



The Salzburg Tales



"... A MAGNIFICENT
AND TRULY ORIGINAL
NOVELIST."

THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT



CHRISTINA STEAD

THE SALZBURG TALES

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*All characters in this book are
entirely fictitious, and no reference
is intended to any living person.*

ANGUS & ROBERTSON PUBLISHERS

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THE
SALZBURG TALES

“These tales have an extraordinary range of scene, subject, character and manner; comedies, tragedies, fairy-tales, fantasies, extravaganzas; they are idealistic, ludicrous, cynical, adventurous and exciting, pathetic sometimes . . . There has not been anything quite like this collection before.”

H. M. GREEN. *A History of Australian Literature.*

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THE PROLOGUE

SALZBURG, old princely and archiepiscopal city, and its fortress Hohen-Salzburg, lie among the mountains of the Tyrol, in Salzburg Province, in Austria. The river Salzach, swift and yellow from the glaciers and streaming mountain valleys, flows between baroque pleasure-castles standing in glassy lakes, and peasant villages pricked in their vineyards, and winds about to reflect the citadel rising in its forests, single eminence in the plain. The river divides the city, leaving a wooded mound on either hand, rushes noisily under the bridges between Italian domes and boulevarded banks, and rolls out, placid, fast and deep, towards the Bavarian plain and the rain-burdened evening sky.

Yesterday morning, the city flashed like an outcrop of rock-crystals in its cliffs by the river: in the evening, rain-clouds sat on the Kapuzinerberg and the Mönchsberg and squirted their black waters on the town and beat down the mild leafage of the woods. This morning the clouds rolled away with troutside gleams under a fresh wind, and the river, risen a foot in the night, and roaring like the wind, is again calm and yellow. And now, on this last day of July, the townspeople look at the red walls of the naked Tyrol far off and at the giant peak of the Untersberg, like a hatchet in the air, and all their conversation is that they hope it will be fine for the first day of the August festival, the great event of Salzburg men.

Now the streets are full : bands of German students in blue linen coats with rucksacks and staves lope through the town at a round pace, counting the monuments and ignoring the tourists ; foreign women in summer dresses peer in jewellers' windows full of Swiss clocks and edelweiss pressed under glass, foreign gentlemen buy tufts of reindeer hair to put in their hats, and trout-flies ; the milk-wagons are busy, the elegants sit in the cafés and drink coffee with cream, and the men going home from work on their bicycles glance thirstily in the low leaded panes of beer-cellars on the Linzergasse, and see severe Berlin merchants and tall blond American college boys drinking good Salzburg beer. A stage has been put up in the Cathedral Place for the Miracle Play of " Jedermann," German bands are playing Mozart and Wagner in all the cafés, the Residenz Platz is packed with visitors waiting to hear the Glockenspiel at six o'clock ring out its antique elfin tunes, tourists pop in and out of the house at number nine, Getreide-gasse, where Mozart was born, musicians and actors are walking and talking under the thick trees on the river-bank, and even the poor people in the new pink and blue stucco houses, built in a marsh on the Josef-Mayburger Kai, look at the red sunset and count busily for the hundredth time the little profit they will make on the Viennese lady who has rented a room from them for the duration of the Festival.

Opposite the fortress, across the river, is the yellow-walled Capuchin convent in its tall wood. One has to pay a few groschen each day at the Convent Gate to enter the wood. Within the gate, transported there from Vienna, stands the little wooden hut in which Mozart wrote " The Magic Flute." Higher

up the hill is a fine outlook towards Bavaria, and on the crest of the hill in the grounds of an ancient house built of beams and hung with vines, in which the monks formerly dwelt, is a vantage-point commanding the city and its environs.

In this wood the visitors to the August Festival walk often, and often sit long, in groups, listening to the innumerable bells of the town ringing through the wood, and talking, in the fresh mornings. The wood is tranquil in its brown hollows and full of sandalled Capuchin monks drawing wagons of wood, and woodcutters who have to take their carts and horses down the steep Calvary Way beyond the convent gate to reach the streets of the town. Sometimes by the covered well in the tall-wooded hollow are heard foreign voices relating sonorously the marvellous and dark and bloody annals of the town, or some long-spun story brought in their packs with them from overseas, while the soft Austrian breeze entreats the leaves in the tops of the trees, squirrels scabble in the roots and wild violets and sun-coloured fungi fill the hollows. So passionate a love awakes in the stranger's breast as he scarcely feels for his native land, for the incomparable beauty of these wild peaks, these rose walls two thousand feet in air and this mediæval fortress hanging footless on an adamantine rock against the unweathered cliffs of the Untersberg: and as he walks, meditative, along some lowland or upland path, listening to the distant voices, the bells and the diminutive rustlings, he passes an old inhabitant with large brown eyes, sitting immobile on a log, who says politely in his sweet dialect, "Good-day," as he would to a son of the city come from a foreign shore.

THE PERSONAGES

A fresh wind blew in the woods, the pigeons massed in the Residenz Platz, tooting because the sky was bright, and the fountain dropped loudly on the weedgrown stones. The people went through an archway into the Domplatz where "Jedermann" of the poet Hofmansthal was to be played in the open air before the cathedral. Actors in mediæval costumes ran about in the nearby streets and disappeared quickly in a little door at the back of the cathedral, or were seen leaning momentarily over the high cornices of the roofs of the Domplatz. In the courtyard of the fortress, high up in the air, tourists looking like flies or sparrows hung over the wall and peered at the Domplatz, trying to make out whether the play had begun, and whether many people had paid for seats. In the middle of the front seat sat the Archbishop of Salzburg, tall, plump and dressed in red, with white linen and white hands: he greeted distinguished visitors like a prince welcoming talent to his court. Near him on the same seat sat the superior from the Capuchin Convent and the Mayor of Salzburg; but these three great persons, who divided the town into three parts between them, told no tales in the Capuchin Wood.

The FESTIVAL DIRECTOR came in from the Cathedral bareheaded, warm with his last instructions to the actors. He bowed to the Archbishop and remarked that the pontifical sun shone on their labours, in a voice unctuous but constrained, for he was small

and stout, while the Archbishop was firm, large and grey as a gravestone : likewise the sun shone in the Director's face and made it red, and he was aware that the Archbishop did not give a benedicite for his style. Courteously he bent his head once more to the Archbishop's chest and said, he hoped his Grace would applaud the Miracle Play of Everyman which they were about to put on again, and that, while indoors one tricked the eye with fat columns and a giant cornice to suggest boundless space, here his stage was two bare boards, for he had to present simple verities, and otherwise his theatre was exalted above fame by the redoubtable acts of Salzburg's Princes of the Church. Meanwhile, the Director cast glances about him, conscious of whispers and of people standing on tiptoe to see him. He murmured discreetly to the Mayor the hiding-places of his actors concealed on the roofs and explained to a monk that the church-bells of the town would be silent now until the play was done. Then, he glanced over the audience, standing three-quarters on to the Archbishop still, with a gracious air which yet lacked polish, for he was a ready, practical man of elephantine dreams, who tried to give the imagination a footrest on earth : and he was always casting off from his thick, square shoulders set on his thick long torso, presentiments of trouble, of criticism and of failure. His eye grouped the audience quickly this way and that like the parting of thick hair with a comb. Here were the art patrons, rich amateurs, people of fashion, the Viennese, Berliners, New Yorkers, here the musicians, conductors and actors, there the poor, the townspeople from the boarding-houses, Cook's tourists : beyond the rope were the *Naturfreunde*, and in the background some wretched of the town,

and peasants come in from the mountains wearing great black hats and bell-bottomed trousers, and monks and college students, and fishermen, and conscripts from the barracks down the river, and idling shopboys and shopgirls escaped for half an hour. Smiling, bowing and turning in the sun like a buoy in the bay, the Director backed away from the Archbishop and sat down a few seats away, waiting for the play to begin.

After the Festival Director came the VIENNESE CONDUCTOR, with another Conductor from Munich. The Viennese Conductor was like a tasselled reed, with shoulders and hands spreading outwards, delicate hips and a soft, long, feline stride: he sometimes took shorter steps and sometimes longer as if to show that in him the passion of rhythm was constant but tidal. He looked this way and that as he bowed obsequiously over his companion's conversation, smiling to himself on the side, as if he had a tidying of joy in his sleeve, and gathering in the ladies' glances; it might have been harvest-time and he a reaping-hook. Bowing, with long bright looks of adulation, he acknowledged the distinguished guests, and stooped with manner consciously rich and theatrical to the Archbishop, for whom he did not give a fig. He took the hand of an aged prima donna and looked as if he would faint from excessive admiration; and then he walked on indifferently, dropping all this behind him, like a dolphin in the waves, going on from easy conquest to easy conquest, speaking of violins and sunshine, of Max Reinhardt and overtones, of Mozart and Apollo, easily, wittily, with everything said in reverse in order to amuse. He was thirty years of age and had conducted orchestras since the age of six. He delighted especially