

You Can't Avoid It!

By Al Segal

A Whimsical Essay by an American Jewish Journalist

ANNUALLY, at this time of the year, I go away to escape Jewish problems by which, in a small part, I make my living. Surely I am entitled to this vacation.

Consider: Once a week I must enclose myself in my room, fill my pipe, let go two or three exhalations, send my mind up on the fragrant smoke to search the air for a Jewish problem: "With what Jewish problem shall I trouble my mind to-day?"

Successfully to gather a Jewish problem weekly, I must mingle much with Jews and hear their lamentations. When I would rather be off in some sylvan glen I must sit among Jews in their private convocations and see them torture themselves with the travail of being Jewish.

Small wonder then that during the year I get tired of being a Jew, particularly a writing Jew. In my secret heart I ask myself: "Why was I born a Jew? Why wasn't I born an O'Brien?"

Happy O'Brien! His problems are the common problems of mankind. He must worry only that ham and eggs shall be provided for his family regularly, that his job shall be safe, that his children shall grow up to be honest and strong O'Briens, that his insurance premiums shall be met on time, that the sheriff shall not foreclose on his house, that there shall be enough in the bank to take care of his old age, that when he dies he shall leave a good name, at least.

On me are all of O'Brien's problems (except the ham and eggs) and the special Jewish problems as well. I must worry on account of Jews in Germany, Jews in Roumania, Jews in Poland and every once in a while somebody comes to my house . . . "Oh, sir," says he, "the Jews in Germany are devastated, the Jews in Roumania are having their usual hard time and the Jews in Poland are forever hungry. How much will you give?"

OR I worry because some non-Jew looked at me cross-eyed as he passed, with such a look as distinctly said to me: "You are one of them Jews. Hitler is right."

I am sure that that is what the baleful look in his eyes meant and my heart gives itself to lamentations on the unhappy destiny of being a Jew.

Or, on account of some Jewish problem, I fall into a quarrel with another Jew. He says to me: "I can understand why some hotels keep Jews out. It's on account of a certain class of Jews who are obnoxious. You wouldn't have them in your house either."

I answer him: "There are obnoxious non-Jews as well. But do hotels keep all non-Jews out because of the obnoxious ones?"

So, from one word to another, we come to a hot quarrel until the sweat pours down on our necks; for the day is hot, too.

Therefore, I look forward to the vacation period (as I did recently). I will run away from all this. From my back will fall the burden of the Jewish problem. I shall throw it, in fact, into the Great Lakes as I board the magnificent vessel that is to carry me on a circuit of these lakes.

I shall throw it off and it will sink with a gurgling sound that seems to emit a lamenting "Oi!" as it goes under in the deep waters. The burden will be off my back and during these happy days I shall not be a Jew.

I shall be O'Brien without any special problem. I shall know no Jews. I shall hear no cry of pain.

I make ready for this with avid zeal. Joyously my motor car speeds toward Chicago, where my tour of the lakes begins. The car seems to understand. "We're running away from Jews," it says to me as its speedometer rises to 65 miles an hour.

"Only 100 more miles," it exults.

"Fifty miles!"

"A mile more, my friend, and we're there."

WE come to the water's edge and board the vessel . . . My load of Jewish problems descends into Lake Michigan with a profound sigh and I am sure I hear it in the wind . . . "Oi! Oi!"

My happy feet rejoice as they circle the promenade deck; they are no longer conscious of burden . . . And so to bed.

I am awakened by the joyous call of the musical breakfast bell and quickly I am up and quickly I am dressed and quickly I am on the way to the dining room.

On such voyages one is always eager to discover who his table-mates are. What yokel, what sour-face, what bore, what pretty girl, perhaps, has one drawn? The two whom I am destined to have for breakfast, dinner and supper, throughout the voyage are already at table when I arrive. In fact, the man and his wife are half through with their bacon and eggs.

"God morning," says he.

"Good morning."

"I guess," he says, "introductions are in order."

"My name," I observe "is Segal."

"And I am Cohen. This is Mrs. Cohen. We seem to belong to the same church, as one might say."

"Yes," I reply. "There seems no escape."

"What's that?"

"I mean, we always find each other. It's gravitation."

Mr. Cohen and his wife exchange puzzled glances: "What kind of a guy is this? What is he talking about?" . . . Mr. Cohen completes his rasher of bacon in silence.

Silence, however, in time becomes too oppressive at a breakfast table and Mr. Cohen at length feels words are in order.

"Well, what do you think of our friend by now?" he asked.

"Whom do you mean, Mr. Cohen?"

"That Hitler . . . Do you think he can last much longer?"

The burden I dropped into the lake in the night has bounded out and here it sits with us at the breakfast table.

The Nelson Trio

FORTHCOMING VISIT OF JEWISH MUSICIANS

Travelling on the high seas on their way to South Africa are the Misses Anna, Ida and Sara Nelson, popularly known as the Nelson Trio, who will open a South African concert tour on the 20th of this month at the City Hall, Johannesburg.

The three sisters are a talented group of musicians who were born in Winnipeg, Canada, of humble Jewish parentage. Early in life they showed unusual musical ability, and at the present time, although still in their teens, they have been acknowledged by many eminent critics as a combination of brilliant artists. The London "Jewish Chronicle" wrote of them: "These three young artists are all accomplished technically, but what is more important, they have a remarkable degree of ensemble and show signs of developing into exceptionally fine musicians," while the London "Daily Telegraph" wrote of them: "That these three ladies who show so much of sheer ability now, will rise to very high things, there can be no reasonable doubt."

Their tour is being arranged in South Africa by the Cherniavsky Concert Bureau which has brought out to this country many famous artists, including Jascha Heifetz, Madam Galli-Curci and others.

The Nelson trio will come to South Africa from a successful tour of Australia where they have just given no less than 120 concerts. They were entertained in many towns by the Jewish communities who gave them everywhere great support. There is no doubt that their visit will be eagerly looked forward to by Jewish music lovers throughout South Africa.

Farewell to David Fram

On Saturday evening next at the residence of Mr. L. Feldberg, 32 Hendon Street, Yeoville, a farewell reception will be given to Mr. David Fram, the eminent Yiddish poet, who is leaving South Africa on the 14th of this month for Europe. The reception will commence at 8 p.m. sharp.

Elsewhere in this issue will be found an article dealing with the work of this notable Yiddish poet.

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