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OBERAMMERGAU:

after ten years, the passion play in bavaria

By GEORGE SHUSTER

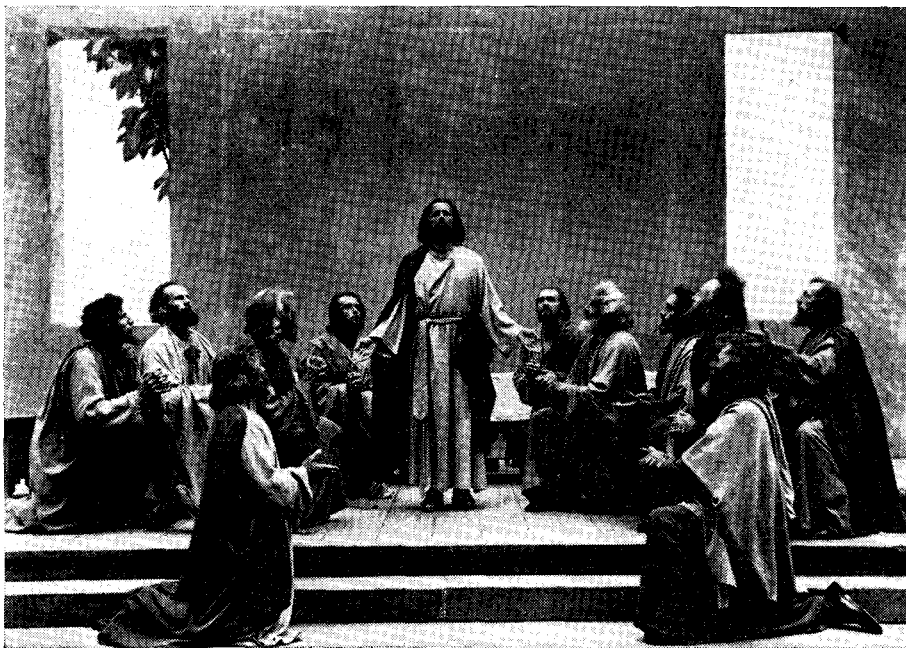
DURING THE past several months Oberammergau beards have been carefully grown and groomed. The hair of maidens falls from their heads in streams. Passion Play time is approaching and the village must be ready. It is a pleasant village indeed, built in the style which the Bavarian mountain country loves. The walls of houses are brightly painted with figures and maxims, the streets are wide, the church is never empty, the inns are substantial, and the prices they charge have been regulated by community decree. The whole has its special quality, for which they Germans

use the term *gepflegt*. That is, although people and animals live here, and right lustily, no chicken bones and egg shells, to cite Ruskin's special abominations, are to be found even in the alleyways.

Several hundred thousand people will plan to see the Passion Play this year, and an equal number will wish they could. The crowds will be extraordinarily well behaved, for the spectacle to be witnessed casts a religious spell on everyone. There is no faking or mummery about this undertaking. Getting ready for it is strenuous community work in a spiritual as well as in a physical sense. To qualify for even a modest part one must have led a blameless life. Only a small portion of the proceeds goes to reward the partic-

ipants for their time and trouble. The village has been offered fabulous sums for movie rights. I remember one enterprising American who was not going to take no for an answer. He kept on raising the offer until the amount was truly staggering. But so far as anyone could see not a soul in Oberammergau was tempted. It is of course true that the Passion Play helps to keep Oberammergau thriving, primarily because visitors see wood carvings made by village artisans and buy them. But each piece is authentic and well fashioned. Nobody carts merchandise in from a factory and palms it off on the gullible.

When the Play was last given, ten years ago, Germany was still living under the American Occupation, and I



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was in charge of that segment of it which had to do with Bavaria. There was a question as to whether we ought to go and see it. The redoubtable Bavarian minister of culture, bearded and sternly religious Dr. Alois Hundhammer, held that a prominent member of the cast had been a Nazi and therefore refused to attend. Questions were also raised about possible anti-Semitic implications. But after everything had been carefully investigated by wily intelligence officers, the verdict was that although Oberammergau was not perfect in an imperfect world, there was no reason to stay away. Nevertheless I, for my part, went reluctantly. Being a person who takes both religion

and art seriously, I feared that the spectacle would turn out to be a sentimental version of the greatest of texts, dreadfully mouthed by ham actors.

But after seeing the first part of what is virtually an all-day performance—it lasts from eight in the morning to six at night, with a two-hour interval for lunch—there was no doubt in my mind that what we were witnessing was honest, austere, very moving, and beautiful. The text is not Shakespearean, but has the feel of good homespun folk art. Looked at from one point of view it is a baroque production, which means that it is rich in pageantry and in choruses moving about with an ecstatic

flourish. But seen from another it is a simple, stark retelling of the story of Christ's Passion, done with a realism which makes one grip the seat and say to oneself, "All this really happened!" The impact on the audience is almost overwhelming. It is a quite unforgettable experience to be one of more than five thousand onlookers, not one of whom whispers or fumbles about in his seat during the many hours of the performance.

The baroque in all its forms had spilled over into South Germany from Italy during the Counter Reformation time, and was refashioned into something quite genuine and new by a host of gifted architects, sculptors, painters, musicians, and poets. Therefore the best way to get ready for the Play is, if at all possible, to drive down from Munich and stop to see the monastery and church of Ettal, not far north of Oberammergau, just where the glory of the Bavarian mountains begins to unfold. Here is South German baroque religious art at its very best, still giving outer form to religious and educational endeavor. The long, flowing, dramatic rhythms of the structure and its adornment may seem almost worldly but they are not. They strive to open the door of the heavenly world just a little in order to show what sacrifice is for. In Catholic terms, the ascent is upward from the Cross. But one should stop at Ettal and not stay. You will need the night in Oberammergau to get the feel of the village and peasant life, unspoiled but not dour, out of which the panorama of the Passion rises.

The Play is presented in a theatre which protects the spectators from the elements, but does less well by the actors because an effort has been made not to lose all the flavor of the original out-of-doors setting. Accordingly the stage is divided into two parts. The rear section, where carefully designed scenes and tableaux are shown, is shielded, but the forestage is not. When I saw the play, rain fell in torrents during one hour of the afternoon. The result was that Judas, who has one of the more flamboyant roles, was almost inundated to the accompaniment of thunder and lightning. But he went on manfully—if that be a word applicable to so traitorous a character—and it seemed to me his lines took on added poignancy by reason of the intrusion of disapproving nature. At any rate, the structure makes possible easy transitions from elaborate massing of choruses, usually with musical accompaniment, to the central scenes of dramatic narrative and action. The climax is, one need hardly say, the Crucifixion scene, which might easily have been some kind of travesty, but

(Continued on page 69)



Malta's national costume is still seen on many of Malta's streets.



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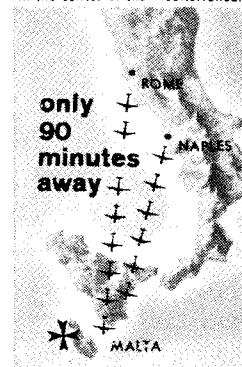
you spend the day returning in time to another age, you may spend the evening doing a rhumba.

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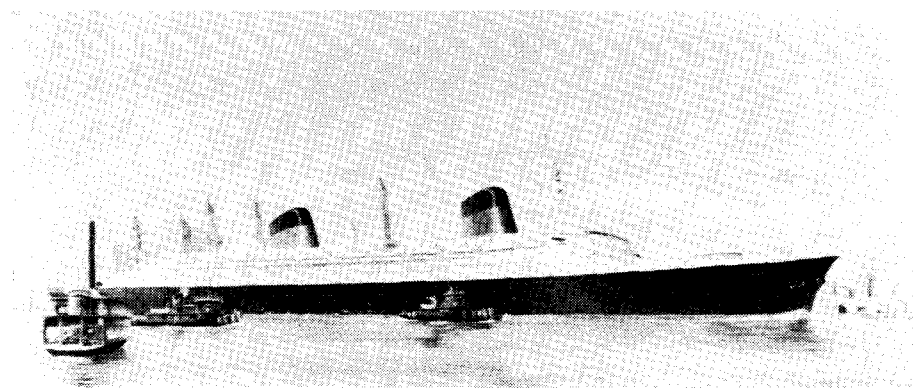
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SHIPS OF THE SIXTIES

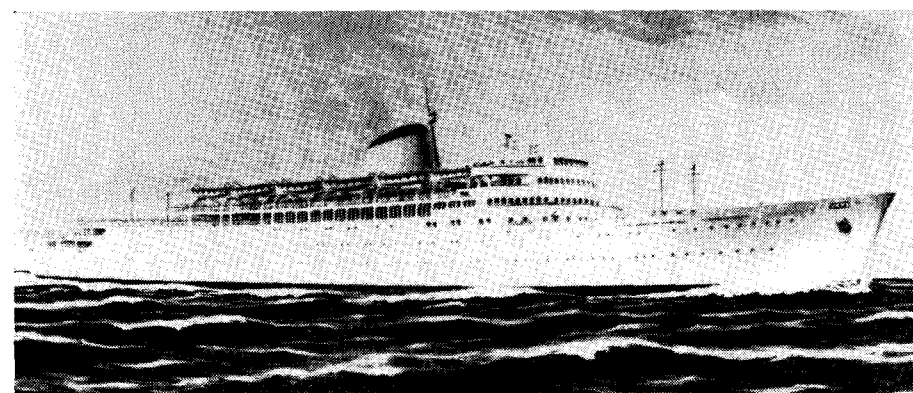
Although the age of the jet has arrived, fulfilling its incredible promise of six-and-a-half-hour crossings to Europe, ships are far from obsolete and ship travelers far from scarce. All during the soaring Sixties, while men make motions toward the moon, and work diligently toward speeds called Mach 2 and Mach 3 that will make Europe a two-hour flight from Manhattan, ships will continue to slip down the ways, bigger than ever, faster than ever, and bound for service in both our oceans. The new *Leonardo da Vinci* will hardly be outbound from Genoa on her maiden voyage next June when the Italians will lay the keels for two more giant liners that will cross from Gibraltar in five days. Two years from now the French will bring to port their first major liner since the *Normandie* came to New York in 1935. The year 1962 may yet see the arrival of the oft-talked-of \$50-a-crossing ship. On the Pacific, meanwhile, the Orient and Pacific Lines, which floated five ships in 1959, will add two more this year, and another two next year to bring the first large-ship service to the western sea. Approved, but still waiting for a budgetary appropriation, is the U.S. Lines's new 2,000-passenger Atlantic liner, and the American President Lines's *George Washington*, which, when and if, will carry twice as many passengers as its present Pacific ships and will cut down the run to Japan by four days. Here are some of the anchors that will be aweigh as the decade unfolds:



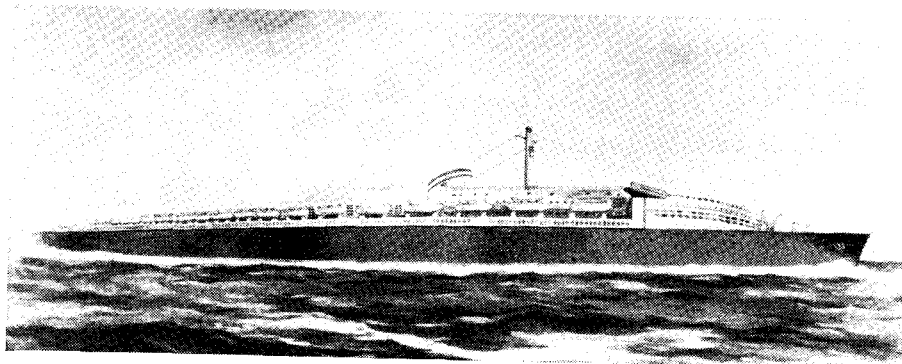
1960: *Leonardo da Vinci*, sailing from Genoa June 30, has eleven decks, will carry 1,250 passengers in three classes. Air-conditioned top to bottom, with private baths in all but a fifth of the tourist cabins. Three outdoor swimming pools with infrared heating on the first class poolside lido.



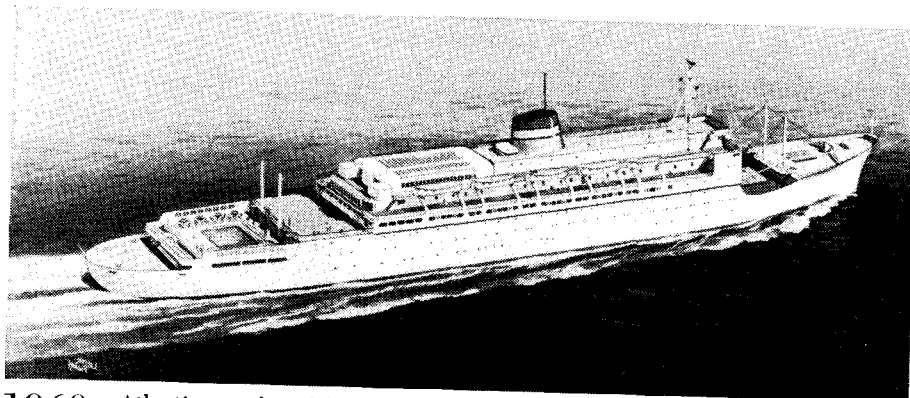
1962: *France*, at 1,035 feet the longest ship in the world, will be the first French Atlantic entry since the *Flandre*. She will replace the *Ile*, stoke memories of the old *Paris* and French gaiety and gourmandry across the Atlantic. Outdoor and indoor pools, eleven decks, 2,000 passengers in two classes.



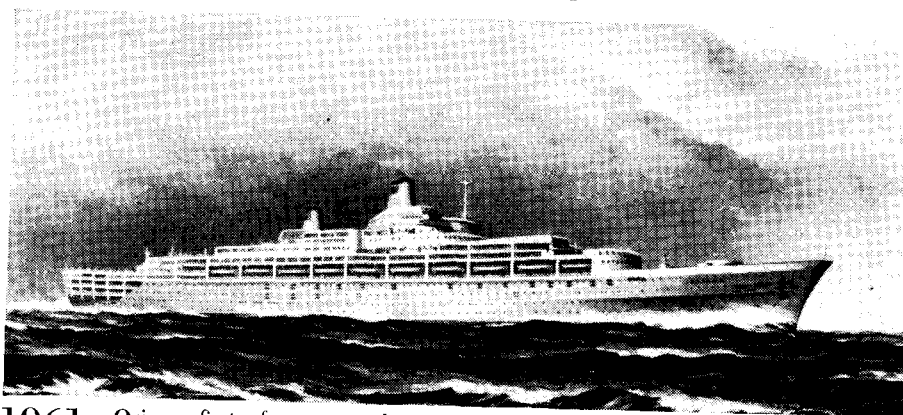
1960: *Victoria*, already in service, is built for cruising, has two pools on the broad lido deck. All one class, all outside cabins. Designed for pleasure, it packs an Italian crew, an Italian orchestra, Italian pasta on an otherwise Continental menu. Owned by Inces Line, whose S.S. *Nassau* sails to Bahamas.



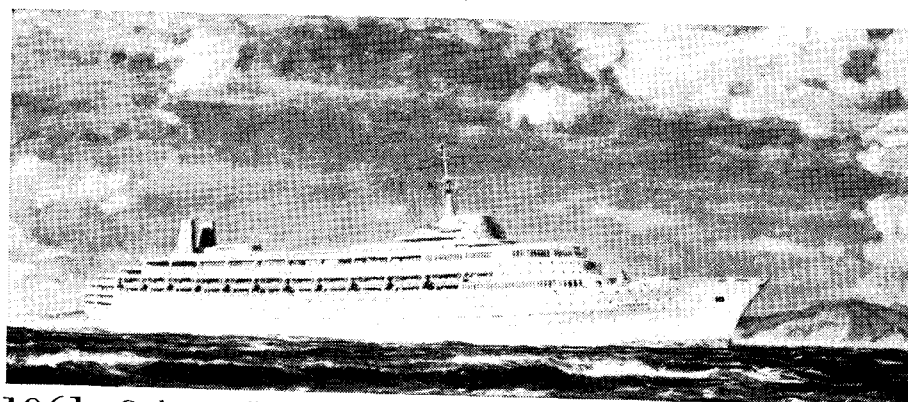
1962: Peace, first of two much-heralded superliners that will carry 6,000 passengers at rates as low as \$50, may indeed sail two years from now. Refused subsidy by the U.S., hotelman H. B. Cantor will build in Germany. Ships will cross in four days. Entirely air-conditioned, private baths in every room, cafeteria meals.



1960: Atlantic, purchased by American Export and refitted, goes into May service as only U.S. flag tourist ship. It will sail every thirty days on a 12,000-mile cruise-type route to Spain, Italy, Greece, and Israel. Play deck and pool, private baths throughout, most staterooms accommodating two people.



1961: Oriana, first of two superliners for the O. and P.'s Pacific service, she will carry 638 in first class, 1,496 in tourist, with fares to Japan starting at \$364. Also touches at Hawaii, Manila, Hong Kong, and South Pacific.



1961: Canberra will carry 600 in first, 1,650 in tourist, cruise at 27½ knots, help open a new area to tourist-class passengers. O. and P. will also serve Europe by way of the Suez Canal, call at the Caribbean, sail the Panama Canal.

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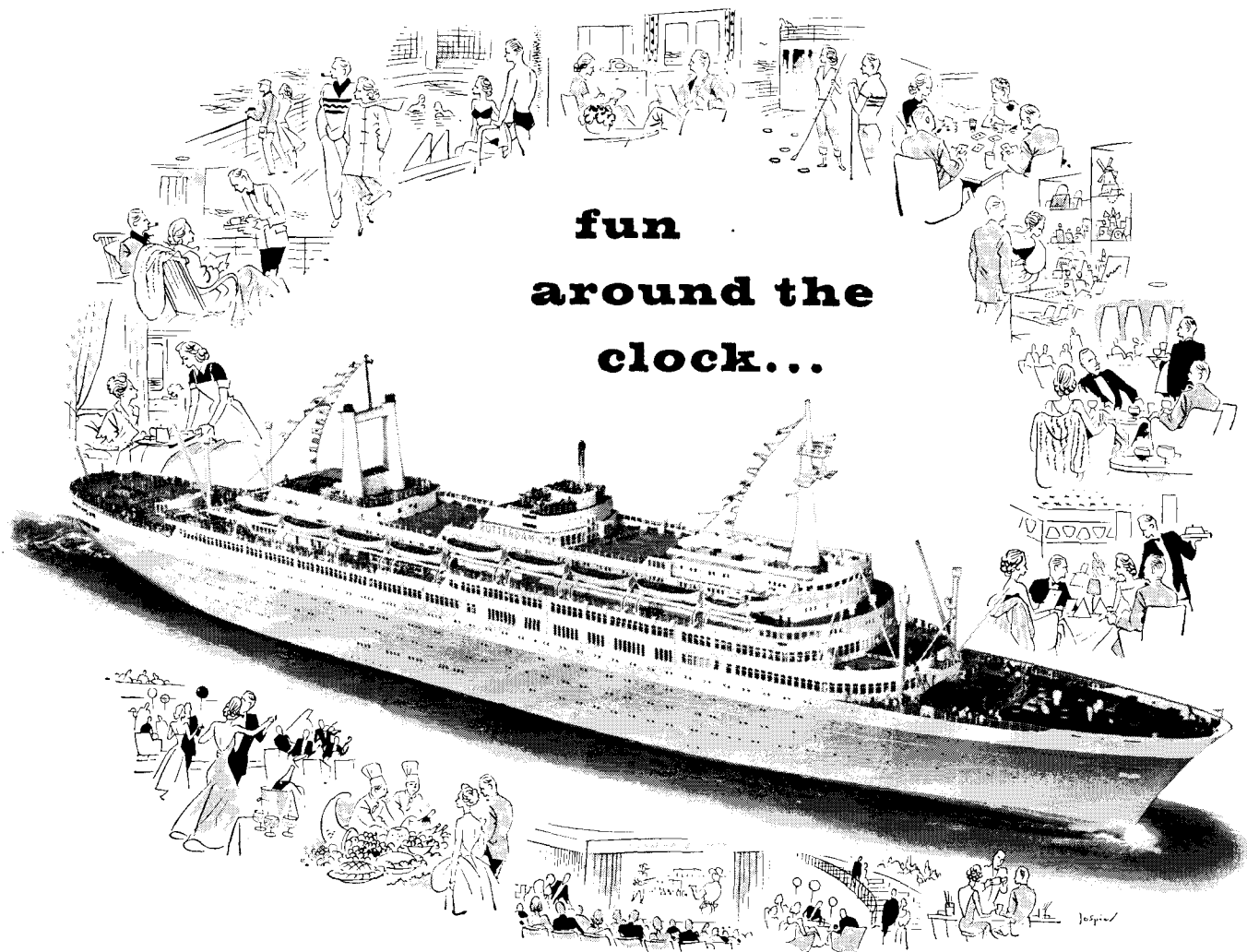
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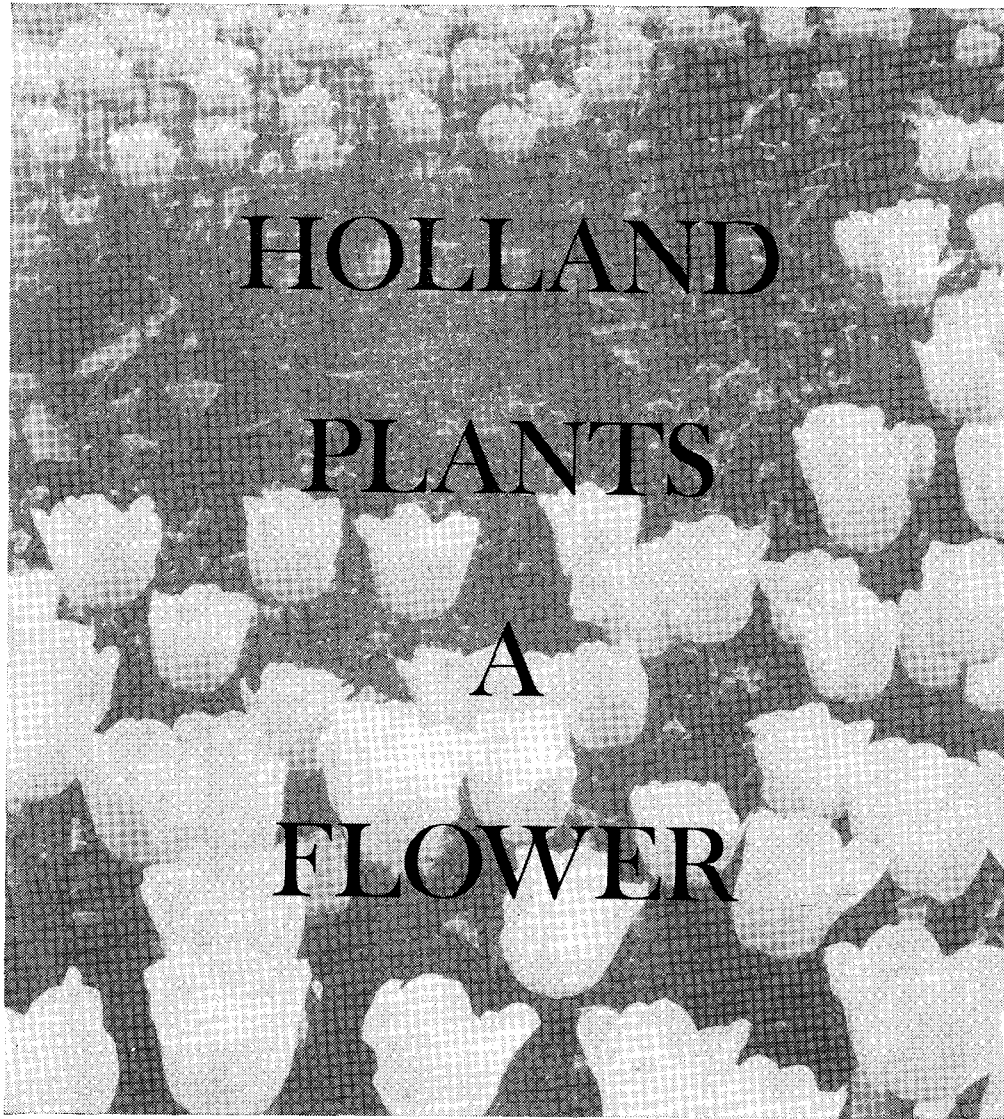
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By JOSEPH WOOD KRUTCH

IF LOTS OF tourists don't go to Europe this season it won't be for lack of special attractions. In fact to those of us who did our most extensive traveling before the war when you didn't go to see special attractions, but only the usual life and setting of other cultures, it sometimes seems that Europe is becoming more and more one vast Disneyland.

To meet all the competition Holland has come up with something new, namely a super-duper flower show called the Floriade, designed to attract gardeners, botanists, agriculturists, and in fact all who, for one reason or another, are more interested in what comes up out of the ground than in either Olympic weight-lifters or Mozart.

According to the official announce-

ments, this bright idea would not have occurred to our Dutch uncles if 1960 had not happened to be (so they say) the precise 400th anniversary of the first arrival in Europe of that only rival of wooden shoes and windmills as quintessentially Dutch—namely the tulip. However that may be, plans for the Floriade were begun four years ago; Rotterdam has set aside 125 acres (including the principal city park) for the show. It will run from March 25 to September 25, or almost from equinox to equinox, and thus include everything from what W. S. Gilbert called the flowers-that-bloom-in-the-spring-trala to what a possibly greater poet called the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness. The bulbs will reign during the first two weeks; chrysanthemums, vegetables, and fruit during the last ten days. The most expensive tickets are on sale at 2.25 guilders.

Though Dutch in sponsorship, the show is also international. Belgium, Luxembourg, Sweden, Great Britain, Italy, Spain, Israel, West Germany, and France have all agreed to participate. The United States Congress has appropriated \$150,000 in foreign currencies, and its part in the show will be a joint project of the Department of Agriculture and the American Horticultural Council. It is said to be the first time that the U.S. has ever participated officially in an international horticultural exposition.

DESPITE the fact that the turgid and turbid imagination of the public relations consultant is rather too evident in the advance notices, there is every indication that the show will be really worth seeing by the casual visitor as well as by the amateur or the professional horticulturist. The official