

# Echoes

## Pope Blesses Palestinian Soldier

When members of a Jewish unit now in Rome were received in audience by the Pope some time ago, His Holiness asked one of the soldiers, a Palestinian-born Jew, where he came from.

The young man replied: "I am a Jew from Palestine," to which the Pope, speaking perfect Hebrew, said: "The Lord bless thee and keep thee."

## They now say in Palestine that it is "a land flowing with Lowdermilk and honey."

the Yiddish language, and its "humour" must be understood against the background of centuries of history. Alien to Sholom Aleichem's people and language is the riotous laughter of sheer physical well-being, of high animal spirits. Horseplay, slapstick comedy, and the practical joke they would have regarded as infantilism. They did not guffaw when a man slipped on the ice and came down with a crack; they winced. The boozy and boisterous jocundity of a Falstaff would have disgusted them. They were not squeamish about broad stories, but the *Decameron*, with its innumerable and monotonous variants on the strategy of deception, would have struck them as trivial. Their laughter was not earthy because, in the literal sense, their life was not earthy.

## The Yiddish Language

Yiddish is a language of refuge, intimacy, domesticity, and affection. It has a warm religious colouring, but it is free from cant. It is also a knowing language, full of hints, allusions, and interjections which take their meaning from tone and context. It is rich in "portmanteau words." Because of its high emotional charge it passes easily into the maudlin; on the other hand, it does not lend itself to pomposity, and it has no professional and academic jargons—that is, if we except the jargon of sacred learning, which is of the stuff of the language. Its vulgarities are not repulsive, but comical. Pure, simple Yiddish has a tenderness which can only be reproduced in English by a careful use of Anglo-Saxon words; but there is no way of conveying the atmosphere of this language, with its uniquely private history.

I have already mentioned the break in spirit between Yiddish and the Middle High German which is its verbal base. The transformation wrought upon the original material is not reflected in the words themselves. As words they are easily recognisable; but their connotations and associations are so remote from those of their German analogues that they might just as well have been taken from the Latin or the Sanskrit. In any case, it is just as hard to translate Sholom Aleichem into German as into English or French.

The passing of Kasrievky and of Sholom Aleichem has been attended by the passing of the Yiddish which was their language. For Yiddish has undergone many changes since those days. The experiences in which it was steeped, and upon which it depended for its effectiveness, were those of other generations. The Yiddish of Soviet Russia has another tone; so has that of the modern Yiddish writers generally. It is much easier to translate because it is much nearer to international journalism; it has moved away from the separatism of a dying world. Which is all to the good, except so far as the quality of the Yiddish is concerned.

# Serious and Otherwise

\* by ben dor \*

## A German Catholic Who Became a Yiddish Writer

The profession of Yiddish journalism has among its devotees one who is indeed a curious phenomenon. Racially he is one hundred per cent. German and religiously he was born of Catholic parents and raised in a Catholic orphanage. His name is Rudolph Rucker.

What social forces transformed a pure German Aryan into a Yiddish writer? For, apart from racial antagonism, the Germans have always claimed that Yiddish—originally derived from medieval High German—is offensive to their ears. Rucker's metamorphosis can be traced through several intermediate stages. He was born in 1873, at Mainz, Germany. After leaving the Catholic orphanage at the age of 14 he learned the trade of bookbinding. For such an underprivileged boy it was quite natural that he should become interested in the problems of labour and be drawn to the Socialist movement. But his youthful radicalism must have been extreme, for he was subjected to three political trials which finally drove him from his native land and forced him to go elsewhere. He first came to Paris, where he made the acquaintances of Jewish anarchists and became aware of the existence of a Jewish literature. Later he moved to London where he lived with German comrades in the West End section and visited the Yiddish-speaking proletariat in the Whitechapel district.

While attending the meetings of the latter he became interested in learning Yiddish and, being gifted linguistically, soon acquired sufficient mastery to make that language one of his chief means of literary expression. Before long he developed into a brilliant Yiddish writer and lecturer. In 1898 he began to contribute to various Yiddish radical periodicals, and in the years that followed he became the editor of "Dos Freie Wort" and "Der Arbeiter Freund," the publisher of the journal "Germinal," the author of original works in Yiddish and the translator of others.

His chief interest in life, however, is the propagation of the philosophy of anarchism. True to his principles he carried on anti-war propaganda in England after the outbreak of the First World War. For this the British interned him from 1914 to 1918 and then deported him—against his will—to his native Germany. Since his liberation he has become the intellectual leader of the anarcho-syndicalist movement. In recent years he has been touring many cities of Canada and the United States and lecturing to the Yiddish-speaking proletariat on social and political subjects.

## "Rothschild's Violin"

The following story by N. Vortsov has just reached me from Moscow: The famous composer Dmitri Shostakovich, some time ago greatly surprised a Jewish Fleishman family of Bezhetsk, when he wrote them four letters in which he paid glowing tribute to the musical genius of their son, Benjamin, who had died fighting on the battlefield near Leningrad.

The parents knew that Benjamin was a gifted musician, and that before joining the armed forces he had written a one-act opera based on Chekhov's story "Rothschild's Violin."

In his story, Chekhov describes a Gentile coffee-maker and Rothschild, a Jewish musician, who plays a flute in the village orchestra. They quarrel, as Yakov cannot tolerate Rothschild's melancholy way of playing,

even if the melody is a merry one. The discontented Yakov repents his ways only when again draws near. Yakov, also a fiddler, gives his violin to the Jew, and for the first time feels carefree and happy.

Deeply touched by the gesture, Rotaschild gives up the flute after Yakov's death, and plays only on Yakov's fiddle. And the music is sad and beautiful, just like the estrangement and reconciliation.

In the first letter written shortly after the death of Benjamin, Shostakovich says "I was profoundly impressed with the composition 'Rothschild's Violin.' I played it every day, and my admiration for it knows no bounds. Fortunately the whole composition has been preserved, though quite a bit of it has not been orchestrated. I am doing this now, and the task is giving me great pleasure."

Benjamin's composition is destined to become world famous. The fact that it has been so highly praised by the eminent Shostakovich encourages the belief that young Fleishman has insured for himself a noteworthy place in Russian music.

In a later letter Shostakovich writes: "I will certainly avail myself of the first opportunity of calling on the parents who raised such a remarkable son. I loved Benjamin. He was a man of warm heart and vast musical talent."

For years now the Fleishman's have lived in Bezhetsk, a village in the Kalinin Province. Josef, the father, is the dentist of the village and his wife Rachel is a teacher of music. When Russia was invaded their three sons, Isaiah, Benjamin and Ilya, joined in the defence of the country. All three lost their lives on the battlefield.

## Colonel Cohen

I WAS sorry to learn of the sudden death of Lieutenant-Colonel Stanley S. G. Cohen, a member of the well-known Cohen family of Liverpool and son of the late Mr. Louis Cohen, the first Jew to be Lord Mayor of that great city.

Col. Cohen, who was born in Liverpool in 1880, was a brother of Major Brunel Cohen, Hon. Treasurer of the British Legion, and of the late Mr. Harold Cohen who gave £100,000 for a library for Liverpool University and died on the day when the library was opened. He himself was a well-known philanthropist, devoting himself in particular to the work for the Hospital for Sick Children in Great Ormond Street, W.C., for which he gave £50,000 in 1935.

Head of the great Lewis's group of companies in Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and Leeds, he was not only a leading business man, but also a great patriot. He served as a volunteer in the South African War, holding the rank of Second Lieutenant in the Liverpool Regiment, and again in the Great War, when he commanded a battalion in the same regiment.

In Jewish affairs he was prominent as President of the Trades Advisory Council, "was the ideal deeply felt, particularly by that organisation." "Stanley Cohen," said a leading member of the Trades Advisory Council, "was the ideal President for our organisation whose task it is to disseminate those principles of business which he himself represented with so great distinction."

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