day does not expiate till he has become reconciled with his neighbor.

If any one take thy ass give him the saddle also.

Whoso gives alms in public had rather not give alms at all than shame his fellow-man.

"Whoso studies the Law in the secrecy of his home," saith the Lord, "I shall cause his godly deeds to be known in public."

Let thy words be few when thou offerest them in prayer to God.

Let this be thy short form of prayer: Thy will be done in heaven, and may peace of heart be the reward of them that reverence Thee on earth.

Lead me not into sin, even from its temptations deliver Thou me.

NEW TESTAMENT.

Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not neither do they reap.

Therefore take no thought, saying: What shall we eat? or what shall we drink?

Take therefore no thought of the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged.

With what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again.

How wilt thou say to thy brother, let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and behold a beam is in thine own eye.

Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do you even so to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Whoso heareth these sayings of mine and doth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock.

And the rain descended and the floods came and the winds blew and beat upon that house; and it fell and great was the fall of it.

Freely ye have received, freely give.

NEW TESTAMENT.

The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room, lest a more honorable man than thou be bidden of him.

But when thou makest a feast call the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind,

TALMUD.

Neither beast nor bird follow a trade, and yet they are fed without toil.

Whoso has bread in his basket and yet asks: What shall I eat to-morrow? belongs to those of little faith.

Sufficient unto the hour is the sorrow thereof. Thou shalt find it heavy enough even then.

Whoso judges his neighbor charitably, shall himself be charitably judged.

With what measure man metes, it shall be measured to him in heaven.

Do they say: Take the splinter out of thine eye? He will answer: Remove the beam out of thine own eye.

Whoso would reprove others must himself be spotless.

What is hateful unto thee, that do not unto another. This is the whole Law, all the rest is commentary.

Whoso studies the Law and acts in accordance with its commandments is likened unto a man who builds a house, the foundation of which is made of stone and the superstructure of bricks. Neither storm nor floods can injure it. But whoso studies the Law, and yet is wanting in good deeds, is likened unto the man who builds the foundation of his house of brick and the superstructure of stone. The flood comes, and undermines and destroys the house.

As freely as God has taught you, so freely shall ye teach.

Whoso humbles himself in this world shall be exalted in the next. Whoso makes himself like unto a slave, for the Law, in this world, shall be made free in the world to come.

To him that hath shall be given; from him that hath not shall be taken away.

TALMUD.

The Sabbath has been delivered into your power, not you into the power of the Sabbath.

When thou art bidden as a guest seat thyself in a place lower than that which thou art deserving. Let others assign to thee the higher place, not thyself. Never strive after the highest place lest they say unto thee: "Descend!" Better that they say unto thee: "Ascend to the higher place," than that thou shouldst be obliged to descend to the lower.

So build thy house that its entrance be toward the street and that the poor have free admission, and let them be welcome guests within.

And the Lord saith unto the servant, go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.

It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master.

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.

But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.

Whoso, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man who is a householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace. And said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the laborers and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour they received every man a penny. And when they had received it they murmured against the good man of the house. Saying, these last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.

For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.

A king invited his servants to a banquet, but did not appoint the time. The wise among them adorned themselves, and waited at the entrance of the king's palace, saying: Can there be anything wanting at a king's house to delay a banquet? But the foolish among them continued at their labor, saying: Can there be a banquet without preparation? Suddenly the king's summons came. The wise, being ready and adorned, entered. But the foolish, hurrying from their work, entered with the soil of their labor upon them. The king welcomed the wise, and bade them to partake of the feast. But he was angry at the foolish, and bade them to stand and look on.

It is enough for the servant that he be as his master.

Unless God wills it, not even a bird falls from the sky. Unless God wills it, no evil can fall upon man.

"Do I not number the very hairs of your head?" saith the Lord.

With the destruction of the Temple the power of prophecy departed from the prophets and entered the hearts of babes and simpletons.

Whoso humbles himself in this life in love for the Law of God shall be counted among the exalted in the world to come.

A king hired a number of laborers to work in his garden. Among them there was one whose labor was greatly pleasing in the eyes of the king. After observing him a while, he called him to his side, walked up and down with him, engaged in pleasant converse. In the evening the laborers came for their pay, and the king gave to each his day's wage. To him, whom he had called from his labor early in the day, he gave as much as to them who had toiled all day. These were displeased, and complained of unfair treatment, inasmuch as they had labored all day long, and had received no more than he who had toiled but little.

When the king learned of their displeasure, he said, This laborer has labored in but a few hours as much as ye have accomplished in all the day.

In the life to come there will be neither eating nor drinking, neither marrying nor following a trade, neither envy nor hatred. The heads of the pious will be adorned with crowns, and the godly will rejoice in the presence of the Lord.

The writer of this review has himself witnessed the Passion Play, but he has so far not recorded his impressions of the scenes enacted.