

GISELA HARBURG.

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8th March, 1939

Dear Nelson,

I feel ashamed of myself when I look at the date of your last letter - September 1938, but I am so drowned in letters of all sorts of people asking me for something that I simply cannot allow myself the treat of personal letters.

Your letter was forwarded to me to New York where I stayed from September 5th to December 26th. Actually my parents had more or less forced me to come along, as at the time when they left, the European crisis was just starting and they were scared that I might, as the last member of my family, be alone shut in in Germany during the war. I went much against my will and after the greatest resistance as there was much work to be done and I had the feeling I left my people in the lurch. This feeling increased when I was in America and I was feeling so ~~stupid~~ doing nothing that I went innocently to the Hadassah asking them if I could help them in the Youth Aliyah work. To my great disgust it meant speaking, something I had successfully avoided to do for the last 26 years, as I am scared stiff to speak in public. The Hadassah, however, forced me to overcome this inhibition and for 6 solid weeks I spoke about three times a week. Actually it turned out to be most interesting and I could get a better insight into American Jewish Life than I could have got any other way. Moreover, the American Jewish public, I noticed, is the most easy audience in the world. On one of my speaking trips to Detroit I met I think the sister of yours who is married to the Rabbi in Jackson and who couldn't have been nicer. Unfortunately I saw much too little of her. In St. Louis I met your adorable mother-in-law. I hope you got our common note.

When Munich was over, I was naive enough to jump to the ceiling with joy as I hoped I could go back to Germany and continue with my work. But the Hadassah insisted I should speak in New York at their annual ~~congregation~~. So I postponed my departure to November 8th. When I came back from St. Louis my family insisted that if I was going to be so "meschugge" to go back to Germany, I should at least immigrate to U.S.A., first, via Canada, so that, if I should have to leave Germany, I should at least have a country where to go to. In view of my return to Germany this seemed sensible even to me. I left for Toronto where I was, however, held up a week, until all the formalities were coped with and thereby missed my ship. In the meantime the 10th November had happened. My uncle Fritz who had come back from Sweden to Hamburg for three days to help with the negotiations for the sale of the Jewish Hospital was arrested. At this point even I had to admit that it was not advisable to go back to Germany and that I was only going to be held for hostage. As the family then decided that no member of our family should speak any more in public, not even in parlour meetings to avoid the possible danger of denunciation I started an affidavit agency of my own that is I tried to make well-off people sign guarantees for urgent cases in Germany. On the whole America had a demoralising effect on me, as I looked at people with an eye as to how much money I could get out of them and how many affidavits they would sign. When the emigration of children to England began, I decided to go back to London to help in this work. Actually, after a few weeks of nosing round in the different organisations I landed again

in the Youth Elijah Office here in London which is now the Central Office for children going to Palestine from the refugee countries. I am also meddling around in the Hachscharah Scheme on Lord Balfour's Estate in Scotland.

My future plans if one can have any in these mad times are to get back to America in the end of June in order to keep my residency up and then to Palestine. I hardly dare to say that any longer, as I have been saying it for about 3 years perpetually and nobody will believe it until I actually turn up in the country.

Mother and father are at present here but are going back to the States in May. I am staying here with my sister Anita and we enjoy it tremendously after several years of separation.

How is Helen and how are you? What are your future plans? The Palestine Conference is racking our nerves and the outcome looks more than gloomy. Do write soon again, as full an account as this one.

Tons of love to Helen and you

from yours

Isela

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