

Poale Zion Organization

700449

Poale Zion Organization

45 EAST 17th STREET
NEW YORK 3, N.Y.

August 3, 1944.

Miss Hodell
Executive Office of the President
War Refugee Board
Washington, 25, D.C.

Dear Miss Hodell:

In the telephone conversation with Mr. Lesser yesterday, he advised me to turn to you in connection with the following matter:

The Poale Zion Organization, together with the Jewish National Workers' Alliance, two Labor Zionist organizations active in this country for the upbuilding of Palestine and for the welfare of the Jewish People throughout the world, decided to send some money to persons well known to our organization through many years of mutual cooperation before the war. These people are in a position to help organizations similar to ours, who were working with us before the war. These organizations are now doing underground work in the Nazi-occupied countries.

We now have on hand eight thousand dollars which we would like to send to Marc Jarblum and Dr. A. Silberschein in Geneva (37 Quai Wilson), from whom frequent reports are received about their contacts and activities.

Since speaking to Mr. Lesser a new situation has developed. We decided to send eight thousand dollars to Palestine, to Mr. Melech Neustadt (Yehuda Halevi 40, Tel Aviv) who is the secretary of the "Vichud", which is the central office of the world Labor Zionist organization with which we were affiliated before the war. This office and Mr. Neustadt are in contact through Istanbul with the underground organizations in the Nazi-occupied countries, especially in the Balkans and Eastern Europe. Mr. Neustadt has visited Istanbul several times. I had the honor of sending a bulletin containing information about his activities to Mr. Pehle, in February, 1944. (acknowledged by Mr. Pehle on Mar. 3, 1944 - #247).

We originally thought there were no difficulties in sending money for this purpose to Palestine. However, our bank advised us that for this purpose we also must apply for a license.

We therefore are now in need of a license to send eight thousand dollars to Mr. Jarblum and Dr. Silberschein and eight thousand dollars to Mr. Neustadt. In the very near future we planned to send another twenty-five thousand to Palestine and ten thousand dollars more to Geneva. We would therefore appreciate it very much if you would grant us the license for eight thousand dollars plus twenty five thousand to be sent later to Palestine and for eight thousand plus the ten thousand

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Miss Hodell, War Refugee Bd.
August 3, 1944 2.

dollars to be sent later to Marc Jarblum and Dr. Silberschein in Geneva.

I hope to hear from you very soon. Thank you very much for your efforts on our behalf.

Respectfully yours,

David Wertheim
David Wertheim, Secretary

DW/RCS

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MISS HODELL

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT WAR REFUGEE BOARD

REFERRING TO TELEPHONE CONVERSATION WEDNESDAY HAVE NOT YET
RECEIVED LICENSE STOP IN VIEW OF URGENT APPEALS FROM ABROAD
FOR IMMEDIATE REMITTANCE PLEASE WIRE PERMIT THANKS YOU

POALE ZION ORGANIZATION OF AMERICA DAVID WERTHEIM
SECRETARY 45 EAST 17TH ST NEWYORK NY

1244P

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In reply please
refer to: 604

MAY 6 1944

Dear Mr. Wertheim:

Thank you for your letter of April 26,
enclosing a copy of "The Last Stand".

Very truly yours,

J. W. Pehle
Executive Director

Mr. David Wertheim
Secretary,
Poale Zion Organization,
45 East 17th Street,
New York 3, New York.

FBI ABH
BB Hutchison:agf 5-2-44 JG

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PRESS
ALIM

604

TELEPHONE
GRAMERCY 7-8880

W. R. B.

Filing Authority

To: Files

Ans. J H Silver

No. Ans. Req.

Initial

Date

Poale Zion Organization

45 EAST 17th STREET
NEW YORK 3, N. Y.

April 26, 1944.

Mr. J. W. Pehle,
War Refugee Board
Office of the Executive Director.
Washington 25, D.C.

Dear Mr. Pehle:

We are enclosing our latest booklet and hope you
will find the contents both interesting and useful.

Sincerely yours,

David Wertheim
David Wertheim, Secretary

dw/rc
af/oe

APR 26 1944

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CROSS-REFERENCE

.....
(Name of Applicant)

.....
(Application Number)

Copy of the "Last Stand"

SEE: Sent to Helen 6/2/45
for the War Dept. (This was one
of the references in Standard
War Criminal "List".)

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APR 28 1944

Dear Mr. Wertheim:

Thank you very much for your note of April 26 and the enclosed booklet which I anticipate reading with great interest.

Very truly yours,

(s) Lawrence S. Lesser

Lawrence S. Lesser
Assistant Executive Director

Mr. David Wertheim, Secretary
Poale Zion Organization
45 East 17th Street
New York 3, N. Y.

LSS:als 4/28/44

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Poale Zion Organization

45 EAST 17th STREET
NEW YORK 3, N.Y.

April 26, 1944.

Mr. Lawrence S. Lesser
War Refugee Board
Office of the Executive Director
Washington 25, D.C.

Dear Mr. Lesser:

We are enclosing our latest booklet and hope
you will find the contents both interesting and useful.

Sincerely yours,

David Wertheim
David Wertheim, Secretary

no enclosure under Reid
in file PPA

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In reply please
refer to: 247

MAR 3 1944

Dear Mr. Wertheim:

Thank you for your letter of February 28, 1944,
enclosing a copy of your bulletin containing information
of your underground activities in Nazi-occupied countries.

It is noted that you are affiliated with the
American Jewish Conference whose proposals will be care-
fully studied and will be regarded as representing the
views of your organization. I shall, of course, be pleased
to receive any supplemental suggestions which you may wish
to offer, as our programs take shape.

Your offer of the assistance of your organization
is indeed appreciated.

Very truly yours,

(Signed) J. W. Pehle

J. W. Pehle
Acting Executive Director

Mr. David Wertheim,
Secretary,
Poale Zion Organization,
45 East 17th Street,
New York 3, New York.

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CABLE ADDRESS
"AMPOALIM"

TELEPHONE
GRAMERCY 7-8880

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FILING WITHIN
TO: MAIL & R.
ANS.

NO ANS. R.C.
INITIAL
DATE

Poale Zion Organization

45 EAST 17th STREET
NEW YORK 3, N. Y.

28 February 1944

Mr. J. W. Pehle, Acting Executive Director
War Refugee Board
Office of the Executive Director
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear Mr. Pehle:

The Poale Zion Organization of America is a constituent of the American Jewish Conference. We are represented on the Rescue Commission of the Conference and are aware of the contact established between the Conference and the War Refugee Board.

The Poale Zion Organization has, since the outbreak of the war, been in communication with its fraternal labor Zionist organization in Palestine and has assisted them in their efforts in the field of rescue of Jews from occupied countries and especially in the work of the labor Zionist underground movement in the occupied countries.

At this time, the secretary of our central office in Palestine, Melach Neustadt, is in Istanbul, where he is conducting intensive activities in aiding our labor Zionist underground movement. We deem it advisable to send you a copy of our most recent bulletin containing information of our underground in the Nazi-occupied countries. In addition to receiving information through Palestine and from Istanbul, we also get information frequently from another leading figure in the labor Zionist movement who remained in Geneva, Switzerland after the last World Zionist Congress held there at the end of August, 1939.

In cooperation with other fraternal organizations of the labor Zionist movement in America, the Poale Zion organization has assisted financially the activities undertaken by our Palestinian friends and the friends in Geneva, over a period of years. Due to existing difficulties in transferring money from the United States, we arranged for a separate account for all of our funds in Canada (our organization has a large membership in Canada) and our Canadian funds were transferred to Palestine for the aforementioned purposes.

We hope that you will find the information contained in our bulletin of importance and interest for the work of your Board. Please be assured of our eagerness and desire to cooperate with you in every possible way and do not hesitate to call on us.

Very sincerely yours,

David Wertheim
David Wertheim
Secretary

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encl.

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Poale Zion Organization

45 EAST 17th STREET
NEW YORK 3, N. Y.

February 24, 1944

Bulletin #5

FROM OUR UNDERGROUND IN THE
NAZI OCCUPIED COUNTRIES

During the last few weeks, we have received a number of reports from Palestine about the Jewish situation in Nazi Europe. Some of these reports can be made public without harming the rescue work being done for those Jews. The reports were summarized in an article by Shlomo Grodzensky in the "Yid-disher Kemfer" of February 4, and will probably appear in their English translation in the forthcoming issue of the "Jewish Frontier". In this bulletin, we will attempt to summarize those reports and shall include some facts which cannot as yet be made fully public.

First a few words about the sources of these reports.

Soon after the outbreak of the war, a bureau was set up in Geneva, Switzerland, to establish contact with Jews in the occupied countries. This bureau serves not only as a center of information, but, what is more important, as an agency of practical aid, material aid, as well as aid to individuals in escaping to neighboring neutral or satellite countries.

In the summer of 1942, the first news of the radical extermination policy of the Nazis began to reach Palestine and the United States. About that time, a second rescue center was established in a neutral country, in the vicinity of Palestine. During 1943, the year of extermination of European Jewry, this center, established by the Jewish agency, succeeded in establishing contact with every Jewish community in Nazi Europe.

It is still not safe to publicize the details of this work. But we may say with certainty that this center was the only point of contact between the Jewish communities in Hitler Europe and Jewry in the allied countries. This center maintained correspondence with Jewish groups in the occupied territory, sent its couriers and emissaries to some of them, dispatched money, food, helped individuals and groups to escape from countries under direct German control to neutral and satellite countries where treatment of Jews was relatively milder than in the former. This work naturally, could be accomplished only at great cost, both physical and financial. The job was done by a select group of members of various kibbutzim*.

*kibbutzim -- communal settlements.

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As mentioned before, this center is practically the only source of information about what is happening in the Jewish communities in the Hitler countries. The bridge between the occupied countries and Palestine is, in the first instance, Hungary. There is a macabre irony in the fact that Hungary, one of the first poison centers of "zoological anti-Semitism" between the two wars, is at present, the most important haven of refuge for the Jews who have succeeded in escaping the Nazi inferno in Eastern Europe. Hungary has, of course, even now, a fascist and anti-Semitic regime. Until 1943, Jewish refugees in Hungary were treated very brutally; some were even forced to return to Poland. At the present time, however, it has adopted a more "liberal" policy towards refugees. Hungary, like some of the other "satellites" has finally become convinced of the imminent defeat of the axis. Hungary has now the largest Jewish population of any European country (outside of the Soviet Union), about 800,000. To cross the border into Hungary is the last hope of every Jew in Poland and other countries where the extermination policy has been in force since the summer of 1942. Hungary is also the most important source of information about Jews in Poland and the other axis countries.

Hungary is not the only point of refuge for those Jews who are trying to escape from Poland. According to a report which we recently received, some Jews, disguised in German uniforms, have managed to reach Rumania, via Kiev and Odessa. Even bloody Rumania can be a haven of refuge to Jews trying to escape Poland. In order to reach this "land of security", they are even willing to undertake a journey through the Nazi occupied Ukraine.

How does one escape? Escape from Poland is a feat involving not only great risks, but also a relatively large sum of money. An idea of the expenditure involved in an escape from Poland to Hungary may be gotten from a report of Miriam M., a young girl from Bendin, Polish Silesia, a member of the "Hashomer Hadati", who arrived at her destination in September, 1943.

When M. M. realized that she was about to be sent to one of the extermination centers in Poland, she and another girl decided to try to get out of the country. In order to do so, they acquired, with the help of relatives who had previously been wealthy and had managed to save some of their money, "Aryan" passports (22,000 marks each), engaged a German guide (4,000 marks each). They reached a large city in South Germany without difficulty. There they were met by a very sympathetic Aryan woman who turned them over to a man who is in touch with our rescue center. They spent a week with him and later he took them across the border to the country in which they are at present.

One must not forget that this is an unusually fortunate case. Most attempts at escape involve much greater danger and risk.

Polish Jewry, what there is left of it, is now going through the agonies of death. The fullest report of the situation is contained in a letter which was sent from "somewhere in southwest Poland" on July 17, 1943. It is signed by Frumke, one of the leaders of

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the Polish Hechalutz and four other members. Since receipt of their letter, they too have perished in a battle with the Gestapo in Bendin.

The letter follows:

"To the chaverim* (in a neutral country) and all chaverim, wherever they may be:

"Dear Chaverim: After waiting so long, we were very happy to receive your letter which was delivered through . . . Unfortunately it arrived rather late. We have long desired an opportunity to tell you of our life and our struggle. During the first year and a half of the war, we organized a strong network of Hachshara** centers. Our youth movements were much stronger and better developed than in normal times.

"Unfortunately, a year and a half ago, all organized activities became impossible. After the period of organized ghetto life, came the period of systematic extermination. It began in Wartegan (the regions of Lodz and Posen). About 80,000 Jews were exterminated by gas. In Lodz itself there remained a small, completely isolated Jewish community of 40,000 souls, dying of hunger. At the present time, we have no news from Lodz.

"Then followed the extermination of Lithuanian Jewry who were liquidated in the mass shootings in Bonari. There remain about 20,000 Jews in Wilno, Kovno and Shavli. Of late, we have not been receiving news from them. Lithuania is, it seems, Judenrein.

"We tried to make preparations for self-defense, but without success. In the "government" area (Warsaw, Lublin, Chenstochow, Chracow and vicinity) there are now no Jews left. They were exterminated by gas in Tremblinki, near Malkinia. This is a famous extermination center not only for Polish Jews, but also for the Jews of Holland, Belgium, etc.

"We are most proud of our accomplishments in Warsaw. We organized the "self-defense". Terrible battles raged in the ghetto. Unfortunately, only several hundred (about 800) of our enemies fell. Consequently, all Jews were exterminated and the ghetto was totally destroyed. There is not one single Jewish community left in the "government" area, aside from three forced labor camps (Travniki, Ponietow, near Warsaw and Prokochin, near Chracow), with a Jewish population of 30,000. Within a few weeks, they will all be dead.

*chaverim -- comrades

**Hachshara -- agricultural training centers

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"There are several thousand Jews in Warsaw who are alive disguised as Aryans. None of the "Hashomer Hatzoir" have survived. Tossia, Hania, Joseph Kaplan, Mordecai Anilewitz and hundreds of others are dead. . . of the Poale Zion. . . of the Noar Zioni. . . of the Bund. . . (the original letter contains a number of names).

"The Ukraine and Polesia are Judenrein. In Bialistok, about 20,000 Jews have survived and they live under relatively better conditions. The Jewish population of the Lublin region was exterminated completely in the gas chamber centers of Belzetz and Sobibur.

"The only Jewish community which has lived under relatively favorable conditions up to now is upper Eastern Silesia. However, three weeks ago, seven thousand Jews were deported to be shot and burned in Oshvietchim. Within the next few weeks, this region will be Judenrein too. When you receive this letter, none of us will be alive. To date, we have received no word from the last transport. We are certain that they have been destroyed in Oshvietchim. I have personally visited all places mentioned in this letter and was an eye-witness to the exterminations.

"Do what you can. I doubt if you will be able to help us in time. We are facing our last days.

"Our hope to see the Homeland will unfortunately not be realized. Cordial regards to Tabenkin, Gravitzky, Bendersky, Yaari, Koldoni, Goldstein, Lubianiker and all the other dear ones (leaders of various kibbutzim and youth organizations in Palestine). We haven't the strength nor the patience to write as we would have wanted to and as it would have been desirable."

According to a report of Chaver M. B., who was engaged during the past year in rescue activity in a neighboring country, only 200,000 Jews have survived in Poland, of which 100,000 live openly as Jews and the others -- underground. These Jews are all concentrated in western Poland. Eastern Poland is completely Judenrein.

Of those surviving, some have acquired Aryan passports -- others have joined bands of partisans in the forests and the mountains. Some of the leading members of the Polish Hechalutz and the various Zionist youth movements, are active in these partisan bands.

A detailed report of the partisan activities of the Hechalutz in western Poland was presented by a representative who crossed the Polish border last September. (He came on a special mission, planning to return to Poland later). He reported that in western Galicia, an armed band of partisans under the name of "Hechalutz Halochen" ("The Fighting Hechalutz") has been functioning for some months. These groups each number five members, have dynamited railroad lines, attacked prisons and released Jewish prisoners,

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done away with agent provocateurs. "Hechalutz Halochem" is not the only Zionist partisan group. Every communication from Poland in the last months mentions individuals and groups who have taken to the woods, from which they carry on a guerilla fight against the Nazis.

There are disturbing reports about relations of the Jews and the Poles in the underground movement. "Hechalutz Halochem" at first cooperated with the Polish underground organization "Polska Partia Robotnicza" (Polish Workers Party). However, this organization exploited the Jewish partisans. They were given the most dangerous jobs. When members of the Polish underground were caught by the Gestapo, the underground leaders often exchanged them for Jews, who were turned over to the Nazis. Another report complains of the large sums demanded by the Polish underground for arms purchased by the Jewish partisans. (It must be added that these reports about the attitude of the Polish underground have as yet not been confirmed by other sources).

It is important to mention these things, since some Jewish journalists and members of political circles, have been circulating idyllic descriptions of Polish-Jewish relations in Nazi occupied Poland. We are told that the old Polish anti-Semitism has practically disappeared, that Poles are sacrificing themselves for the persecuted Jews, that Poles are equipping Jewish self-defense with arms. We rarely find such items in the reports reaching us from Poland. We do hear however of Jews who live among Poles protected by "Aryan" passports.

One of the last reports to reach us contains the testimony of a German soldier about the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto. Our friends precede the report with the warning that it should be read with caution since the soldier is evidently interested in whitewashing the regular German army and throwing all the blame on the S. S. troops. We shall, nevertheless, summarize the main facts of this strange document.

According to the German soldier, the 25,000 Jews who lived in the Warsaw ghetto on the eve of the uprising, began to make preparations for self-defense as soon as they learned of the intentions of the authorities to liquidate the ghetto. Arms were brought into the ghetto from the outside through the subterranean sewage canals.

Late in April (1943) two platoons of regular German soldiers were sent to accompany a transport on the way to an extermination center from the ghetto to the nearest railway station. These two platoons did not return. Two more platoons were sent, with similar results. It turned out that the arrival of these soldiers in the Ghetto had been met with vigorous resistance, that some of them had been killed and that the others had either been taken prisoners or had joined the defenders. For some time, there have been rumors in the army circles, particularly in the officer corps, that open protests have been made against forced participation in the mass murder of civilians, which is not in accord with the army code.

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Early in May, motorized units were sent to the ghetto to break the resistance of the inhabitants. The clash took on proportions of a real battle and the Nazis were convinced that the defenders of the ghetto were well armed and were fighting behind well constructed fighting positions. In mid-May, several hundred German officers and soldiers who were ordered to attack the Ghetto joined the defenders, taking along with them their equipment. On May 16, soldiers of the regular army, were exchanged for S. S. troops.

A terrible battle ensued in the ghetto. The S. S. troops attacked in large numbers, equipped with tanks and assisted by aircraft. The ghetto was completely destroyed. In this battle, most of the defenders of the ghetto fell, and with them, thousands of officers and soldiers of the S. S. troops. Only a small group of Jews and German soldiers who fought on their side managed to escape through the sewage pipes which connected the ghetto with the city.

An inquiry conducted by the Gestapo and the command of the S. S. troops revealed that 1,800 German officers and soldiers fought on the side of the defenders of the Ghetto. The defenders of the ghetto fought under the leadership of a German colonel who managed to escape. The whole story was kept in the strictest secrecy and the Gestapo did everything in its power to prevent it from leaking out even to the General Staff and the Nazi party. There were hundreds of arrests, deportations and liquidations in order to cover up the traces of this story.

* * * *

Chaver M. B. makes the following summary of the situation of European Jewry (outside of Poland) at the end of 1943.

"In Slovakia there remain about 17,000 Jews, most of whom are in hiding. The Catholic Church has made some effort to save them. However, the more radical Nazi elements are resolved to exterminate them in order to remove all traces of their lootings and other crimes against the Jewish population.

"Only 200 Jews remain in Austria. In Wiener Neustadt, there is a labor camp where the remaining Jews of Saloniki (Greece) are concentrated. Saloniki itself, one of the most important centers of Sephardic Jewry, is now completely Judenrein. The Jews of Athens have fared somewhat better, probably because of the strong resistance of the non-Jewish population to the Nazi persecutions. The Greek underground has organized a society to protect and help Greek Jews, which is called "Butima Hebreus" (Help to Jews).

"Forty thousand Bulgarian Jews are kept in concentration camps. In Rome (Italy) the Nazis ordered the Jewish community to pay a very large sum of money, to be paid in gold. The Catholic Church contributed part of that sum.

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"In Rumania things have not changed during 1943. 16,000 Jews live in the Czernowitz ghetto. Of the 150,000 Jews deported to Transdnestria, only 55,000 remain. 100,000 died of hunger.

"40,000 Jews are concentrated in the large labor camp in Therasenstadt (Czecho Slovakia). Some of them are Czech Jews, but most of them have been brought from other occupied countries. They are employed in the famous Skoda Works. They live and work under very strict discipline, but are given a certain measure of self-government. The internal affairs of the community are managed by a council of over 300 members. In Theresenstadt, there are concentrated the surviving leaders of most Jewish communities in Europe. This cannot be an accident. The reasons behind this are still unclear."

This is the terrifying summary of European Jewry. Two million Jews have been exterminated in Poland. And yet all communications which have reached us in recent months and weeks repeat the assurance that it is still possible to save individuals and groups from the Nazi ghettos. This requires large sums of money. According to Isaac Gruenbaum, head of the Palestine Rescue Committee, the sum required is 50,000 pounds per month. The Jewish Agency is now trying to raise this sum through the Rescue Campaign being conducted in Palestine and through other sources.

We want to call the attention of our Party members to the following excerpts from a letter received from M. Neustadt, secretary of the World Ichud (World Union of Poale Zion Parties):

"Aside from general aid . . . which helps to secure a piece of bread, clothing, an opportunity to escape, etc., . . . which is our common task, there is a special duty towards our own movement in the occupied and satellite countries. Why special aid to our chaverim? Because they face greater danger, because they are more exposed than others, because they do not escape at the first opportunity, because they are the initiators and leaders of every rescue activity. Without them no effective rescue work is possible. And above all, they are in the forefront of all attempts at armed resistance. This aid can be rendered only by our movement.

"We have now in a number of places, chaverim that work in a spirit of unprecedented devotion. We must help them. We must strengthen their hands. They inform us that they are resolved to offer armed resistance should they face the same situation as the Jews of Warsaw. They ask our advice and aid. We must give them the assurance that they are not alone, that our parties in the free countries are with them.

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"With arduous efforts and large material means, some Jews can be saved from the Nazi hell. In addition to our participation in the general rescue work, we must show our special concern for our own "family". They are worthy of that concern. They remain at their posts until the last moment; when opportunities of escape are offered, they refuse to leave the danger zones; they voluntarily choose to fight and die with the others. Those who manage to escape do not consider their task done, and are among the most active workers for the rescue of those they have left behind. The rescue work in the neighboring countries is largely carried on by chaverim who have only recently managed to escape themselves."

* * *

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