

—'Molly Picon' to You

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE FAMOUS JEWISH COMEDIENNE
AND HER HUSBAND, MR. JACOB KALISCH

MEET Mrs. Jacob Kalisch — Molly Picon to you — and her husband, who have just arrived from overseas. You will be surprised at their meeting. It is a warm, personal meeting with no airs and graces. It is as though you were meeting old friends, and the yiddishisms and the intimate note of the meeting immediately make you at home.

Coming straight from Europe, Molly Picon brings absorbing impressions of present-day conditions among Jewry overseas. She is particularly enthusiastic about France, where she fulfilled an important engagement in Paris. This versatile little star, who comes from America, gave her Parisian programme entirely in French and was applauded to the echo. Included in her programme were several distinctly Jewish items. One of them, "The Wandering Melody," has a noble Hebraic theme, showing how the underlying melody of Jewish life wends its way through the world, from country to country, and finds its various forms of expression. Molly Picon told me the French public were most enthusiastic about these Jewish numbers, and she feels that this is typical of the liberal and liberty-loving spirit of France. "There," she says, "democracy is rooted. No anti-Semitic feeling can make headway there, on account of the Frenchman's broad and tolerant outlook."

The vast majority of the French people, she said, greatly admired Leon Blum, and were moved by the pride he showed in his race.

Glowing Spirit of Palestine.

She talked of her impressions of Palestine. She was there a couple of years ago; she regretted she had not been able to visit the country since then.

"We visited Eretz Israel as the guest of Bialik," her husband said. Under his guidance we made a thorough tour of Palestine, going to all parts of the country. In Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem and many of the settlements Molly gave performances of Jewish sketches and interpretations of Bialik's poems, and everywhere she was most enthusiastically received."

"We were captured heart and soul by the wonderful spirit of the land," Molly Picon took up the conversation. "We were thrilled by the optimism and courageous outlook of the people living there. Particularly the glowing spirit of the youth left a memorable impression upon us. They have a spirit you don't find in the world anywhere more, or at least very seldom. It is the spirit of life, the spirit of conquerable life."



Molly Picon.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Kalisch showed deep interest in the New Palestine Symphony Orchestra which Bronislaw Huberman recently formed. They know personally the world famous maestro, Toscanini, who conducted the inaugural concert, and they felt that his going to Palestine for this purpose was the highest tribute an artist could pay, not alone to the orchestra, but to Palestine itself.

"No commercial considerations could sway a man like Toscanini," Mr. Kalisch said. "He is an independent man, and would only make such a gesture through his own enthusiasm."

Impressions of South Africa.

The visitors are most impressed with South Africa. The land comes to them as a new experience.

"It is a surprising contrast to overseas," Molly Picon said. "This is such a vast country. You have such vast horizons here. It is so different to the tightly packed countries of Europe, where town grows almost on top of town. We couldn't understand why there is talk about restricting immigration here. It seems to us that there are such great possibilities for newcomers. These vast stretches of land which seem to be lying idle—surely thousands of people could draw a living from them and help the progress of your country."

"Johannesburg," she said, "is the greatest surprise of all. I think it is wrong to talk about this city as Little London or Little New York. It isn't an imitation of London or New York. Johannesburg has a personality of its own. You feel so much vitality here—at least we do. The only city

I can think of to compare with Johannesburg is Tel-Aviv. Johannesburg has Tel-Aviv's youthfulness and eager spirit, and, being such a young city, it is marvellous how it seems to be rebuilding itself at present. This is something you don't find overseas. There cities stand for hundreds of years before they reach the present stage of Johannesburg."

Both Molly Picon and her husband showed great interest in Jewish life in South Africa. They plied me with many questions as to Jewish activities, particularly as to the strength of Zionism, and, apropos this subject, they mentioned proudly that they had each taken a Shekel on Sunday! So far they have not met representative circles of the Jewish community as such, but they are keenly looking forward to doing so while here. Molly Picon even hopes to be able to give a special programme for a Jewish audience. She would like to give an all-Yiddish programme, and she thinks a city like Johannesburg should have a strong enough Jewish community to make this possible.

She does an enormous amount in Yiddish entertainment in America. Last year, feeling that there were very many places not catered for in this direction, she undertook a concert tour among those towns and cities having small Jewish populations. She visited some 60 to 80 centres, mainly under the auspices of Hadassah, Jewish Community Centres, Bnai Brith and the Young Men's Hebrew Association, and met with most enthusiastic response everywhere.

Molly Picon is one of the great stars of the Yiddish stage. She was "discovered" by her husband, a leading figure in the American Yiddish Theatre, who brought her before the wider audiences her art merits.

Jacob Kalisch was also the discoverer of Paul Muni. He was Muni Weisenfreund in the days when Mr. Kalisch found him touring with a small stock company. He too entered the Yiddish Theatre and, under Mr. Kalisch's aegis, became one of its greatest stars.

Mr. and Mrs. Kalisch are spending about six weeks altogether in South Africa. From here they return to Europe where Molly Picon has a full programme of starring engagements ahead.

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