

show in town is *Boy Meets Girl* by Sam and Bella Spewack.

Well, Ham Fish making a speech is funny. I grant you that. Herbert Hoover breaking out into wisecracks is something to consider. But Ham and Herb together, as an act, couldn't begin to approach Willie and Eugene Howard. This is going to be a hell of a country under fascism. I'm warning the nation. You can get into these things without considering the consequences and then you're stuck. What you have is a President whose first name is Alf and any amusement program headed by Eddie Dowling. Instead of the Marx Brothers, you have a return of Mary Pickford with her friend God. After you have tried God, you are likely to wish that you had Harpo back chasing a dame from one end of a boat to another, complete with leers, ogles and compound depravity.

In any event, I Take My Stand. Where the Marx Bros. go, there go I. If they want to form a little organization of their own known as the White Shirts, with collars attached, I'm with them. If they retire, I retire. I offer it as a program for the country. At least as a warning. Pause a minute for thought, America, before allowing the operators to change reels.

Two Dostoyevskis

IF COLUMBIA PICTURES were wise they would not have risked comparison of their version of Dostoyevski's *Crime and Punishment*, directed by Josef von Sternberg, with the French version (Cinema de Paris), directed by Pierre Chenal. They might have obtained the American rights to *Crime et Chatiment* just as the 20th Century Productions did with the French version of *Les Misérables* and prevented its release.

To say that the von Sternberg film suffers by the comparison is to put it very gently. It isn't Dostoyevski, of course; but it isn't even decent showmanship. It is a pompous, self-conscious and false movie. The director has reduced the Dostoyevski novel to an unsuccessful second-rate detective film. The murder is unmotivated and Peter Lorre as Raskolnikof becomes a conventional killer who does away with an old hag. He goes around leaving all sorts of stupid clues. Porfiry as played by Edward Arnold is not the learned *jude d'instruction* who in Russia of 1865 combined the roles of police magistrate, Chief of Police and District Attorney, but a Hollywood version of the Inspector from Scotland Yard or a Washington G-Man.

Von Sternberg has attempted to "universalize" the story by costuming the characters in contemporary sartorial splendor and using contemporary sets with the advertising photographers' version of artistic lighting, thus localizing it as a pseudo-high-grade melodrama with a pat moralistic theme. In its superficiality it is surprisingly complete, even to the musical score, which is used uncreatively with no relation to the novel and consists of standard murder-mysterious motifs

with a spattering of Beethoven's *Fifth*. And Marian Marsh looks more like Marlene Dietrich in *The Devil is a Woman* than a St. Petersburg prostitute.

On the other hand *Crime et Chatiment* while it doesn't contribute anything new to the cinema is an honest attempt to transfer Dostoyevski's novel to the screen. In that it is certainly successful. Raskolnikof is the anarchistic student who is forced to leave his studies (in the von Sternberg version he graduates with honors) because of his extreme poverty; he is the Raskolnikof who plots the murder of the miserly money lender with great precision, suddenly loses his nerve when confronted by the sister of the murdered money lender and is compelled to kill her, too. (This second murder is eliminated in the American version.) Pierre Blanchard does a splendid job as the sickly wild-eyed student who "killed a vile noxious insect and an old pawnbroker woman, of use to no one! . . . Killing her was an atonement for forty sins. She was sucking the life out of the poor people."

This is no detective story and Harry Bauer as Porfiry is no wise detective. He is a "man of heart and conscience." He solves the crime because he understands Raskolnikof. Arthur Honegger has composed a brilliant musical score which Pierre Chenal has used to the greatest advantage to intensify the action. It is never the literal commentary of the score in the von Sternberg film. As good as the French film is, it is regrettable that the French director failed to reproduce the social and physical aspects of St. Petersburg of 1865. The exterior sets strike the only false note in the film.

PETER ELLIS.

Between Ourselves

WE HAVE just received the following letter and we are glad to throw a spotlight on it here:

TO THE NEW MASSES:

Within the past week the Theater Union has received a deluge of letters, telephone calls, and messages from friends, asking us to "do something" about Albert Bein's *Let Freedom Ring*. We are happy to announce that we have been doing something, and that on Tuesday Night, December 17, *Let Freedom Ring* will open in the Civic Repertory Theater, with its original company, under our management. Since we are taking over the production on short notice, we shall need every bit of support that the press, unions, organizations and individuals can give us. We urge all those who missed this fine play uptown to come to see it at once at Theater Union prices.

THE THEATER UNION.

Last week THE NEW MASSES urged the immediate revival of *Let Freedom Ring*. By rescuing the play, the Theater Union gives proof of its own alertness and does a great service to the many thousands who want to see a fine labor drama.

In response to many requests from readers we are reprinting in pamphlet form Robert Forsythe's article, "The World Gone Mad," which appeared last September 27 in THE NEW MASSES. An edition of 100,000 has been ordered, and the first supply will be in our hands within three or four days. The pamphlet will be put on sale at 2 cents a copy, and at a lower price when ordered in quantity. Readers who are able to take these pamphlets for distribution are asked to communicate with our business department.

The new magazine, combining Anvil and Partisan Review, of which Alan Calmer writes, will be published in January. The first number will contain contributions by John Dos Passos, Newton Arvin, Waldo Frank, Carl Van Doren, as well as hitherto unpublished authors. Calmer is one of the editors.

John L. Spivak's article next week continues his revelations about Fascist Italy. "Il Duce's Labor Racket," throws light on the character of labor "unions" in a fascist state, the story being told in an interview with the head of Mussolini's department for "unions."

Sales of THE NEW MASSES improve on newsstands when the magazine and the posters it furnishes dealers are prominently displayed. Readers are urged, when buying copies of THE NEW MASSES from newsdealers, to suggest that good display be given to the magazine, which will also help the newsdealers since they will increase their sales. Friends of the magazine are invited to write us of their efforts and successes along these lines.

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