

JEWISH CAFES ON THE EAST SIDE

New York from a New Angle

By M. GLASS

YOU who hanker after the Cafe du Dome or the Rotonde on the Boulevard Montparnasse, come with me Eastward to New York, to the East Side of New York. There, almost any Friday, Saturday or Sunday night, you will find on lower Second Avenue typical Montparnasse cafes, fairly bulging with playwrights, actors, musicians and poets, all engaged in lively conversation and inspired by nothing stronger than tea or coffee, accompanied perhaps by an appetizer, such as chopped liver with onions, or even *maatjes* herring.

True, the bill of fare expressly states that a supplement of five cents will be charged for all appetizers not followed by a meat order, but this rule is not enforced against the habitués of the cafe, although a stranger from uptown will be obliged to pay his way, and bang will go another nickel. But then, these cafes are not conducted for the convenience of strangers, who do not understand the conventions of East Side Cafes. For instance, that man dressed as a waiter who directs the stream of traffic which is constantly coming and going on Saturday and Sunday nights in the Cafe Imperial, and who also occasionally removes dishes and swabs the top of a temporarily vacant table, is not a waiter at all. He is at least sixty years of age, has the face and manner of a waiter and walks like a waiter, "with sweet feet," as the Italians say, but as a matter of fact he is the "bus boy." And why? Has he not earned promotion by years of labour as a bus boy? He ought to be at least a *maitre d'hotel* or captain, you think, but that's because you don't know East Side cafes.

A Mere Waiter.

A waiter—a mere waiter—takes your order and collects the check, pocketing the usual tip, but the bus boy is above and beyond all that. At one time he may have been just a waiter, but now he has risen to the estate of bus boy and owns a five-thousand-dollar interest in the theatre opposite the cafe, three tenement houses and several savings-bank accounts, and that's what it means to be a bus boy in an East Side cafe.

"How come?" you ask, and the answer is a bit complicated. In the first place, a bus boy is obliged to

carry with him, in cash, upward of two hundred dollars, for the most remunerative of his perquisites is the cashing of cheques for habitués of the cafe. He will not, of course, cash your cheque or my cheque, but without hesitation he will cash the cheque of Mr. Max Margoninsky, leading man of the Regency Theatre on Second Avenue, corner of Choose-your-own Street, because he knows that Mr. Margoninsky gets a hundred and twenty-five dollars a week and has a six-hundred-dollar balance in a certain branch of one of our most solvent banks.

On Saturday night, however, Mr. Margoninsky finds himself short of funds after the theatre, due to a run of bad luck in the pinochle game which goes on constantly during the Saturday night performance in the star's dressing room. The result is that Mr. Margoninsky will have to cash a cheque at the Cafe Imperial after the performance. The bus boy will do it for him, and will charge the nominal sum of only ten cents for every ten dollars, so that if Mr. Margoninsky cashes a cheque for fifty dollars, the bus boy will collect fifty cents. Thus with a capital investment of two hundred dollars, ever revolving, the bus boy will earn an average of two dollars a night, representing the low rate of interest of 365 per cent. per annum!

But this is not the only financial transaction which yields the bus boy a profit. So that you may not feel gauche when you visit the Cafe Imperial, it is one of the folkways of Second Avenue for a habitué of the cafe to tip the bus boy a nickel. Now, as the old street vendors used to say, a nickel will not make you, break you or set you up in business, but if there are two hundred habitués of the Cafe Imperial, each contributing a nickel to Guttman the bus boy, that makes Guttman's income from this source alone a little matter of ten dollars a night. Is it any wonder, then, that when the proprietor of the Cafe Imperial died last year and his widow offered Guttman an interest in the firm, he refused it and preferred to remain a "humble" bus boy?

And that's not the whole of it either. On Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights, when tables are at a premium in the Cafe Imperial after

midnight, who is it that turns up chairs against several of the tables and claims they have been reserved by telephone? Doubtless you have guessed. Twenty-five cents to Guttman the bus boy will release one of these tables, and counting ten tables a night, this adds another two dollars and fifty cents per diem to the bus boy's income.

But there are never perquisites without responsibilities, so that Guttman is supposed to know by name all the habitués of the Cafe Imperial, and it is his duty to page them when there is a telephone summons, for a lively business goes on in the cafe, which is also a literary, dramatic and mercantile agency. Plays are sold there, actors are engaged, and upon occasion some such involved transaction is consummated as the exchange of a delicatessen lunch room in the Bronx for two vacant lots in East Rockaway, added to a cleaning and pressing establishment in Fifth Street and thirty-five dollars and fifty cents "boot" money.

"Shakespeare on the 'Phone."

All these activities naturally require that the principals and their agents should be called to the telephone, and Guttman, the bus boy, is the person charged with the paging. Not much politeness is wasted by Guttman on the patrons of the Cafe Imperial, and unlike the bell boys who wander around corridors waiting what sounds as though it were "Mis'ter Wah-wah! Please," Guttman the bus boy omits the please. He contents himself with a clear enunciation of the patron's name, which he bellows economically.

The other night a music critic who lives uptown, but who finds inspiration in the Continental atmosphere of the Cafe Imperial, said that Guttman the bus boy could be depended upon to page automatically any name that the cashier mentioned, and as a test we induced the cashier to tell Guttman that Mr. Shakespeare was wanted on the telephone. Without a moment's hesitation, Guttman planted himself in the geographical centre of the cafe and yelled: "Shakespeare on the telephone!"

Immediately a tall, gaunt personage, with the long hair and beetling eyebrows of a Yiddish tragedian, arose from a table and went to the

cashier's desk, where the telephone booth is situated, and where for five minutes there occurred a scene of indignation, explanation and apology. My critic friend did not know or had forgotten that one of Second Avenue's most unemployed actors called Shakespeare—a surname which he assumed because his original name of Sheikowitz didn't sell so well on the stage.

Among the *poseurs* and professional boulevardiers of Second Avenue cafes, however, is to be found genuine talent, particularly of the stage and of music. Indeed, many successful actors in the Second Avenue theatres are deserting the Yiddish stage for the English, and that do, usually startle the uptown critics out of their hard-boiled attitude toward actors and acting. Maurice Schwartz, of the Yiddish Art Theatre, recently transferred his talents to an uptown house and presented, in English, a play by the Yiddish playwright, Sholem Aleichem, and was the Cafe Imperial agog with excitement? The habitués were afraid he was going to make a hit and he did. It was almost as disappointing to them when the critic saw him and approved most heartily!

World Centre for Jewish Music in Palestine

THE New World Centre for Jewish Music in Palestine is carrying on with its important cultural work, and local committees for the fostering and furthering of interest in Jewish music are being formed in the United States, England, France, Germany, Austria, Poland, Lithuania, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Switzerland, Italy, Egypt, Syria, India, Dutch East Indies and South Africa.

Some of the world's greatest musicians are taking an active interest in the work of the Centre. These include Ernest Bloch, Kurt Weill, Darius Milhaud, Joachim Stutschewsky, Karl Rathaus, Max Ettinger, Jakob Weisberg, Heinrich Schalit, Hugo Adler, Paul Dessau, and Herbert Fromm.

Lectures for Young Women

A special sub-committee of the Young Mizrahi has been constituted for the purpose of arranging a series of lectures for young women who may be desirous of gaining a knowledge of the essentials of Judaism. These lectures will be conducted by prominent authorities. The course to be made as educating and varied as possible. No charge is to be made and the enrolment of young women is cordially invited.

In this way a long felt need has been filled. The object is to instill a proper Jewish atmosphere, to cultivate a good knowledge of the dietary and hygienic laws, and to promote the learning of all sections of Jewish tradition.

Further particulars will gladly be furnished upon application to the Secretary, Young Mizrahi Organization, 196 Millbourne Road, Judith Paarl.

CUTHBERT'S FOR GIRLS SCHOOL SHOES