

How Jews Capitalized a Protest Against Jews

The American stage is under the influence and control of a group of former bootblacks, newsboys, ticket speculators, prize ring habitués, and Bowery characters. At the present writing the most advertised man in the world of theatrical production is Morris Gest, a Russian Jew, who has produced the most salacious spectacles ever shown in America—"Aphrodite" and "Mecca." It is reported that the scent of nastiness has been so strongly circulated among theatergoers that tickets are sold a year ahead for the Chicago exhibition of one of these shows, the patrons being, of course, mostly Gentiles.

Now, it is a fair question, who is this Morris Gest who stalks before his fellow Jews as the most successful producer of the year? It is nothing against him to say that he came from Russia. It is nothing against him to say that he is a Jew. It is nothing against him to say that although success has favored him, his father and mother are still in Odessa, or were until recently. Yet, in a recent interview, in which the professional note of pathos was obtrusively present, he lamented that he was not able to bring his parents to America.

The story of Morris Gest is the last one in the world to use as a "success story" of the type of "the poor immigrant boy who became a great theatrical producer." He is not a great producer, of course, although he is a great panderer to the least creditable tastes of the public whose taste he has been no mean factor in debasing. Gest sold newspapers in Boston and became property boy in a Boston theater. In 1906 he was a member of a notorious gang of ticket speculators who were the bane of the public until ticket peddling on the sidewalks in front of theaters was suppressed by the police. There are still other stories told about him that link his name with another sort of traffic, but whether these stories are true or not, there is nothing in Gest's career to indicate that he would ever contribute anything to the theater's best interest. He is the son-in-law of David Belasco.

Then there is Sam Harris, long the junior partner of the firm of Cohan & Harris, who began his career in the arts by managing Dixon, the colored champion featherweight pugilist, and the redoubtable Terry McGovern, champion lightweight prize fighter. With tastes formed at the ringside, he launched into theatrical ventures, allying himself with Al Woods. He catered to the lower classes and made a fortune by producing atrocious melodramas in second and third class houses.

And yet this is the Sam Harris who commands the patronage of hundreds of thousands, yes, millions of theatergoers, some of whom go on innocently believing that when they invade the theater they also enter, by some mystical process, "the realms of art."

Al H. Woods has but one good eye. It is not this personal loss that matters, but the history of the misfortune which goes back to the time when Al was a member of an East side gang. The common report was that he used to play the piano in a downtown place, east of Fifth Avenue. Mr. Woods is also a distinguished patron of dramatic art—he presented "The Girl from Rector's" and "The Girl in the Taxi," two of the most immoral and pointless shows of recent years. Several times he has secured the rights to certain Viennese operas, which were bad enough

in themselves from a moral point of view, but which were at least constructed with true artistry; but even these he marred by an inept infusion of vulgarity and blague.

The public, of course, does not see and does not know these gods before whom they pour their millions yearly, nor does the public know from what source theatric vileness comes. It is amusing to listen to the fledgling philosophers discuss the “ tendencies of the stage,” or expatiate learnedly on the “ divine right of Art” to be as flippant and as filthy as it pleases, when all the time the “ tendency” is started and the “ art” is determined by men whose antecedents would make Art scream!

The American Theater is a small group of Jewish promoters and a large group of Gentile gullibles, and it is only the latter, who “ kid themselves” that there is anything real about the matter.

It is perfectly natural, therefore, that the complete Judaization of the theater should result in its being transformed into “ the show business,” a mere matter of trade and barter. The real producers are often not culturally equipped for anything more than the baldest business. They can hire what they want, mechanics, costumers, painters, writers, musicians. With their gauge of public taste and their models of action formed upon the race track and the prize ring; with their whole ideal modeled upon the ambition to pander to depravity, instead of serving legitimate needs, it is not surprising that the standards of the Theater should now be at their lowest mark.

As theatergoers are noticing more and more, the Jewish manager whenever possible employs Jewish actors and actresses. Gentile playwrights and actors are steadily diminishing in number for want of a market. At times the employment of Jewish actors has been so obtrusive as to endanger the success of the play. This was notably the case when the part of a young Christian girl of the early Christian Era was given to a Jewess of pronounced racial features. The selection was so glaringly inept, ethnically and historically, that it militated strongly against the impression the play was intended to produce.

The “ cover-name” conceals from the theatergoing public the fact that the actors and actresses who purvey entertainment are, in large and growing proportion, Jewish.

Some of the more prominent Jewish actors, many of them prime favorites, are Al Jolson, Charlie Chaplin, Louis Mann, Sam Bernard, David Warfield, Joe Weber, Barney Bernard, “ Ed Wynne, or to mention his real name, Israel Leopold,” Lou Fields, Eddie Cantor, Robert Warwick.

Among the prominent Jewish actresses are: Theda Bara, Nora Bayes, Olga Nethersole, Irene Franklin, Gertrude Hoffman, Mizi Hajos, Fanny Brice (wife of Nicky Arnstein), Bertha Kalisch, Jose Collins, Ethel Levy, Belle Baker, Constance Collier. The late Anna Held was a Jewess.

In addition to these there are others whose racial identity is not revealed by their names or any public knowledge about them.

The Jewish press claims for the Jews, aside from the commercial control of the stage, the control of the fun-making business. “ The greatest entertainers, vaudevillians and fun-makers are Jews,”

says an article in the *Chicago Jewish Sentinel*, commenting on the extent to which Jewish actors monopolized the Chicago stage that week.

Among the composers we once beheld Victor Herbert and Gustav Kerker in honorable places; but now the Irving Berlins have forced themselves into places hewn out and established by Gentiles who had a regard for art.

There are no great Jewish playwrights. Charles Klein wrote “The Lion and the Mouse,” but never repeated. There is, of course, much commonplace work turned out for the stage; a commercialized stage needs a certain amount of “product.” Among those engaged in such work are Jack Lait, Montague Glass, Samuel Shipman, Jules Eckert Goodman, Aaron Hoffman, and others.

The Jewish claim to exceptional genius is not borne out by the theater, although the Jewish will to power is therein amply illustrated.

Belasco’s name comes to mind, perhaps, oftener than any; and Belasco is the most consummate actor off any stage. To understand Mr. Belasco is to understand the method by which the “Independents” fought the Jewish Theater Trust, and still retained the monopoly of the Theater for the Jews.

The old Trust was bowling along merrily, smashing everything in its way, thrusting honored “stars” into obscurity, blocking the path of promising playwrights, putting out of business all actors who would not prostitute art to commercialism, and there occurred what always occurs—for even the Jews are not superior to natural law—a bad case of “big head” was developed.

Klaw, Erlanger and their immediate associates felt themselves to be kings and began to exhibit a few supposedly royal idiosyncrasies.

There were some protests, of course, against the arrogance of the Czars of the Theater. The Vanderbilts and other New York millionaires embodied their protest in a movement toward a national theater which was erected at Grand Central Park, and for which \$1,000,000 was spent. One of the members of the Trust proved his birth and breeding by saying that this attempt to cleanse the theater was really only a plan to provide a place of vice for the benefit of the millionaire backers. The remark inspired deep rancor, but was more revelatory of the Jewish Trust’s essential conception of the theater, than anything else. Belasco came from San Francisco, where he had done various stunts, including those of an itinerant recitationist, illusionist and actor. James E. Herne took an interest in him as a youth and discovered him to be adept at helping himself to dialogues out of printed plays. Under Herne, Belasco learned much about stage effects, and soon became very successful in touching up defective plays. Coming to New York, Belasco fell in with DeMille, a Jewish writer for the stage, who only needed Belasco’s “sense of the theater” to make his qualities effective.

Belasco became a factor in enlarging the Jewish control of the stage, in this way: he was connected with the Frohmans, but was unable to persuade them that Mrs. Leslie Carter, who had

been the center of a sensational divorce suit and who had placed herself under Mr. Belasco's professional direction, was a great actress. The making of a star out of Mrs. Carter, and the gaining of public recognition for her, proved a long task. The Frohmans were unsympathetic.

Then, among the managers there was dissension too. The Shuberts had been compelled to take the leavings of the other Jewish magnates, especially the leavings of Charles Frohman, and the Shuberts revolted. The Shuberts were natives of Syracuse, and their preparation for the theater was not promising of their devotion to art. They were program boys and ushers. Then the haberdashery business claimed them as possibly a speedier course to wealth. Samuel Shubert eventually became a ticket seller in the box office. In due time, having learned a few marketable secrets of the theater, he launched a frivolous burlesque and comedy show. With this he floated into New York, and continued with his musical shows of a shallow kind, until the name Shubert has come to be descriptive of the productions. The Shuberts, of course, booked in Trust theaters.

About the year 1900, the Shuberts quarreled with the Trust and Belasco quarreled with the Frohmans, and the two hailed each other as fellow belligerents and proceeded to see what could be made of their belligerency. The public was showing signs of disgust with the Trust. That was the cue!—the Shuberts and Belasco would appeal to the public to help in the fight against the Trust. Belasco and the Shuberts would play the part of injured independents; public sympathy would be aroused, and public patronage would boost the “Independents” into the strength of a new Trust. That is exactly what occurred

Belasco's theatricalism helped to this end. He is an actor off, as well as on the stage. He affects the pose of a benevolent priest, and dresses the part, wearing a priestly collar, with clerical vest and coat. Although of Portuguese-Hebraic origin, Belasco dresses after this manner to honor, as he says, a tutor of his early days. Anyway, the costume is very effective, especially with the ladies. He has a tremulous, shy way about him, and he sits in his sanctum with the lights so arranged that his priestly face and splendid shock of silver hair seem to rise out of an encompassing and shadowy mystery. It is very effective—very effective. One woman declared, after being admitted to the presence and gazing on the face that rose out of the shadows into the light—“I have a better understanding of the divine humility of Jesus Christ since I have been privileged to meet Mr. Belasco.”

Thus, “the master,” as he is called, was well equipped to appeal to public sympathy. And he did appeal. There was no end to his appeal. He told stories of personal attacks made on him. He wrung his hands in desperate grief against the Trust's menace to the stage. His own productions, however, were not all immaculate. There was one, “Naughty Anthony,” which brought the police censor down upon him. But there was a very clear conception in the public mind as to what the Trust had done to the stage; Belasco said he was against the Trust, and the rest was snap judgement.

The Shuberts and Belasco thus found themselves in a very favorable combination of circumstances. Their first financial aid came, strangely enough, through ex-Congressman Reinach, a Jew, “Boss” Cox, of Ohio, and others who were interested. These supplied the first money; the Shuberts supplied the management; Belasco supplied the wonderful impersonation of a Daniel come to call the Jewish Theater Trust to judgement. The campaign succeeded and the

wealth rolled in. For a time Belasco did prove to the public that he could produce better plays than the old Trust had given to the public, and to that extent he justified public confidence in him.

The end of the old Trust came in a natural way. The Shuberts became rich and powerful, and the Trust was then willing to do business with them. Some of the Trust members died, and about 1910 the old Trust ceased to exist as the dominant factor in American theatrical affairs. But the rise of the “Independents” did not bring relief; it only captured for Jewish enterprise that part of the theater which might have become the prize of a legitimate body of protesters against the old cheapness and vulgarity. The pretended protest won. The theater was saved to Jewish control.

Jewish managers had created the public disgust in the first place. They knew what the public reaction would be, so they prepared to capitalize the reaction, and thus control the theatergoing public both going and coming. This they did with admirable strategy.

During the outbreak there was some genuine feeling of independence on the part of a few non-Jewish managers. John Cort organized a western theater circuit. Colonel Henry W. Savage swung loose from Klaw and Erlanger, as did also William A. Brady. But independence of the Jewish control has never flourished. Wherever it did keep up an independent front, it stood for the theater in its best sense, and served as the only channel of expression for the remaining few stage artists. The coming of the motion picture, however, gave true independence its quietus. The motion picture “industry” —and it is rightly named an “industry” —is entirely Jewish controlled, and as it is pushing its way into the legitimate theaters and crowding out human players for long periods every year, theater managers have to bow to it more and more.

It remained for the Shuberts, however, to give the theatrical business a most original twist. They made it a real estate speculation. Readers of this article may recall that recently they have read that in their own or a neighboring city the Shuberts are going to build one or two theaters. In one city, the announcement was made that two theaters were to be built. That particular city happens to need almost everything else but theaters. However it cannot get anything else it needs, and there is no doubt it will get the theaters.

The Shuberts learned this trick when they were supposed to be “bucking the Trust.” They went after any building they could get, and because of the public enmity to the Trust, they got better terms than otherwise could have been possible. An old riding school in New York became the Winter Garden. The great Hippodrome, the materialized dream of a non-Jew, Frederick Thompson, was taken over by the Shuberts. It soon dawned on the Shuberts that there was more money in theatrical real estate than in theatrical art.

Today, the Shuberts, while nominally theatrical managers, are really dealers in theatrical leases and buildings where theatrical productions are made. A theater, as a real estate proposition, pays amazingly well. Figure up the amount of space you occupy as a show, the length of time you occupy it, and the price you pay for it. It is rent raised to the *nth* degree; then the offices which make the bulk of the structure, and the stores in front. Really, “the show business” is the minor consideration.

What does it cost the Shuberts? Very little but the use of their name. When it is the matter of a new theater, outside capital supplies three-fourths of the money, but the lease and the control are vested in the Shuberts. That is a rather handsome arrangement.

In the matter of producing plays, the same arrangement is often followed—the author, the star, or their backers supplying the larger part, sometimes all of the capital, while the Shuberts lend their name to the management and take their share of the booking fees and the rental of the theaters where the show is produced.

In October of last year (1920) a serious slump hit the theatrical business. Even in New York the theaters were experiencing the worst depression of years. More than 3,000 actors were idle and managers were compelled to resort to the cut-rate ticket agents to sell their seats. And yet, in the midst of it, Shubert announced six new theaters for New York alone. At the same time they announced the production of forty plays.

Forty plays! If a man announced that he was going to build six new art museums in one city and fit them up with the requisite number of oil paintings produced under his own direction, he would be considered crazy, especially if it were a matter of common repute that he knew nothing of art and was having the pictures painted merely to give value to his real estate!

It indicates how thoroughly accustomed the public has become to “ the show business” and the “ motion picture industry,” that the announcement of these former haberdashers is taken so complacently. Forty plays!—when anyone can count on the fingers of both hands all the present-day American and English playwrights even remotely deserving of notice!

It is said that the Shuberts do not expect more than three out of forty plays to succeed. The success of a play, in the artistic sense, is not their business. To maintain enough plays on the road to keep alive their real estate investments is really the thing.

Thus it is now not strange where theatrical slang comes from. An actor who wins success is said to have “ delivered the goods.” An approved actress is “ all wool and a yard wide.” An author “ puts it over” his audience. A girl of no particular class is a “ skirt.” A young chorus girl is a “ broiler” or a “ chicken.” An actress who plays the part of an adventuress is a “ vamp.” A very successful play is a “ knockout.” Taken all together, it is “ the show business.” This is the effect of Jewish control of any profession—as any American lawyer will tell you.

The only protest now being offered is by the small dramatic clubs which, whether or not they know it, are the strongest “ anti-Semitic” influence on the theatrical horizon.

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