

Vedem: The Secret Magazine by the Boys of Terezin

Negroes and Us

By **Hanus Pollak** (perished, Auschwitz)

Not long ago I read Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe. You all surely know the book. It tells the life story of several black slaves in America. Many of the horrors of Negro slavery are described in the book, the beatings, the starvation, and so on. But most of all I was moved by the splitting up of families. Many slave families were waiting in the slave markets to be auctioned off. Their only wish was to be sold together to one master. But not even this smallest desire was granted. They were each sold separately, and would probably never meet again. This is how Negro slaves were sold and treated in America in the nineteenth century, that is to say, three hundred years after the discovery of America.

How do we differ from those slaves, and how do our times differ from those times? We live here in Terezin, in a slave warehouse. Just like the Negroes, we are subjected to beatings and hunger. The one way in which we perhaps differ is the irregular and unjustified splitting up of families. But even this is now happening. On January 29, 1944, young men and old, sons, fathers, brothers, and relatives were sent away by transport. This is happening to us Jews, a persecuted people. Just like the Negroes, Tom and the three others, we bear our fate calmly and heroically, looking it straight in the eye. On April 2, 1944, when they actually boarded the train that was to take them away into the far unknown, I stood on the street corner with the crowd to see many friends, perhaps for the last time, while others took leave of their relatives. Then the slave owner [SS commandant Rahm] dressed in a green uniform and cap, called the overseer [Janacek, head of Czech gendarmes] telling him to allow those dogs onto the train to say farewell to the departing. Not long afterward, the train left, and word soon spread like wildfire through Terezin about the decency and compassion of the slave owner who had allowed his slaves to say farewell to their children, their fathers, their brothers, their loved ones.

So how do we really differ from those ignorant black slaves, now, at a time of great cultural flowering, in the middle of the twentieth century? Could not a book called Mr. Kohn's Garret be written to stand beside Uncle Tom's Cabin?

Preparing for the High Holiday

By Valtr Einsinger

I noticed an interesting psychological feature in myself this week: How even an unbeliever and atheist can be drawn against his will into the emotions surrounding the high holidays. Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year, is the first link in a chain of ten days, when every Jew scrutinizes his actions over the last year, weighs them on the scales of his impersonalized sense of justice and, before his conscience or before God, confesses all his sins and repents.

Not even I could escape the atmosphere enveloping Terezin in the days of Rosh Hashana, an atmosphere whose special aroma was sweetly familiar to me from my Orthodox past. But in my case, it indicated a special kind of contemplation. I did not examine my own past actions, but rather those of the people around me.

The world is swimming in a sea of war crimes. Its depths are unmeasurable. So I ask myself: how should I behave towards the perpetrators of that war? Is the German nation as a whole guilty? Should our hatred, our just rage, and our judgment come down on them all, without distinction?

I do not want to give you ready answers. That would be too easy. Nor do I wish to say straight out: Let us love these and hate those. I shall try to outline a method that is less easy, one that will force you to think and draw your own conclusions.

By a most unusual chance I discovered, on the eve of Rosh Hashana, a notebook of mine containing my notes on Eckermann's conversations with Goethe. Some of the notes I include here:

1. "He who would act justly, need never condemn, need never consider what perversity is, but most only act well. It is not a question of tearing down, but of building up, what could become a source of joy to humanity."
2. "The poet loves his country as a man, and a citizen, but the land of his poetic power and his poetic acts is goodness, nobility and beauty, which are bound to no particular region and no particular country. Then what does love of one's country and patriotism mean? They mean fighting against all harmful prejudices, eliminating narrow-minded views, enlightening the spirit of one's own nation."
3. "The only important thing is how one weighs in on the scales of humanity. Everything else is conceit."

An Unsuccessful Ramble Through Terezin

By Petr Ginz

Hells, bells, it's already half past eleven, we have to start printing soon, and I haven't got my "Rambles" column yet, I said to myself. Where could I go to get an article of about ten inches out of it?

Just then the nurse came out of the sick bay asking for five people to go and fetch the Schonkost (special diet). She had four on the detail already and needed a fifth - quickly. So- what about you? And of course, I submitted to my fate and went (modeling my behavior on the great Leos Demmer). It was better than getting typhoid, and perhaps I might even get a column out of it.

When the nurse had gathered us all together, she brought some containers and said in a deadly serious voice: This container is for the special diet, and this is for the Icterkost.* You put the soup into this one, the mashed potatoes into this one, and the sugar beets into this. Then she went off to get the mess tins. We thought if we could sample a little from each of the dishes we might eat our fill. Kotouc** even suggested we establish a Dipico (dietary pinching company).

At last we set out. The journey was uneventful and we reached the Hamburg barracks, where the dietary kitchen is now situated, without mishap. Recalling my newspaper duties, I tried to get some sort of interview going.

- How many people does this kitchen serve?
- Why do you ask?
- If you want to know, I'm the editor of a magazine called Vedem.
- That's a good one - an editor - ho, ho, ho, Well, if you must know, about 450. Just look at him - an editor indeed, ho, ho, ho.

That kind of conversation was certainly not to my taste and so I took the container of mashed potatoes and left. We fell in and started back. Oh, what pen could describe our sufferings on this arduous pilgrimage! The wind drove sand into our faces, soup spilled from the buckets over our clothes and into our shoes, while the nurse, who wasn't carrying anything, quickly led the way. Kalisek was pleased. His feet were warm, he said, because hot soup was slushing about in his shoes. Metzl said genially that no one would notice we'd spilled any soup. The wind was blowing sand into it anyway, so it came to the same thing. Kominas complained about his hernia and Kotouc stoically bore his fate - a pot of gravy, part of which had spilled over his trousers. When we came to the end of our journey, we were exhausted both physically and mentally. We dropped our containers, turned around, and marched home. On the way a boy asked us what the people with special diet were getting for lunch.

- Sprinkled mashed potatoes, we answered.
- Sprinkled? Said the boy, astonished.
- Yes, we answered, sprinkled with sand

* A diet for those with jaundice (from the Latin - icterus).
** Kurt Kotouc.

Memories of Prague

By Petr Ginz

How long since I last saw
The sun sink low behind Petrin Hill?
With tearful eyes I gazed at you, Prague,
Enveloped in your evening shadows.
How long since I last heard the pleasant rush of water
Over the weir in the Vltava river?
I have long since forgotten the bustling life on Wenceslas Square.
Those unknown corners in the Old Town,
Those shady nooks and sleepy canals,
How are they? They cannot be grieving for me
As I do for them. Almost a year has passed.
For almost a year I have huddled in this awful hole.
A few poor streets replace your priceless beauty.

Like a beast I am, imprisoned in a tiny cage.
Prague, you fairy tale in stone, how well I remember!

The Madman

By Petr Ginz

I walk the streets alone and alone
Pondering the evil in the world.
And thoughts about it fill my mind,
As I walk the dark streets
Alone and alone.
I remember. Long, long ago,
A madman wished to change the world,
Turn it upside down and inside out,
Fill people and youth with one ideal:
Take nothing on trust, let nothing stand,
Fight for every inch of land.
If something is down, then lift it up,
If others stay silent, you must speak up.
And so this madman years ago
Tried turning the world upside down
And walked his cat instead of his dog.

Petr was editor-in chief of Vedem magazine. He perished in Auschwitz.

The Forgotten

By Zdenek Ornest

Your pale remembrance compels me to be calm,
That once again I may recall my love,
Perhaps I'll smile again when we embrace
You are my ally, and my best of friends.

Sweet remembrance, tell me a fairy tale
Of my beloved that now is lost to me.
Tell me the story of the Golden Glitter,
And tell the swallow to come back to me.

Fly after her and whisper it in her ear.
Does she remember me, even for a moment?
Is she well, and even more I'd know -
Am I still her one and only love?

Come quickly back to me, don't lose your way,
I would recall other memories from the past.
Beautiful you were, but I fear that you're gone.
Goodbye my love. I loved you once so well.

The Thaw

By Zdenek Ornest

Silently, lightly, slowly it drifts down
Onto the black and bleeding earth,
From somewhere up high, steadily descending
Whirling in the air on a tender breeze.

Covering all and glittering strangely,
As if to envelop this aged rot
And as in a dream, suddenly everything
Becomes once again what it once used to be.

Hidden is the filth that blankets the world
Hidden the darkness that blinds us all
Hidden the hunger that makes us retch,
Hidden the pain that breaks our backs.

Just for a while we breathe again freely
Drugged by the glitter, by the world all in white
I look out the window, the steady snow falling
And suddenly everything's water again.

Zdenek dedicated *The Forgotten* to Ruth, a girl who was deported to Poland immediately after he arrived Terezin.

Zdenek survived the war, and was instrumental in the publication of *Vedem* in 1994.

For Children

By Hanus Hachenberg

We are all children, little ones,
Playing with a colored ball.
We cry easily with ruddy cheeks
And then, with glowing faces
We look at a silvery world,

At green hillsides,
At life. We look ahead.

We are soft deer,
Complaining to crows
We think that we live
But merely accept blows.
We are all children,
Playing with the globe,
Water sprites
Pursing our lips
To receive our mother's milk
Peace,
Life.

We are all people,
That is, we are matter.
The millwheel of time turns
Our feathers are drying, drying.
We scratch away in the night
Over our blouses
That take away our eyes
And in the day we are only in darkness.
We are all people
Gambling for the globe,
And the globe turns in blood
And turns and turns
And we reach out
For the small lights in the night
We children, children
Of a great revolution
We want to learn
So that from the earth we might
Freely drink
Live
Triumph.

Questions and Answers

By Hanus Hachenberg

What good to mankind is the beauty of science?
What good is the beauty of pretty girls?
What good is a world when there are no rights?
What good is the sun when there is no day?
What good is God? Is he only to punish?
Or to make life better for mankind?

Or are we beasts, vainly to suffer
And rot beneath the yoke of our feelings?

What good is life, when the living suffer?
Why is my world surrounded by walls?
Know son, this is here for a reason:
To make you fight and conquer all!

Hanus perished in Auschwitz