

The country should have anticipated calamity with counsel. But the citizens of the country are divided into two sects, the covered-heads and the bared-heads, and whatever one sect tries the other foils. Even each of the sects is split within itself, one faction hating the other, perhaps more than the enemy hates the covered-heads and the bared-heads put together.

How can one country be split, like two contending nations? This can be explained by the nation's history, which still exerts an influence, even though the world has changed and the nation's way of life has changed, and its youth has abandoned everything which was precious to their fathers.

This country has a tradition that its founding fathers were Jews, and of course it is customary for Jews to cover their heads, so some of them cover their heads. But why do some of them bare their heads? They consider themselves in the category of Jews who lived before the time of Revelation, who had not yet been commanded to cover the head; therefore they bare their heads. And since one group covers the head and the other group bares the head, they are split, and they hate each other. But why should covered-heads hate each other, since all of them cover the head? Well, some wear skull caps and others wear hats, some wear square skull caps and others round skull caps, some are as large as anger and others smaller than a louse, some are of rags and others of silk. And one does not need a head especially—just so it is covered. And why should bared-heads hate each other, since all of them bare the head? Well, some of them have wavy hair and others cut it short, some are bald and others have a high forehead. And one does not need a head especially—just so it is bare.

As their heads differ, so do their opinions. One sect nods to the East; the other sect nods to the West. The only reason that they ever nod at each other is to crush skulls. Therefore, they do not join in debate over matters of state. They agree on one thing only: Each sect maintains that all the evils which befall the country are due only to its opponent, and if the author had no qualms about writing superfluous statements he would declare that both sides speak the truth.

II

There was in that country one man who belonged neither to the covered-heads nor to the bared-heads. He was just a man. If he had to be classified he would bare his head; otherwise he would not. He saw that a national disaster seemed inescapable. He said, "I will pray for rain, before the entire country dies of starvation." This should always come first

PEACE EVERLASTING

S. Y. AGNON

I

THE COUNTRY was in great trouble. There had been no trouble like it since the day when the country was founded. The heavens did not send down rain, and the earth did not yield its produce. It was as if heaven and earth had vowed to make an end of the surviving remnant. The supply of food decreased and the number of bodies swollen with hunger increased. A grain of wheat was going for gold, and barley for silver. Milk had turned to water, and there was no water. For the Lord had not sent rain upon the earth.

Every day the sun rises in the sky like a flaming ball, to play with its populated earth, and every night the moon shines, dry and bare. As the heavenly hosts on high, so the hoarders of food on earth—their bellies bulged like cannon balls. The strong became weak, the weak became sickly from hunger, and the sickly shriveled and died.

Troubles never come singly. When all strength had failed, a rumor was heard that enemies surrounded the country. The enemy had not yet entered the country, but he was very near. Even in normal times the country imports food; now that the country was surrounded by enemies neither food nor drink could enter the country. The citizens should have taken up arms, to fight, but the famine had weakened them. Everyone was weak, except the food hoarders, who were gaining strength each day, for the food hoarders created the impression that the country needed them since they labor for the public good, supervising the food supply, and if you trouble them with fighting, the entire country would be dying of hunger.

The enemy, seeing that there was no one who would stand against him, drew nearer, he from without and the famine from within. We thought that the trouble had already reached its peak, but an even greater trouble appeared, for the storehouse of trouble is bottomless, and there is no trouble which is not surpassed by another.

This story, taken from Agnon's *Collected Works*, published in Tel Aviv by Schocken in 1951, appears in the volume *Samakh P'nehel*. It is printed here with the permission of Schocken Books, Inc. All rights reserved by Schocken Books, Inc. The translation from the Hebrew is by Rabbi Jules Harlow, Associate Director of The Rabbinical Assembly.

—pleading to the Merciful One for mercy—but it had been forgotten by the citizenry, for it is human nature to forget what we should remember. He went to every synagogue and study hall in the country, but did not find a place for his prayer, since all of the country's covered heads were assembled at them for their conferences. Garbed in sack-cloth and ashes, he went out to a field, a place where no one lives, for the country's citizens usually spend all their days in the city, where one can listen to speeches and the like. That man prostrated himself in prayer and in supplication before the Holy One Praised Be He, and pleaded for rain to fructify the desolate earth, that its children would not die of starvation.

The Holy One Praised Be He had been anticipating the prayers of the citizens, for He is a God who desires lovingkindness and wishes His creatures well. Now, to allow them to eat their bread with a clear conscience, He ordained the order of prayer, so that they should first pray and then be rewarded, just as a cantor takes payment for his prayer from the sexton. However, since the citizens of the country were preoccupied with arguments and debates, they did not have time to remember their Creator, who redeems and saves, and is merciful in all times of trouble and distress, and who has it in His power to benefit His creatures if they are deserving of deliverance and mercy. So they did not remember what they should remember—until people heard that one man had pleaded for rain.

Reports reached the leaders of the country and they were alarmed, covered-heads and bared-heads alike. The bared-heads were alarmed, lest he be answered from heaven and they be found knowing there is something above them. The covered-heads were alarmed, asking: Is it possible that a man who had not studied in their *heder* and who was not one of their professional students, who did not grab crumbs from the plate of their Rebbe, is it possible that he stuck his nose into their business? For when it comes to prayer, who is knowing and acceptable in the Presence of He who hears prayer, if not they? All of the sects began moaning and groaning, each sect for a different reason, but all for the same basic reason that this man who had prayed for rain was with neither one nor the other of them. And since they all were moaning the distance between their opinions decreased, in theory if not in practice. However, the newspapers, may they be recalled with good thoughts, are of great value in leading theory along into practice. One small question was asked in the newspapers: This man, who sent him, and in whose name had he been received in God's Presence? They began making disagreeable remarks about a little man who cloaks himself in greatness,

and they were complaining that God had left the great men of the country, to become attached to a little man who belongs to no party. And once an opening had been made for talkers, all thinkers in the country came out to disclose their opinion that that act was liable to destroy the very foundations of the country, not to mention law and order, for anyone without authorization from the community who sets himself up as a representative can be considered as one of the dissolute criminals who respect nothing, destructive of the country's basic law.

All the ink spilled by the pens was absorbed bodily. The entire country began coughing up such things, until nobody could say anything that had not already been said by his comrade. The two of them would be astonished, for they had been opponents through the years, but now they are of one opinion, and not only is their opinion the same but their speech as well, even their tongues, which utter those things in the same way that the other sought to say them.

They decided to send deputations and delegations to the country's leaders. The leaders welcomed them and put themselves at their disposal, to wage defensive and offensive war with that one who had violated the national law and order. But words were still as far from actions as actions are from words. And were it not for the hoarders of food, they would have fulfilled their obligations through words, and words upon words.

The hoarders of food, covered-heads and bared-heads alike, since they are preoccupied with one matter—i.e. money—all of their days, have taught themselves to forego everything other than money, for money can smooth over opinions and win the hearts of others, like a bank note which one cashes, or like one penny added to another. All the monied men in the country gathered for formal consultation concerning the lawlessness of the generation which breaks the law and seeks to uproot all foundations of discipline, in this difficult hour when the nation is depressed, downcast, stricken and suffering, and everyone in the country is hungry, and it is well known that in the end hungry men, since they have nothing to lose, could easily revolt. And here the author must state that the food hoarders speak words of truth. The citizens of the country were so hungry and weak that the very shoulders which bore food and drink to the hoarders' banquets were bending and drooping beneath their burden.

Wine accomplishes a great deal; good food accomplishes a great deal. And when the belly is full, the body is satisfied; and when the body is satisfied, the mind is clear. All the food hoarders began seeing each other as of one mind. Immediately they were gracious to one another

and greeted one another warmly. Due to the great amounts which the covered-heads ate and drank, they were sweating and fanning themselves with their skull caps; as a result, their heads were bared. Similarly, due to the great amounts which the bared-heads ate and drank, their heads were covered with sweat, and whenever they would wipe them with handkerchieves their heads would be covered. Each group was surprised at itself, surprised at what it had said about its opponent, when they were alike in every respect. And when they realized that they really were equals they reached an agreement to do something equally appropriate for them all. What that something was we soon shall see.

Something which at first appeared to be supernatural began happening quite naturally. How so? All of the country's hoarders of food began inciting and arousing the great men of the country, the covered-heads covered-heads, and the bared-heads bared-heads, until all of them gathered at a place called Tonguey, for everyone whose tongue serves him well can master the citizens of the country. They began discussing in earnest what to do, lest on the morrow rain should fall, and the earth yield its produce and all law and order would be overcome, since the rain would not be falling because the heads of state agreed that the country needed rain but because of that man who had gone off by himself to pray for rain. And this affair was likely to bring destruction and annihilation in its wake, for any person at all could then do whatever his heart desires without the agreement of the nation's leaders. And since the deeds of the Holy One Praised Be He come when least thought of, and the rains could come suddenly, they all agreed unanimously to accept whatever suggestion would be made first, without debates and postponements, without changes and delays.

So all the great men of the country were gathered as one to discuss the matter formally. There were bared-heads, whose heads have made no peace with either the sun or the rain, since the one dries out their brains and the other drips on their bald pates glistening at the heavens, and who were occupied all their days with making barriers between themselves and the sky. They spread a type of tent over themselves during the summer because of the sun, and during the winter because of the rain. And since all their thoughts are concentrated upon matters separating them from the heavens, they were first with a proposal, suggesting that a rain shelter be made, to stretch from one end of the country to the other, so that even if the Master of rain caused rain to fall to fructify the earth, the rain nevertheless would not reach the earth and would not cause it to bring forth anything, and law and order in the land would be maintained, and the deeds of that one who sought

to overturn law and order and of those who rose to assist him would be null and void. The covered-heads, all of whose thought was their coverings, considered the suggestion, and accepted it happily.

Immediately thereafter they gathered for a second meeting and appointed measurers for the entire country, to measure the length and width of the land, and they selected a committee to gather all the country's weavers, to weave a carpet the size of the country. They selected another committee to gather all of the country's carpenters, to make poles from which the carpet would be hung. They selected another committee to determine the location of the poles. Another committee which they selected was a committee of forcers who know how to give advice on how to force poles into the ground. They selected another committee to supervise the workers. And then they made just an ordinary committee, which was divided into two sections, ordinary committee A and ordinary committee B. After all the committees had been appointed, they appointed a committee committee.

After all these committees had been selected, a special committee was selected to name the carpet, for everything which has a name becomes a slogan and is likely to make money. And money was certainly needed for the manufacture of the carpet and the construction of the poles and especially for the support of the committees. All members of the committee gathered together for a meeting. They finally decided to give the naming into the hands of the Society Linguistia, the Linguistia being in charge of all linguistic matters, all of whose members are linguists and verbally verbal, expert in all languages, among them even members who are expert in the language of the country.

All of the members gathered together and rented large buildings where they installed secretaries and aides, and sat down to consider names. There were some who suggested the carpet be called Preventeric, since it was to prevent the rain from touching the ground, and some suggested it be called Enablerific, since it would enable the country to maintain law and order. And there were those who suggested the carpet be named Coverific, since it was to be a cover. And some suggested it be named Protecsterific. They finally decided to name it Protecsterific, since it involved a protest, the basic purpose of making the carpet being to protest against the rain which was likely to ruin all law and order in the country. And why did all the names end with the letters "erific"? Because poetry was on the decrease while poets were on the increase, and the linguists had seen fit to aid them by making their rhymes easier for them. Immediately they appointed two committees: one to decide whether to write Protecsterific all in capital letters or all

in lower case letters, and one to decide whether to write it all in lower case letters or all in capital letters. A third committee was appointed to decide whether to spell it protesterrific, with three r's, or protesterrific, with two r's, since the citizenry was still split over every letter, some preferring one spelling and others another spelling. It came to the point where each and every letter was like two kinds of letters. Finally they determined to write it with both a capital letter and lower case letters, in order to show respect for the proponents of both positions.

Once the carpet had a name, all of the country's speakers began speaking about law and order and about Protesterrific, and all of the newspapers were publishing their speeches, in addition to the articles which the journalists themselves were writing. Even the poets were not out of action, but knocked out their verses with great satisfaction; indeed whose mind dare we encumber just to remember all of their number, for their very sound the ends of the earth did rankle, and all the frogs of Egypt would not reach their ankle.

The great men of the country did not lose sight of the major principle. They launched a drive for funds and appointed cashiers and collectors, salesmen and solicitors, and they too went out to every town and village, and organized meetings and spoke. They began by attacking the breakers of law and order and ended by praising the Protesterrific, which unites the entire country and leads to peace. Hearts waxed enthusiastic and all hands were warmed. From holes and cracks the farmers brought out seed which they had hidden in order to sow their fields, and they made large banquets for the nation's select who had brought peace and unity. While they were eating and drinking, brides and bridegrooms came, these bringing dowries and those their bridal veils. Before there was time to congratulate them, old men and women came with the burial shrouds they had prepared for themselves. And if anyone did not bring anything he was persecuted until he gave in spite of himself.

They collected the donations and the contributions, and brought in weavers and carpenters. The weavers made the carpet and the carpenters the poles, each craftsman using the characteristic color of his group, black coloring black, red red, and blue blue. The work on the carpet was completed and the work on the poles was finished. They hung the carpet on the poles and spread it out from one end of the country to the other. The citizens gaze at the carpet and rejoice at the Protesterrific and say, what a lovely Protesterrific, what a lovely Protesterrific. Lawless men have sought to destroy all discipline but our eyes are upon

the Protesterrific; happy are we who have been privileged to see the restoration of discipline to its rightful place, and the unity of the nation.

III

The prayer of that man accomplished a little, and the will of the Holy One Praised Be He accomplished everything. The Holy One Praised Be He produced the key for rain to open His good treasury, the heavens. The key, which had not been used for many years, had become rusty. And when the key was stuck into the sky, an enormous noise was heard, the sound of thunder before the rain. And from that rust the heavens were blackened, and were filled with clouds. And after the noise, rain began falling. The carpet split into shreds. The rain reached the earth and saturated the ground. For it is the way of the citizenry to do their deeds haphazardly, since the idea, not the deed, is the main thing. And so rain fell, to slap at the face of every man. The colors of the carpet blurred; the black became red and the red became blue and the blue became black, or red, until it was impossible to tell the difference between black and red or between red and blue.

The author often has the opportunity to teach that there is no evil unaccompanied by goodness, and he still maintains this outlook, and has no fear of mockers. However, just as there is no evil unaccompanied by goodness, so there is no goodness unaccompanied by evil since, in this world, goodness and evil are intermingled, and everything good for this one is bad for that one. Since a great deal of rain did fall, causing the earth to yield its produce, bread to eat and water to drink, the hungry were happy but the sated were sad, since the prices of all the food which they had hoarded went down and they suffered losses. And even the happiness of the great men of the country was incomplete: the covered heads, for their skullcaps and hats had been mangled, and the bared heads, for the rain had slapped at their bald pates.