

HOW BARNA KISS SAVED FOUR JEWS

By RICHARD YAFFE

IT WAS during the war. Three slave labour groups were sent out from Budapest to the Russian front. There were 217 Jews in each group, and none came back from two of them. Of the third, 208 came back. I was one of them. We were saved because of this man.

The speaker, a Manhattan doctor called Andreas Gal, gestured towards a man sitting with him and myself in Dr. Gal's office — Mr. Barna Kiss, a gaunt man with a deeply lined face and sparse hair, looking considerably older than his 54 years.

His right eye is almost sightless, and the left is far from perfect. He suffers frequent losses of memory and must be under constant medical care. All this because of a delicate operation for a brain abscess from which he almost died and which left him unable to work to support himself and his wife, 16-year-old son and 11-year-old daughter.

Four of the people Mr. Kiss saved, foremost among them Dr. Gal, have assumed that burden. They find it extremely hard to bear because of their own limited resources. The story began when Mr. Kiss, a member of the Protestant Reform Church, was conscripted into the

Hungarian Army in 1942 when he was 30 years old. He obtained false papers for his Jewish wife so that she could escape the Nazis and the Budapest anti-Semites, and at one time he hid 16 Jews in his apartment, saving their lives.

"He is so modest that he did not tell me about it. A few months ago, though, a friend came in from Cali-

fornia and asked if I knew what had become of Barna Kiss," Dr. Gal said. "I told him, and he told me about the 16 and that he had been among them."

Then Dr. Gal recalled the day the labour gang was rounded up and Mr. Kiss put in charge of it. An extremely polite young man, his manner stirred the deepest fears

within the Jews. They had had experience with mild, polite Nazis whose sadism later proved to be in reverse ratio to their gentleness. The 1,000-mile march from Budapest to the Russian frontier proved them wrong. The labour gang was made up entirely of professional and business people, who were in no physical state to endure this hardship. They not only had to drag themselves and their heavy packs along, but they also half dragged, half carried their sick comrades who sometimes slumped from their arms and died where they fell.

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At the end of every 40-mile day, the men collapsed where they halted, and slept. All but Dr. Gal. The only doctor there, he spent the better part of each night giving what medical attention he could to the marchers.

Dr. Gal said he thought he was doing all this unobserved, for he was afraid that he would be stopped by the commander if discovered. But Barna Kiss had been watching him, and one night he asked the doctor to treat him for a sore neck.

The following day Mr. Kiss told Dr. Gal that he would turn a blind eye while the labour gang hid the axes and shovels they were forced to carry under some straw in the horse-drawn wagons that accompanied them.

He said they could also unload their packs into the wagons and fill them with straw, although pretending that they were still heavy in order to fool the Nazis.

Thus the march became somewhat easier — especially for a rabbi among them, a Rabbi Schwartz, who had been carrying nearly a quarter of a hundredweight of prayer books on his back, together with a heavy load of other articles. A day later one of the marchers

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