



## New Years 2018

FATHER MALACHI: At the close of the life of Father George, he went into prison and was able to be set free.

We are enclosing both chapters of this miraculous event.

What Jesus Christ said was that he had served the cross of Christ for so long whether in Croatia, Russia or the Ukraine, that the law had to set him free. This is again the teaching of the miracles from the St. John baptism we spoke of lastly.

Source: God's Underground, Father George, 1949.

## CHAPTER 18

# Christians Behind Bars

THE key turns in the door. A guard tells me to follow him and bring my bucket with me. I trail down the slimy steps: although the sun is beating in through a broad window, it seems half dark after the cruel brilliance of my cell. Another door is opened and I am pushed into a large exercise yard of frozen mud and garbage. There are some fifty or sixty gaunt and ragged figures in the yard.

"Line up," says the harsh voice of a guard. We drag ourselves into a row.

"Shirts off." I look around me: in all the row of famished bodies the ribs stand out. Big welts and fresh scars mark every tortured chest. The men gasp as we are driven through the short gymnastics—a mockery of our living death, for these exercises are required by law from the old prewar days, to keep the prisoners "in a condition of health."

I have been afraid to steal more than a glance at any of the prisoners while the guard stands by, for I do not want to implicate anyone by even a flashing glance of recognition. But now we pull our dirty, torn shirts about

us. Now the guard moves back towards the prison wall. We begin our promenade around the yard and I permit myself to look full into the faces of these men.

The dirty, unshaved faces all look much alike at first; except for two men with blackened eyes. Then I look more closely. I recognize Stefan: he was one of the ardent members of the Catholic Action groups. He is only twenty-one, but hardships and suffering have bent him so that he walks like an aged man. And there, a few paces in front of me, is Louis. Our eyes meet. When the half-hour processional is ended we have a few minutes of freedom. Louis sidles up to me.

"The guard who comes on at midnight is one of us," he mutters. Then he drifts away.

Back in my cell in the glaring lights I consider my position as a priest. Can I do anything to help these men? It becomes apparent from the presence of Louis and Stefan that the crime for which many of the prisoners have been assembled here is the crime of believing in the Faith. That faith must be nourished inside these walls.

I had started out my prison career with a Breviary, snatched up from the bedside table through long habit when the midnight summons came and I was taken to the Bratislava jail for "questioning." But the book was taken away from me during the first search; it has never been returned. I have neither a Mass kit nor a Missal. But I have my Rosary!

I was able to smuggle the beads by an old trick familiar to every member of the Christian underground: I kept them rolled up in my hand and raised them above my head with my undershirt while the various police guards

searched all my pockets and the linings of my clothes. The Rosary is here, the single visible reminder of the beauty of my Church's liturgy. I look at it, cupped in my hand. It is a cheap Rosary, but it symbolizes all the material aids to worship man has learned to use: here is the stained glass of the Sainte Chapelle and the dome of Saint Peter's, the groined arches of Notre Dame and the Sistine frescoes, compressed in one string of beads.

Man is spirit but he has a body, too, and it is by bending both to the service of his Lord that he fulfills himself. That is why we need stained glass and Rosary beads. That, too, is why I must find a way to bring to these soul-hungering men their physical God; it is the first and biggest thing to do.

I cannot tell when it is midnight inside my cell by any change of light. But I know that it takes ten minutes to say a Rosary. I begin to pray and thus to count the hours. I guess that it was around six o'clock when we left the exercise yard: twice since then my cell door has been opened and a bit of greasy cabbage soup pushed inside the door. I tick off the Rosaries: six to an hour, a hundred and eight, it should be midnight now. I say four more Rosaries for greater safety. Then I set up a noisy hammering on the door of my cell.

A bolt shoots back. A bearded face appears. A pair of curious, suspicious brown eyes appear. It is the midnight guard.

"Louis spoke to you?" I ask. He nods. "Yes. He told me I should trust you."

"Come in," I whisper. The guard shuffles inside the cell. I open my fist and show him the Rosary.

"I am a priest," I tell him. "There are good Catholic

men inside this jail. You must help us. You must make it possible for me to say my Mass and give Communion to them."

He is frightened. He shakes his head emphatically.

"It is impossible," he whispers. "I would like to help you, Father, but they would find out. You cannot see the other prisoners except at exercise time. You cannot possibly say Mass then. No, no. Do not ask me. They would kill us all."

"Listen, my friend," I said to him. "I know I cannot say Mass publicly. But that is not required. If you will bring me a little grape wine and some Hosts, I will say Mass here in the dead of night. You need know nothing about it. I will hide the things securely."

He looked around the bare and brilliantly lighted cell.

"There is no hiding place," he said.

"Bring me a bit of string," I promised him, "and I will hide them. Look. Try to stare up at the light in this cell."

He turned his eyes upwards and dropped them at once.

"You see?" I said. "No one can stand it. The light is too painful. I will attach the little packages to the light bulb. They will be invisible."

He thought.

"Tomorrow," he said, "I will try. Tell me where to get the things for you."

I murmured the name and address of a priest who would understand. Down the corridor a man began to shout. The guard made a quick gesture of silence and slipped out.

The next morning I was called to the office again for questioning. It was the practice in this jail to turn politi-

cal prisoners over to the ZOB. These men were brutal: some of them had worked as collaborators with the Gestapo and had had a thorough course of training in the methods of the Nazi secret police. But for some reason they did not use physical torture this day as a prelude to my talk; instead I was led into an office where a single smiling, uniformed figure sat at a desk.

"Good morning," he said to me with great politeness. "Please sit down."

He offered me a cigarette. Lighting it, I studied his face. He was a young man with a narrow face, tight, thin lips, and the eyes of a fanatic who has drilled himself to Spartan self-control. He began to talk to me with an air of friendliness.

"I am a member of the Party," he said. "You surely know enough to understand what that means. In Czechoslovakia now *I* have the power. These figureheads in the government are window dressing: their fine liberal sentiments will not help you here. We are running Czechoslovakia. I advise you not to try to smuggle out any pleas. That will only annoy us, and when we are irritated we can be very disagreeable."

"I am sure of that," I said. "But what are the charges on which you are holding me? You know that I have never been guilty of any of these ridiculous things your men have tried to force me to confess. What do you want of me?"

"Oh, as for that," he said. "We want a very simple thing. We want a written confession that you and your Church are our enemies. That's true enough, isn't it?"

"We are Christians," I told him. "If we are good Christians we can have no enemies—no human enemies. As for your Communist ideals, yes, they are our enemies so

far as they are based on a false and atheist conception of man. Yes. That is true."

"Very noble. But if you insist on all the myths of Christianity, you are our eternal enemy," he said. "Until you and your God are as dead as Jupiter and Osiris there can be no lasting truce.

"You know that as well as I. You know that the two systems are completely incompatible. If Christianity and Communism make common cause for a few months, as they did against the Nazis, that is just a matter of tactics. As soon as the Nazis were destroyed the old death struggle between our two systems began again."

"During the war," I said, "your Russian friends did not speak of the reopening of the churches as a provisional matter of expediency or mere tactics. They told the Russian people that from then on they might worship as they pleased. The masses here will not like to discover that they, too, were duped. Their religion is very dear to them. It will require a terror to make them stop practicing their faith, and terror does not inspire confidence. Your Party leaders will incur hate, and yet more hate, the harsher their measures are against the Church. Are you quite sure it is wise to try to rule a people by hatred?"

He shrugged.

"This is all very interesting," he said, "but it is not the point. The point is this: we are going to discredit you and men like you. We are going to make the people believe that all the priests were working with the Nazis. We need a few prominent traitors among the clergy for this purpose.

"You admit that you are the enemy of our Communist

régime. That is practically a confession of treason now. Why not make things more comfortable for yourself and stretch the truth a little? Why don't you sign one of these confessions of conspiracy against the government? Then we will let you go."

"Because they are not true," I said. "Because I never have conspired against the government."

"Oh, come now," he said. "Every time you celebrate a Mass you are showing your opposition to the government of today. Why not express your hatred of us in the form we wish you to?"

"Because it is not true."

"What is truth?" he asked me. And I said, "That is the question Pontius Pilate asked."

That day in the exercise yard I managed to get into line next to Louis when the long promenade began. We had a full half hour in which it was possible to talk by merely keeping the lips from moving, as all prisoners learn to do.

Louis told me the explanation of those bent and dragging bodies which I saw about me. He said, "All of us have been tortured. Some of us are tortured every night. They begin by kicking you in the stomach and hitting you between the eyes. Sometimes they knock out a tooth or two. But the real agony comes later."

Unobtrusively he drew my attention to one of his crippled hands.

"They put a long pencil between my fingers and twisted them on each other until the bones were cracked," he said. "On some of the others they have used an old Oriental device: they twist their noses until the blood runs down their throats and chokes them. All of us, of course, are beaten with belts and chains. Some-

times they beat the soles of our bare feet with sharp sticks.

"But the most dangerous things they do are not physical. They read us declarations signed by our most trusted friends; these implicate us in every kind of plot. They give dates and names and details. Sometimes, after torture, you are so confused that you begin to doubt your own memories; you wonder whether you have really done these things. While your mind is groping and bewildered, a glass of brandy is held beneath your nose, a lighted cigarette is offered you and you are told, 'Just sign this and you can have a drink, a smoke, a good hot meal.'"

I marveled at the courage of these boys who had endured such pain, such persecution and had still the spirit left to give me a warning of what might lie in store for me.

"What are they trying to get from me?" I asked.

"They want you to confess that you were involved in a plot with the Hlinka Guard against the government," he said. "They are trying to implicate the Church, the bishops and even the Vatican authorities.

"Your name has already appeared in half a dozen of the false confessions they are trying to get us all to sign. But do not fear, Father: these are good boys here. They will not give in."

That night the key in my cell door turned gratefully and the friendly guard moved rapidly inside. Without a word he reached into his pocket and produced a half-pint bottle of wine, a second bottle filled with unconsecrated Hosts, a length of strong twine. He locked his hands together, close to the door, and beckoned me to stand on them so that I could reach the cord above the

dazzling light and attach the holy contraband as we had agreed.

I made the precious bottles secure. Then I gave him my blessing and my silent thanks. He slipped out of the door again. The Communist prison had its chaplain now.

By standing on tiptoe I was able to unknot the two small bottles and bring down the materials for my Mass.

With the help of whispered consultations in the exercise yard we worked out a system by which the Catholic prisoners might receive the sacraments, under the very eyes of our Communist jailers.

The guard who came at midnight managed to distribute to each Christian prisoner a small bit of tissue paper and a piece of bread. The Christian wrote his confession with these; it was collected, folded, tucked inside the morning hunk of bread which was brought to my cell. I unrolled the confessions, read them and swallowed the papers. I was able to give absolution to these poor boys by meeting their eyes in the exercise yard and winking—the signal we all understood. This method was used for more than forty Catholics.

Those who had confessed had a great desire to receive the Eucharist. This, too, was made possible by our friendly guard. Each night I consecrated Hosts for those who wished to receive the following day: I wrapped each of them in a bit of clean paper smuggled in for the occasion, and the guard put them into the bread that was pushed into the communicant's cell.

My Mass materials were never found. My Christian underground continued all the time I stayed in that cell.

One day I was led from my interrogation down a long corridor I had never seen before. At its end was a heavily

bolted door. The guard threw it open and pushed me inside. I found myself in a cell with five men drawn up stiffly at salute. When the door had clanged to behind me, they relaxed. I was now to share their cell.

"Always stand at salute when you hear the guard coming," one of them told me. "Otherwise he beats you."

I threw myself down, exhausted, upon the pile of straw and rags in a corner of the cell. I had been interrogated most of the previous five nights.

One of the young men came close to me. He leaned over with great kindness.

"It is strictly forbidden to lie down during the day," he whispered to me. "The guard has orders to watch us through the peep hole and see that we are standing up at attention whenever he passes. But we have learned how to time his arrival. Lie there and rest now: we'll give you the alert when you have to spring up and be ready for him."

I scarcely heard his voice. My nerves, frayed by the strain and the sleeplessness, took their revenge. I fell into a kind of coma. I was only vaguely conscious of the faces of my cellmates. My brain was no longer receptive to new impressions from the harsh and hostile environment. I could still pray; I could no longer act or speak or think.

Later, however, I revived and looked about at these cellmates. They were pale and sickly men with unkempt beards and tattered, ragged clothes. They were half-frozen and half-starved; I later learned that all in that cell suffered from frostbite. We warmed ourselves by sleeping close together at night; during the day we rested only in uneasy snatches while our friends stood guard.

But it was possible to talk to the other friends in misery. Gradually, I learned their stories. One of them was an old-time Socialist who had refused to join the Communist Party in his region. A second was an aviator who had been indiscreet in telling his friends of the things he had seen in the Russian-occupied countries during the war. All of the men were political prisoners. All had been tortured far more severely than I.

Jan showed me his scarred palms: during his examination the guards had brought red-hot irons, around which they bound his suffering hands "to make him remember." The wounds were festering.

I asked these men whether our cell was served by the friendly guard who came on after midnight. Yes, they said. There was a good man who smuggled messages to the outside and sometimes slipped them a bit of extra bread. One night I determined to establish contact with him and arrange for him to bring me, here, the wine and bread essential for my Mass. After darkness blotted out the little window through which the icy winds blew night and day, I drew out my Rosary and began saying it to mark the hours. When I was sure that twelve-thirty had passed, I rose and banged against the door of the cell with the tin bowl in which our supper had been served.

The guard came. I told him I had been moved and that I wished the materials for my Mass brought to me here.

He shook his head.

"It's too dangerous," he said. "It's too dangerous for both of us. Any one of your cellmates could betray me, and two of them are half-crazy. You can't trust them not to talk. And the others, too. Torture might make them sell us out."

He was right. It was heartbreaking for men as miserable as we to have to doubt each other, to fear that one of us might trade the life of another for a little extra prison privilege. But I had no right to expose these unhappy, unknown prisoners to such a temptation by sharing the secret of my Mass. I begged the guard at least to remove the wine and Hosts from my old cell and see that they were destroyed. He promised that he would.

I made no secret to my cellmates of the fact that I was a priest: each day I watched the moving patch of sun on the wall of our cell and when noon came I produced my hidden Rosary and prayed for an hour. The men watched me in a respectful silence: if they spoke to each other at these times, it was in whispers which could not disturb me. Even one poor man who could not stop counting moved his lips soundlessly while I prayed.

My religious duties had been narrowed, now, to the compass of this small and wretched little cell. It was my task to smuggle hope and charity inside its bars. My greatest enemy in this work was suspense. We did not know what future lay in store for any of us. We were no longer taken downstairs for torture and examination. We sometimes heard the cries of men being dragged through the corridor shortly before dawn, to their death: the executions took place close enough to our window so that we could hear the drop of the bodies from the hangman's noose, the death cry of the condemned man. But nobody came to call us to our death. Nobody brought us word of what the secret police wished to do with us. Nobody let us know whether we were ever to walk out of those cells alive or whether we were to live on, forgotten, until we went wholly mad.

We were able to slip messages to the outside world

through our sympathetic guard; but no answers came back. I smuggled half a dozen tiny capsule-contained notes to be delivered to other priests, to the non-Communist men in the government whom I knew, to the representatives of friendly powers in Prague. For months I did not know whether any of these notes had actually been delivered: the guard was able only to hand them on to whatever priest he found it safest to approach.

I realized that all of us might have to stay in our dank and dreadful cells for months or years. We could not merely stand and stare at the walls without succumbing to despair. And despair is a sin. I must help us all to make a life inside this cell. I must stir the men to some activity which would give continuity to our days and hope to our sorrowing souls.

I said as much to my poor comrades, who had already sunk so deep in lethargy that they were scarcely able to understand my words.

"You are intelligent men," I said. "You have studied and thought in the past. We must all study again. We must save ourselves from self-pity by stretching our minds. Come, now. What shall we study?"

Their brains were dulled by suffering; none of them were able to teach the others, but all of them were able to rouse themselves sufficiently to listen. I said to them, "You have all been interested in social problems; two of you are socialists. We will start with talks on sociology."

For one hour every afternoon I addressed my "class" on social problems. At first their attention wandered; they had the habit of falling into a trance. But Ilya was still fairly alert: the first day, he challenged one of my statements about the Marxian theory of value. While we kept one eye on the door for the guard, while we chafed

our numb feet against the cold, we forced our minds to deal with a few of the abstractions of economic theory.

The next day it was a little easier. The talks on sociology became a ritual, a portion of the day marked off from the others, regular sessions which we began when the sun had reached a particular crack on one of the walls.

One day Ilya said, "It is hard to argue socialism without a knowledge of history, and I have spent so little time in school. Can't you give us talks about the history of Europe, too?"

I did. I worked out a course of daily talks on other subjects, too. I began each lecture with a review of the things we had discussed the day before and I always asked whether any of the men wished to question the things I had told them. This proved a useful device: it stirred up their sick and sluggish minds so that they thought about the subjects under discussion in the dreary hours of the day and night. The escape-world of debate and discussion began to win.

During the first few weeks we were only four in the class: then one day the fifth man, Alfred, stopped searching through the window for his wife and joined our discussion of the Crusades. Until that moment he had not spoken a single word. Now, he showed an agile and well-trained mind. The war against Alfred's fantasies was not won in a week. But after a while he spent only a few shamefaced hours a day watching for his wife to appear at the window. In his heart he now realized that he was deluding himself. He recognized his dreams for the drugs they had become.

The sixth man was sicker. We called him "The Count," for we did not know his name, and he counted all the

time. He might have been quite alone in the cell, for all the attention he paid to the rest of us. Sometimes "The Count" paced about us in the cramped space, fitting his steps to the numbers he intoned. More often he stood slumped against a corner of the cell, counting, counting, counting.

One sunless, cloudy morning I stood leaning in silence against a wall, mentally preparing the lecture I would give my friends that afternoon. Suddenly I felt a hand tugging at my sleeve. It was "The Count"; his lips were moving, as always, but he was also pointing to the floor.

"What is it?" I asked him.

He pointed vigorously to the floor, to my pocket, to the shadowless wall of the cell. Then, with great difficulty, he controlled himself. Sweat poured from his forehead. His hands were white as they grasped my arm.

"Time to pray," he gasped.

It was the first sign we had had that he knew what was going on about him or could speak except in numerals. I glanced out of the window: it was impossible, without the sun, to know whether noon was really there. But I nodded and thanked "The Count." I drew out my Rosary. Before I knelt I drew him down to his knees beside me. For the duration of the prayers he remained silent. After that, each day, he prayed with me. And I deliberately lengthened the number of prayers a few more each day, so that he might be given those extra moments of peace. One morning, during the prayers, "The Count" began to sob; a great torrent of sorrow broke from his heart and flowed into tears. When it was over, he sank exhausted to the floor and lay there in silence for the rest of the day. He never counted again. Soon "The Count" was attending the lectures with the rest of us.

## CHAPTER 19

# Back to Freedom

HAD the letters which I smuggled to the outside world ever reached my friends? Had my colleagues begun an investigation of my sudden disappearance, so many months before? I did not know. I had no mail, no direct news of the outside world, no source of information except the prison grapevine. This operated with uncertain success: during our exercise hour one of the prisoners, who worked in the prison bakery, passed on to the rest of us such scraps of news as he had been able to pick up through a grocery boy from the outside world. These items were garbled, confused and sometimes quite inaccurate: they had filtered through the minds of the grocer's boy and the prisoner before they reached my ears, and neither was a political economist.

But one day during our walk in the prison yard, the baker slid into line beside me and whispered, "You're in the news today." "I?" I asked him. "Yes," he said. "The secret police announced that you have been arrested as a Vatican spy. They're going to try you soon."

It was a new phrase, reminiscent of those novels of

eighteenth-century England in which the Jesuit fathers were romanticized as members of a giant international conspiracy. The Vatican employs no spies; the Prague government, some of whose members had known me and my work for twenty years, knew that I was not a spy for any state. But what was behind this yarn seemed evident enough. The Communist-run government was seeking priests whom they might put in the dock in an effort to discredit the Church. My own movements, during the war and after, had been furtive enough to suggest that I had something to hide. I wondered whether the ZOB had decided to make public some of my shifts of identity, my secret movements, and try to prove through these that I was involved in underhand activities. I spent that day in thought. I must decide what I should do if the baker's news proved halfway accurate.

Oddly enough, it turned out to be straightforward. Shortly after midnight I summoned my friendly guard. When he came to the grilling, he verified the story.

"The papers are full of your case," he said. "There is a great to-do about whether you are to be tried in a 'people's' court or a civil court. Tonight's paper says that foreigners are sending protests, trying to help you out. Good luck to you."

It was thanks to an eminent French diplomat, I later learned, that the plans for my trial were actually changed. I had been scheduled for one of the ZOB courts, where summary justice is handed down in star-chamber proceedings. After the intercession of my powerful French friend, the Prague government agreed that I might have a trial by jury.

The next morning I was summoned from the exercise yard and hustled out of the jail. There was the inevitable

waiting taxicab. There was the inevitable escort of three gunmen. I was driven to a hotel room where my guards produced a valise filled with clothes I had not seen for many months. They had been seized from the house where I was first arrested in Bratislava.

"You can clean up here for the trial," they said.

I looked into the bathroom mirror. I saw my gaunt, unshaven face. I peeled off my shirt and saw the marks of the heavy chains. My ribs stood out like those of a cardboard skeleton.

And I had been one of the lucky ones among political prisoners! I had been only mildly tortured. I had been imprisoned for a comparatively short time. I had had a spiritual training which enabled me to fight off despair more easily than my friends who still lay on stinking straw, a few miles away from the hotel where I was stepping into a warm and soapy tub. My compassion for the others haunted me.

After my bath I was given a decent meal: white bread, meat stew, real coffee, jam. It seemed the height of luxury. Everything on the way to my trial was like that. It was such a joy to see the sunlight, to gaze at the streets, to see men and women walking freely that I could not take seriously the fact that I was still a prisoner. And a prisoner facing a very serious charge.

What was that charge? It was, I found, another long catalogue of absurdities. Some of my movements during the war were accurately included in it: the prosecution had copies of two of my false identity cards. They had found witnesses willing to swear that I had illegally organized an underground resistance against the Nazis *before* the Communists had any quarrel with them. This was the crux of the indictment: I had not waited for the

Russians to declare war on the Nazis before finding their system evil. I was therefore not a trustworthy friend of the present Czecho-Slovakia, or of Russia.

But the indictment did not stop with this, for such a charge would *not* have made me a villain in the eyes of the Slovakian and Bohemian public. In order to achieve this end, and in order to smear my Church, the ZOB had gathered together an astonishing array of false affidavits. These were sloppily compiled: they were intended to link me, together with the whole Catholic Action movement, to the collaborationist groups who had supported Hitler. No shred of evidence was introduced to show that our students had ever associated with the German-sponsored organizations. How could it be? We had been sworn enemies of the Nazis from the first.

I stood my trial. I listened to the affidavits and to the cynical ZOB effort to undermine our patriotism. The "informers" whom the ZOB had gathered were a pitiful lot of young boys, collaborationists with the Nazis who had been promised amnesty if they would bear false witness to the association of our Catholic movement with their own.

I was allowed a lawyer who made an honest effort to help me. I sat next to him in court, while the frightened pro-German youths told their fantastic yarns. I whispered to him questions which would obviously show that the boys were lying.

"Ask him if the man he is implicating walks with a limp? Ask him the color of his hair? I am sure he has never even seen him."

The lawyer put the embarrassing question to the witness. It was obvious to the jury that he had invented a pack of lies.

"What was the date of the alleged meeting? How did we arrive there. How many men were present?"

I was able to prove that on the date of my alleged collaboration I had been halfway across the country in another town and had been seen by a dozen reputable witnesses there.

It was a trial run according to the laws of civilized courtroom procedure—a democratic trial. Perhaps it was one of the last to be held in the unhappy countries under Russia's shadow. Thanks to the processes of democratic law, still inscribed in the government lawbooks, thanks to the presence of a jury which judged by the evidence, and thanks to a judge left over from the pre-Communist regime, I had a fair trial.

And I won.

As I gathered my papers and started to leave the courtroom under the eyes of the scowling secret police, the judge leaned down and spoke to me.

"You are leaving here a free man, Father," he said. "I congratulate you. But I wish to warn you: your life cannot be answered for by this court. I advise you to leave the country, and to go at once."

It was obviously sound advice—unanswerable advice. But leaving the country might be quite as dangerous as staying. If I should ask for a passport, if I should try to cross the border openly, one of two things would surely happen. Either the ZOB would arrange for my passport to be refused; or—an even more disagreeable contingency—I would be shadowed and followed across the frontier, and disposed of in some lonely and convenient spot.

I spent that first day of freedom in the familiar game of losing my shadowers: I doubled back across my

tracks. I dropped off the rear platforms of streetcars after they were in motion. I took elevators to the fourth floor and walked to the fifth, and darted down the stairs. That night I was sure I had shaken off pursuit. I sought out the suburban home of a good friend, a foreigner whose work included the repatriation of refugees.

"I thought you might be coming here," he said quietly, as he drew me inside his door and pulled the blinds. "I have even drawn a plan for you. You must hide here tonight and tomorrow night. Then we shall get you to safety on Wednesday. This is how we'll do it."

A number of Belgians, refugees who had fled from the Germans into Czecho-Slovakia during the war, were being repatriated on a special train. My friend could arrange a false identity for me as a merchant from Brussels; tomorrow he would arrange to get the necessary papers forged. On Wednesday I was to be driven to the station and smuggled on board the train.

It was a sound plan: that night I soaked from one of my old passports a photograph which showed me wearing a pince-nez with a broad band. The next day my friend's wife bought me glasses of just this kind. With a stiff, old-fashioned turned-down collar and these glasses I looked the part of a respectable merchant, a man too stiff to enter lightly into conversation with the peasants who would make up the majority of travelers on the refugee train. This role would help me to avoid talking and revealing my accent.

On Wednesday morning we set out by car and drove rapidly to the station. We had deliberately planned to arrive at the last possible moment; the refugee train was already moving. I jumped aboard. Boxes, bundles, metal-bound trunks, straw suitcases bulged from every win-

dow. Joyous, excited faces waved farewell: these people were glad to be going home.

They were far too much absorbed in their own happiness to notice an unobtrusive merchant with a forbidding pince-nez, who sat in a corner of the carriage, his nose in a book. They were far too busy to inquire what that book might be.

I sighed as I opened my Breviary: it was a long time since I had enjoyed the luxury of reading the daily office. I turned to the appointed Psalm: "*In convertendo Dominus captivitatem Sion . . .*" "When the Lord turned against the captivity of Sion, we became like men consoled. Then was our mouth filled with gladness and our tongue with joy."

It was my farewell chant to Prague, to Czechoslovakia, to the lands behind the Iron Curtain. It was my exit from captivity, my entrance to the West.

Freedom lay at the other end of this silver rail over which our train was hurrying. We were leaving many evil and dangerous things behind us; things which may yet destroy the peace and hope of the postwar world. But we were heading for the world where men still know the difference between good and evil and where God's priests are free to speak of Him. My heart sang out to greet the fortunate people I was soon to join, the people who might some day send back the gift of liberty to the imprisoned martyrs I had left behind. I had set my face towards the sun.