

The Theatre

God's in His Heaven

ON Sunday evening, Feb. 3, the Theatre Union prize one-act play, *God's in His Heaven*, by Philip Stevenson, and Clifford Odets' *Waiting for Lefty* were presented before an overflowing and enthusiastic audience at a benefit given for New Theatre magazine. The Stevenson play was a disappointment. The Theatre Collective which produced it, while doing only a fair job of it, is not solely responsible for the disappointment. The play as a play fell down. It tells the story of a skilled worker who doesn't believe that anything is wrong with the good old U.S.A.; that nobody starves; and that if a fellow tried hard enough a job would be forthcoming. It shows the depression sticking its corrupting paw in his household when his son returns from eight months of job hunting, a cynical, potentially criminal social anarchist. The son can't stay at home any longer. The four walls oppress him. He leaves for the road just a few hours after he has returned. And although starvation and corruption, the depression twins, have hit his confidence, the father hysterically keeps grasping the last straw, "Nobody's starving."

The trouble with *God's in His Heaven* is first, that it is dated. Its punch was effective in 1930 or 1931. Today the American worker may be confused but he's not blind — social forces have been moving quickly. Secondly, there is no one character with whom the audience can sympathize. Certainly not the father. And the son, vicious, bitter, and violent, has not had the advantage of a progression of character which a three-act play would have given him. One can sympathize with a depression waif on the stage, but one has to have the opportunity of seeing his decline; seeing his fight against joblessness; seeing callousness almost crusting his sense in order to fully sympathize and identify oneself. Thirdly, the play is slow starting and long drawn. Its dramatic core lies in a psychological turn of the father's character which can never be clear nor convincing simply because the structure of the one-act form doesn't allow for a great deal of character progression.

As an historical portrait of an American

type the play may have some importance, but as one which either exposes the effects of the depression or urges its audience to act, regretfully we must say *God's in His Heaven* is a failure. Its shortcomings should stimulate playwrights to write more one-act plays. The workers' theatres demand them. They are as important as any three-act play. *Waiting for Lefty* proves this. Clifford Odets' play can be seen again and again, for it doesn't lose force or interest. It has more direct agitational appeal than anything else we have seen with a possible exception of the last scene of *Stevedore*.

MICHAEL BLANKFORT.

Other Current Shows

New Masses Night. Ambassador Theatre. Feb. 9, 8:30 P. M. A brilliant program staged by The Group Theatre for the benefit of THE NEW MASSES. Seven "revolutionary divertissements" are an added attraction to the main piece of the evening: Clifford Odets' *Waiting for Lefty*, the powerful revolutionary drama which has been greeted with shouts and cheers since its premiere on Jan. 5. Tickets on sale at THE NEW MASSES, from 55 cents to \$1.65 (tax included).

Revolutionary Dances. Center Theatre (Radio City), Feb. 17, 8:30 P. M. Solo and group dances chosen by a board of prominent dancers and dance-critics and offered as a summary of the year's accomplishments of the Workers Dance League. This program has been arranged in response to the demand of thousands of dance lovers who were turned away from the two previous solo recitals. (Tickets available at 114 West 14th Street.)

Crime and Punishment. (Adaptation of Dostoevsky's novel.) Biltmore Theatre. When Dostoevsky wrote this novel, to question whether or not God

exists was considered revolutionary enough. This is only typical of the "dated" quality of the play based on that novel. The famous introspection likewise give the appearance of stale stuff simply because we no longer accept as important the particular social context in which Raskolnikov's conscience was tortured. The novel may still be a great novel, for it is rich with character and observation, but the play, necessarily no more than a sketch of the book, fails to be more than that. It is too bad that Victor Wolfson's talent as a director, and Irene Sharaff's splendid scenery appear to be wasted on a hopelessly inadequate play.

Laburnum Grove. Booth Theatre. Affable British suburbanite (played well though sometimes overplayed by Edmund Gwenn) throws his household in a panic by casually admitting his trade is counterfeiting. A drop of dramatic situation diluted to make three acts of middle-class banality which London theatregoers kept alive for fourteen months. A perceptive (*i. e.*, revolutionary) treatment of the same theme could have amounted to something of considerable importance.

Sailors of Cattaro, by Friedrich Wolf. Civic Repertory. The Theatre Union's third production and the most important play in town. Tells the story of the Feb. 1, 1918 rebellion in the Austrian fleet, of the seizure of power by the rank and file sailors. Wolf's posing of individual as against collective leadership confuses rather than clarifies the problem. Outside of this flaw, the play deserves wide commendation. Brilliantly acted against the truly magnificent set by Mordecai Gorelik, with moments of masterly drama. Attendance required of all New MASSES readers. Cheapest seats 30 cents.

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Land of Sweet Lorgnettes

ROBERT FORSYTHE

WHEN the history of the last depression is written, a chapter will be needed for Mr. Gatti-Casazza and the Metropolitan Opera House. Mr. Gatti will appear only as a symbol, as a gentleman who represented his lords and ladies in the day when an ordinary citizen was allowed in the opera house only after fumigation and ended his career in that fantastic period when ladies in ermine were standing before microphones pleading with the hoi polloi to come to the aid of the Diamond Horseshoe.

Being always more social than musical, the opera has been so definitely an upper class diversion that it has never been necessary to class angle it. On the romantic side, there were stories of the good Italian bootblacks and spaghetti dealers who stood in line during the late winter afternoons for the privilege of buying standing room for the night. They were fondly described as the real lovers of the operatic form and whether belonging to the prima donna's clique or carried away by their enthusiasm for the tenor's high notes, they were expected to keep up a clamor of "Bis!" and "Bravo!" as long as the principals could be inveigled to come before the curtain and long after the ladies and gentlemen in the Diamond Horseshoe had ceased making the pretense of looking at the stage and had taken to their ogling of friends in other boxes and the customary stroll through the lobby.

The possession of a box on the lower tier was regarded as the ultimate in social distinction. While there were such compilations as the Social Register to indicate who belonged to the better families, it was only at the opera that one could find visible evidence of the respective standing of the contesting parties. The boxes were purchased outright and remained in the permanent possession of the owners, changing hands only at rare intervals and for large amounts. They were held often by estates and handed down as heirlooms. In the absence of a title which might pass from the father to the eldest son, the Metropolitan Opera box was the nearest thing to rank that the country possessed.

Up until 1930, the Met was on easy street. Not only did it have a lengthy season, but it had built up a surplus, something quite unknown among opera companies. In Chicago the Civic Opera had a deficit of \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 every year. The McCormicks carried most of the burden for years and then it was taken over by Mr. Samuel Insull, who succeeded not only in ruining the company when he ruined half of the Middle West, but of ruining many of the members of the company, who bought stocks at his suggestion. Prices at the Metropolitan in those days were based on a price of \$8.80 for an orchestra seat. If you could afford \$4.40, you would

be entitled to a seat in the Family Circle, which was approximately in the neighborhood of Second Avenue and at an altitude which could only be described as perilous. If you were given a seat in the Family Circle on the sides of the Horseshoe, it was possible to see only one small side section of the stage, even by standing and leaning as far forward as possible without precipitating yourself into the lap of a De Peyster in the orchestra seats below. In short, the general public was admitted only on sufferance and was allowed no liberties which might jeopardize the pleasures of the ladies and gentlemen who arrived in the middle of the second act and endeavored valiantly to ignore the musical hubbub going on before them.

It was in 1932 that the custodians of American culture felt the pinch to such an extent that they were filled with cries of anguish. The Met couldn't go on unless it had a guaranteed fund of \$300,000 for the season. It was then that Society graciously stepped aside and allowed the masses to support the classes. Without opera it was hinted that American culture could not continue. It was pointed out further that the Met was America's own, the pride and joy of every citizen who jammed into a Lenox Avenue Express. Miss Lucrezia Bori, consumed with the zeal of a Spanish Crusader and perhaps with the necessity of maintaining a place where she might profitably sing, headed a committee which touched the heart of the populace with its pleas. Could the old lady who sold papers under the steps of the Sixth Avenue "L" feel that she had done enough for her adopted land unless she had contributed to the support of Mr. Kahn's opera? Was it proper for the buttonhole maker to feel that he had fulfilled his duty when he had saved for three months and got enough for one ticket in the Metropolitan gallery, only half a mile from the director's stand? If opera was to be rescued, if American pride and honor were to be upheld, it was the duty of every loyal burgher to come forward and do his part. The money was raised and the opening night of the 1934-35 season was among the most brilliant in years. Among those present were General and Mrs. Vanderbilt, Mr. and Mrs. J. Pierpont Morgan, Mr. and Mrs. Otto Kahn, the Countess Gazumpus and Mr. Herbert Ackleroyd, Mr. Cholly Knickerbocker, Miss Helen Worden, Mr. Izzy Kaplan and assorted photographers, reporters and singers' managers. The boxes, orchestra, balcony and family circle were filled with excellent folk in starched front and low bodices who would be driven to work on the morrow by their chauffeurs. On the outside making neat and proud rows for the celebrities to file through on their way to the entrance were the representatives of the loyal

citizenry who had supplied the bulk of the subsidy.

It seems now that even the yearly \$300,000 will not be enough. The wealthy box holders, who are also owners of the real estate on which the opera house stands, have decided that they can no longer sustain culture even when it is supported by their inferiors. There is a plan to shorten the season even beyond its present curtailed length. There was an abortive project to combine the Met with the Philharmonic Orchestra. But even that was not sufficient. The gentlemen who were able to raise two million dollars for the defense of America's Cup were unfortunately not prepared to die for dear old Aida. When things looked blackest, a clatter was heard and in rode the Hon. Fiorello H. La Guardia, Mayor of the City of New York, with a plan for a community center of art, of which the Met should be the nucleus. Not only would there be opera, but there would be "pop" opera during the summer, at which presumably the general public might be seen while the box holders were resting at Newport and Narragansett Pier.

There is every possibility that the Hon. Fiorello will get his wish. The distinguished box holders will sacrifice their holdings in the opera house for the greater public good and for a figure which will amply care for their investment and they will even go further. They will agree to retain their ancestral boxes and add tone to a fine civic venture by appearing at opening nights amid flashlights, general public acclaim and Miss Nancy Randolph of the Daily News, just as if nothing untoward had happened.

More about "Chapayev"

WHAT is there about *Chapayev* that makes it so great? It is the most mature expression of a tendency that has been apparent in Soviet films ever since the liquidation of the R.A.P.P. (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers.) The influence of the R.A.P.P. during the last period of its existence resulted in films that were schematic and uninteresting. The ensuing demand that "Soviet films must portray, not schematic figures, but living, breathing heroes of socialist construction, the Civil War, the various revolutionary periods . . ." had a revitalizing effect upon the Soviet cinema.

The first example of this new tendency to reach the United States was the classic *The Road to Life*. Later we were shown *Golden Mountains* by Yutkevitch. This film represented an extension of the method first introduced by Ermler in *The Fragment of An Empire* (1928-39), also of the Lenin-grad studio. *Shame (Counter-Plan)* directed by Ermler and Yutkevitch, was a further step toward a synthesis of the "personal" or "psychological" film. In both these films, the worker was a human being and not a saint. The aristocratic factory boss of *Golden Mountains* was not the capitalist of *The*