

Conference Notes

CAIRO, Egypt.—Madame Chiang, fragile and lovely as a lotus blossom, shopped for silk stockings, visited mosques and Saladin's Citadel and had her hair done. Roosevelt and Churchill went to the Pyramids and listened to a half-hour condensation of their aeonic history by the No. 1 Dragoman, Haji Ali Robeishi, who declined a large Rooseveltian tip and made a fortune selling exclusive interviews to seventy war correspondents and will have all the Freedom of Want a man could wish for.

The Generalissimo wasn't impressed by the Pyramids, which he saw with Madame. The Great Wall of China, he said, gets less publicity but is a better job. The hinx, however, got him. "He emanates majesty," said Chiang. "He is a real god." Churchill, described by Roosevelt as the writer of the group, wrote the communiqué. It was edited by the President, who changed the phrase "territories Japan has taken from China" to "territories Japan has stolen."

Madame Chiang, who witnessed the signatures, clapped hands and blurted happily, "That's great!" Then everybody posed for pictures. The original of what came known as the China Communiqué was presented to Chiang as a souvenir.

The conferees met behind barbed-wire barricades, minefields, anti-aircraft batteries, cordons of troops and secret police. Even more formidable was the protective crier of censorship.

The subsequent meetings with Premier Joseph Stalin in Teheran and with Turkish President Ismet Inonu, were covered

by the correspondents by proxy—by two British civil servants and two American newspapermen employed by the Office of War Information. They did as well as could have been expected.

The plans—as made long before they started remodeling Mena House from a comfortable hotel into an office building and wiring it with 400 miles of cable connections with 47 villas where the bigger pots were housed with their staffs in the vicinity—didn't include Stalin's presence in Cairo. Arrangements were being made for the Mahomets of Anglo-American democracy to come to the mountain of vietism in Teheran.

Curtain to Act One

When, after five days of political and literary talking, planning, lunching, winning and dining in Mena House, the scene shifted to Teheran for Act Two, the China Conference had lost its interest for reporters and perhaps for the world.

Stalin had propagandistically dominated the Cairo Conference *in absentia*.

Teheran, he dominated it in person. At all we learned directly in Cairo was that the Russian uniforms are of excellent material, that the Soviet Secret Police are efficient and omnipresent, and that all cried gats, including servants. We covered Act One with periscopes, and Act Two by remote control. Stalin returned to Moscow, and Roosevelt and Churchill came to Cairo to meet the Turkish delegation headed by Inonu for Act Three.

All three conferences were of acute importance, but in some ways, the most significant was the one involving Turkey. The very fact that Inonu, cleverest knife-walker in the diplomacy of neutrality, came to see Roosevelt and Churchill was a slap in the teeth for Hitler, who, or fellow, simply hasn't anyone with whom to hold conferences these days. He even holds cabinet meetings by lock-



U. S. SIGNAL CORPS. FROM ACME

ing himself in a room. Inonu's presence in Cairo strongly indicated that Turkey's balancing act was about over, and that the country would enter the war at 11:59½ P.M. before the fateful midnight hour of victory, to secure a reservation at the peace conference. It was apparent that Turkey had at last decided that continued neutrality might be unprofitable, and Inonu's arrival gave point to the statement of the Teheran Communiqué warning Germany of great offensives "from east, west and south."

Turkey's persecution of Jewish, Greek and Armenian minorities with a capital tax law designed to obliterate them economically, gave spice to the Anglo-American-Turkish meeting. The law is called "The Varlik." One correspondent wondered whether democrats Roosevelt and Churchill were going to "swallow Turkey hook, line and varlik." They didn't. Almost immediately, Ankara announced relaxations in the application of the law. But, despite indications that Turkey might at last yield air bases to the Allies for operations against the Balkans as a minimum concession in exchange for a place at the peace table, reporters had nothing in the way of proof.

Long before the conferences opened on November 9th, knowledge of the forthcoming meetings was general and found its way into a brief item in a Cairo paper and, within a few hours, was the property of the Axis radio. Cable facilities in Cairo were limited, and radio transmitters couldn't be used because the enemy would intercept correspondents' messages and employ the contents of dispatches for propaganda and military purposes. Yet, twenty-four hours before the appointed time, the news was broken in faraway neutral Lisbon by Reuter's, the

British Agency, that the China Conference had been held. It was picked up by London's BBC, and American stations and reporters heard themselves being scooped.

It happened, not once, but three times. Lisbon scooped everyone with news of the Cairo Conference. Moscow beat Cairo to the punch with the first news of the Teheran Conference, and Ankara scooped the Cairo reporters with the first word of the Roosevelt-Churchill meetings with Inonu. And then to add scoop to scoop, certain Turkish officials received members of the Axis press in Ankara and made statements on the conferences!

Then came a bright ray from a setting sun. Jan Christiaan Smuts, premier of the Union of South Africa, came to the Cairo press room and spoke candidly to seventy reporters for a full twenty minutes.

Vistas of a New World

"We are passing," he said, "through one of the great revolutions of history. The significance of this war is that it is the first step to that greater world which is coming. The war of arms will pass, and the greater battle of the human spirit remains before us. A higher level of human destiny lies before us, for the elements are gathering for something much bigger than ever we conceived in our human destiny.

"This war is just the beginning and I am glad our generation has proved true to the challenge, untouched by degeneracy. I look forward now with new faith to posterity. The Old Order is passing. The Old World to which I belong is dead. It lies buried in the sands of the Western Desert. We have been through a series of conferences, probably the most significant in a hundred years, and it is part of

Chiang Kai-Shek visits the pyramids. "The Great Wall of China," he said, "gets less publicity but is a better job." U. S. General Royce is at right

the pattern of a revolution which is the greatest since the French Revolution."

And so the Teheran conference between the head of democratic republic and the chiefs of government of a socialist state and a liberal constitutional monarchy was given a new meaning. It was clear now that the date for the execution of Hitlerism had been set and that, probably more important still, the groundwork had been laid in Teheran for the reconstruction of Europe according to a jointly drafted blueprint which will minimize, maybe for all time, the dangers of a re-birth of tyranny.

To some of us, Smuts—an offstage noise—was the hero of Cairo. Two years ago he thought Germany's attack on Russia was a great break for democracy because Communism might thus be destroyed. A year ago he was still worried about the Russian colossus. Today his faith in democracy is so profound, his understanding of the basic struggle of mankind for economic as well as political democracy so broad, he can at least comprehend that nations such as Britain, America and Russia can, in the words of Churchill, "go forward—together."

Smuts came to Cairo from Britain, where he had seen Britons working purposefully. A long visit there did him good. It's from England—and not the old England of class and privilege, but the new England which honors work—that the great contributions to the social and economic revolution through which the world is passing will come. FRANK GERVASI

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Shivaree Before Breakfast

Continued from page 22

his handkerchief and put it in with the stones so they wouldn't rattle and give them away. Old Alf's house sat to the left of the pike on a little rise at the end of a long, sad, cypress-framed lane. Not many people went up the lane now that Alf's old English mother was dead, except to use it as a short cut to the fishing pools in the Sandusky which lay behind the house.

When Josh and Labe turned into the lane they began to talk in whispers again. "We ain't too late," Labe said. "No smoke from the chimney yet. They're still in bed."

"No credit to thee, we ain't," Josh whispered back.

"I'll show thee the window where I heard the talk coming from."

They tiptoed around the old house. "There it is," Labe whispered, pointing to a window at the back of the house. They pressed themselves along the edge of the house until they stood under the window.

Labe's face was sparkling. Cautiously he got Josh's handkerchief out from around the pebbles. "Thee ready?" he asked, pail poised for action.

"Sh—" Josh said, pinching his arm. "Sh— Let's listen to them talk first." They stood there listening, hearing only their own heartbeats.

Then they heard Old Alf say something. Something they couldn't catch, something in a low, soft voice that sounded the way Labe had said—as if he might be talking to a baby. Finally his voice was louder and they could hear what he was saying.

"Molly darling," he said, "I'd ought to get up and light the fire for you. You're a sweet girl to say you'll do it for me—a sweet girl, with your long black hair. But you're plain spoiling me, Molly darling. That's what you are."

THERE was a pause. "They're kissing now," Josh said. Labe looked at Josh with respect.

Old Alf went on. "I always did say, Molly, there's no sight so pretty as a woman combing out her hair. And when her hair's as black and her arms as white as yours, Molly, it's a pure feast for the eyes. A pure feast."

The old fellow sighed contentedly. "Flannel cakes for breakfast did you say? Flannel cakes and treacle and tea strong enough for a mouse to trot over. That's my girl, Molly. That's the breakfast to get."

"I can't hear her talk," Labe complained.

"Maybe she's dumb," Josh whispered. "Maybe that's the reason he's keeping her a secret."

They heard the corn-husk mattress rustle, the old man's bare feet hit the floor boards. "I'll be downstairs, Molly," he called, "before the first cake's on."

"Now," Josh whispered, "now," and he pulled the wooden bow across his horse fiddle, so it sounded like a cat with its tail caught in a door. Labe shook his lard pail so hard and fast every inch of space was packed with sound waves. He hopped up and down while he shook it, like an Indian brave. This was what they'd planned and waited for and here they were doing it. Pretty soon Old Alf would bring his wife to the window, and make a little speech, and maybe give them some candy.

But Old Alf didn't bring his wife. He came to the window alone, his nightcap still tied under his sharp brown chin, his cotton nightshirt hanging from his bony shoulders. He peered out as if he didn't know what his eyes might light on. When he saw the boys under his window he said with more wonderment than anger, "What's the meaning of this racket? This time of day? Under my window? You

Millhouse boys taken leave of your senses?"

Labe spoke up. Shivareeing was a polite and thoughtful thing to do. It was a disgrace if you got married and no one shivaree-ed you. So Labe felt proud and honorable about the enterprise: "We was shivareeing thee and thy new wife," he said. "Thee and Molly," he explained as Old Alf continued to stare at them.

"What's that?" the old man said, and he had the same look in his eyes Labe had seen in the eyes of a cottontail he had run into a fence corner. For the first time Labe felt a little uncertain about what he was doing.

Josh said, "It's a shivaree for thee and Molly. We found out thy secret and got ahead of everybody else. We heard thee talking to her, and knowed thee was married."

"You heard me talking to her?" Alf stood there at the window for a long time looking at them. Then he said, "Go round



"If you ever get to Turnip Corners, Tennessee, you won't ever mention this to a Miss Liza Hanks, will you, Miss Dietrich?"

COLLIER'S

GREGORY D'ALESSIO

to the back and come in, boys. Door's unlocked. I'll be right down."

The old man was downstairs by the time Josh and Labe opened the kitchen door. "Come in and sit, boys," he said, but the boys felt better standing. He had taken off his nightcap and pulled a pair of pants on over his nightshirt but his feet were still bare. Old Alf kept pinching his lower lip together, and his sad brown eyes still had the rabbit-in-the-fence-corner look.

"Boys," he said, finally, "I ain't married." He went over to the bucket where he kept his corncobs soaking in coal oil, took a half dozen and put them in the cookstove.

"But we heard thee, talking," Labe said. "Talking to Molly darling," he added.

Old Alf got his fire going before he said any more. Then he settled himself in a rocking chair and put one bare foot on top of the other.

"How old're you boys?"

"Thirteen," said Josh.

"Nine," said Labe.

"'Bout eight of you Millhouses, ain't there?"

"Seven," Josh said. "Sarah died."

"Seven," the old man repeated. "You don't ever get lonesome over there, you?" He rocked back and forth and rubbed his bare feet together.

"Neither did I while Ma was alive. Didn't matter what it was, she'd always have something to say. I used to get little tired of it. Yes, I did," he told the staring boys. "Then, after she'd been dead a while didn't seem as if I could stand getting up and not a sound in the house. Not a sound," he said, and rubbed his feet slowly and sadly together.

Josh and Labe backed toward the door. "Then's when I started talking to Molly," he told them.

Josh asked in a dry voice he could seem to dampen by swallowing, "Who Molly? Is she," he asked, knowing the Bible, "thy concubine?"

"No," Old Alf said, and sighed. "N she ain't. She ain't nobody. She do exist. I just made her up. I talk to her just to hear my own voice. I just prete she's my wife."

Josh looked at Old Alf as if he were part of a nightmare he was dreaming. But Labe was smiling. Everything was clear to him now. "Thee got anyo else?" he asked.

It was the old man's turn to stare. "Eh he asked.

"Thee got anyone else thee talks to Besides Molly," he explained.

"No," Alf said shortly, "Just Molly. ain't no Mormon."

Labe knew about them. "Thee could have children," he said.

"No," Old Alf insisted. "There's just Molly. At my age children would ruin me."

Josh felt his heart getting smaller and smaller, and heavier and heavier. "The crazy," he said. "Thee's gone soft in the head." He had to believe that. Growing up meant not being worried or scared anymore; if it didn't, what was the use being alive—taking the trouble to grow up? you just got scareder and loner—like Old Alf? No, he was loony, crazy as bedbug.

OLD ALF was nodding his head and giving his lip a pull at each nod. "That's what folks'll be saying all right they get wind of this. Not though," he said "if you boys could manage to keep your hold your tongues. I ain't asking you to understand. But you boys know I ain't any more cracked than you are."

Labe was only an inch or two from Alf's bare toes now. Cracked? He'd never seen a grownup act so smart. He won't tell a living soul, Mr. Applegate he said.

Old Alf looked at Josh. Josh was facing against the kitchen door, his black eyes seemed to have flowed to points. "Well Joshua?" he asked.

"Thee's crazy," Josh said, "but thee needn't worry. I won't tell anyone." He turned and flashed out the door.

Labe watched him race 'round the corner of the house. "I guess I'd better go," he said. "Breakfast'll be over." But kind of hated to go. The sun was shining through the dusty windows, the teakettle was humming, a cat had crawled out from the wood box. Old Alf was rocking away his eyes on something Labe couldn't see.

"Goodby," Labe said, reluctantly.

Old Alf roused himself, and for a minute the old man and the boy looked at each other.

"Come again," Old Alf said, smiling. like to have somebody to talk to."

"So do I, Mr. Applegate. I'll be back," Labe answered, and loped off after Josh his lard pail rattling.

THE END

The Empress Was a Lady

Continued from page 15

er. Saints alive! Poor, poor scared little devil. We'll treat her kindly and see 'er rough."

He went on deck then and wandered solemnly about in the rain, feeling the mounds and stays, testing the steps of the companions, trying all doors, inspecting the hatches, and tapping anxiously on plankheads to make certain the planks were sound. The head rigger located him later with his head buried somewhere inside one of the patent winches.

"When you've finished chewing the bars," said the head rigger mildly, and waited while the captain scrambled to his feet and, somewhat ruffled in dignity, rushed himself off. "One of my men kicked this up," said the head rigger, handing over a dented bowler. "Now, about the ship. I'm scheduling everything so you can take her into the stream tomorrow afternoon. I was figuring on tying her onside the wharf again when she came out of dry dock, but the way the river's rising you'll be safer where you can tow her clear if you have to in a hurry. If a mishap comes down there's no telling."

"Aye," agreed the captain. "I'll be ready, mister." He punched the dents from his bowler and adjusted it squarely, feeling better. In fact, he felt almost cheerful as he went aft again, until he saw a man under a small shed on the wharf carefully painting the name Felicia Prue Wonkey on a new lifeboat, and he shuddered and cursed in his beard.

THEY handled the barkentine gingerly the next afternoon and started with her at the anchorage from where, after a few soft touches, she would head down the river for the sea and her trials. It was

still raining, and the wind was a series of erratic gusts that swung the light hull alarmingly against the restraining tugs. There was a lull to the estuary water and when a larger tug or powerboat roared past, the resultant wave made the ship quiver as much as the nervous Captain Wylie on the poop.

"I'll expect most anything," he announced to Mr. Barton who had thought it would please the old man if he came aboard for this occasion. "She's skittish as a dory on a ground swell. But I've Solway standing by the anchors forward and I've two fair men at the wheel in case anything busts loose. These blasted power boats..."

The words gurgled in his throat and he gripped the rail hard. A seagoing tug was heading past with a heavy lighter in tow and simultaneously a small freighter was coming up astern on the other side; and while they were both keeping well clear Captain Wylie saw the two washes would meet and strike him almost midships.

"Stand by!" he roared to Solway. "She'll be getting a lift!" His voice cracked then and he swore fearfully as the lift came, with a furious gust of wind to aid it. The Felicia Prue Wonkey buckled like a startled colt, sawed from port to starboard, snapped the line of the bow tug and swung out of control toward the nearest wharf. Sirens started. The tug bells jangled frenziedly. Men shouted. The wind rose to a triumphant scream in the rigging and taking the barkentine broadside on surged her gaily across the estuary, the stern tug helplessly carried along.

"Let go!" thundered Captain Wylie, his

bull voice shearing across all other sounds, but Solway was hopping about on the fo'c'slehead and waving his arms and shouting something unintelligible. The vital, agonizing seconds passed, and then with a giant rattle one cable went out from the hawsehole and the anchor bit bottom. The barkentine, in full career now, was brought up short as the cable tightened, and her stern swung smashing into the wharf with a glancing blow that carried away a dozen pilings. Someone thought to cast a line ashore then and a hawser was snubbed to the bollards. As if satisfied the Felicia Prue Wonkey shook herself in a last flurry and sedately settled down.

Captain Wylie ran an arm across his wet forehead and let out his breath with a rush. "The Empress all over again," he said shakily. "By damn! All over again."

Mr. Barton was leaning weakly on the rail. "Good Lord!" he said. "I thought she was going clear up Main Street."

"Her mammy would have," the captain stated. "No monkeyshines with her. A lady she was and she had her temper." "I think I'll go ashore," said Mr. Barton nervously. "This ship's too much for me."

Solway brushed past him and confronted the captain, his seamed face purple. "Jonah is right, Bottlenose! She ain't safe nowhere. Cranky as an ore boat butting the tide. I tell you..."

"Shut up!" roared Captain Wylie, coming to life. "If you'd got them anchors away when I yelled she'd have weathered it."

"Anchors be damned!" shouted Solway, shaking his fists. "That fancy patent winch jammed on me. There ain't anything aboard what works right!"

Captain Wylie rocked on his heels a bit and simmered down. "Well, maybe she needs humoring more'n I thought," he conceded. "But we'll get the kinks out of her. Like I said, a good slapping around in a nor'easter'll fix things."

"Only thing to fix her is a wrecking crew," snarled Solway. "I'm quitting, Bottlenose... I mean, Cap'n. It just ain't in the cards." He was still protesting as the captain steered him below and uncorked the Double-O Black Rum.

DURING the succeeding days, while sundry planking was being replaced and other things remedied, Captain Wylie prowled the ship in deep thought. He felt he understood much of the reason for all this unruly behavior, and he also felt there was something that could be done to remedy it. Just what, eluded him for the moment, though he had an uneasy feeling the solution was lurking just around in the corner of his mind. One day the head rigger found him crouched far down in the ship's bowels, probing here and there with a flashlight, like a hunter stalking his prey.

"What in the devil's got into you now?" demanded the astonished man.

Captain Wylie straightened and eyed him unabashed, rubbing his beard. "Rats," he said. "All this time since she left the ways an' she ain't got a rat aboard. It's unhealthy. She's a fine pile of plank and rope and oakum, but she ain't a ship yet, mister. That's what's the matter with her. No rats. It's a bad sign."

Ashore, Captain Wylie began to avoid his old haunts, and took to turning corners when he saw an old acquaintance approaching. He was a marked man. He was a joke. Only communion with Solway and the Double-O Black Rum could give him solace, and he was relieved when he learned the barkentine was ready for



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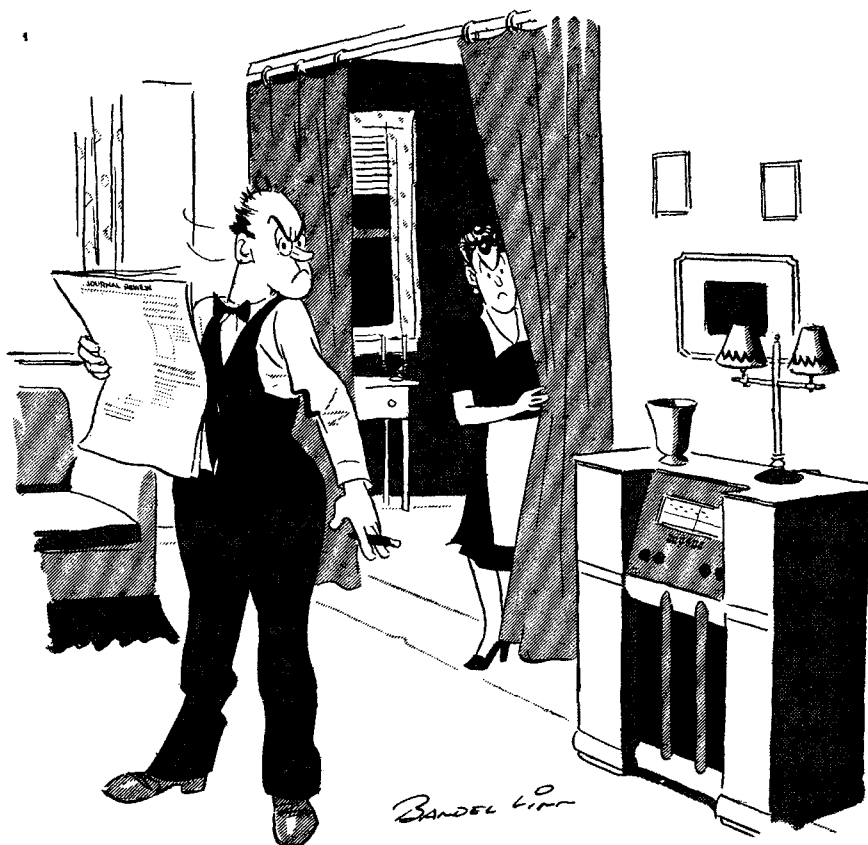
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NEWS

"... this action seemed to back up the statement of one Eastern labor leader who said: 'Our policy is not to win the war at any cost,' but 'to win the war without sacrificing too many of the rights we have at the present time.' One spokesman for the miners charged the government with failing to hold the line against inflation—while calling on them to do it. Another representative for the workers said the strike wasn't caused because of any dissatisfaction, but was called 'in sympathy' with a walkout of neighboring workers in a plant manufacturing synthetic yo-yos. The War Labor Board has asked the men to 'please go back to work.' John L. Lewis only smiled when questioned, but later added the strike was a wildcat with which he wasn't connected in any way..."

COLLIER'S

BANDEL LING



XXV

WHEN Baldur von Schirach entered Vienna in 1940 as *Gauleiter* and *Reichsstadthalter*, succeeding savage Joseph Buerckel, Austrians may have had some expectation that he would end the beatings, murders and pillage that made life in the enslaved country a thing of fear and horror. The new ruler was a poet of sorts and, as head of the German Youth Movement, had sung lyrically of love, happiness and beauty. More than that, he was the son of an American mother whose forebears had fought for freedom at Bunker Hill and Valley Forge. Even his name carried a certain assurance, for Baldur, son of Odin and Frigg, was the god of summer sunlight.

The disillusionment of the Austrians came quickly, for Schirach proceeded to match Buerckel in cruelty and blood lust. In his initial proclamation, he announced that his soul would not give him rest until he had driven every Jew from the land and put a swastika in the place of every Cross of Christ. This pledge has been kept to the letter, for 185,000 Jews have been liquidated, and such priests and pastors as still remain at large walk in dread. An ardent disciple of Alfred Rosenberg, Schirach means to force the worship of the old Norse gods on his unhappy subjects.

Many of the 185,000 Jews were beaten to death, but the larger part went to Poland in locked cars without food or water. In winter they froze, in summer they suffocated and, as a result, few were left alive at the end of the nightmare journey. After the ghettos had been cleaned out, Schirach devised an ingenious method for picking up all those who had escaped the first dragnet.

In the cities, streets were blocked off without warning, and Storm Troopers personally examined each man and woman. Aryans were released, but Jews were thrown into trucks and hustled off to the station without being given opportunity to collect personal belongings or to notify their families. As relatives came out of hiding to hunt for missing loved ones, these, too, were arrested and deported.

Every Catholic school and convent in Austria was closed, and, at last count, eighteen priests had been assassinated, and 479 were known to be in jails or concentration camps. The liquidation of the College of the Holy Virgin, in particular, stirred all Vienna to a madness of rage that had to be put down by gunfire. After

the nuns had been whipped out into the street, thirty girl students were taken to Gestapo headquarters on the charge of underground activities. Four have never been heard of from that day to this, and the other twenty-six, finally released—sobbing, hysterical, ravished—had no dearer hope than death.

Atrocity piled upon atrocity. Not only was Josef Fitzhum, Buerckel's infamous chief of police, continued in office, but under Schirach's approving eye the beast devised new bestialities. As an example, Josef Beyer, an Austrian official in Oberwarth, Burgenland, was slowly cut to pieces while still alive. Fitzhum's barbarities shocked even hardened Nazis, but Baldur the Beautiful found them good.

A peculiarly nasty piece of work, this *Reichsstadthalter* of Austria. Born in 1907 in Weimar, he was an early convert to the Nazi faith and at seventeen he headed a Hitler movement in the city schools. Lehman was his father's name, but doubtless disliking the sound of it, Baldur calmly changed to von Schirach. The rightful owners of the latter name, properly outraged, brought suit and won a judgment, but little good it did them. By that time the Nazis were strong enough to have it set aside, and later the judge himself was sent to a concentration camp.

In 1928, Baldur rose to be director of Hitler Youth in all the public schools, and in 1933, when Hitler became Chancellor, he was made Youth Leader for the whole of Germany. Rosenberg, Goebbels and Ley cannot escape responsibility for the systematic debauchment of German boys and girls, but Schirach was the spearhead of the drive against chastity, continence and every Christian teaching. Day in and day out he bawled the divinity of the sex impulse, demanding the release of every inhibition.

Like other prominent Nazis, Schirach's sex urges are more than a little errant, and in 1940 his adventures in pederasty became an open scandal.

As he was too valuable to the Party to be jailed or shot, Hitler wiggled out of the dilemma by transferring Buerckel to Lorraine and giving the vacated place to Baldur the Beautiful. An intensely Catholic people the Austrians but, in the hour of liberation, nothing is more certain than that they can be counted on to "go pagan," until von Schirach's case has been attended to. . . . G. C.

CARICATURE BY SAM BERMAN

the stream again. This time too, if all went well, she would not anchor but tow clear out of the estuary, down the river and to the sea for her belated trials.

Now once again the tugs were jockeying into position. Once again things looked auspicious and Captain Wylie felt almost cheerful, or did until he saw young Mr. Barton coming aboard with what seemed to be a large brown bear sheltering under his umbrella, but which turned out to be Mrs. Wonkey in an ample fur coat.

Mrs. Wonkey panted up the poop companion and planted herself securely against the rail before unsnapping her pince-nez and surveying the ship. She seemed delighted though breathless.

"How clean and neat," she exclaimed. "So much different from the last time I saw her. You must have dinner with me, Captain, when you come back. I am most anxious to hear the results of the trials."

Captain Wylie swallowed and pushed back his bowler, "Aye, ma'am," he said heavily. "And now if you'll stand aside maybe I can see about us casting off."

He groaned as he faced forward and lifted a hand to Solway. As anyone knew a woman was bad luck on shipboard, and this woman of all others would send a shudder through the barkentine from keelson to truck. He filled his lungs and roared an order in such heartfelt sailor language Mrs. Wonkey's eyes started from her head and a blush came from the confines of her fur collar and flooded upward. He gave vent to another blast and Mrs. Wonkey groped weakly for Mr. Barton's arm and was hurriedly led below.

"River's starting to bring things down," observed the head rigger, on board for a final checkup. He joined Captain Wylie and jerked his pipestem at the turbid waters of the estuary. "I figured this wet spell'd do it. You'll be lucky to get out before the freshet catches you."

"I ain't worrying about the freshet," the captain growled. "Just let me get clear in the river an' I'll take what comes." He eyed the miscellaneous flood litter about him and scowled.

"She's working a bit uneasy," said the head rigger. "I don't like it." He tested the wind gusts with his cheek and gnawed his lip. "There's a sort of mud bar to port," he advised, "and the flood may have changed it some. Better have the lead tug take up the slack again."

"I know the old bar," said the captain sourly, "and I guess I know my business." But he cupped his hands and yelled and the lead tug tooted back, indignant at the interference in her business. But when she put her weight on the towline to bring the barkentine to the channel center the ship hung back and seemed to fight her. Captain Wylie turned and glared at the helmsmen.

"Can't you keep her steady?" he demanded. "Give her hard astarboard!" He paused as he saw the helmsmen's faces. "What's the matter?" They were turning the wheel back and forth in panic and one man spluttered, "She won't answer, sir. Must be jammed below."

CAPTAIN WYLIE broke into a cold sweat and lunged forward and the lead tug began tooting alarmingly, answered by the stern tug, while the Felicia Prue Wonkey seemed to grit her teeth and brace herself for a tantrum again. Captain Wylie could feel it coming.

Then for a moment it seemed the tugs had her controlled as she started to swing wide to a crosscurrent, but at the very borderline instant a sprawling tangle of old flood-borne line came drifting across the lead tug's stern and was sucked diabolically under into the propeller. The tug captain reversed frantically to clear himself before damage was done, but backing up too far on his own towline involved the bight of that too in the smother.

The Felicia Prue Wonkey then reared went to town. She lurched gaily bumping aside sundry drifting logs and debris, almost swamped a pol launch that got in her way, and blithely ignoring the anchors Solway hurriedly went, hauled them with her and buried the cutwater firmly and deeply into the mud bar to one side of the channel. The much accomplished she gave a sigh and settled down with a slight list to port, the star-stabbing jibboom pointing ironically at the open river scarce two cables' length away.

Captain Wylie leaned on the poop to rail and began to swell, but somehow the purple words failed to come. He let out his breath and his shoulders sagged. That was the end. He felt all the fight ooze out of him and for the first time was aware of the weight of his years.

"All right," he muttered wearily. "All right. You just don't want to go. Who's to blame you. Poor little girl."

THE head rigger patted his arm with sympathy and wisely said nothing, as Captain Wylie went slowly down to the main cabin, groping dazedly for each step with his sea boots. Mrs. Wonkey was flitting a handkerchief and looking alarmed, uttering short cries, and Mr. Barton was pacing up and down and giving vent to profanity under his breath. "What's wrong with this damned ship," he exploded when he saw the captain. "Is this all some sort of a joke? Or is it sabotage?"

"Sabotage? Joke?" said Captain Wylie. He fumbled in the locker for the Double-O Black Rum. "Oh, aye. I suppose. He peered at Mrs. Wonkey and scowled. "You seem a mite distressed, ma'am. Could I get you a glass of port?"

"Heavens, no!" Mrs. Wonkey shuddered. "I never touch liquor, sir," she stated, horrified. "Never! As a matter of principle I even insisted upon christening this unfortunate ship with soda water instead of champagne. I would not contaminate myself. . . ." Captain Wylie dropped his glass and stared.

"Wait a bit!" he croaked. His eyes bulged with unbelief and he shook his head to clear his ears. "Did you say soda pop? Did you say you christened this ship with soda pop? . . . Soda . . . Well, darn my eyes!"

"Listen!" he thundered. He towered over Barton and Mrs. Wonkey, and, setting his bottle down, forcefully enumerated on his spread fingers. "Listen! You crawling sand lice! You launch a sideways, like she was some crab scuttling for cover. You make it on a Friday the 13th of the month. You christen her with a name like Felicia Prue Wonkey. And now," his voice sank to a whisper, "I learns you insulted her with soda pop. Soda pop! Saints alive! No wonder she's ashamed to face the sun. The Empress was a lady!"

His voice rose and shattered through the cabin. "Solway!"

Solway Joe's seamed face appeared anxiously at the scuttle and Captain Wylie flourished his arms. "Get a stage rig for'ard," he ordered. "Get the pain with a full bucket! I got a job to do!"

He groped in his locker for a heap of package which he tucked under his arm. He answered no questions but thrust the astonished Mr. Barton and Mrs. Wonkey aside he stamped ominously and posed up to the poop.

Brushing past the boss rigger, he started for'ard; the rigger stared for a moment then went after him. At the fore'she Captain Wylie was leaning over the side and inspecting the stage the carpenter had rigged according to Solway's orders.

"Now, where's that painter?" the captain demanded and Solway pushed forward a nervous little man carrying a brush and a large bucket. "Well, don't sta