



All at once he hated Bernie, hated his assurance. "Get out of here," he shouted

Fighting Words

DAVID SANDERSON was in the restaurant where he usually lunched, when he felt a bone-crushing clout on his back and heard a familiar voice bellow in his ear, "Dave, you old goat! What do you know!"

Bernie Martin loomed over David as he always had, broad and heavy-muscled, with the same superior smile on his face. David had not seen him since high school; but in a second the years slid away and he was back in the schoolyard on that unforgettable afternoon. They had fought over a girl—Bernie, the school's leading athlete, and David, who had difficulty crossing the street by himself. Everyone expected a slaughter, but suddenly, almost before the fight had begun, Bernie was flat on his back and David was standing over him, not even breathing hard.

At that point, a teacher had intervened and the fight was never resumed. David walked home with Ellen McMorran, and that evening he kissed her for the first time and told her boldly, summoning unexpected strength from the bright vision of his triumph, that she was now his girl.

The memory of that one fight had been enough to balance the accumulated shame of all the other times Bernie had bullied him. Even now, the sight of Bernie so obviously successful could not dim David's pleasure. Before he quite knew what he was doing, he had invited Bernie to dinner.

"Ellen and I are married, you know," he said, carelessly. "She'll be glad to see you."

"I'd be real pleased," Bernie said.

David gave him the address and Bernie promised to come right after a very important conference. It was not until he returned to his office that David wondered whether Ellen would mind . . .

"No one forced me to marry you," Ellen had said once, but David could never believe the marriage was anything but a wonderful mistake that would be rectified as soon as the proper authorities got wind of it.

So he was delighted when he phoned Ellen and she said she'd be very interested to see Bernie again. On the way home after work, he bought a bottle of imported wine and a dozen long-stemmed roses. But when he came into the house, Bernie was already there and all the vases were full of flowers that David did not even recognize.

"Cleaned up that meeting sooner than I'd thought," Bernie said, airily. He was sitting on the couch, next to Ellen, and they were both having a drink. Without any warning, David felt again the weakness of the knees he had always felt before Bernie; but then Ellen got up and kissed him, and thanked him for the flowers and the wine, and he remembered that she had chosen him, after all, because he had been the stronger.

He had a drink to catch up with them, and then another because he could not match Bernie's overpowering flow of conversation, and then a third because he wondered if it was altogether necessary for Ellen to look at Bernie the way she did. By that time dinner was ready, but David found himself making a mess of the roast and Bernie had to take it from him and do the carving. David's chest felt constricted, as though his confidence were being squeezed out of him, and he said, speaking before he had really meant to, "Say, you remember that fight we had in the schoolyard?"

Out of the corner of his eye he could see Ellen stiffen, but he was watching Bernie.

"Oh, yeah," Bernie said. "You were sore at me or something."

"Over Ellen," David said. "You were annoying her."

"No kidding?" Bernie turned to Ellen and smiled broadly. "Was I annoying you, baby?"

"You certainly were," David said. He could not wait any longer. "I knocked you down for it."

"You knocked me down?" Bernie said.

"It may be difficult for you to believe," David said, "but that's exactly what I did." He was beginning to feel better already.

Bernie chewed a piece of roast beef thoughtfully. Then his eyes lighted up. "I remember now. I tripped."

"What do you mean, tripped?" David said indignantly. "I hit you in the eye."

"That wouldn't have knocked me down," Bernie said. "Not from you. I remember just the way it happened. I tripped over something."

"You tripped over nothing," David said, his voice rising. "There was nothing for you to trip over. I hit you in the eye and you went down."

"David," Ellen said.

"You got it wrong," Bernie said pleasantly. "You

couldn't have knocked me down with a baseball bat. I must have tripped over somebody's foot."

David stood up, shaking a little. "I didn't want to bring my wife into this," he said, as stiffly as he could, "since she was the cause of our quarrel. But if you insist—" He turned to Ellen. "You were there. Tell him what really happened."

"Is it so important?" Ellen asked.

"What kind of a question is that?" David said. "Go on, tell him."

"I'll tell you," Ellen said gently. "He did trip, David. I know he did."

For a moment there was only the sound of Bernie cutting another piece of roast beef. Nothing had changed in the room, but to David it seemed suddenly different.

"See that, kiddo?" Bernie said agreeably.

"Don't talk with your mouth full," David said.

HE TURNED and walked blindly into the living room. All he could think of was the walk home with Ellen after the fight and the boasting he had done. He sank into a chair and put his head in his hands.

"We'll have coffee in here," Ellen said. She came into the room with Bernie, and David looked up and saw how well they went together, what a handsome couple they made.

"What I don't understand," Bernie said, "is why you're so excited about all this. So we had a fight when we were kids. So what?"

You wouldn't understand if I told you, David thought. You never knew what it meant to be awkward and afraid. And then to have a memory of one time when you fought and won, and felt sure of yourself for the first time—to build your life on the memory of a single victory, and then discover it was a phony all the time.

All at once, David hated Bernie as he always had, hated his assurance and his strength and his easy way with Ellen.

"Get out of here!" David shouted. "Get out of my house!"

"David," Ellen said, her voice terribly calm. "You're acting like a child. If Bernie goes—"

"You'll go with him?" David said. "Is that it? Well, go, the two of you." He walked unsteadily up to Bernie and pushed him in the chest. "Maybe you tripped before," he said, "but if I hit you this time, you'll really go down."

"Now, Dave," Bernie said.

And then David reached back and brought his arm around and hit Bernie as hard as he could on the point of the chin. Bernie stood where he was and blinked his eyes slightly. David cursed and swung again.

"Excuse me, Ellen," Bernie said, and hit David in the eye. David's head went back and his feet went up, and for a frantic second there was no part of him on the floor at all. Then all parts of him were on the floor, and the room revolved around him in bright colors. . . .

When he opened his good eye, Bernie was gone and Ellen sat on the couch, looking at him dispassionately. He struggled to a sitting position and waited until the room stopped whirling.

Then he asked thickly, "Where is he?"

"I sent him home," Ellen said.

"Why didn't you go with him?"

"Because I didn't want to." She looked at him without pity. "You give me a pain. I thought it might do some good if Bernie hit you, but I guess it didn't."

"Maybe it did," David said. He got painfully to his feet. "I've been living in a dream. Bernie knocked it out of me."

"Are you sure?" David nodded, and Ellen sighed softly. "You didn't need it, you know." She stood up and crossed to the coffee table and began to pour. "It sure took you a long time to get over it."

"Seventeen years," David said.

"If I'd known what I was starting, I don't think I would have done it."

"Done what?"

"But in that case, you never would have come near me. I would have had to find some other way. And you were such a ninny."

"Done what?" David asked again. "What did you do?"

Ellen put down the coffeepot and looked at him tenderly. "Why, David, I tripped Bernie Martin that afternoon," she confessed. "What do you think I did?"

THE END



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The Minister, the Rabbi and Their House of God

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27

"How about the church itself? Would you have any objection to using that?"

Rabbi Fleg was incredulous. Since the day it had been built 104 years ago the church had never sheltered any but a Presbyterian congregation.

"I'm only speaking for myself," said Dr. Stitt. "Permission must come from my board of elders. But if you're interested, I'll ask them."

Rabbi Fleg shook his hand impulsively. "I'd be very glad to use your sanctuary," he said. "But I have my doubts about my congregation."

"I'm not so sure of mine, either," confessed the minister.

It was decided that Dr. Stitt broach the subject to his parishioners first. He called a meeting not only of the elders, but the entire church membership.

Very Little Anti-Semitism

"There was a very mixed reaction," he recalls. "One or two people mouthed the usual anti-Semitic nonsense. Several others thought it would be a great opportunity for making converts. But the great majority debated it honestly with their conscience and faith."

It finally simmered down to one point: Could the Jews, if they were permitted to worship in the church on Fridays, accept the presence of the cross that stood on the Communion table?

Definitely not, Dr. Stitt told them. The Jews would have to be permitted to substitute their own holy symbols, the ark of the covenant and the seven-branched candelabras.

"On Fridays," said Dr. Stitt, "our cross would have to be moved out to the vestry room."

This precipitated a new debate that raged for hours. Finally, a little old woman, who had not uttered a word all evening, spoke up from the rear of the room. "To move the cross," she said, "would be the Christian thing to do. That would not violate its message. That would fulfill it. For in moving the cross we would be extending the hand of fellowship to fellow men."

No theologian, says Dr. Stitt, could have put it so simply. Or effectively. The Presbyterians voted to invite the Jews to use the church. But for not more than six months.

When Rabbi Fleg conveyed the invitation to his flock it touched off fevered discussion. The minority, as often happens, were the most vocal. Some feared that they were being patronized, and others that they were being ridiculed. And a few were frankly prejudiced. They felt that to worship in a church would be an affront to God.

"The majority were inclined to accept, but the minority would not relent," recounts Rabbi Fleg. "They searched their souls and found an endless gift of tongues."

In desperation Rabbi Fleg took the rostrum. He said to his congregation, "We impose conditions on the church. They impose none on us. As liberal Jews we should recognize their liberalism. Church or synagogue—wherever a man worships, that becomes his House of God."

The rabbi's eloquence triumphed. But not completely. Six members of the congregation resigned on the spot.

During the next two months the Christians and Jews kept politely aloof. However, the two ministers shared adjoining offices in the Village House. From their daily association mutual respect grew to firm friendship. And an even firmer conviction that their paths led toward the same goal.

They had come together by a circuitous route. Son of a telephone company employee, Jesse W. Stitt was born forty-six years ago in New Brighton, Pennsylvania.

His family later moved to Detroit, where he quit high school at seventeen to set up a printing shop. Partner in the venture was hazel-eyed Janet Hopkins, his Scottish sweetheart.

"She was devout, and I was devoted," he recalls. "And in my devotion to Janet I also fell in love with the church."

He determined to become a minister; Janet encouraged him. "But first you need a college education," she said. "And so do I."

The problem of tuition was settled by Dr. Wiley L. Hurie, president of the College of the Ozarks, at Clarksville, Arkansas. Dr. Hurie, who was visiting Detroit, offered them a scholarship on condition that they do the school printing. They married and left for Arkansas. Four years later they were graduated with honors—Mrs. Stitt as the valedictorian, her husband salutatorian. The couple then came to New York, where Dr. Stitt received his divinity degree from Union Theological Seminary in 1933.

Serving as a guest preacher at several churches, Dr. Stitt's liberalism drew instant attention. And soon thereafter he received a call to become permanent minister of Brooklyn's Marcy Avenue Baptist Church. As a Presbyterian, Dr. Stitt was slightly astonished by the Baptist invitation.

So, although he strongly favors the union of all Protestant sects, he told them bluntly, "If you really want me as minister, I'd be glad to serve. But if you want me only as a convert, the answer is no. I was baptized as an infant. And I don't feel the need of further immersion. Not even for the sake of the job."

They accepted him on these terms. "They had never thought of any other," says Dr. Stitt. And for the next six years he occupied the pulpit. During this time he campaigned militantly for his flock to come to the aid of Negro Baptists in the neighborhood. The Negroes had no church of their own and no Sunday school.

"I was very successful," said Dr. Stitt. "My parishioners sold the church to a Negro congregation, and I was out of a job."

A Church with Few Members

But not for long. The Village Presbyterian Church engaged him as minister early in 1939. "They had a congregation of only 35 persons," says Dr. Stitt, "and they hoped I could do something."

He did—by instituting a broad program of nondenominational community service. It attracted hundreds, adults as well as children. His congregation grew also. And with it Dr. Stitt's renown as a liberal clergyman.

It was this reputation that caused Rabbi Fleg to visit him in desperation that gray December day.

"I suppose it was also a sort of challenge," Rabbi Fleg recalls.

Challenge has been a driving force in the life of the thirty-six-year-old Jewish clergyman. A native of St. Louis, he worked his way through the University of Missouri. Then, with no preliminary training, he entered Hebrew Union College, at Cincinnati. To obtain a rabbinical degree under this handicap was considered almost impossible. He was graduated in 1943.

His first congregation was in Lexington, Kentucky. Its demands were not strenuous enough for the dynamic rabbi. So he also served as civilian chaplain at the Army's Darnall General Hospital, Danville, Kentucky, as well as at 12 other military and naval installations. In addition, he was radio news commentator for station WLAP.

Then Rabbi Fleg turned to religious journalism. Coming North, he published the Long Island Israel Light, on Long Island.

"I wanted to spread the message of liberal Judaism to a wider audience," he re-

Collier's for February 17, 1951

counts. "I spread the message too thick and my finances too thin. The paper failed."

He went back to the pulpit. And he was heading a temple in Hempstead, Long Island, when he received a call from his nominal superior, Rabbi Daniel L. Davis, head of the New York region of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. Rabbi Davis asked Rabbi Fleg to organize a reform Jewish congregation in New York's Washington Square-Greenwich Village area. There had never been such a group in the area's history.

"I couldn't resist the challenge," says the rabbi.

That was in July, 1948. Starting with a nucleus of 10 persons, who worshiped in one another's homes, Rabbi Fleg's congregation grew rapidly. Within a month, there were 25, then 50 members. The group engaged quarters in a hotel for Friday-night services. By December they had increased to 75. The hotel raised its rates. The Jews had to leave.

Unwanted elsewhere, too poor to build a temple, their plight appeared hopeless until the Presbyterians offered them temporary shelter in the church.

Sharing nearby offices, the rabbi and Dr. Stitt found they had much in common. But not so their respective flocks. They regarded their association as only a stopgap. And they acted accordingly: polite, but withdrawn, and mutually disinterested.

Thus it continued for two months. And then the Jews made the first move in what became an unprecedented relationship. They invited the Presbyterians to join them in a bazaar. The church elders said they would be delighted. But there wasn't time enough. They couldn't bring their share of the merchandise to be sold.

"Even if you bring nothing," said the Jews, "the profits are still half yours."

The Presbyterians accepted. And for the first time their elders met with the Jewish board of trustees.

"It was like the first meeting of in-laws before a wedding," recalls Dr. Stitt. "The elders sat on one side, the trustees on the other. Everyone waited for everyone else to do the talking."

Since each side refused to be outwaited, they decided to leave all arrangements to 15 committees. Each committee was composed of Christians and Jews.

The committees met regularly for the next three months, separately and together.

They visited one another's homes, met with one another's friends—and became friends. In their common association they found common respect. And, in the words of Rabbi Fleg, "They also found that tolerance can be an achievement as well as a preachment."

The Jews had planned a six-day bazaar, with wheels of chance as a main attraction. They threw the wheels out when they learned that the presbytery frowns upon them as gambling devices. In further deference to the Christians, the Jews ruled out Sunday as a bazaar day. The Christians, for their part, eliminated Friday out of respect for the Jews.

"Because of all this," says Dr. Stitt, "the bazaar lost a good deal of money. But our people found each other."

The First Interfaith Service

Two months later, on May 14, 1949, the congregations held their first interfaith service. The occasion was the dedication by the Jews of a pulpit Bible to the memory of the late President Roosevelt. Actually it was a regular Jewish Friday-night service. Dr. Stitt agreed to participate as a tribute to the Roosevelt ideal of tolerance. And Rabbi Fleg had also invited the Presbyterians, hoping at most for a handful. To his delight almost the whole Christian congregation appeared.

Dressed in his pulpit gown, Dr. Stitt joined the rabbi in reading the Sabbath prayer. Then, while everyone listened in astonishment, including Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, he pronounced the traditional blessings from the Torah in perfect Hebrew.

The service was a tremendous success. Congratulations poured in from all quarters, ecclesiastic as well as lay. When the Jews' six-month probation expired in June there was no hesitation. The Presbyterians insisted they remain at the church.

As the interfaith program grew, so grew the enthusiasm of the minister and the rabbi. "And in our zeal we almost wrecked it," says Dr. Stitt.

The crisis arose from the joint worship on Armistice Day, 1949. Heretofore religious interfaith had merely meant one group attending the other's services, with only the host's symbols on display.

This day the symbols of both faiths were used. The ark of the covenant, bearing the star of David, was opened and lighted behind the pulpit. On the Communion table



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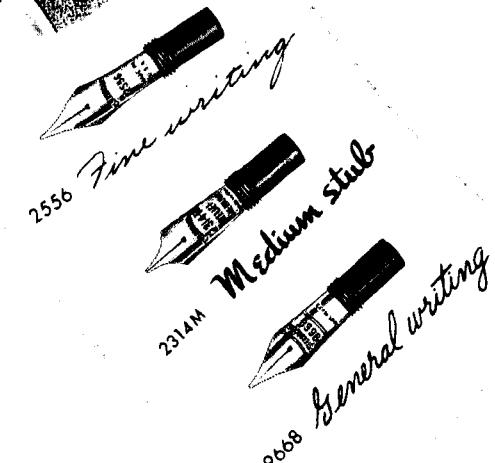
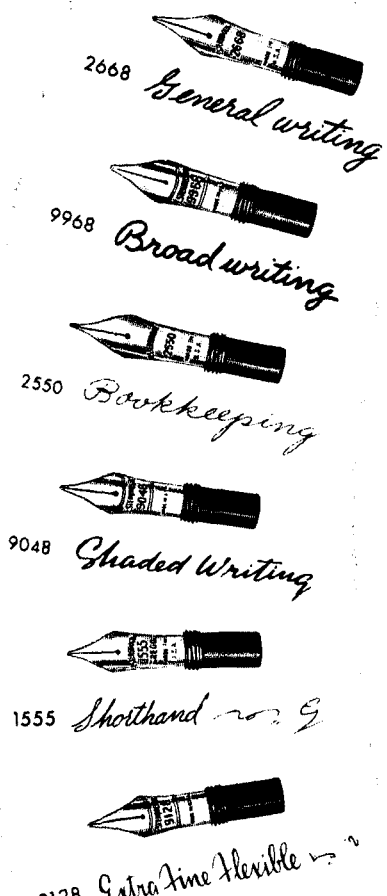
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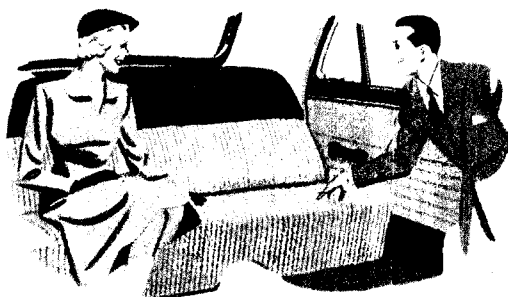


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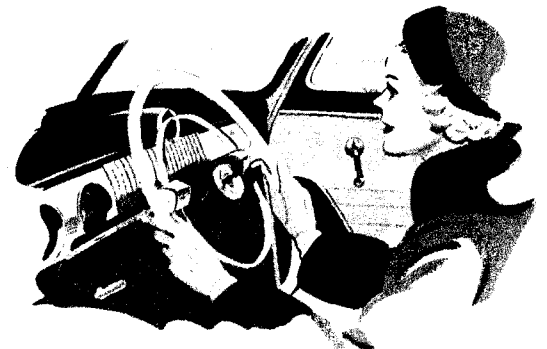
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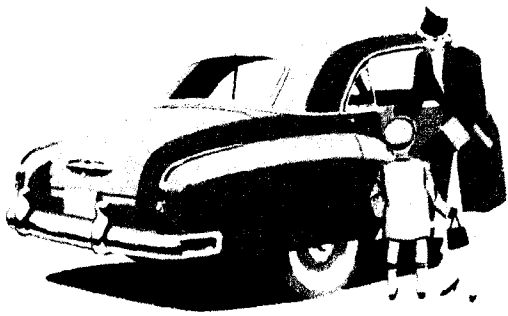
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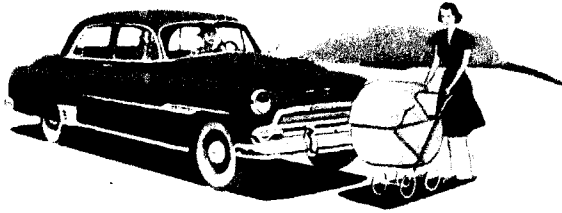
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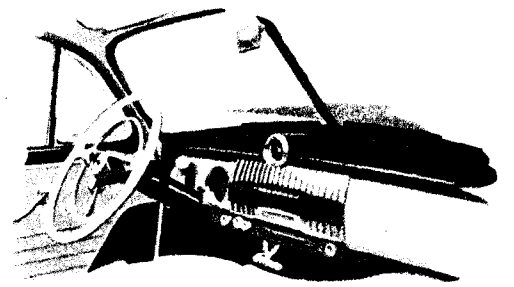
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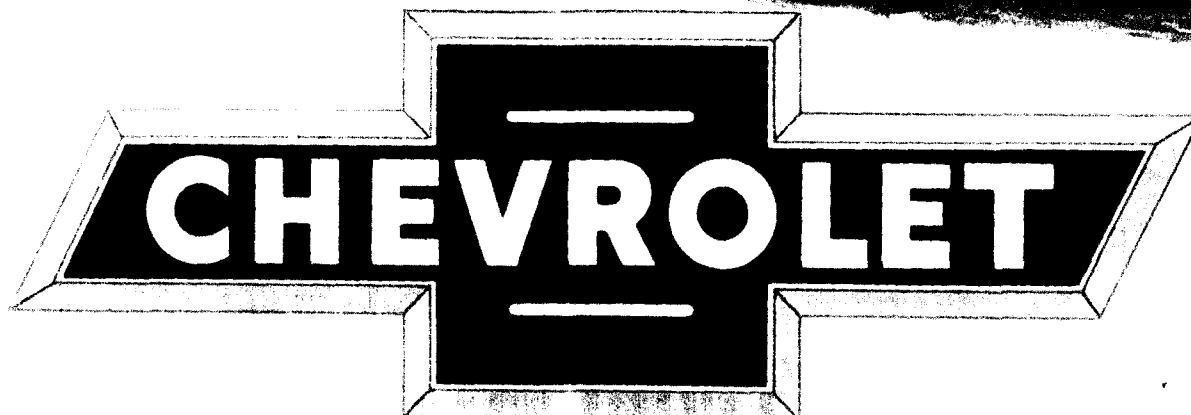
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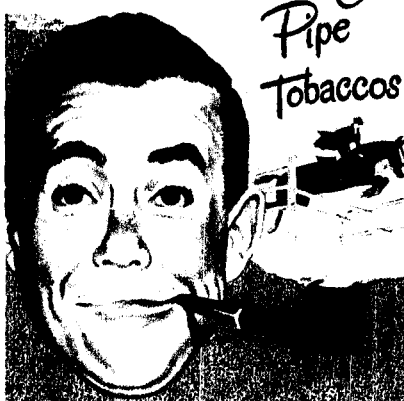
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in front of the pulpit stood the cross, flanked by two altar candles. And at each end of the table were the seven-branched candelabras of the Jewish faith.

The rites were conducted in both English and Hebrew, with alternate use of the Presbyterian Hymnal and the Jewish prayer book. They concluded with a sermon in dialogue between rabbi and minister.

There was no objection to the joint ritual. With that both congregations were highly pleased. But the display of both Christian and Jewish symbols created a great stir. The conservatives in each group objected.

Theory of Symbols Explained

"Our intent," says Rabbi Fleg, "was to show each group that although their symbols differed, they had been created to lead men to an understanding of one God. But since men are men, some misunderstood."

For a while it seemed the misunderstanding would lead to abandonment of interfaith. Rabbi and minister were reconciled to it. Their congregations, however, were not.

"They realized," explains Dr. Stitt, "that their differences were those of brothers, not strangers. And that they had both merely suffered growing pains."

As proof of the family spirit, the Jews were invited to become equal partners in the house of worship. Twin signs were erected outside, one reading "Village Presbyterian Church," the other "Village Temple."

"The twin signs," says Dr. Stitt, "were suggested by a member of my congregation who had originally opposed the invitation to the Jews."

Thereafter, the relationship grew—until it reached the stature it enjoys today. Special interfaith rites were continued, minus symbols. Jewish prayer books were placed permanently in the pews. And rabbi and minister embarked on their campaign of religious enlightenment.

In addition to lectures, forums, classes in history, the two clergymen continually stress mutual association "to eradicate xenophobia, the fear of the unknown." At the temple's Hanukkah festival, the Christian children help light the candles. At yuletide services the Jewish children reciprocate. Churchmen attend Passover rites. The temple helps decorate the church at Christmas.

On a social plane it is the same. The congregations have formed a dozen clubs. They range from bridge to folk dancing, from dramatics to operatics. Their Greenwich Mews Players have won wide acclaim. Equally successful has been their "Lemonade Opera." Six members of the cast have been auditioned by the Metropolitan.

United spiritually and socially, the church-temple has also united financially. All income and expenses are shared, except the salaries of the clergymen.

Members of both congregations agree that religion, translated into action, has brought new meaning to their everyday existence.

"The interfaith program has given me faith in myself and man's ability to solve his own problems," says Dr. J. Lewis Leboy, a dentist and a member of Rabbi Strome's flock.

"It has taught me that going to church means going nowhere, unless you take its lessons with you into the outside world," is the way Carolyn Neumeister, insurance company office supervisor, sums it up.

Another of Dr. Stitt's parishioners, Robert Sullivan, an engineer, puts it this way: "First I wondered how interfaith would work. Now I wonder how we ever worked without it."

One of the church-temple's proudest



COLLIER'S "I don't know. What do you think? We could do a lot of eating out for \$14.89" CHARLES PEARSON

achievements is its nonsectarian settlement house. Created for neighborhood children between the ages of seven and fourteen, it seeks to foster tolerance without preaching. The personnel serve as an object lesson. The director is Roy T. Kurahara, 26, a Japanese-American, of Sacramento, California. Under him are 30 volunteer teachers—Protestant, Catholic, Jewish; Negro, Chinese, white. Each is a college graduate, studying for a higher degree.

Tuition for the children is \$5 a year—free to those who can't afford it. Enrollment is open to all. Activities run the whole gamut of children's interests. There is even a Junior Night Club for girls, with juke box and soft-drink bar. And a class in playing the piano—attended by a solitary student.

Experience with Intolerance

Kurahara is no mere theorist. He learned about intolerance the hard way. During the last war he was interned at Tule Lake, California, under the Japanese Relocation Act.

Kurahara's methods are simple but effective. As an illustration Dr. Stitt cites the case of a boy of nine. The boy would neither play nor talk to the other Village House children. Bit by bit, Kurahara drew him out. The boy was the only Jewish child in his neighborhood, the only Jewish child in his class.

"His schoolmates so ghettoized him," says Dr. Stitt, "that he was afraid to play with anyone, even here."

Kurahara went to the boy's tormentors, invited them to Village House and placed a Jewish teacher in charge of the group. Resentful at first, the boys came to admire the teacher's athletic skill. But they still refused to include the Jewish boy, protesting. "That Jew doesn't know how to play with us."

The teacher pointed to himself. "But this Jew does. And you wouldn't have known it unless you tried. Why don't you try that kid?"

They tried. And friendship replaced hostility.

Operating thus by day, the church-

temple and its program have won nationwide attention. Christians and Jews have shared quarters before. They still do. But only in an emergency—because of fire, cramped quarters or temporary homelessness. For instance in Savannah, Georgia, Synagogue Mikve Israel gave shelter to a burned-out Methodist congregation. In Bismarck, North Dakota, Baptists borrowed the local temple for a one-day revival meeting. And in Rockville Centre, Long Island, Unitarians are meeting in the Central Synagogue until their own church is built.

The Village church-temple, however, is the only permanent union of Christians and Jews. Under one roof, within one sanctuary, each retaining its creed but joined together in religious and social interfaith.

Blessed by the presbytery and the Jewish parent body as pioneers in a great project, Dr. Stitt, Rabbi Fleg and also Rabbi Strome have been invited to lecture before religious and civic groups in all parts of the country. These include Dallas, Chicago, Los Angeles, Portland, Maine; Omaha, Detroit, Buffalo, Allentown, Pennsylvania; Canton, Ohio; Louisville, Kentucky; Tampa, Florida, and Danbury, Connecticut.

Last June Rabbi Fleg left the congregation to write a book on religious philosophy and complete his studies toward a doctor's degree. He was succeeded by husky Rabbi Sidney Strome, veteran of the South Pacific campaign and an enemy of "lip-service religion."

As the first rabbi assigned to MacArthur's troops—an assignment he personally requested—he fits naturally into the interfaith program. He had conducted services in every creed on the battlefield, Protestant, Catholic and Jewish. And he had come home convinced that "Judaism without interfaith is ghettoism."

Together with Dr. Stitt he had furthered the work of the church-temple. Their congregations have grown to a total of 700. They are planning a marriage clinic, a child-guidance bureau, and even wider social programs. And as they work together they muse upon the words of the Prophet Isaiah.

For Isaiah said, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." THE END

Next Week

How Truman Writes Those Letters

BY JONATHAN DANIELS

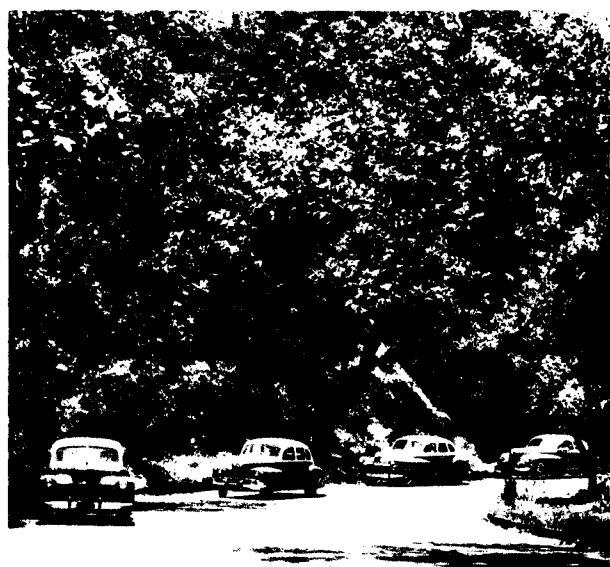


PURPLE MOTOR OIL CONTAINS AMAZING ANTI-WEAR INGREDIENT

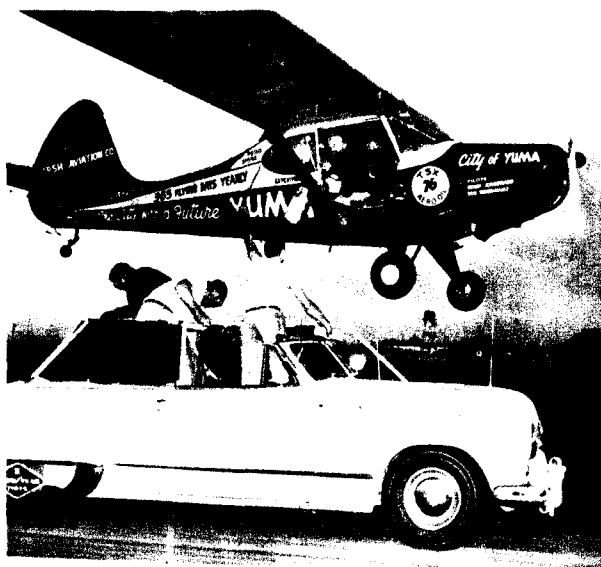
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Above, the Metropolitan Opera's great tenor, Jussi Bjoerling, and his wife, Anna-Lisa. At left, Mrs. Bjoerling puts the finishing touches to her husband's Don Carlo costume

PHOTOGRAPHS FOR COLLIER'S BY RICHARD BEATTIE