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A JEW ASKS SOME QUESTIONS

By **ARTHUR ROSENBERG**, with a reply by **HEDLEY STONE**

It's not easy to fight. It's hard to learn to hate, to be callous and indifferent to blood and suffering. But once you're in a war, you *must*! You fight, you hate, you watch blood flow with taut, pressed lips, but all the while, somewhere inside of you, a voice whispers reassuringly, "That's all right, boy. You're fighting for a 'cause,' and it's *right* to hate and kill. Go to it! Get this over with and then we'll have those Four Freedoms they've been talking about."

Yes, it is bitter to fight and kill. But it's far worse to learn that some have forgotten *why* you battle, and that the Four Freedoms have become to some people only words that sound sweet to the ear but that are entirely impractical and worthless. Then you begin to wonder just why you're so busy hating, why the downing of an enemy plane or the sinking of an enemy submarine should be the cause for so much rejoicing. You begin to doubt that inner voice that once was so comforting, and then this war seems but a mockery.

Four years ago, anti-Semitism was something of which I had heard and read much, but experienced little. The atrocities invoked by the Nazis in Europe shocked me, filled me with a deep horror, but my sympathies were directed toward the sufferers because they were *people*—any people—not because they were Jews. I was proud to hear my fellow Americans deplore the acts condoned by Hitler, and I was surer than ever that nothing of that sort could ever take place in America.

Then, some years ago, I joined the Merchant Marine as a radio operator. We were sending goods at that time to Egypt and Sudan for the prosecution of the war by the British desert armies, and the first urgent need for ships and the men to sail them was being recognized here at home. I joined my first ship enthusiastically, with pride, because she was bound for the Red Sea with war cargo. Here we were, Catholic, Protestant and Jew, all sailing for a common cause. Here, I thought, is Democracy and the Right Way of Life in action, with no attention being paid to creed or color, but all men working together and for each other.

Ho! I have to laugh at myself now, at the little altruistic fool that I was back in 1941. I was so sure of my ideals, of

the goodness of mankind, of the sincerity of the spoken word. I never dreamed that any other conditions could exist in a nation like the United States, a country so surely heading toward a war to uphold those beliefs of which we heard so much.

I learned quite a bit on that first ship, and my education increased as I made subsequent trips on other vessels. I was a bit hard to convince at first, for it's not easy to destroy a person's ideals and, in a short time, replace them with other conclusions, no matter how clear and unavoidable. But only a fool will ignore what he sees and hears over a period of time, and I saw and heard much.

DISCUSSIONS spring up easily on board a merchant ship, and I was present at many of them. The favorite topic was Nazi Germany and her treatment of the different religions but the Jewish faith in particular. I listened eagerly as the chief mate, a man who represented the sea and seamen to me, took his pipe from his mouth and began to speak. I nodded my head in acquiescence as he declared that "Germany is all wrong," and when he said, "The trouble with the Nazis is that they're going about this in the wrong way," I merely laughed and suggested that he meant that the Nazis were wrong, and no more. That's when I first began to realize that the world was not all sunshine and that it was not necessarily inevitable that by defeating the Axis powers we were heading for an existence of peace and "live and let live." For the mate looked at me as though I were inconceivably blind and stupid (as I certainly was!) and snapped back: "I said that they were going about this in the wrong way and that's what I meant! You can't get rid of the lousy Jews by killing them off, a few thousand here and there; you've got to have a worldwide plan and everyone has to act together."

I suppose I should add that no one present was aware that I was a Jew, but I doubt if it would have made the least bit of difference. Just as soon as the mate's words were out of his mouth, the entire group began to exchange heated words about the Jews, and told countless stories of how they'd been "fleeced" and "exploited" by the

"chosen race." I noticed gratefully that there were a few who said nothing but looked at the others in disgust and spat over the side, but they were truly only a few.

I listened to the tales for about five minutes, meanwhile trying to collect my scattered thoughts and find some foundation for all my beliefs again. Five minutes was all I could stand, and then I stood up and called the mate to one side. I explained to him that I was Jewish and that I'd rather he wouldn't talk before me as he had that night. He was surprised to learn my religion, but he voiced no regret for having spoken as he did. He merely seemed interested and pleased to learn that there was a Jew on board.

FROM then on I began to learn to be patient, to hold my temper, and to listen to the most stupid and dangerous statements I'd ever heard. The mate and the steward, and one or two other less violent anti-Semitic officers, would spend every meal hour—for six months—recalling injustices they'd suffered at the hands of Jews! Most of the experiences seemed to have been told them by friends, however. The old, familiar refrains—that is, they're familiar now—were repeated over and over again:

The Jews started this war for business reasons.

The Jews never do manual work, they always go into a business and then take over.

The Jews are a bunch of unscrupulous devils to deal with, and they think more of a penny than. . . .

And this went on endlessly. At first, I thought I would trace their antipathy, and cure it in that manner, but I gave that up when I heard the mate admit when and where his abhorrence of the Jews had first begun.

It seems that he lived out on the West Coast when he was young, and reading in the paper of an offer made by a local dealer for a desirable type of wild nut, had spent a week with a friend in picking them. Finally, he had a sizable batch and the two of them carried their pickings to the dealer, who happened to be a Jew, for payment at ten cents a pound. The Jewish marketer is supposed to have looked at the nuts, about twenty-five pounds, and said: "Well, I really don't need that kind of nut, any