

## Chaff

About 30 years ago a performance of Mendelssohn's oratorio, *Elijah*, was being prepared for in Toronto. The night of the dress rehearsal had arrived, when for the first time the choir, soloists and orchestra were to be together. The bad news arrived that one of the soloists, the tenor, wouldn't be there; he had gone to Montreal to attend a special birthday of his mother, and a blizzard had caused the cancellation of all flights out of the city. There was panic all round for some hours, until it became clear that he would be back in Toronto the next day in time for the first performance that evening. Well, a dress rehearsal without one of the soloists was definitely second best, but at least they would have everybody present the next day for the public performance. And, after all, the tenor had been preparing for weeks, hadn't he?

The first performance was moving along splendidly, with the tenor doing the job he was supposed to do very effectively. But lodged in the middle of the piece is a one-liner for him, with King Ahab crying out in exasperation, "Art thou Elijah, the troubler of Israel?" As that part was approaching, the conductor glanced to his left, and saw with dismay that the tenor was sitting comfortably with the score under his arm. The conductor began to whisper out of the side of his mouth, "Art thou Elijah, Art thou Elijah!" The tenor didn't hear him and remained as he was. The conductor tried again, and, though his whisper had even greater intensity, it had the same lack of success. Finally the baritone got into the act. He touched the tenor on the shoulder, and said with some urgency, "Art thou Elijah!" The tenor turned to him in great astonishment and answered, "No, I thought you were."

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In the 1920s and 30s three huge radio networks were established in the United States: NBC, CBS, and ABC. They are no longer known as *radio* networks, but they exist as broadcasters to

the present day. NBC took the decision of forming their own symphony orchestra, and they brought about a coup that created headlines across the western world. The orchestra would be led by the conductor with the highest profile in the musical universe of that time: Arturo Toscanini.

Meanwhile a young announcer in NBC was making his mark, and would in due course become one of the most familiar voices in broadcasting. His name was Ben Grauer. But in the time we are talking about he was only in the early process of becoming everybody's favourite. So one day the bosses gave him the coveted job of announcing for the performances of the symphony. At the end of his first time in that role he said in his most stately and measured tones, "You have been listening to the NBC Symphony Orchestra, under its permanent conductor Artinni Toscuero. [Short pause] That is, I should say, Artos Urinni. [Fairly long pause, and then] ARTURO TOSCANINI! [Somewhat shorter pause] *My* name is Ben Grauer. Remember that. It's probably the last time you'll ever hear it."

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A rabbi, a Catholic priest, and a Protestant minister, on a beautiful calm day, were sitting in a small boat fishing not too far from shore in a small lake. After a time the rabbi said, "I need to go to the bathroom". He got out of the boat, walked on the water to shore, and made his way into the bushes. Awhile after he returned, the priest said he also needed to relieve himself, so he left the boat walking on the water to land, did what he had to do, and returned the same way. Some time later, the minister, with some nervousness, said he too had to get to land for a bathroom break. He stepped out of the boat and was immediately over his head in the water. He came up spluttering, and swam to shore. After a time in the bushes he emerged and looked over hesitantly at the boat. The rabbi said to the priest, "Do you think we should tell him where the stepping stones are?"