

Karl Bissinger

St. Marks Place neighbors—W. H. Auden with mailman John, hardwareman-seedman Charles and his wife, and grocers Joseph and Bernard.

I'll Be Seeing You Again, I Hope

By W. H. AUDEN

Though I've lived more than half my life in the States, am an American citizen (which I expect to remain), have acquired a short a and that wonderful verb gotten and have learned to say aside from instead of apart from. I cannot, of course, call myself an American. I do, however, think of myself as a New Yorker and believe that I shall continue to think so, even in Oxford.

At Oxford I shall be living in a college community which, at my age, I believe is better for me than living in a metropolis. If I had to choose between New York and London, I should probably choose New York with all its perils.

People ask me if I shall miss the "cultural life" here. My answer: I have never taken part in it. Since I like to go to bed very early, I seldom go to the theater or movies or concerts. My

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cultural life is confined to reading, listening to records of classical music, and solving crossword puzzles, activities I can indulge in anywhere. At this point I must say that the crossword in The New York Times frequently drives me up the wall with rage because of the lack of precision in its clues. Time and again, one sees from the letters one has what the word must be, but the clue is inaccurate. The clues in British crosswords may be more complicated, but they are always fair. E.g., Song goes dry for a ruined Dean. Answer: Serenade.

The sole advantage of a metropolis, admittedly a great one, is that, there, one's friends are easily accessible. No

change in one's life can be unaccompanied by sorrow, and my mind is preoccupied at the moment by the thought of the many dear friends I have, both in the city and outside it, and how much I am going to miss them.

New York, however, is not simply a metropolis: It is also a city of neighborhoods, and I consider myself extremely fortunate in the one where I have lived for the past twenty years. (To me, it will always be The Lower East Side, never The East Village.)

Whoever invented the myth that America is a melting pot? It is nothing of the kind and, as a lover of diversity, I say thank God. The Poles, the Ukrainians, the Italians, the Jews, the Puerto Ricans, who are my neighbors, may not be the same as they would be in another country, but they keep their own characteristics. It is a neighborhood of small shops where they know one personally, and how nice they have all been to this Wasp! Let me take this opportunity to thank in particular Abe and his coworkers in the liquor store, Abe the tobacconist; On Lok, my laundryman; Joseph, Bernard and Maurice in the grocery store at Ninth and Second Avenue; Harold the druggist; John, my mailman; Francy from whom I buy my newspaper, and Charles from whom I buy seeds for my Austrian garden. God bless you all! And now I must begin to think about the problems of packing. The heart sinks.

W. H. Auden is the poet and essayist.