

# How Jews Capitalized a Protest Against Jews

## When the Public Revolted Against Jewish Theatrical Trust, Other Jews Came in as "Independents" and "Reformers."

(Continuing the series on Jewish Control of the Theater, begun in the issue of January 1, and continued in the issue of January 8.)

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 a 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.

### The Genesis of Our Drama Masters

THEN there is Sam Harris, long the junior partner of the firm of Cohan and 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 theatrical 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, mechanicians, 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.

### Jews in the Stage Profession

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 Revolt Against the Czars

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 idiosyncracies.

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 in 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.

### How Mr. Belasco Did His Part

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 judgment.

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 judgment. The campaign succeeded and wealth rolled in. For a time Belasco did prove to the public that he could pro-