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Bertha Kalich, Her Nerves Wrecked, Recovers Only by Returning to Yiddish Stage

The exclusive announcement in Zit's Weekly Newspaper several weeks ago that Mme. Bertha Kalich, the eminent actress, who for many years had queened it on the English-speaking stage, was quietly appearing at the remote Irving Place Theatre in performances in Yiddish of some of her old-time successes, caused amazement and tremendous speculation on the part of her army of friends and admirers.

The true story, now revealed for the first time, is that of the happy culmination of one of the most remarkable psychological experiments ever recorded in the history of medicine—an experiment that restores to the English stage a great actress and is a triumph for the brilliant scientist under whose advice it was directed.

Mme. Kalich, after a continuous engagement in New York and on tour of more than two years in "The Riddle: Woman," suffered a complete nervous breakdown one year ago. Many specialists were called into consultation and for two months she was a patient at the Post-Graduate Hospital, so that her case could be studied with greatest care.

It was finally decided that she was suffering only from the tremendous strain imposed upon her by her devotion to her art, for it is known to her intimates that, unlike many other prominent artists, Kalich believed in "living the part" she was to act, and few roles have called for greater emotional strain than that of Lilla Olrik in "The Riddle: Woman."

Complete mental and physical rest, the experts declared, would quickly restore Madame to her fullest powers, but the actress' active brain yielded stubbornly to his regime. Finally, however, Kalich gave herself up to the task of recuperation and soon the physician declared that she was completely restored and ready to return to her beloved work.

Then, to their amazement and dismay, Madame insisted that they were may, Madame insisted that they were cure had been effected. She had lost confidence in herself, and insisted that it would be impossible to again face an audience, especially in a new role, with all its attendant study and rehearsal.

The doctors then found themselves face to face with an entirely new problem. The brilliant woman who had enthralled millions of theatre-

goers during her years on the stage, who had held audiences spellbound, or moved them to laughter or tears by the exercise of her own will, had lost faith in herself. In vain they tried to reason with her. But they could not overcome a condition that threatened to baffle all their science.

It was at this point that Dr. Samuel W. Bandler, specialist and author of many authoritative works on nervous diseases, suggested the remarkable experiment. Since Madame felt herself unable to prepare herself for a new role, he suggested that she try an old one. Instead of undergoing the strain of eight performances a week, she was to try two or three.

Madame listened with interest, but gave him little encouragement. Then, little by little, she was gently led into a discussion of the plays in which she had made her first success in this country. She dwelt lovingly upon the roles in "The Truth," "Sappho" and "The Orphan," recalling with glowing pleasure these early triumphs when, as a mere girl, she had swayed her first American audiences.

"Then why not try one of those roles again?" asked the doctor.

"But they were in Yiddish, which I had to learn when I came to this country from Roumania, even before I began to learn English," she answered.

"But you could play them now without rehearsal, couldn't you?"

Madame admitted smilingly that these roles were indelibly stamped upon her memory.

Then it was that the great idea was born. A Yiddish stock company was playing at the Irving Place Theatre and the management joyfully welcomed the suggestion that Kalich should appear in her famous characters for such performances as she wished. It was not so easy to get Kalich's consent, but finally she entered into the experiment, although insisting that it was useless.

And thus it happened that one Friday night, several weeks ago, at the Irving Place Theatre, the audience that had come to see the local leading woman in Gordin's "Sappho" was astonished to find the great Kalich, who so long ago had deserted the Yiddish stage, back among them. They did not know why she was there. They only knew that she was there. And they accorded her an ovation that brought a flush of pleas-

ure to the pale cheeks of the star, while in the wings the group of physicians watched with eagle eyes the miracle that was being worked.

When the final curtain fell that night, the doctors knew that they had won, but when the excitement wore away the reaction came and Madame again protested that she was not yet her old self. The doctors only smiled and asked her to go on again the next night.

By the time the news had spread through the city, the adored Kalich was a legend among her friends and on that Saturday night the theatre was packed to suffocation by an audience that made the walls fairly tremble with their applause. Again the doctors were in attendance and this time Madame's protestations of failure were fainter.

A week later, after a rest, Kalich was induced to return for two performances in "The Truth." The cure was working. With each appearance her confidence in herself was becoming more and more restored. Another rest, and then three appearances in "The Orphan," and Madame agreed with the doctors that she had been but the victim of a delusion. She was again Kalich, the superb, and began to talk of her plans for the new season and the new plays already awaiting her decision with which to return to Broadway.

WHAT'S WRONG IN THE PULPITS?

An Interview by Bernard A. Bergman

When the thirteen colonies fought for freedom, one of the Revolutionary War heroes was Jonas Phillips, president of the Shearith Israel Synagog, which in 1776 had already been established 120 years in America.

When this famous old Spanish-Portuguese Synagog, at 90 Central Park West, recently chose a successor to the late L. Napoleon Levy, who had been president for 28 years, the great grandson of Jonas Phillips, Captain N. Taylor Phillips, World War veteran and prominent lawyer, of 51 Chambers street, was selected as the head of the oldest synagog in this country.

From President Phillips in 1776 to President Phillips in 1921, from the middle of the seventeenth century when the synagog was founded to the present day, its services have not changed. The congregation worships in the same manner and uses the same ritual and prayers of the original congregation, organized a few years after New York City was settled.

What's Wrong in the Pulpits?

Because of the unique position of the synagog in American Jewish his-

tory, the words of its president have more than passing weight in a discussion of Jewish affairs, and Captain Phillips, in his characteristic manner, speaks straight out in honest and frank fashion.

"The trouble with our rabbis today and the same fault applies to the Gentile pulpit, is that they don't attend to their congregations," Captain Phillips declared. "They seem to believe that sensational sermons which get their names in the papers, attending celebrations and public events, constitute the bulk of their duties. They don't go after their congregations, they wait for their congregations to come to them.

"They seem to forget that it is personal interest that counts, personal contact, bonds of sympathy developed between congregation and minister. The position of the rabbi or the preacher is similar to the physician who holds his patients by personal ties and by the confidence they have in him.

Why Not Go to the Movies?

If the pulpit is to be made into a theatre, then the congregation can get much better entertainment of this sort from the stage or the movie.

"Suppose the synagog is filled by sensational sermons? Are better Jews being turned out because of them? The congregants don't follow the Jewish precepts, don't keep the Sabbath, and their moral and religious life isn't improved, just because they fill a house of worship every week.

"I don't want to be misunderstood. We need interesting and snappy sermons, but we also need deep personal interest in the congregation and loyalty to and confidence in the rabbi."

Captain Phillips illustrated his point by saying that when he was Deputy Controller of New York, he could not have achieved results with his thousand employes merely by a weekly talk. "My words would have gone in one ear and out of the other," he said. "The employes would have worked by the time clock and that is all they would have done. But by personal contact, these people worked so loyally that they would not think of quitting until everything was finished. The same thing is illustrated by the marvelous spirit developed at Altman's, whose employes are noted for their faithfulness and excellence. Altman's hasn't any better staff than anybody else, but the humanizing influence is there and better results are achieved.

Must Seek the Preacher.

"The thing to do is to make the congregation so strong that people will seek the preacher, not because of his lectures on non-Jewish subjects,

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