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Reich is able to wage war on the world once again. To show how it is to be done, this representative of the High Command picks himself a small village in Belgium and goes to work. The resultant struggle, historically true or not, might have provided first-rate drama. The behavior of an emancipated village faced with the problems of disunity might have contributed some insight into the technique of solving such problems—provided the characters were permitted to work out such behavior in a soundly conceived dramatic structure. Here is where the film breaks down. In order to get the plot unwound an anti-fascist native lets himself become a tool of the Nazi almost without a struggle. He sees his village ruined, his friends killed, himself stuck away in a Nazi horror prison, and yet without a murmur lends himself to a series of connivings that would make the most rudimentary anti-Nazi shudder. Here is a classic example of plot determining the character rather than personality defining behavior. The falseness of this technique creates false character, of course, and makes subsequent action unbelievable. Such a weakness is doubly damaging in a film like *The Master Race*, because it violates not only dramatic soundness but historic veracity as well.

The plot requirements as set down in this film lead to other implausible relationships. The wealthiest woman in the village is the wife of a collaborator, yet when the village is liberated not one single inhabitant shows an interest in her existence. She is allowed to harbor the Nazi without creating a ripple. A boy fighting in the underground woos

her daughter—a character, by the way, which has no outline at all, not even a theatrical one. There are other incredibilities of this nature, but I think I have made my point.

Herbert Biberman has indicated, by his statements throughout the film, that he is a man of political discernment. What baffles me is that one of his understanding should be guilty of such faults in dramatic structure. (He wrote the original story, helped in the adaptation and directed the film.) My guess is that he attempted to crowd too much into one picture, and hence gave himself no time for the proper development of character and situation. There are at least four ideas in the film that might have made full length pictures if treated separately. The fight of the villagers to preserve unity could make a film in itself, without resort to the contrivances of melodrama. So could the struggles of the young guerrilla in his attraction to the daughter of the collaborator. One of the women in the film bears the baby of a Nazi soldier. Her reaction to this child as it grows up, the attitude of the villagers towards her and the baby could make an excellent movie. How to treat the Nazi prisoners in this community would make valid film. But all these elements are so jammed together that none of them gives life to any of the personae or their impulses as they move through the picture.

It is unfortunate that the political clarity and sentiments that animate much of the dialogue should be wasted on so much artificiality. Perhaps Mr. Biberman will try again. J. F.

ON BROADWAY

THE three plays under consideration in this week's panel might well be reviewed by a psychoanalyst. In each of them, the conflict grows out of the insecurity of an individual who consequently seeks stability by embracing an illusion. Teta, the cook in *Embezzled Heaven*, creates the image of a personal priest who will insure her entry to heaven. Elwood P. Dowd, the friendly schizoid in *Harvey*, evokes a six-foot rabbit who will attract toward him the quick interest of those about him. And Mrs. Sturdevant, with her silver cord showing in *Sleep, My Pretty One*, does not outlive the illusion that she can forever bind her son.

The story of Teta's violated faith that she could buy her way to God's footstool by paying for her nephew's education for the priesthood is scarcely a play. Rather it is a fable, a fable somewhat pretentiously dressed for its simple moral and too often dull and obvious. Dowd's story is a hilarious fantasy. And Mrs. Sturdevant's is a melodramatic bore. Perhaps their degrees of entertainment account for the phenomena that whereas no one, who did not already have it, left *Embezzled Heaven* with a belief in heaven, and all were repelled by Mrs. Sturdevant's neurosis, all of us who came to *Harvey* incredulous of the existence of a six-foot rabbit left convinced

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that we had not only seen him, but that we were seeing him up and down Broadway. Indeed, we debouched among the crowds and taxis as happy at being insane as Elwood himself.

It is unfortunate that L. Bush-Fekete and Mary Helen Fay's adaptation of Franz Werfel's best-selling *Embezzled Heaven* reflects so little of the psychological depth and suspense in the novel. Most especially so because we do not often get a chance to see Ethel Barrymore; and here she is in an untheatrical tale which gives her acting-space only in the first act, retires her behind a number of lesser exhibitors in the second act, and almost wholly smothers her in a third act, which has twenty minutes of Vatican ritual and perhaps ten minutes of pertinent drama.

Another who is on stage all too briefly is the great German actor Albert Basserman, who plays the Pope with such great authority and human dignity that he dwarfs the imposing audience chamber Stewart Chaney built. The Theater Guild has surrounded these two with many excellent performers, among them lively Sanford Meisner, Martin Blaine as the young priest who helps Teta overcome the blow to her heavenly aspirations, Bettina Cerf, and Wolfe Barzell, who comes out of the Yiddish theater to do an old Jew in a manner entertaining enough but a trifle too caricatured and pointed.

The part of Teta's nephew, who cheats her over a period of thirty years into believing that he is using her money to become a priest, is played by Eduard Franz. However, it is written superficially and played in a style that puts his knavery on too commonplace a level to seem more than a low stunt. B. Iden Payne staged the play with evident competence, but its static nature would have borne down a genius.

AS FOR *Harvey*, written by Mary Chase, presented by Brock Pemberton, and directed by Antoinette Perry, it is all Frank Fay and Josephine Hull, but especially Frank Fay. It is largely due to Fay and, I am sure, to Miss Perry that though we begin the evening tolerantly amused at Elwood P. Dowd's mild hallucination, by the time the third act is over we believe we have seen Harvey, the six-foot rabbit who actually never appears, and have taken him into the more fabulous interior of our lives forever. Nor do we feel particularly sensitive about it, because even the psychiatrist who undertakes to cure Dowd

of Harvey's companionship himself falls victim to Harvey's charm.

But to get back to Frank Fay—and *Harvey* is practically all Fay or fey, however you spell it—his conception of Dowd is so quiet and amiable and ingratiating and altogether reasonable that after a while, he appears to be the only being with sense and a point of view in the community. Mary Chase has provided him with wonderful lines. Fred Irving Lewis, as the psychiatrist who nearly takes to his own couch, Tom Seidel and Janet Tyler as the lovers, and Josephine Hull, of course, provided him with enviable foils. But when the fun is over, you will remember only Frank Fay—and Harvey—and that should be enough for the most insatiable taste. Best of all, but typical in style, is Dowd's story of how he happened to meet Harvey. He had just poured a dear friend into a taxi, he says, when he heard his name called. He looked around and there leaning against the lamppost was a six-foot white rabbit with his legs crossed. As Fay relates it, "I was not in the least surprised. For when you've lived in a town for forty years, many people know your name."

There is nothing much to say about *Sleep, My Pretty One*, except to regret that Pauline Lord should have returned in such a hopeless vehicle. The cast is competent, Roy Hargrave directs well enough, Raymond Sovey's rooms are good theater; the fault is all Charlicie and Oliver Garrett's, who simply rewrote an old plot without grace of creative imagination. HARRY TAYLOR.

Miracle of the Ghetto

LAST year it was the Yiddish Art Theater which brought us one of the few anti-Nazi plays of the year. Today, it is again a Yiddish theater group, the New Jewish Folk Theater, which dramatizes the nub-reality of world conflict: the struggle to the death of either Nazis or freemen. Under the direction of Jacob Ben-Ami, it has chosen to present one of the most heroic incidents of the war of liberation, an epic which heartened the whole Allied world and particularly the underground fighters on the European continent: the unyielding stand to the last of the Warsaw ghetto. A challenging theme, with the heart's blood of humanity in it, a theme which should have made for a play, savage, terrible, white-hot with man's belief in his dignity, a play like an arsenal to all freedom lovers, like a beacon on the mountain of our time

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Before we examine H. Leivick's *The Miracle of the Warsaw Ghetto*, let us glance briefly at the factual strip of the rising in the spring of 1943. When the Nazis first entered the city, there were approximately 400,000 Jews in the un-walled ghetto. The Nazis proceeded to herd every last Jew as defined by the Nuremberg law into a tightly constricted corner of this inner city. They built a wall about it, barb-wired it, mounted machine guns commanding all approaches. They sat on every least phase of life within the caged community. Now, they began bringing to it Jews from all the conquered countries until at the end of 1942 there was a ghetto population of 600,000 souls. Since by this time they had completed all arrangements for exterminating these people, they began entraining them for the gas chambers at the rate sometimes of ten and twelve thousand men, women, and children a day. At the eve of the Passover feast, there were left in the ghetto only 40,000 people, the youngest, the strongest, those whom the Nazis had held to the last as slave labor. It was these younger men and women, many of them undoubtedly French, Belgian, Czech, Dutch, who rose out of the frightful disintegration of dignity and morale, to find the courage and weapons with which for forty days and nights they challenged the coordinated might of several divisions of Nazi infantry and tanks and bombers. By their deed, though not one of them was left alive, they succeeded in breaking out of the ghetto walls into the stream of freedom's fighters everywhere.

MR. LEIVICK, who is a noted Yiddish poet and dramatist, approaches his massive theme in a reverent mood and succeeds in conveying much of the grandeur and heroism of the Warsaw epic. In the old teacher, Isaac, he has created a vigorous and inspiring personality in whom the spirit of the ancient Maccabees joins with a pungent folk simplicity to make him a leader of his people. The slogan which Isaac inscribes on the wall of the synagogue: "Jews, Do not Despair," becomes an affirmative summons to action which sweeps away the counsel of passivity and despair given by Isaac's former pupil, Israel.

Apart from the character of Isaac, however, it cannot be said that the author has been too happy in his choice of protagonists. The chief difficulty is that too much of the action of the play de-

velops through old religious Jews and centers in a synagogue; the young men and women, among them many from western countries, who actually organized and carried through the Warsaw uprising, appear as shadowy and largely anonymous backdrop figures. Mr Leivick evidently sensed this weakness and attempted to overcome it by presenting the political leaders of the revolt, one representing the Socialist Bund, another the Communists, and a third the Zionists. Through these figures the author sought to express the unity which was achieved among the three principal political groupings. The fact that the idea of unity is given such emphasis in the play is important. It is unfortunate, however, that this unity remains on the plane of declarations and conferences among three men; one does not see it as an organic part of the action of the play. Moreover, both the Zionist and the Communist, particularly the latter, are stiff, two-dimensional figures. Only in the case of the Bundist is there an attempt at full-blooded creation. Certain of the scenes involving the Bundist, Yechiel, his wife and children, are moving and give the audience an insight into the thousands of personal tragedies that go to make up the gigantic tragedy of the Jews under Nazism.

Through the character of Israel Mr. Leivick sought to convey the conflict between action and inaction within the Jewish people. I am afraid this is a highly intellectualized concept which had no roots in the reality of the Warsaw Ghetto. Certainly it was entirely valid for the author to include a character who opposes struggle and advises passive resignation. However, this character is so strongly emphasized that he appears almost as the alter ego of the Warsaw Jews. His later transformation into an audacious fighter as a result of the Nazi murder of the girl he loved, while by itself not incredible, is presented with mystical trappings that make it unconvincing. And to see this almost impalpable creature finally assume the leadership of the revolt and, at the curtain, uplifted to become its noblest expression, tends to obscure the courage, the clarity, the wisdom, the resourcefulness with which the Warsaw men and women fought their way out of the ghetto and into the world.

The production is well directed and mounted in pictorial settings by H. A. Condell. Neither Jacob Ben-Ami as Israel nor Berta Gersten, who plays the wife of the Bundist and mother of the

girl killed while trying to reach the Polish underground, give anything important to their parts. Menachem Rubin is excellent as the old man Isaac and contributes the best acting of the play. Isidor Casher, Michael Goldstein, and Abraham Teitelbaum are merely competent in the roles of the political organizers of the uprising. Michael Gibson and Dora Weissman are admirable in bit parts.

Despite its faults, *The Miracle of the Warsaw Ghetto* is a serious contribution to anti-fascist drama. Its presentation required imagination, courage, and enterprise of the highest order; its subject is both timely and magnificently timeless; it is of the tissue and heart of Jewish existence. The New Jewish Folk Theater and Mr. Ben-Ami deserve credit for having produced it. H. T.

RECORDS

COLUMBIA has spanned a gap in the field of recorded Wagnerian literature with an album of excerpts from the last act of *Tristan and Isolde* (MM 550). Practically all of Act III, as given by the Metropolitan, can now be heard on records by sandwiching this new set between the Prelude, by Weingartner and the Paris Conservatory Orchestra (Columbia 69805D), and the *Liebestod*, sung by Kirsten Flagstad in Victor Album DM 644. Older recordings of the act completely lack the technical clarity which the music requires.

Lauritz Melchior, whose heroic tenor voice has fantastic power, is dramatically thrilling, as actor and singer, interpreting his great Tristan. Herbert Jansen's mellow baritone records very well as the worried Kurvenal. An anonymous Isolde adequately cries out her few lines at the sight of her dying lover. The accompaniment is by two separate orchestras, the Colon Opera Orchestra, conducted by Roberto Kinsky, and the Columbia Orchestra under Erich Leinsdorf. They do their jobs capably, though they are sometimes overbalanced by the voices. Indeed, in certain passages the orchestra plays as a background to the singers. Such a state of affairs offers no resemblance to Wagnerian opera-house performance, living or dead. But then again, it is a rare recording that captures the perfect blend of voice and orchestra and it will probably gratify many to hear

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