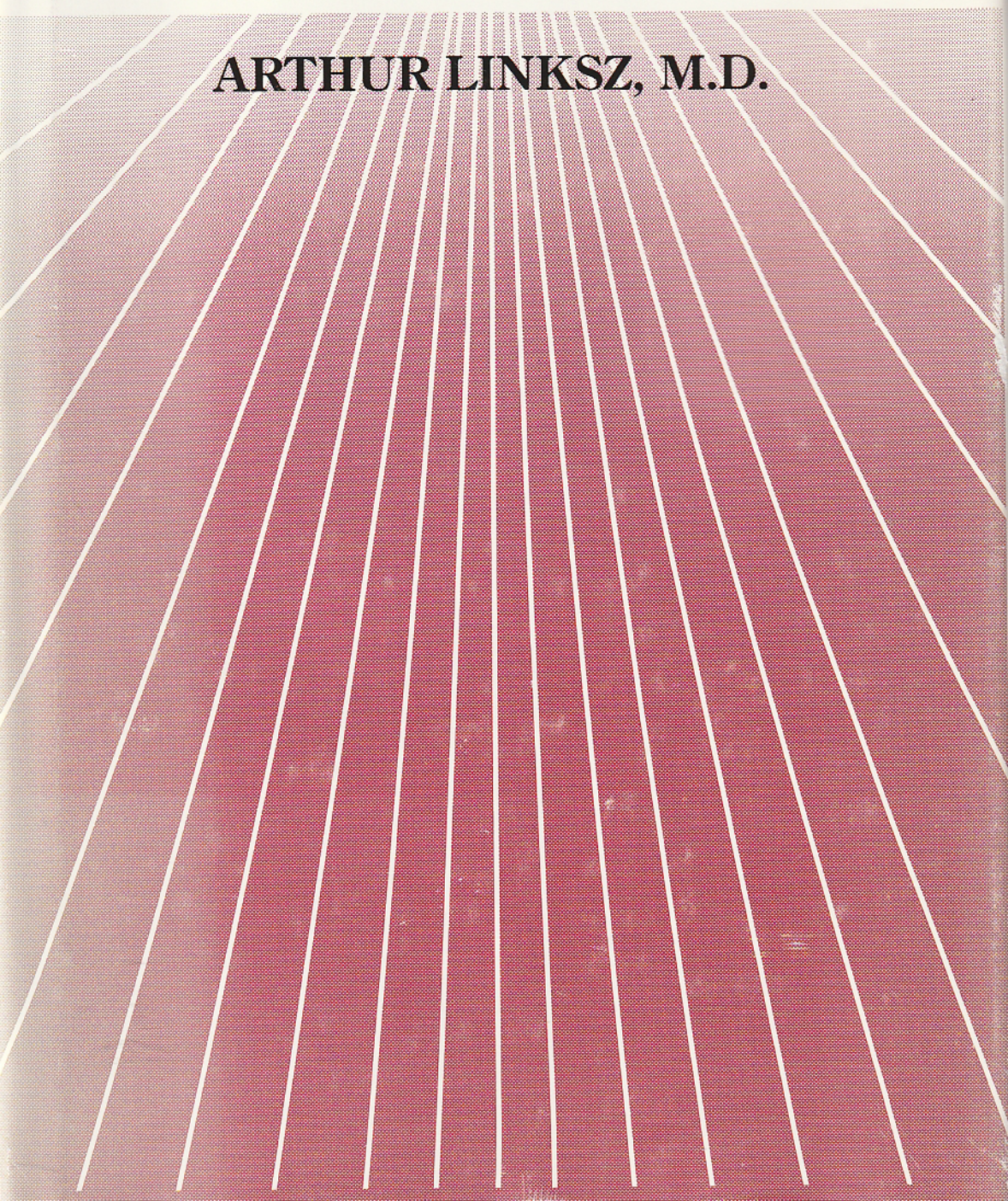
FIGHTING THE THIRD DEATH

ARTHUR LINKSZ, M.D.



The author, born in 1900 in a small town in Hungary, has spent the last 45 years of his life in America where he became one of the most prominent practitioners, researchers and clinical professors of ophthalmology, as well as the acclaimed author of books on the physiology of the eye, color vision, dyslexia, and art. His autobiography, ***Fighting the Third Death,*** deals primarily with the author's first eighteen formative years, which coincided with the last eighteen years of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In his memoirs the author captures and recreates the mood of pre-World War I Central Europe, and conjures up vivid images of the socio-economic, cultural, and psychological realities of the period.

At the same time, obeying the irresistible commands of his memory and association, he also presents, in intriguing oscillations between the remote past and the present, connections of thoughts and feelings which bridge sixty or seventy years. *Especially fascinating is his preoccupation with the phenomena and mechanisms of memory, and with the philosophical problem of individual survival in the memory of others.*

A different and no less interesting aspect of the book is that of the historical vignettes which bring to life the images and doings of the author's ancestors who lived in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, several of whom were rabbis whose reputations were still alive, and whose life stories could still be retraced through careful study of documents and family traditions.

FIGHTING THE THIRD DEATH

by

ARTHUR LINKSZ, M.D.

Translated from the Hungarian by

John J. Alpar, M.D.

in Consultation with the Author

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2025

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FIGHTING THE THIRD DEATH

Other Books by Dr. Arthur Linksz:

Physiology of the Eye. Volume I. Optics. 1950
Physiology of the Eye. Volume II. Vision. 1952
An Essay on Color Vision and Clinical Color Vision Tests. 1964
On Writing, Reading and Dyslexia. 1973
Visszanézek . . . (Looking Back). 1977
An Ophthalmologist Looks at Art. 1980

Dedicated

To the memory of my first wife, Magda, who was alive when the original, Hungarian version of this book was written and published;

To my American-born sons who are now, for the first time, able to read about their father's early life;

To Julia, psychology professor and author, who, even before our marriage, encouraged me to see to it that the book be translated and has, ever since, given her full support to the project;

To my friend, Professor John J. Alpár, whose labor of love—the immense task of translating the Hungarian text into English while preserving the author's individual style—made the "impossible dream" a reality;

To Professor Raphael Patai, an anthropologist and historian of note, the author of many books, for his careful reading of the manuscript and many valuable suggestions;

To Ms. Elizabeth Warner, for her all-encompassing attention to every aspect of the process of transforming the manuscript into a book;

To Mrs. Tomi Lopez, who patiently typed the manuscript over and over until it was flawless;

and, finally,

To János Kovács.

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Foreword

Quite a few years ago—I think is was the fifth, or perhaps the tenth anniversary of the death of Béla Bartók—I attended a Hungarian Bartók commemorative festival at the Town Hall of New York. The well-known writer Lajos Zilahy gave a reading obviously intended to be a eulogy. I do not remember anyone or anything else, any of the other participants or of the other parts of the program. Only the name of the concert pianist, Miklós Schwalb, appears vaguely at the periphery of my memory. Zilahy read one of his short stories which made an unforgettable impression on me, although even today I can only guess what could have been the connection between the substance of the story and the memory of Bartók, who was already at that time clearly destined for immortality. Perhaps Zilahy chose the subject precisely because he found himself face to face with the question of immortality and presented the story as an example of its opposite.

The story concerned a man, whose name I have forgotten. Zilahy may have chosen his name so that it should not be memorable. He tells the story of the man's life in such a way that we cannot remember anything about it. Absolutely nothing extraordinary happened to this man during his lifetime. I don't even remember what he did during or with his life. I think he remained unmarried; he had no friends, no relatives. His parents were dead. He died quite early himself. Nobody visited his grave. If he had any monument on his tomb, it had rotted away. Nobody erected a headstone for him. If he left behind letters or papers, they were destroyed or burned—it was as if a gust of wind had swept them into the gutter. From there on, this man "ceased to exist." He did not only die. He ceased to exist. (I believe it was George Orwell, the extraordinary English writer, who invented the idea of a nonperson—of course, in a different context). Allow me to repeat: János Kovács (let me call him by this name) not only died, but ceased to exist. When the last person who knew your name, who remembered

you, dies, when the last piece of your writings, which would at least have preserved a trace of your memory, disappears, then you really cease to exist. Obviously, this is what Zilahy wanted to say. At least, this is what he said to me.

In effect, everything I have just put down here is almost completely my invention. I repeat: I really remember nothing of Zilahy's story. Everything is suppressed, forgotten. The actual memories are all negatives. I do not know the name of the hero of Zilahy's short story. I only know that it was a Hungarian name, the kind you find by the half column even in the New York telephone directory, let alone the listings in the phone book of Budapest. Nor do I remember his occupation. It was certainly supposed to be uninteresting. The only visual memory I can vaguely recall is of a breeze that swept every piece of paper into the gutter, but that is neither here nor there. What I do remember is the essence of the story, the moral of the allegory: a man does not really die when he ceases to breath; he dies when the things associated with his name are gone, and the people who still remembered him are dead.

I wrote the above Foreword sometime about the beginning of 1974. About that time was born the first chapter of my autobiography—about my college years in Pápa and about Professor Császár. Actually, I had never planned to write memoirs. As a matter of fact, nothing really noteworthy has happened to me. On the other hand, the story of my meetings with Professor Császár did bother me for decades. I really wanted to write about it. Then came the pages about the *Jewish Telegraph:* that stroll with my grandfather almost seventy years ago. Now that finally everything I have scribbled over the last year-and-a-half has reached the stage of being fed into a typewriter, let me add that in the meantime Zilahy has died. I was toying with the idea that once the Foreword was typed I would send it to him and ask him what was the truth behind his story. For me, János Kovács has grown into the symbol of transitoriness, of ceasing, of nonexistence. He is that frightening monster, that Moloch, which devours the memories, the past, the soul, and transforms what is innermost into things-which-never-were.

And here a remembrance rises from many years ago, from the early twenties when I was a medical student in Prague. A concert was

given in a beautiful, old church; it may have been either the German Calvinist or the Lutheran church of the city. Old German church songs were on the program. I recall only a short fragment of the melody to which the last three lines of a longer song were sung:

Der dritte Tod, das ist der ewige Tod,
Davor bewahr' uns Jesus Christ
Um seiner heiligen fünf Wunden Ehre . . .
(The third death is the eternal death,
May Jesus Christ save us from it
For the sake of his five sacred wounds . . .)

I no longer remember what were the other two deaths, but the "third death" was cessation, when even the soul died.

An even older memory: my father read with me the Hebrew biblical text—one of those chapters from the *Five Books of Moses* in which the God of vengeance threatens those who do not fulfill the commandments or who transgress one of the prohibitions. Even now, I can hear God saying, of course, in Hebrew, and through the voice of my father:

That soul should be extirpated from the
midst of his people.

So, I said to myself, frightened by my father's words, even the soul can die. The death of the body was nothing, that I knew. That was a basic teaching that my father always preached so convincingly in his funeral orations in the cemetery. He used to mention that we were but dust and ashes, weak mortals, and that Mr. X or Mrs. Y "returned his (or her) immortal soul to his (or her) Creator." Occasionally he said "noble soul." And then, he always finished his sermon with the encouragement of the prophet Isaiah, declaiming loudly in Hebrew (I can hear his voice, and I know that he believed in what he said):

He will destroy Death forever,
And the Lord God will wipe the tears
From every face.

So even death can die. Certainly, since God created it. But the soul can also die, because even the soul was created by Him. And if a person's soul dies, he can have no resurrection. What then will happen

to those dry bones of the vision of the prophet Ezekiel? To those scattered bones which will arrange themselves together, upon which muscles and sinews will take shape, and which will be brought back to life by some kind of wind, some great and terrible storm... What will happen to those, I speculated, whose souls, too, had been destroyed?

This—the death of the soul, the third death, the cessation, "János Kovács," is the leitmotif of my writing.

But how in the world dare I write an autobiography? I have not become a famous person, the course of whose life would interest anybody, would inspire anybody, or whose life could, in some way, be an example. I was never a "celebrity," was neither the friend of a person of prominence nor his secretary, his cook, his masseur, to be able to divulge intimate details about him. My life contained no unique adventures, no exciting or dangerous events, which would be worth writing about. In fact, nothing extraordinary has ever happened to me. True, I lived through two world wars, but I took no active part in either. During the first, I was too young, during the second, too old. I was never a soldier. And I came to America at the "best possible time." ("Yes, Doctor, you really saved yourself a great deal of the trouble we had to go through.") True, my parents stayed at home and were destroyed in Auschwitz. The scar this left in me may be permanent, but certainly nothing exceptional. Thus, there would be no point in talking about it. Why then do I write? I can answer with two words: "third death." I would like to avoid, to prevent, the death of my soul. I would like to leave a perpetual record of my memories. (Oh, what a pompous word "perpetual" is! I wonder how long does that which is perpetual last?)

There are certain happenings about which today only I have knowledge. These remembrances are stored somewhere, somehow, in my mind, and they will live as long as my brain lives. (There are people whose brains die before their hearts do. I heard that my paternal grandfather, Jacob Links, lived this way at the end—with a non-functioning brain, but with a working heart). When I die, or when my brain stops functioning, those happenings will become things-which-did-not-happen. They will cease to exist; they will be extinguished. Like János Kovács.

What was so frightening for me quite early in my youth was to

think not of the transitoriness of the body, but of the mortality of the soul—the soul about which my father said with such deep conviction was "immortal" and "returns to its Creator." During my later juvenile, atheistic years, I denied the existence of the soul. Only matter existed, I kept asserting, and matter was everlasting. Today I am as convinced as my father was that the "soul is," it lives, it exists. The word "soul," to be sure, has acquired a different meaning. And so did the word "is." There *is* my consciousness, there are memory-images in my mind. More exactly, they are in myself, within the physical space occupied by my somatic self, to which only I (yes, only I) have direct access. What is more, these memory images *are,* they exist, even when they are not present in my consciousness.

So the thing I am so much frightened of is not the mortality of my body—that is only painful and sad (even now that I sit here and write I suffer pain)—but that of the soul. Yes. The soul too is mortal. As I said, there are certain events about which, in this whole wide world, only I know. They are stored somewhere inside me. Occasionally they frisk about somewhere in the consciousness, but most of the time they rest in a locked drawer of my brain. But they are alive!

Take my encounters with Professor Elemér Császár, long since dead. He asked me a question during my final oral examination in physics. The question was, to some extent, an extraordinary one (he did not ask it of anyone else), and only the two of us knew without any further explanation why he asked it of me. Even now, almost seventy years later, I remember it vividly and with some shame and pain. The reader will have to struggle through the chapters about my college years in Pápa if he wants to understand the antecedents and the sequence of that event.

Or think of another event—a happening which again has occurred only once since the world became a world. And today, only one living person knows about it—I, myself.

After five years of absence, I dared for the first time to go home to Devecser to visit my family. It was the summer of 1924. (I shall try in the sequel to make the reader understand why I had not dared to do it earlier.) I informed my father of my arrival, but asked him expressly that nobody should meet me at the railroad station. From the station, I took a roundabout way, through the outskirts, through the "peasant streets," so that I should not have to go through the town where every-

body knew me. In the evening, I went to the synagogue services with my father as if I had been away for only one week. Later, we sat down to dinner. At the end of the meal, as always, my father began to sing a psalm. But this time he did not recite Psalm 137, which was usually read on weekdays,

> By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea,
> we wept,
> When we remembered Zion . . .

Instead, he intoned Psalm 126, the one sung after the Sabbath and holiday meals:

> When the Lord brought back those that returned to Zion
> We were like unto them that dream.
> Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
> And our tongue with singing . . .

Of course, I noticed the substitution. "But this is not a holiday," I said quietly. "Oh yes, it is a holiday," said my taciturn father. (Oh, only now do I know that he really loved me! And even now my eyes are full of tears as I write these words.)

Well, such are my "world events." And, János Kovács, I must protect them from you—from annihilation. This is my only excuse for writing this book.

I was twenty-five years old when it was finally settled (really it was not entirely my decision, but mainly that of Professor Henrik Benedict, the director of the Jewish Hospital, one of the finest hospitals in the city) that I would become an ophthalmologist. Soon, I shall have to say more about this. Even after the choice had been made, I still asked myself for many years whether I should not have rather become a psychoanalyst. To this very day, this question, this doubt, gnaws at me. Would I have achieved more? Would I have been happier? This being the case, before I describe how I came to be an ophthalmologist, I must first tell how and why I did not become an analyst. The chronology is somewhat complicated. I mix up what came later with what happened earlier. I shall start again with later events. It really makes little difference.

1

Two Semesters in Budapest (1918-1919)
Revolutions and Counter-Revolution

I believe, the Hungarian Soviet Republic, the so-called "Dictatorship of the Proletariat," as they referred to it officially, and with a certain contempt, during the years of the Horthy era, ended on a Friday, late in July or early in August, 1919. (I always had trouble with dates.) We were informed—I don't know whether a newspaper brought the news or perhaps an official telephone call or telegram—that Béla Kún and his fellow commissars had left the country. A conservative trade union leader by the name of Peidl became Prime Minister. For me, always an optimist, always believing in the ultimate improvement of things, even this turn of events had a comforting or even reassuring aspect: the new leader was not a count, not a general, not a lawyer, not a politician, and, thank God, not a Jew. In final analysis, two steps forward and one step backwards really means one step forward. Besides, it became evident that the workers were "patriotic" (as they said it in Devecser) and not internationalists. The workers, the "have-nots," were in the front lines. The gentry, the "haves," tried to encourage the Rumanians to move toward Budapest. Even so, the flight of the commissars gave cause for alarm. The new government could not, or dared not, guarantee their safety. This should have been a warning signal for us, too, although as I remember, the higher orders were that in order to avoid chaos, everybody should remain in his place. In Pápa, where the bad news reached me, that day and even the next day it was "business as usual." Géza was still the

military commandant of the city—Géza, my mentor, my boss, my friend, and at that time, my idol. Everything was completely quiet. At least outwardly it was. Yet the commissars' escape-like departure *was* disquieting. (I recall a special train, perhaps an armored train. I have seen once such a frightening thing at the Devecser railroad station.) I remember quite clearly that Tibor Szamuely, one of the most powerful commissars, shot himself when caught at the Austrian border.

I am quite sure that the day after was a Saturday, but it is also possible that it was only a lazy day, a day of waiting. "What will tomorrow bring?" I had nothing to do; I just sat around in the sun reading one of the early stories of Dezsö Szabó. Its title was *Nincs Menekvés (There Is No Escape).*

Books have always played a great role in my life, and, in an almost mysterious way, they always came to my hand when I was ready for them. That summer I read Szabó's *Elsodort Falu (A Village Swept Away),* a gigantic piece of work whose perusal required weeks. I do not wish to talk now about this book nor about Dezsö Szabó as a person and his sudden, unexpected about-face which he pulled exactly at that time, within a few days following the collapse of the Hungarian Soviet. I felt as if I had been hit over the head with an ax: my adored Dezsö Szabó—a doleful Hungarian like Endre Ady, and a great Hungarian revolutionary—changed sides! But did he really? Only later did I understand that what he did was not really an about-face. He was a revolutionary, but only for the Hungarian cause. He had no interest in Marx, in the working class, in the "Internationale." He was interested in Kassa, in Kolozsvár, in the fate of the Hungarian peasant, not in the emancipation of the middle class or the eight-hour work day. When the Horthy regime began to herd the Hungarians toward the German mire, he went again into opposition. He even became a friend of some Jews. He was a bad politician. But he did not become a fascist. Let me do justice now to his memory.

At that time, I bought a copy of *Nincs Menekvés,* simply because it was written by Dezsö Szabó. I knew nothing about its contents. It must have been one of his early works, published in the provinces. Its

style reminded one of the *Napló (Diary)* the first great, truly Dezsö Szabóesque work. I do not remember its contents, its plot, its characters. My copy itself is lost. I never read it again. Even so, two episodes have remained indelibly in my memory: it was in it that I first met the name of Puvis de Chavannes, the French artist, and the description of a painting titled *The Poor Fisherman.* I don't know why and how this picture got into the book. It seems it had something to do with Christ. It is impossible not to think about him when one sees that picture. It is an amazing coincidence that around 1922, when I saw for the first time in my life a great exhibition in Prague of 19th-century French painters, this canvas was part of it. And it is even more amazing that I still have the catalog of that exhibition. It is in my library, somewhere among the thousands of collected programs and catalogs. When I left Prague in 1923, I left it there with my friends. Forty years later I got it back from them, among other books. Of the exhibition itself I remember best the paintings by van Gogh. My meeting with van Gogh developed into an enduring love affair. But I cannot talk about that now. All I want to say is that we gave my younger son David the middle name Vincent, the name of van Gogh.

For me *The Poor Fisherman* remained beautiful, even when the new Avant-garde wave banished into the attic this kind of symbolistic—should I rather say sentimental-realistic—pictures. Expressionism and Cubism became beautiful and meaningful for me, too, but only at the price of long spiritual battles. On the other hand, *The Poor Fisherman* never lost either its meaning or its beauty. As in politics, so in art, I was never able to wed myself to a movement. Doubt (as in English, so in Hungarian, the word *doubt* is related to *du,* that is, *two,* to seeing both sides of an issue) always remained.

When I think of *The Poor Fisherman* it is impossible for me not to see also those two prints in the Devecser cobbler's store, the *Death of Petöfi* and Millet's *Angelus;* of course in this case rather the latter, and not without a reason. Somehow, *The Poor Fisherman* and the *Angelus* share the same mood: quietness, tiredness, prayer at sunset after completed work, even if there is no distant church tower in *The Fisherman.* I have never seen a picture that depicted the serenity, the acceptance, the inner peace, as perfectly as this painting. (That the head of the fisherman inevitably reminds us of Christ just adds to its magic.) But of course all these are later feelings. Why did the name and

the picture remain connected in my memory with the book of Dezsö Szabó? I still do not know. As I said, my copy of the book got lost and I have never encountered it again. Yet, even though this memory is unforgettable, there is something else that prompts me to speak about it here and now.

It is a frightening image. Again, I remember neither details, characters, nor events, only a vision. I see myself in an empty room with two exit doors and I have to choose which one to open, although I do not know where either one of them leads. And as I open one of the doors, I find myself again in an empty room, and again there are two doors. I must choose again and again. And again I find myself in an empty room and must choose . . . and I can never, never turn back to try one of the other doors as well. All this intrigued me a great deal: time, that mysterious fourth dimension, mercilessly flowing in one direction and never allowing a turn-back. (Today, even this is no longer true. Today, even this is too simple.) No writing, no philosophy, could describe or express it for me in a more distinct, more frightening way than that vision which has stayed with me ever since. The choice is yours; you are free to choose the other door. And so, too, do the consequences change. It is not predestined that Oedipus has to kill his father, or that Laertes must die at the hands of his son. There are no Greek tragedies of destiny. You can never blame fate, or anyone else. It was you who made the choice, you were the one who acted accordingly and you must accept the consequences.

What follows really has little to do with the rest of my book—perhaps I shouldn't even write about it. Before I embarked on the present opus, I decided that I would not write about things medical, about my professional career, about myself as a doctor. Still, there was a professional event in my past which has remained a nightmare ever since, and which has made me wish I could turn back the flow of time even at the price of half my life. Some time between 1945 and 1950, during a delicate eye operation, a "mistake was made." One does not "make a mistake," one does something that results not in what was intended. In the medical jargon it is called a "complication." I noticed it, my assistant (a young resident ophthalmologist) did not. I told only the family physician at the end of the operation that in a glaucoma surgery one can expect "complications." I completed the operation as

if nothing had happened. In this kind of a situation a thousand things come to one's mind in a fraction of a minute; one must decide within seconds and decide irrevocably. I decided to wait. As it became evident, my decision was wrong.

To my misfortune, a few weeks earlier I read about a case somewhat related to this one in which a rather new miracle drug (much in vogue at the time) saved the eye in a similar situation without further surgery. In this case, neither the drug, nor a second operation performed later was of any help. The eye was lost. My improper move made me sick in the heart. For weeks I awoke with recurring dreams of anxiety. I could see clocks everywhere, and myself. I repeatedly relived in my dreams the half hour that preceded the critical moment. Everywhere in the hospital, wall clocks showed the time—7:55, I enter the hospital, 8:05—the dressing room; 8:10—the operating room; 8:25—the beginning of the operation. As yet, there is nothing wrong. *The problem is still in the future.* I am still permitted, it is still possible for me, to take the other step, that certain other step I should have chosen. *Nothing yet happened.* And then, 8:35. *Even in my dream I cannot do what I should have done.* As in a Greek tragedy, the outcome is inescapable in the dream. There is no choice. No way to retrace my steps. *No escape.* I wake up from the nightmare; I talk to myself in a loud voice; my face and body are covered with sweat. Even H.G. Wells' time machine would not help. *Not even in a dream, can one turn that which happened into that which did not happen.*

This is really what the next several pages are going to be about. The situation is aggravated when it is not you yourself who chooses the door that opens into your future. Sometimes you are just adrift. Sometimes "bad luck" hits you in the face. A blunder. You make one false step. And from there on everything becomes different. I have a story about this too.

It is the summer of 1955. We arrive in the small New England university town where during the next two or three weeks I shall explain to young ophthalmologists the secrets, the miracles of our eyes, our precious organ of vision. These few weeks are the highlight of my working year. It is 10 o'clock in the evening. My wife and the assistants are at work. They are busy with the preparation of the experiments to be shown, the pictures to be projected, the lectures to be given next

day. "Arthur, you could take the dog for a walk," I hear Magda say. "We are almost through." I step out into the dark, unfathomable night. The dog suddenly pulls at the leash, I stumble, fall, and find myself in a manhole that was left open. I get bruised. Total darkness. All I can feel is the pull of the leash. That is fine, I think, looking at the situation through the eyes of a doctor. I am able to crawl out of the hole, hence neither my vertabrae nor my ribs are broken. But then, it is odd that my right foot should be twisted 180 degrees. I begin to yell, "I broke my leg." Ambulance, hospital, doctors. Some kind of injection. The orthopedist. Chills. (Linksz, shame on you. You are not going into shock are you?) The next thing I remember is that sometime during the early morning I wake up in a hospital bed. My right leg is in a cast up to my waist and (what a frightening vision!) it is several centimeters shorter than the other. That's nothing, I think, it is a walking cast. Soon, it will be morning. I will be able to get up. I will be able to lecture. As it turned out, I was in the hospital for four months and in a cast for eight. (I did age early. My decalcified, rickets-ridden bones did not mend easily. Ever since that time, I am "half-sided"; now I am almost a hunchback. I am also accident prone.) Again for weeks I kept having nightmares. In my dream, I re-live the past over and over again. I try to eliminate in my dream the critical moment, to convince myself that it has not happened, that it is still in the future. I do not succeed. There *is* predestination. There *is* Greek tragedy. It exists even in our dreams. It comes to my mind. *There Is No Escape.* In any case, one cannot magically turn the thing that happened into a thing that did not happen. *One cannot change things.* I remember a volume of collected poems from my college years. Perhaps it was Milan Füst who wrote it? Or Zoltán Somlyó? Simon Kemény? A volume of contemporary poetry. *Változtatnod nem lehet (You Cannot Change It)* was the title.

I spent the last few weeks of the Dictatorship of the Prolatariat in Pápa under the aegis of Géza. (As I have mentioned earlier, I was rather busy reading *A Village Swept Away.)* It would be an exaggeration to claim that I was working. I got some kind of a job with the *Pápai Hirlap,* the semi-official organ of the College and of the Reformed parish, the most reputable of the two or three weekly papers published in Pápa. The *Pápai Hirlap* was also the unofficial, but for all practical purposes the *de facto* organ of the party, of the ones in power, during

those months. So I became a journalist and (as I kidded myself) a teacher of the people. I was supposed to organize a free school system for the future education of proletarian youth. Of course, there was hardly any time to organize anything and the whole idea remained a dream . . . .

Interestingly, I do not remember what my salary was or whether I ever received any. Yet I must have earned some money to live on. I do not even remember what my plans were. Did I plan to stay in Pápa? Or, perhaps, did I plan to continue my law studies in Budapest? I do not know. Or was I just drifting? Or was I still waiting for the dream of Joseph to be fulfilled? (The "dream of Joseph?" I have not mentioned it as yet. I shall get to it in its own good time.)

Did I plan to study law? I took my legal studies so lightly that at the end of the second semester I did not even bother to get the signatures of the professors. But then there was no point in continuing, since the authorities simply closed down the Faculty of Law. At any rate, my second semester remained incomplete. I kept my registration book for decades, perhaps until our emigration. It contained the most ridiculously beautiful photograph ever made of me. It made my hair look more full. It was taken by Olga Máté, a photo artist from the city, a friend of my arch-feminist friend, Renée Lovas. By the way, from my entire second university semester I have only one memory: I heard the poet Mihály Babits lecture in the great hall of the Gólyavár. The Dictatorship of the Proletariat elevated him to full professorship in one step, jumping over all the ranks in between. (Poor, frightened, clumsy professor; he was to suffer a great deal for this favor.) I cannot remember how many of his lectures I attended. But I do remember that once I got up the courage and introduced myself to him as a student who "plagiarized" him in his ode. He remembered, but not in a friendly way. I have never seen him again during all my years in Budapest. I read his immortal *Jónás Könyve (The Book of Jonah)* in America.

An interpolation, at the beginning of October 1975. I took from the shelf the 1967 edition of the collected (not complete) poems of Babits to look into his *Book of Jonah.* (Every occasion to do so is a good excuse.) It opened on page 547, and at first glance these lines caught my eye:

I don't believe in Predestination,
. . .
And perhaps if I make a different wave of the hand,
The world will alter its course
. . .
Even when free, I am not free.

How odd: a few paragraphs earlier I concluded that there is no predestination, and later I stated that there is. Only God knows. I am quite aware that others, too, have been thinking about this problem.

In the final analysis, it is almost incomprehensible for me that even though my memory usually encompasses most details, I have never been able to account to myself for exactly where and how I spent the four or five months of the "Dictatorship of the Prolatariat." For instance, I have a recollection that once I was in Lovászpatona, not far from Pápa, where a distant niece of my mother was married to a rich, older produce merchant, and that from there I carried to Devecser a very heavy backpack full of food to my parents. (Of course, it is possible that this memory is false and all this did not really happen at that time, but a year or even two years earlier, while I was still in the College. I am not sure.) During that certain night in Lovászpatona, about which I later must give an account, these relatives certainly did not come to my mind. It seems to me vaguely that I was twice in Veszprém, but the two occasions merge into one, and I cannot fix them in time. I can see myself at least on one occasion as I tried to get from Devecser to Budapest on a freight train, in a carriage marked "six horses or forty men." The line led through Veszprém or, to be more exact, through Jutas, one of the suburbs of Veszprém. Those were confused revolutionary times, and the regularly scheduled passenger train did not run. I learned that there was no train for more than half a day from Jutas to Pest. It was a free half-day, which could be used for sightseeing. I went to see the city of Veszprém.

Here, January, 1939, comes to my mind: When embarking on the journey to America, I left Budapest all by myself in a desperate mood. To tear myself away from my beloved Budapest meant, for me, almost suicide. Yet, even in the dark mood I managed to stay for a few days in Strasbourg—the first time in my life on French soil. Next I visited

Metz as a guest of Dr. Hommel, an ophthalmologist friend of mine, who showed me the Maginot Line, the symbol of French security. And finally, I stopped in Paris. I *had* to see Leonardo's *Holy Family* in the Louvre. (Freud wrote a book about the mystical eagle whose outlines are hidden in that painting.) Also, the statue of *Winged Victory*. And I just had to take a walk along the Boulevard Saint Michel where Ady's "autumn sneaked into Paris yesterday," and to find the hotel where Endre Ady had stayed. Of course, I saw also other things in Paris: I looked up Jewish friends who had escaped from Germany and were biding their time in smelly hotels with squeaky stairs. Among them was a couple from Berlin, who salvaged their beautiful library and their German culture, and with whom I spent an unforgettable evening among old books. The man was an aging, super-cultured, assimilated German Jew, with a much younger wife. They adored each other. It did not take much more than a year for Hitler to march into Paris. My friends apparently saw no point in trying to flee Paris; they committed suicide. And after World War II I looked in vain for my ophthalmologist friend of Metz. In spite of his faith in the Maginot Line he was deported to Poland; he never returned. But why continue?

Veszprém could not be farther away than some 20 miles from Devecser, but somehow I never had a reason or chance to go to see that city. Yet, there was direct railroad service between Devecser and Veszprém, and some of my former classmates, the gentry boys, went to the high school there. For me Veszprém remained a foreign city—a clerical city, a Neolog city—whereas in Pápa the Calvinists were the leading element, and the Orthodox Jews, forming a sizeable block, were significant participants in public affairs. We did not feel estranged from the Calvinists. ("The Calvinists are not anti-Semitic," said Father, or perhaps Uncle Silber.) There was the figure of a rooster on the steeple of the Calvinist church of Noszlop, not a cross. And the Calvinist church of Pápa was rather like a prayer house; at that time it did not even have a steeple.

It was an interesting experience, the half-day I spent in Veszprém. The city preserved the glory of its past. The revolution could hardly make a dent in it. What remained in my memory after that visit was the church—perpetual and unchangeable. I hardly took note of the inner city; looking up the synagogue didn't even come to my mind.

The Veszprém of everyday I do not remember at all. I can recall the cathedral and the chapel of Queen Gizella. (She was the wife of Saint Stephen and the mother of Saint Imre.) I remember a picturesque viaduct-like bridge over a deep ravine, adjacent to the cathedral and the palace of the bishop. In Devecser, which belonged to the diocese of the bishop of Veszprém, they always spoke about that very, very important person with deep respect, almost with awe. As I remember, at least once a year his official duties brought him to Devecser. (At such times I was not permitted, or it was not polite, or perhaps only my father did not want me to leave our apartment and gawk. I always loved to see what was going on.) From my childhood I remember the name of the bishop, Baron Hornig, and that he was the only Hungarian bishop who supposedly reached the rank of cardinal (even if I did not know exactly what that meant); and (oh, how proud I was of such distinction bestowed upon our county!) that it was not the cardinal prince-primate, but the bishop of Veszprém who had the privilege of crowning the Queen of Hungary.

I really gobbled up the details the doorman of the bishop's palace gave me, at my request, patiently answering my questions about the way of life of that great personage. I remember him telling me that the bishop travelled the distance of about 200 steps between his palace and the cathedral in a four-horse carriage each time he went to the pontifical high mass on Sunday. But what made the deepest impression on me was his story about the twelve canons. As the doorman explained, they walked every afternoon, always exactly at the same time, in a single line in front of the small chapter palaces. I remember a face (I could draw it, I say to myself, but of course I would not be able to) a stern, wise, unhappy, old face, etched in stone. Look, I said to myself, this man once dreamed that he would be a bishop, the bishop of Veszprém. And, lo and behold, he is stuck here for his old days as a mere canon. This theme, the thwarted career, obsessed me at all times in my life: the deputy rabbi, Herr Pollak *der Dayen,* who will never become the Chief Rabbi (at most perhaps a rabbi in Devecser), the outpatient chief physician who never became the chief of the department; the colonel who never became a general; the violinist who sits in the second row of the orchestra and will never become the conductor, or what is more, a soloist; and above all, the never fulfilled though basically ambivalently held dream, the "professor extraordinary"

("the associate") who will never become the "ordinarius," the incumbent of a chair in the university. This face, this scene occupied me so much that on another occasion I had to go to Veszprém, or had to wait there for a connecting train (during that year I went to Devecser from Budapest and not from Pápa), I went to look at the canons' walk to see again the unforgettable face of the old canon. I can see it even now.

As I said, the legendary wealth, the rank, the position of the bishop of Veszprém excited my fantasies since my childhood. In truth, so did the Catholic church—with its colors, its solemnness, and its strict hierarchy. Even today, if I see in the newspaper an article concerning the high clergy, I will find time to read it. *The New York Times* devotes a page in every issue to the biography and necrology of outstanding or at least somewhat known people who died the day before. (If a cardinal dies, they even print his photograph.) I still read these death notices with the same excited interest that the *petit bourgeois* of London brings to the daily bulletins concerning the royal family of England.

I must confess that in my youth I was just as much fascinated by the doings of the aristocracy. Church and aristocracy somehow belonged together. Both Devecser and Pápa had a Count Esterházy; in both cities the castle and the Catholic church were neighbors. This almost childish interest in the aristocracy was, of course, connected with the juvenile grumblings against the omnipotent God: if he is omnipotent (which I did not doubt), why did He create me a man and poor to boot? (This motive, the grumbling against God, was used by the well-known Russian Jewish writer, Sholem Aleichem, in his immortal stories about Tevie, the milkman. For the *Ribbono Shel Olam (Master of the Universe)* it would have made no difference whether Tevie was poor or rich; why then did He choose to let him live in poverty? If somebody could, from birth on, put the "Br" (for baron) or especially "Gr" (for *"gróf,"* count) in front of his name, he would not have to struggle throughout his life; all doors opened for him just as for a beautiful woman. (A beautiful actress only had to marry a count and she became a countess, "her excellency the countess.")

By the way, I also admired an opposite attitude in the hierarchy of the church; the life story of Jankó Csernoch who became cardinal prince primate, and whom the old Jews of Galgóc still remembered helping his father, the old Slovak wood cutter, carry the logs into the

yard of the rabbi's residence.

There is another memory linked to travelling in the cattle car. It is possible that it did happen, and it is possible that it is only a dream. Sometimes I cannot separate the two. I can see only cars completely filled with young men—as if they were soldiers coming home from the war. On the other hand, they are not in uniform. There are many small stations between Devecser and Veszprém; everywhere I can see crowds of old and young peasant women, waiting, their heads covered with kerchiefs. At every stop some men are getting off the train. They fall into the arms of the women and some of them immediately disappear behind a gate. They are home.

I believe the whole thing is just a dream. How would the women know during the revolutionary times that their men were coming home by that train? And how could I have seen them reaching their villages? Suddenly I remember that I had the feeling that it would be good if I could also get off the train and fall into the arms of one of the waiting old or young women and could say: "You were waiting for me, I am the one you have been waiting for!" This image haunted me for a long time. What would happen if once I would get off a train at an unknown place, would ring the bell of a strange door and would say, "I am home." They would think I was a lunatic. And to this image belongs another one: I am in a big city, perhaps Budapest, perhaps New York, with thousands, with millions of houses, apartments, and I have in my pocket a key which opens one, and only one, of them. My God, what would happen if I forgot the address?! And, of course, I inescapably associate the waiting women with Peer Gynt, the wanderer in search of himself, for whom his mother or his fiancee, or both, are waiting, and who at the end, even if late in his life, does find his way home. But, enough, I say to myself. Leave the dream. Let's get back to the subject. I did find my home. I do have the key. And I do know the number of the house. (If I would now begin to talk about the time when I read Peer Gynt, about when and with whom I saw it performed, and how all this is associated with the actress Lili Darvas, I would never get any further.)

I remember the train from Devecser to Pest which I took in the first week of September. I started out for Budapest, for the university, to take a position about which I will have more to say shortly. To conquer the world. "Let the CITY embrace you," wrote Terus (putting the word CITY in caps) in one of her letters. I remember that even the corridors of the third class coach were crowded. I had to stand: a kind traveler opened the door of the lavatory, and there I was standing with my luggage and my dreams in the narrow cubicle. "Let the CITY embrace you." The beginning was promising. I enrolled in the law school. For awhile I worked as a private tutor.

I will have to talk soon about this episode. I will not be able to say that in that given situation my behavior was correct. I certainly did not return good deeds for good deeds. But first, I have something else to relate.

Following my high school exam in the late spring of 1918, I spent the summer, because of my so-called apical lung catarrh, with my grandmother and uncle at Ó- and Uj-Beszterce in County Trencsén. My father made one more desperate attempt to save my soul and to keep me for Jewry, or at least a rabbinate in the Neolog persuasion. Somehow he had already accepted that I would enter the university in Budapest. But he wished above all that at least I should simultaneously study at the Rabbinical Seminary, even if only as a non-matriculated student. As examples, he referred to some of his friends who were lawyers, professors and writers but had completed a Yeshiva and remained Jews. Here one of the truly Orthodox friends of my father comes to mind—an example he never forgot to mention. I know that he was the son of the rabbi of Nagyszombat, Dr. S., the editor of the official weekly of Hungarian Orthodox Jews. (I shall never get to the point of writing about the famous weekly of the Neologs, the *Egyenlöség (Equality)* and about its editor, Miksa Szabolcsi.)

I remember that rather obscure little Orthodox weekly among other things, also because of an article expounding the usual complaint of the Orthodox, that most Jews these days have their children study everything except religion, Talmud and Bible. As the writer of the article put it, they have their children learn "French, piano and Hottentot," but not... and so forth. "French, piano and Hottentot" has remained a household phrase in our home. I stub-

bornly refused to subscribe to this ideology, although I kept insisting that I have been observing the religious rules to a tee. One of my father's long letters mentioned the word *happiness* again and again (the title of his most successful book was *Family Happiness*). I answered it by sending him a registered letter consisting of one sentence, without any salutation or signature:

> It is not to my happiness, but to my work that I aspire.
> (Nietzsche)

I do not know where I quoted it from. The result was that my father felt deeply insulted. Among religious Jews, the exchange of letters had its traditional form: you begin with "In the name of God"; after the salutation you wish that your correspondent live a hundred and twenty years and that "his candle may shine." You date the letter according to the weekly portion of the Bible to be read that Saturday, and after the date you add that you are awaiting the Messiah, who "will rebuild Jerusalem," etc. And one couldn't even think of finishing a letter written to parents in any other way than "your grateful son." All this was omitted in that "shameless, disrespectful" letter. But at that point nothing could change my mind. I decided to go to Budapest to become a law student because that is what Endre Ady did—because I wanted to be a writer, a poet, a politician. I saw myself as a young poet, embraced by the young guard of the *Nyugat.* And in order to make a living, I would find "some kind of a job."

The position which could be expected to solve the problem of survival for me simply and in a grand way was obtained for me by Uncle Poldi Spitzer, my father's cousin (they grew up together and together they went to the high school in Zsolna). Poldi was at that time a director of *Fabank (Lumber Bank).* He recommended me to a Mrs. G., a young widow. Her husband had died very young. He too had been a director of *Fabank.* Mrs. G. was looking for a live-in tutor for her two sons; they could have been about 10 and 12 years of age. The tutor had little to do. He was supposed to see to it that the boys did their homework, and to accompany them to soccer or tennis matches, to gymnastics classes, or to go with them on the weekends the boys occasionally spent with relatives who lived in Buda. I remember the horse-drawn omnibus which happened to take us almost from house

to house, from terminal to terminal along the Andrássy Avenue, from Aréna Avenue to the Krisztina Square. I had a beautiful room opening from the hallway and facing the street, in a truly aristocratic apartment on the corner of Nagy János (now Benczur) Street and Aréna Avenue (this too has a different name today) in one of the finest residential quarters of Pest near the *Városliget* (City Park). The lady of the house was "high class," a cultured and generous woman. There was always a guest in the house. An attractive young niece of hers lived there for months. I remember her décolleté dresses that let you see parts of two white hills, and I vividly recall that she played Chopin and Mendelssohn on the piano. I remember the *Lieder ohne Worte* or the *Chants sans Paroles* song cycle. At my request, she played one of its pieces over and over again. (Yes, to know how to play the piano and to speak French remained for me forever the criteria of high class education and accomplishment.) Then, in October, a young lieutenant appeared in the house—a nephew by the name of Weinberger. I do not remember his first name. Everybody called him "lieutenant." He was a kind, handsome, happy-go-lucky, simple young man. My students adored him. He told humorous episodes as part of his war experiences and later, once in a while, he let me exercise my marksmanship with his military revolver in the City Park. I believe that was the first time in my life that I fired a revolver or even had one in my hands.

In this connection a Saturday afternoon stroll comes to my mind. The favorite walks of my father led us to the postmaster's orchard along the banks of the small Torna river. I could have been ten-odd years old. A favorite pastime of boys was to shoot at birds, and I, just to brag about my expertise, began to explain to my father that the boys were using a certain kind of rifle. I said something about a "Flobert," or perhaps about a "22," and obviously I did not know what the specifications meant. My father was not impressed at all. "Why does a Jewish boy have to fill his head with such things?" I knew that ever since the times of Jacob and Esau, Jews have considered hunting one of the most contemptible occupations. "But deer is kosher," I said to my father, "it chews the cud and its hoofs are split like those of a sheep or a cow." Yes, explained my father, if they catch the deer alive and the *shohet* cuts its throat in the ritual way, then the meat becomes kosher and it is permitted. (I believe venison, or meat prepared in venison

style, never belonged to the customary items of the Jewish kitchen.)

It was October or the beginning of November. The Revolution. Mihály Károlyi. István Tisza was shot to death by "drunken soldiers" in the Róheim Villa on the far side of the City Park. The occupants of Nagy János Street and its vicinity organized voluntary security groups. They admitted, of course, the lieutenant and me, too. I had a revolver in my pocket. I was a "leftist" sympathizer. I do not know which left wing party I sympathized with; essentially I was for all of them. I did not understand the dogmas which tore the "liberals" into separate parties. Yet with my usual knack for seeing both sides I ended up defending the "conservative bourgeois," the "exploiters." But at the same time, participation in that group of volunteers was an interesting and diverting experience. Of course, nothing ever happened.

My memories of Nagy János Street include also the *Liget* (or *Park?*) Nursing Home across the street from my window. It was there that Endre Ady spent the last weeks of his life. He died there in January or February, 1919. I went to his funeral. As I remember, the funeral services were held on top of the broad steps leading up to the National Museum. I think it is just a figment of my imagination that I once saw Ady. I know that in the last year of his life he was very ill. I believe that his last public appearance was at the first meeting of a new association called the Vörösmarty Academy (for "creative artists and research scientists"). It is not likely that they would have permitted me to enter that meeting. More probably I saw the picture of the meeting in a paper and made it over in my mind into a *real* experience.

The arrangement made for me by Uncle Poldi was on the whole quite satisfactory, but there was a rub in it—my father. When Poldi had written to him that he knew of an ideal job for me, my father came to Budapest with me to survey the situation. Sweet Mrs. G. had reassuring answers to my father's numerous questions. Either I made a very good impression on her, or I must have been highly recommended. Mrs. G. stated that her family was Jewish but not really religious, but if I wanted I could nail a *mezuzah* on my room's doorpost. And naturally, full board would go with the room, but if I did not want to have it she would gladly give me another 60 crowns in addition to

my salary so I could eat in one of the city's kosher restaurants. And, of course, I could go to the synagogue Friday evenings and Saturday mornings. Today, from a distance of more than 60 years, I don't quite see how my father could really have believed all this. Perhaps the poor dear just wanted to believe it? Perhaps he pretended that he believed it? Was he exhausted? Did he give up on me? I do not know. Did he really believe that I would walk Friday evenings or Saturday mornings to the synagogue (I do not remember now to which one) and to the little street behind the Opera to the kosher restaurant (which my father inspected)? I do not know. At the beginning, rarely, very rarely, I did put in an occasional appearance at a nearby synagogue to reconnoiter, and went fairly regularly to the restaurant. After all, I had to eat something. And why not there? But to walk all the way to the City Park on Saturdays?

It did not take more than a few weeks for me to establish very good rapport with my patroness. I explained to her that I was not religious at all, and that it was only my respect and loyalty to Father which led me to put on this act. Whereupon she remarked that in that case there was absolutely no reason why I should go out of the house to eat. Thus, for the short duration of my passing glory, I received the additional 60 crowns and "happened" to stay in for meals more and more frequently.

Mrs. G. entertained a lot. Never before had I seen such table settings, such service, such hospitality. We were in the fifth year of the war. How did she manage? On these occasions the lady of the house sat at the head of the table; next to her, her beautiful niece companion with the intriguing visible valley between the imagined little hills. On one occasion a real count was seated on her other side. Mrs. G. called him simply, Shemshey. I remember the other guests only vaguely. I sat with my two students at the other end of the long table; the lieutenant sat near us. Somehow he did not feel like going "home," to Transylvania.

This was an idyllic period in my life. The idyll even included those weekly or bi-weekly evening patrols, mostly in the company of interesting capitalist adults among whom I felt quite comfortable. For the first time in my life I could go from my room into a bathroom, turn on the tap, and let the tub fill with hot water. And of course there was also a real flush toilet. I enjoyed all this. I liked being the servant of such a mistress. I began to be proud of my elegant living quarters. My friend

Iván, who was also a law student, lived in a humble, dark, small room with a private entrance in Ferencváros, I believe in the Valeria Street. We met very rarely—he was assigned to a different group studying Roman law and history of law. Besides, he, too, attended the lectures, but rarely. During the daytime he worked as a clerk in the City Savings Bank. Pretty soon he became a familiar figure on Ferenc Boulevard, in the all-night cafés; and before long he knew the women both on the street and in the café.

Sári, too, spent the semester in Budapest, but as a medical student. I saw her only once, by accident, on Museum Boulevard. (Sári was my first great love and is now a grandmother and a well-known Freudian psychoanalyst, but I will say more about her later.) At the beginning of the year she sent word through some ex-classmates that there was no reason for us to meet—she would not be able to return my love. During our short chance encounter I was embarrassed and almost totally silent. I remember only that she spoke about her new home in the József City (a district of Budapest) where she lived with a family named Kulcsár, whose son was a medical student or, perhaps, a future medical student. Some 15 years later István Kulcsár, an M.D. and a medical (but not Freudian) analyst, was the physician and close friend of Béla and Ditta Bartók. I cannot help feeling proud that Béla Bartók and his wife were also my patients in Budapest at the end of the thirties, and in New York in the mid-forties. The last time I saw him was during the last months of his life, on a Sunday afternoon at a concert in the Brooklyn Museum. We went together from Brooklyn to Manhattan on the 5-cent subway. He was already very pale.

Suddenly, a newcomer disturbed my idyllic existence. He was Zoltán, the older brother of the lieutenant, and in every respect his opposite. He had just returned from a Russian prison camp and he was dead serious about his experiences. He wore civilian clothes, a hat pushed back on his head, kept his hands usually in his pockets, and was much taller than his brother. He walked so rigidly that he almost tumbled backwards. He also knew exactly the "truth" he had been taught in Russia. The boys hated him, his younger brother was embarrassed by him, and my beautiful lady boss did not like him either. I myself had at first a deep aversion toward him. I do not even know why he frequented Mrs. G.'s house. He had the answer to every

question. There, in Russia, was the system that encompassed justice, law, the future, and even culture. After all, he said, was it not the country of Lunacharsky and Gorky? And they were Lenin's friends. There is peace, too, in Russia, the peaceful cooperation among nations, nationalities, without any chauvinism. And what do we have here in Hungary? Well, he conceded, it is true that Mihály Károlyi distributed his own land. But who else followed his example? (Not Devecser, I said to myself.) Where was the nationalization of the means of production? The putting an end to exploitation? The Social Democrats only talked. And they helped the war effort. Haven't the traitorous German Social Democrats voted for getting into the World War? Kautsky, Bernstein, Noske, Ebert? And the liberals? Jászi and his friends? *Petit bourgeois* dreamers!

Under the impact of Zoltán's verbal assault I began to ask myself, what was I doing? I was just a drifter. I did not fulfill conscientiously even the light duties assigned to me. I went to more and more protest meetings, to lectures at the "Galilei Circle." The fact is that at the end, the friendship between Mme. G. and myself turned almost into enmity and with the onset of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat I lost the material foundation of my existence. "We lost all we had," said Mme. G. (Of course she is a capitalist, I said to myself. She does not work, she lives on the blood and sweat of poor Transylvanian forestry workers.) But even then Mme. G. remained quite fair. She let me keep my room. (Obviously there must be a man in the house, I said to myself. And the extra room would be appropriated anyhow. Their apartment is much too big for three or four people.) So for a short while I stayed there. What did I do after that? It is odd, but I must confess that I do not know. I know only that Zoltán suddenly became an important person, although not a people's commissar, and a few days after the outbreak of the proletarian revolution he helped me land a sinecure with one of the People's Commissariats—industrial? commercial? welfare? I do not know. I remember only that I sat at a desk in the Bourse Palace on Freedom Square, but only for a short time. The salary was good, I received it in "blue" money. "Good" money.

But this was not the kind of horse I wanted.

So what kind of horse did I want? I certainly never wanted to be a clerk and sit in an office. But then, neither did I want to fight, to

struggle, to compete. How wonderful it would be to be a woman, I repeated the old grumble, a beautiful woman who doesn't have to do anything but expose the cleavage between two small hills.

My dream was the dream of the biblical Joseph about the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars that bowed down before his star, recognizing him as their God-given leader; of Joseph who, at the end, was seated on the right of Pharaoh with the royal ring on his finger.

When the high school idyll of Pápa had ended, I had not realized that all idylls came to an end. I had not known that in Budapest I was not likely to be the first of the class called to the blackboard when his excellency the superintendent visited the school, the poet who won the contest because his ode was better than all the others, and who had it in him, at least in Terus' dreams, to become a Goethe, an Ady, or perhaps even an Atilla Ladányi, all in one person. (I will have to tell the story about Atilla Ladányi sometime.) I had believed that doors would open for me also in Budapest. Someday, somebody would arise from the throne and state that he was only waiting for Me, Me with a capital M—and the chair would be mine. "Let the city receive you," Terus had written when I started out for Pest (it is not right that I should poke fun at my poor girlfriend whose fate it was to be killed in Auschwitz). She had already known that the Messiah was to come from among us. When on the occasion of our fiftieth homecoming I visited Pápa the last time, in the company of Zsiga, I made a pilgrimage to the house of Sári, and to the wood and coal depot of Terus. At either place nobody remembered the old inhabitants. There is only one factual evidence that Terus existed: a pencilled dedication from 1919 in a novel of Herman Bang—the writing is so faded that even I can hardly decipher it. Sári, who was like a steel spring with not a trace of sentimentality, never returned to Pápa after World War II. Though she did visit Budapest, as far as I know, she never even responded to the later invitations to class reunions.

Digression Written in Miami, Florida, February/March, 1975

We are in Florida, guests of Helen and Albert, both medical doctors. They are friends from Pozsony and later from New York. She hails from County Vas. What a pleasure to listen to her provincial idiom! Right now Helen is intrigued by the enigmas of extrasensory perception and other psychic phenomena. She is very interested in all this, but she has her doubts. She gives me a book to read, written by a compatriot of ours, Arthur Koestler. Its title is *The Roots of Coincidence.*

Before traveling, especially before longer vacations, I try to say goodbye to my books, to my library. It is very difficult for me to tear myself away from them. I always carry twice as many books and journals as I can read. And of course, in addition to all that, the manuscript on which I am now working. The situation reminds me of my parents: my mother was always upset: *"Die Bücher, die verdammten Bücher,"* ("the books, those damned books,") she mumbled when my father added another prayer book or a pocket-Talmud to the things to be packed. So, as I was saying goodbye to my books the day before we left for Miami, I suddenly remembered that for quite a few years I had not opened a certain novel by Herman Bang: *Hoffnungslose Geschlechter (Hopeless Generations)* is its German title translated from the Danish, and I had not checked whether the writing was still there, the handwriting of Terus. (The honest German publisher even stated in the book that because of the war he had to use poor quality paper, and it was questionable how long the book would last.) I was alarmed to see that the pages, indeed, had begun to blacken since I last leafed through them, and that the penciled writing—already a few years earlier it was quite faded—had disappeared completely. I could not see it even with a magnifying glass. The 1920 edition of Szabó's *A Village Swept Away* suffered the same fate. The pages blackened and, when one touched them, crumbled (although the ink-written dedication by the author still can be seen clearly on the title page). Yes, death can overtake even books.

I know that I got the Bang novel as a gift from Terus in Budapest in September, 1919. After hiding for four to six weeks in Budapest without a police form (the dates, as always, are blurred in my memory) I took her strolling in a tree-lined alley of the City Park. We were saying

goodbye. Next morning I was to leave by train for Pozsony with questionable travel papers that declared me a native of Galgóc, and were based on a forged police registration card purchased either in Gödöllö or in Cegléd. Terus had come to the city to say goodbye and to encourage me. "I am your certain certainty" were the words she wrote into the book (without her name) above the September, 1919, date.

What does this have to do with Koestler's book? One of the chapters in that small pocketbook dealt with a Viennese biologist named Kammerer, who earlier in the century had written a popular book entitled *Das Gesetz der Serie, (The Law of the Serial Occurrences).* In my circle of friends it became a favorite game to try to discover some mystical connection between all sorts of totally unconnected events. Koestler translated the word as "coincidence." Hence, the title. He cites two examples from Kammerer's book. The first is not interesting. In the second, Prince Rohan, a friend of the Kammerer family, appears in a number of coincidences which seemingly have no causal connection. This is the "Series." To me, the name Rohan is familiar and the association machine starts working right away. I know of a Prince Rohan who lived about the end of the 18th century. I think he was the bishop of Strasbourg (perhaps archbishop or cardinal), a very powerful man, one of the confidants of Louis XVI, perhaps one of his ministers. He was the tragicomic victim who mistakenly gave an expensive diamond necklace, intended for the queen, Marie Antoinette, to an adventuress in the belief that the veiled woman was the queen herself. (I have read the story of this famous "necklace affair" in several variations; only a few years ago I found it again in the biography of Marie Antoinette by Stefan Zweig.) No matter how interestingly the Rohan example may illustrate Kammerer's theory of serial happenings, my spontaneous train of thoughts has nothing to do with Kammerer's thesis. It only shows that with my more than ordinary familiarity with literature and unusual kind of memory, I can easily drift into all sorts of unexpected associations. I do not have to search for mysterious, inexplicable, coincidences. Of course, one is startled when unconnected things occur simultaneously. In the majority of the so-called coincidences, I believe, it is the association within our own brains that plays a role, and not some kind of mystical, supernatural arranger or organizer. The reason I mention all this here does make some sense, however. The example cited by Koestler begins with the

wife of Kammerer reading a book of Herman Bang titled *Michael.* In that book, one of the characters is named Rohan. This is the fact through which the events of that day connect, in which the friend of the family, Prince Rohan, repeatedly appears. The "series" in the case of the Kammerer couple is formed by the name Rohan that happens to occur in a book, and that, at the same time, is the name of one of their friends. For me, however, the name Rohan (to be more accurate, the name Prince Rohan) was simply the start of an association process. The one thing that for me really has a "series"-like character is not Rohan, but the name of Herman Bang. Of course, the coincidence would be even more exciting if the title of the book had been *Hoffnungslose Geschlechter (Hopeless Generations).* But this would be too much, an exaggeration, worthy of the pen of Jókai. It would not be believable. I am sure that in the past fifty years I have not read or seen the name of Herman Bang. It is also certain that I have never talked to anyone about him. (For a while I completely forgot about him, so much so that I mixed up Herman Bang with Hermann Bahr, an essayist from Vienna.) A few days ago I had in my hand that particular Bang novel; I thought of Bang, and now Koestler has chosen that particular example from the innumerable possibilities in which this name, this writer and one of his books appear. Would you call it a series? A coincidence? I thought it worth mentioning, at least.

And Terus? When I last saw my parents in January, 1939, the train from Köszeg to Pest stopped in Pápa for about three minutes. There, at the railroad station, I saw her for the last time. What happened to her later on? She disappeared, together with the others, her family, the people from Pápa, from Köszeg, from Devecser, from all of rich and beautiful Transdanubian Hungary. I know nothing more.

But let me get back to 1918, to Budapest, to my new job, and to the dream of Joseph.

One of the first things I did as soon as I settled in Budapest was to go up to the editorial offices of *Nyugat (West)* with the poems I had published in the *Pápai Hirlap.* What did I expect? Perhaps I expected (I was daydreaming) that upon seeing my poems, the editors, Ignotus and Ernö Osvát, would emerge from their inner sanctums and declare

that as of today I am going to be the editor of *Nyugat,* or at least its chief correspondent, or God knows what? (All right, I do exaggerate a little bit. I still have some sense of humor left!) I was able to talk to two indifferent, young secretaries, both with cigarettes in their mouths (women smoking!), who told me that there were no office hours right then, and besides, manuscripts must be sent through the mail. Moreover, *Nyugat* was not interested in poems which had already been published. I left with my hopes crushed. Never again did I go back. No new poems were born ever after.

Then, in quest of a place where I could earn a living and have some literary responsibility, I went to the editorial offices of *Népszava (The People's Voice),* a socio-democratic daily. There, I waited at the door of a mediocre proletarian poet by the name of Csizmadia, until he let me in. (He had no secretary.) I brought with me a few newer, "socialist"-type poems. There was in them echos of Ady's *Almodik a nyomor (Misery is Dreaming)* and *Proletár-fiú verse (The Poem of a Proletarian Boy),* those ode-like inspirational poems Ady wrote for the annual March festivities of the Galilei Circle. I also brought along a short story that described the life of workers. Quite politely Csizmadia accepted them. I never heard from him again.

But in spite of all this I continued to nurse the Joseph dream—after all, someone will have to discover in me the divine spark, recognize me as one who had received the "call," as the chosen one. I do not believe that these two words, "called" and "chosen," could have existed at that time in my daydreams. And as I describe them now, rich associations blossom around these two words—Professor Benedict, the chief of the Jewish Hospital of Budapest, and the Gospel according to Matthew. They will have to be discussed when their time comes.

In the meantime, September became October, with "Revolution of the Chrysanthemums," the battle of the Chain Bridge, the collapsed fronts. Crowds in Parliament Square. I adored to be present, to be carried away by the crowd. "I do not wish to see a soldier," proclaimed Colonel Linder, the new pacifist Minister of War. And "Don't shoot my son, because I, too, will be there," spoke from the wall posters the enthusiastic anti-war, pro-revolutionary poem of Zseni Várnai.

Then came November: Count Mihály Károlyi became the President of the Republic. I was again there in Parliament Square, in the

crowd of thousands. Very happy. Perhaps poetry is not the right path for me. My poems are weak, inspired by and imitating others' creations. Fewer and fewer poems were stirring in me. It must be that my "calling" was in politics (I borrowed the word from *A Village Swept Away*). As a matter of fact, I did not care for the *Népszava*. From a literary point of view it was a rather low-quality paper. Perhaps I did not even regret that my attempts were unsuccessful. As for Marxism, I did not even know what the word meant. (*Népszava* was a Marxist publication.) The problems of labor unions did not interest me. I felt much closer to the *Huszadik Század (The 20th Century)* and the *Szabadgondolat (Free Thought)*. I still own Oszkár Jászi's book *Történelmi materializmusról (On Historical Materialism)*. I have been lugging it with me, perhaps I shall read it once. When? Perhaps when I retire. Just as I shall read the hundreds of other books I lugged with me. A few days after that victorious October (or November?) day, I went to the offices of the Bourgeois Radical Party. What purpose that place served originally, I do not remember. It could have been the premises of a party or of a club. I do not know. But I remember that it was on the Octagon Place, on the second floor above a large café. Three well-dressed, middle-aged gentlemen were sitting around. I believe one was called Pál Szende. I introduced myself as a law student with radical views, and offered my services. They detailed me right then and there to a young secretary who had to distribute some propaganda brochures. She gave me a list of names and a few hundred empty envelopes to address. All day I served the cause of the Revolution and addressed envelopes. When I said goodbye in the evening, the young woman wanted to pay me for my work with a five crown bill, asking me to come again the next day. The three elegant middle-aged gentlemen were not around. Indignantly, I refused to take the money. I wanted to serve the revolution, not to earn money. Humiliated, I left. The next day I did not show up.

It sounds almost spooky, this repetitiveness. However, there is nothing unusual about it. A psychologist or a psychoanalyst could write about this theme—the fate provoked, the self-repeating life pattern.

Obviously, I wanted it to happen this way. I did provoke the slaps of fate so that at the end I should be able to retreat into passivity, into humility. How much more convenient it is to be led, than to lead. (What is responsibility good for?) The same provocation of fate, the provoca-

tion of failure, repeated itself very often also later, during my university years. But I could not accept just anybody, for example Zoltán, as my leader. There was something in his style, or should I say, his lack of style, that bothered me. And he was too sure of knowing the truth. Géza (there will be a lot more said about him) solved my dilemma. He was Prince Charming, and he also knew the "truth," but, in addition, he was cultured and could recite the poems of Hofmannsthal which he knew by heart. Even today I know almost by heart, and can hear in Géza's voice, that poetic fragment, *Der Tod des Tizian (Titian's Death).* With our very similar backgrounds and upbringing we agreed on almost everything. Him I could accept easily as my leader. I only had to imitate him, to follow him. I was sure that he would go far, and I believed and hoped that I would be his associate, his companion.

The Joseph dream remained again unfulfilled. I did not become a member of the Bourgeois Radical Party either. Yet, that was the party closest to my intellectual interests, or may I say, my style. The Social Democratic party never really attracted me.

There were two places, two organizations, that treated me fairly cordially, where they did not laugh at my provincial dialect, my often quite naive, or even childish, views. One was the Galilei Circle, the other the editorial office of the literary magazine *Ma (Today).* Both of them contributed significantly to my gradual intellectual development.

Most of the Galileians were about my age; the young men from Budapest were, in general, more mature and felt more at home in the Circle. The leaders, the lecturers, were not much older either. Of them I remember best Károly Polányi. Later he became a university professor somewhere in Canada. I never had a chance to meet him. It was in the Circle that I saw and heard, the only time in my life, György Lukács (it is unnecessary to mention that he became the foremost Marxist philosopher of the century). I knew him at that time only as the author of an odd collection of essays, with the title *Balázs Béla és akiknek nem kell (Béla Balázs and Those Who Don't Care for Him).* (This book somehow disappeared even from bibliographies. Not even the Lukács studies mention it.) I also remember an attractive and elegant young lady doctor whose name at that time was Dr. Borbála Ripper. I can still see her elegant gray English-style suit. Some twenty

years later I met her again in London. At that time, under the name Dr. Barbara Lantos, she was one of the members of the London circle of Anna Freud. In 1918–19 I knew the name of Lantos, her future husband, but the memory is obscure. The same is the case with the name Ilona Duczynska. I was pleased to see that she spelled her Polish aristocratic name in the Polish manner with an "a" and not an "i" at the end. And likewise with Tivadar Sugár. About a year later, fate brought me together once with Tivadar Sugár, but of the others I lost track. I guess it was in the Galilei Circle that I first saw and heard also József Madzsar.

Ma was Lajos Kassák's periodical. Kassák himself, the circle around him, the radical literature and art of which the *Ma* was the mouthpiece and home—all this had an ever-increasing influence upon me. Kassák was one of the few prominent writers who deigned to talk to a provincial young man. And I can thank the influence of Kassák and the *Ma* for my appreciation of Dezsö Szabó. Perhaps sometime later I shall talk about it. I want to add another example of my attempts to join, to belong. Should I call it successful? Should I call it unsuccessful? It depends on how we look at it.

During revolutionary times radicalism belongs to the nature of things. I was not the only one who became more radical, and less satisfied with what had been achieved. Not the only one who wanted always more, who moved more and more to the left. But I was one of them. The Galilei Circle contributed to this development, and so did the writers, the poets, and the books of the *Ma,* as well as Zoltán. However, what does it matter?

In the fifties, while the storm unleashed by Senator McCarthy of unblessed memory raged over America, almost everybody looking for some sort of job or position in an intellectual field had first to clear himself. One of the common questions put to a candidate was whether he was or had ever been a member of the Communist Party. So great was the fear inspired by that Hitler-like demagogue that for a while many of the American public institutions demanded an answer to this question. Perhaps they were embarrassed about it. At least, they conducted their probe quietly and without formalities. Perhaps they did not even take it seriously. It so happened that in 1955 I was to be appointed clinical professor at the School of Medicine of New York

University, and before the documents attesting to the appointment were handed to me in the dean's office, a young woman clerk asked me through the window of the office to raise my right hand and state under oath whether I was, or had ever been, a member of the Communist Party. Had I been of a heroic disposition, I would have refused to answer such a question. The worst thing that could have happened to me was that I would not have become an unpaid clinical professor. But then, I have never been a hero. What for? For a moment, a scene flashed through my mind, of which I must report right here. However, I did raise my hand and answered "No,"—but in a very low voice. Obviously, the scene was embarrassing for both of us, and I added, in my mind, "but almost." Indeed, I almost was a member of the Communist Party, but only almost.

Well this is the way it happened. As I have said, I, too, became more radical, and as conditions worsened, also became convinced that, truly, it was only Communism that would solve all problems ranging from the crisis in art to illiteracy, from the plight of the migrant workers to the Jewish question. I felt that I must be in the Party. (And the Joseph dream? Why should I deny it? I believed that, if not the sun and moon, at least the eleven stars would somehow bow before me.)

As I remember, the office of the Party (or something similar) was somewhere near the beginning of Csáky or Visegrádi Street. And, of all places, it was in the apartment of Lajos Kassák. I do not know whether my mind is playing tricks on me, but I also remember an old, gray apartment house on the right side, as one turned into the street from Lipót Boulevard. Why should the office of the Party have been in Kassák's apartment? As I recall, Kassák, though ultra-radical, had never been a member of the Party. He never submitted himself to Party discipline, especially where issues of art or literature were concerned. He was too much of an individualist for that. And there was another thing characteristic of him. While Béla Balázs and György Lukás did not return to Hungary from their emigration for about twenty-five years—either Russia detained them or Party discipline—Kassák quickly returned to the bosom of the Hungarian language, and was not bothered at all during all the Horthy years. As I said, the memory is very vague. I should really reread Kassák's three-volume autobiography. I brought the books along with me, and I can see them on the upper shelf among a host of other Hungarian or

Hungarian-related volumes. They all have been waiting here for about 45 years, for me to retire from my practice and read or reread them. But I do not dare to look into the Kassák volumes. I want to write my *own* personal memories, not research history.

That particular mental quirk of mine, which does not permit me to ignore the details of association, forces me to add here that both Béla Balázs and György Lukács were Jews or of Jewish origin; both were the children of bourgeois parents; both were bilingual. György Lukács even could have put the "von" in front of his name in his German books. Actually, he never did it. Anna Lesznai always referred to Béla Balázs as Herbert. (I can no longer recall whether they were relatives or only childhood friends.) Balázs spent his childhood in Lőcse, in that beautiful, old Saxon city of the Szepesség (Sips), and he published his childhood memories in German. They, too, are here on my "Hungarian" bookshelf. In contrast to Lukács or Balázs, Kassák was not a Jew, and if I remember correctly, he told me once that during his years of emigration in Vienna following the fall of the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat," he never learned a word of German. Anyway, when I practiced in Budapest, Kassák was a patient of mine. (My patients comprised an interesting spectrum of Orthodox rabbis, artists, psychoanalysts, and leftist elements, in addition to all the not interesting patients. I have here in my library two Kassák novels from the thirties, both with a personal dedication by the author—it is unnecessary to mention that they were given in lieu of a fee.)

Many years later in America, I read Béla Balázs's German novel, *Unmögliche Menschen (Impossible People).* While reading it, I discovered that I had already read in Hungarian, during my medical school years, an earlier, incomplete version of it. Its title was *Isten Tenyerén (On God's Palm).* (I think it was published somewhere in Transylvania, at the time already a part of Rumania.) I got the book as a gift from a friend of mine, an antiquarian in Paris. The copy in my library carries a dedication by Balázs to a friend of his named Groethuysen, with the date November, 1929. How did this copy reach a good 30 years later a Hungarian antiquarian in Paris? (If only books could talk!)

The original family name of Béla Balázs was Bauer. Which brings me to his brother, Ervin Bauer. Ervin Bauer was a medical doctor, a promising bioligist, the husband of the famous poet Margit Kaffka.

(She was carried off by the Spanish flu during the winter of 1918-19.) I met Ervin Bauer only later around 1920, during my medical school years in Prague. He had a fabulous mind. We expected a great deal from him. But he got lost in Russia. I had no further information about him nor about his having ever created anything significant.

It was interesting to read in the autobiography of Béla Balázs how he changed from Herbert Bauer to Béla Balázs, his *nom de plume.* The impetus was given by the first publication of his poems. Balázs was an understandable choice. He chose the name "Béla" for the sake of alliteration. I could not help thinking of my own *nom de plume: Ádam* Arthur. The occasion was similar, and the alliteration played a role here, too.

But, to get back at last to my almost joining the Party, I went to report. To report? To join? To enroll? To offer my services? (The Joseph dream?) How should I know today? The fact is that when I climbed up the stairs and reached the door of the apartment (it must have been late in the afternoon), I found three or four men standing there. I recognized one from newspaper photos: he was Béla Kún. (In writing this I have the feeling that I may be mistaken. But it does not matter. *This* is the way I remember it.) They were just about to leave. In any case, when the man asked what it was I wanted, and heard my answer, he suggested that I come back the next day or the day after, because right now it was already late. That night Béla Kún and his leading comrades were arrested by the police and taken to prison. (One must constantly be alert against the creation of stories by one's own imagination. It is quite possible that this happened not that same night, and that I simply did not have time to go back next day or the day after. But this is the way I remember it.) It was directly from the prison that they went on to rule the country when Károlyi resigned, when the communists and the social democrats made peace and accepted the Leninist solution. This is how the Dictatorship of the Proletariat started. Why did I not apply again for admission to the Party? I do not know. During those few days or week, while the leaders of the Party were in prison, the Party office was perhaps closed, and to join would have been unreasonable, or even dangerous. Obviously, it was not advisable. I have never been a great hero. Why did I not join later, I do not know either. I can only guess. To join a revolutionary party? That had some kind of moral implication. But to join quickly a

successful party already in power or just about to come to power? That would have been repulsive. (I shall never forget our Archduke Joseph of Hapsburg who "joined" the revolution and adopted the name József Alcsuthi.) Even here in America I have joined only one party, once—the Liberal Party—because it had no chance at all ever to come to power. The fact remains that I was truthful when I answered the question of the young secretary of New York University by saying "No." It is a fact that I have never been a card-carrying Party member. Interestingly, I don't know whether Géza was a member of the Party. It was practically impossible for him not to be. Nor do I remember how he became the Military Commandant of the city of Pápa. On what legal basis did they ask him to accept the position? Did they appoint him? I do not know. I cannot remember having seen Géza even once in Budapest during those two semesters. It was only after the collapse of the counter-revolution of Devecser that we met again.

It was lucky that that nice girl at New York University asked me only about my Party membership. The satanic senator himself always insisted on knowing whether the person interrogated (the accused) was a communist or not. ("Are you?" or "Were you?" he asked.) It was, of course, unconstitutional, because it is a person's private affair what he believes and thinks, as long as it remains within believing and thinking. The more courageous often refused to answer this question. The nice girl did not even ask it. But had I asked this question of myself, what would have been my answer? I do not know, not even today. Even in my emotions I was mainly a fence straddler, and in my heart of hearts I have always respected, and envied correct behavior, proper upbringing, and the ruling classes.

Yes, what would have been the proper answer to the question of that nice young lady? My fantasy would sometimes run away with me: at times I would imagine that I am summoned by the senator, and that I parry with sarcasm and great superiority the verbal daggers of the hated man. Undoubtedly, the most accurate way of describing myself would have been a "fellow traveler," or a "sympathizer." I was never able to accept the infallibility or the discipline of any party; and I just laughed about the art form labeled socialist-realism. Nor could I ever accept the meddling of politics with the natural sciences. I followed closely the entire unfortunate Lisenko controversy.

On the other hand, I have never read a Marxist book about

economy or related topics. I did not even have time for them. After 1919 I always avoided going to political meetings. Nevertheless, I felt that my place was there. But to stand up and be counted? I did not dare. (Oh, Lovászpatona!) It was not in my nature. Illegal activities were not my cup of tea either. Still, occasionally two gentlemen met in the waiting room of my elegant office in the best section of Budapest. "Accidentally" they asked my secretary to make appointments for eye checkups for the same time, and while waiting, they were conversing.

Once, I remember one of the gentlemen left a thick envelope with me for a few days for safekeeping. It contained a very large sum of money. I stuck it in among the books in my library. Magda never knew about it. A few days later somebody came for it. I was considered reliable. This was made clear time and again. And, usually, no words to this effect were uttered. Once an attractive blond woman doctor came to my office and let me know that every few months she was going to collect money for a foreign aid action. (Perhaps for the Spanish loyalists.) I never said "no."

But as it became evident (and as it was also to become evident on that certain 50th class reunion), I was watched also by the "other side." Endre Tóth knew about me, and apparently so did Dezsö Trócsányi and those boys who did not invite me to the homecomings of 1928 and 1938, which amounted to an exclusion. Otherwise they did not bother me. How fortunate that with my bald head, my glasses, my stooped back, my conservative clothes, colorless voice, I always managed somehow to disappear into insignificance. Really nothing of a tragic or even memorable nature had ever happened to me. I always squeaked through.

At one time, soon after I started practicing in Budapest, I believe in the early thirties, the pressure of the racist regime began to let off, and so did my fear of the possible consequences of Lovászpatona. (I am still putting off the "confession.") And so, when I heard that an association of socialist physicians was in the making, I felt that it would be proper for me to join so that, at least, the number of those who were not followers of the ruling system should be augmented. Perhaps I did not understand the exact purpose and meaning of the association. Or, possibly, I forgot it. I did not wish to become an active member. However, before long and quite unexpectedly, two colleagues came to see me just before the first meeting. They asked me to sit

during the meeting in a certain corner of the room (obviously among comrades) and advised me to vote against certain persons and rules recommended by the organizers. It became evident to me that this would lead to nothing but making the peaceful and primarily educational work of the association impossible. But it seems that this was the very purpose of the strategy of the internal opposition. As far as I remember, nothing ever came of the planned association. At least I do not remember having been present at any subsequent meeting. I believe there were none.

Years later one of the two visiting colleagues (a well-known specialist) became my patient. In the late thirties he was arrested and detained in the Central Prison. One day the prison physician called me to let me know that colleague X needed an ophthalmological examination and treatment and named me as his eye doctor. The prison doctor stated that he would appreciate it if I examined the colleague. I did go, in fact, two or three times to the prison to treat him. It took always at least twenty to thirty minutes before the guard brought the prisoner from his cell into the doctor's office. Dr. X wore his own clothes and was shaved. I shall never forget those waiting periods. I was chatting with the prison doctor. I had always assumed that a medical man, choosing or consenting to serve in a correctional facility, had to be either incompetent or a sadist. I was mistaken. To my surprise, the prison doctor was a highly cultured, open-minded, sad, disappointed, basically melancholic older man who had great understanding for the prisoners, even the political prisoners. I still do not understand why he became a prison doctor. (I am sorry that I forgot his name.)

As I think back now, from the perspective of a long life, I do not even know how, when, and in what circumstances did Géza convert from extreme Orthodoxy to atheism. He had been three grades above me in school and, following graduation, we hardly saw each other for two or three years. He must have spent considerable time on the front to be discharged from the army as a first lieutenant or a captain. In order to explain our new friendship, I must mention some almost childish and meaningless memories.

A Jew is not allowed to shave. This is the biblical commandment. To be more exact: no razor must touch the corners of his beard. The Hebrew word for corners became *payes* in Yiddish, and hence an

Orthodox Jew came to be called *payes* Jew. However if a man did not want to grow a beard while observing the letter of the law, then (another instance of cheating God) he smeared an ill-smelling, caustic chemical on his face. It was called *aurum,* for what reason I do not know. It had to be mixed with water to make a paste. Then this depilatory was scraped off with a wooden spoon so that one did not use a razor. My facial skin could hardly tolerate this procedure. Even when as an adult I went to visit my parents, I carried my little satchel with the *aurum* powder and let my room smell of it, while secretly I quickly shaved myself with a Gillette blade. Thus my father did not become suspicious, and I did not burn the skin off my face. My mother became privy to my deceit but she overlooked it with a gentle smile.

I must have been a senior when I got into the habit of going to the Christian barber on Pápa's Main Street. It was most unlikely that an Orthodox Jew from the ghetto would pass there, and so I did not have to fear discovery. On one occasion, to my great consternation, a young officer entered the barbershop. I had not seen him for years: it was Géza. My first reaction was, "My God, he will tell on me to my father or to Professor Marton, our religion teacher." "Well, well, Mr. Linksz," Géza said somewhat sarcastically, although we called each other by our first names, "You are having a shave?!" As it turned out, he, too, had come for a shave and this was the beginning of our new friendship. The poems of Hofmannsthal were to come later. An unusual, significant difference remained between us in our relationship to our fathers. Géza was quite openly non-religious. He did not hide it even at home. And equally openly, he became a "leftist." Among his seven or eight brothers there were some who were likewise irreligious, some who remained Orthodox, and some who became Zionists. But they remained one family and their parents loved all of them equally. And myself? I never dared to take a stand openly in opposition to my father. And that certain Joseph dream? It remained with me all my life. To beg, to hand in applications, to push, to compete—I would do none of these. I would rather wait and hope. How did the Gospel according to Matthew say in the old, somewhat equivocal translation: "Many are called, but few are chosen." To be among those few—that was my Joseph dream, the dream of my life. It was never fulfilled.

2

Earliest Memories (1903-1905)
A Rabbi Without a Diploma

I believe it was Martin Buber who, in one of his beautiful tales, told about the life and legend of a Tzaddik, a miracle-working rabbi of the Hasidim. It seems that this holy man could converse not only with the flowers and the birds, but also with the rocks and primal lifeless matter, and that his memory reached back to the time he spent in the womb of his mother. What is more, he could remember even the moment of his conception, the instant of reincarnation, when according to the belief of the Kabbalists and the Hasidim, the wandering soul forgets its previous life. In the light of this story, I would not have been good material for a Tzaddik. The most disconcerting feature of my infant years is the almost complete absence of memories—the vacuum. And not only are the memories missing, but so is all information concerning my early childhood. For some reason or another, my early years were later a painful theme for my family, and, if possible, my relatives always avoided talking about them. I suspect that the reason must have been the wish of my mother—my dear stepmother—that, as long as possible, I should not know that she was not the mother who bore me. I only suppose that this was the case; there could have been other reasons. What is certain is that both she and I tried to make believe that she was my real mother. Then too, my real mother died soon after my birth, and who would want to talk about death to a child?

My first memory is about going to the market with my mother and somehow getting lost. Next, I remember that I am sitting on the

front steps of a house and crying. I can see the steps very clearly. It seems to have been a house built in the Dutch style. The steps lead up from street level to the main floor. Like all my early memories, the picture is completely clear, almost photographic; I can see every small detail, can almost count the steps. I could draw a picture of it. Mother and a friendly man—could he have been a policeman?—find me. That is all. The very first memory image.

In 1902 and 1903, for a period which could not have been much more than one year, my father was "deputy" rabbi in Sátoraljaujhely. He never spoke of it later; he never even mentioned the name of the city. I was to hear only through the family grapevine (perhaps my mother mentioned it, or some other relative) that a wicked, intriguing Orthodox rabbi, obviously my father's superior, had embittered his life. As I can reconstruct it from the rumors, it appears that the more modern elements of the congregation wanted to have a "doctor-rabbi" who was learned in the ways of the world, and who would be able to preach and teach religion in Hungarian. But it was this precisely that the elders and the Orthodox rabbi could not tolerate. Sátoraljaujhely was one of the westernmost outposts of East European Jewry, of the Hasidim, those who did not wish to assimilate and for whom a Hungarian sermon was "the first step on that downhill course of assimilation leading straight to perdition." This, in a nutshell, was the tragedy of my father. He was in reality an Orthodox Jew who believed unconditionally in every dogma and observed faithfully every religious commandment and custom. But his idol was Samson Raphael Hirsch, the great Orthodox rabbi of Frankfurt who wrote and spoke German (and not Yiddish). Following Hirsch, my father wore no caftan and was never seen without a necktie. Like Hirsch, he spoke the language of his country: his Hungarian was pure and idiomatic. He was an Orthodox Jew, but he could recite from memory the "Parainesis" of the great Hungarian poet Kölcsey.

After I completed the four years of grade school my father kept me at home for years (to be correct, for five years), from 1909 to 1914, to be tutored privately. I shall have more to say about this later. Gradually, however, he realized that this symbiosis (as I think about it) would have to come to an end. With the passing of years I myself began to rebel. At one time during those five years, in 1912 or perhaps 1913, my father made a pilgrimage to Frankfurt. One of the things he did was to

inspect the famous Jewish high school built on the principles of Samson Raphael Hirsch. He planned (or perhaps it was only his dream) that he would send me there to study. I remember the yearbook my father brought home from Frankfurt. In it I saw for the first time, algebraic equations presented with Hebrew letters. In this event, my father could not bring himself to let me go so far from home. Later the war broke out and that put an end to his dreams. This is how, at the end, in the fall of 1914, instead of Frankfurt, I went to Pápa, to the Calvinist college (or rather high school) where I was admitted to the fifth grade. This meant the loss of a year for me, and this is how all the problems began. Later on I shall have more to say about this, and perhaps also about Frankfurt, which even thereafter, was to remain the city of my father's dreams.

It happened in 1960 that a very charming and very kind Hungarian lady came to my office in New York. She was at the time about seventy years old and lived in Chicago. In the course of her visit she remarked that she had met with the unusual name Linksz once before. She remembered from her youth in Sátoraljaujhely an exceptionally handsome young rabbi who taught religion in the girls' school. I told her with some pride that I was the son of that young rabbi.

Let me interpolate here that no matter where my wanderings led me, one of the first things I did was to seek out Hungarians and Jews. In the 1950s, when I visited Havana for the first time to attend a Pan-American Ophthalmological Congress, my friend the late Dr. Kestenbaum and I were strolling in the streets and we found a less-than-first-class eating place called *Csárda* with the well-known Hebrew letters added under the Hungarian name, indicating that the restaurant was kosher. We entered, and, of course, we struck up a conversation with the owner. On hearing my name, the woman, who must have been about seventy, told me that some fifty years earlier a similarly named young, widowed rabbi used to come to her parents' home in Budapest. Her father, in the end, did not permit her to marry that rabbi because he had a doctor's title and was not sufficiently religious. Also, his clothing was very worldly.

It would then appear that that particular first memory of mine dates from Sátoraljaujhely. But it is also possible that it refers to Balassagyarmat, where from 1903 to 1905, my father served as assistant rabbi in conditions similar to the earlier ones. There was a reason

why my father had only such poorly paid and non-prestigious jobs, including the one in Devecser where he became rabbi in 1905. He told me about it at a much later time, although only in a very sketchy way. Like the rabbi father of Chaim Potok's *The Chosen,* my father, too, was a man of very few words. Although I spent the first fourteen or fifteen years of my life (perhaps with the exception of the first year-and-a-half of which I have no information) in my father's house, I remember that he spoke rarely about himself, his family, his youth, his schools, his teachers, his friends, or my real mother. My first eighteen months were the period when my father was a widower and, I suppose, unemployed as well. It is therefore understandable that he never spoke about that time in his life.

Even important problems could not loosen our tongues. Foremost among these was the rebellion I barely referred to previously that finally resulted in the decision that I would go to a public high school, a *gimnázium*—and thus very importantly for me, would get away from home. After the first year I spent in Pápa the conflict broke out again. As a compromise, father suggested that I enroll either in the Orthodox commercial school of Vágujhely which had a rather questionable scholastic reputation, or in some kind of Jewish teachers' college. World War I was already going on; the Frankfurt solution went up in smoke. Even Father did not like the compromise of Vágujhely. Commerce did not seem to be a career for me. As for a teachers' college, my father endorsed it, seeing that I definitely did not want to become a rabbi. As he put it, a teacher is a ready-made man already at the age of eighteen. He can take a job and can obey the rule laid down by our ancient sages that a youth marry at the age of eighteen. That will protect him from the temptations of the Godless environment. My mother was the go-between of our negotiations. Not until I sent a message through her to my father that I was going to run away did the ice break. My poor dear father—his dreams for me were shattered. He had to accept that his son would not become a rabbi, not even a teacher. In the novel of Potok which, in many details, is an almost uncanny parallel to my life, father and son can, at the end, talk to each other only through a third person. In the novel, that intermediary is the masterfully drawn narrator of the story, who describes the events in first person. This narrator, a simple and quite colorless good boy, does not rob his father of his dreams, and at the end becomes a modern,

non-Hasidic rabbi. In my life the intermediary was my mother.

How little we knew each other! Or I should rather say: how little my father knew me! This was shown by an almost humorous episode. When I settled with Magda before our wedding that, out of respect for my parents, we would go through the marriage ceremony which for us was totally meaningless, my father solemnly drew me aside and from one of his Hebrew books, read out to me the rules of behavior, the things a religious young man had to know and follow on his wedding night. He also told me that prior to his wedding, an older brother-in-law of his, the rabbi of Léva, went through the same procedure with him, and that, of course, he had not touched a woman until that time. He took it for granted that I had not done so either. I listened to him in silence. I must admit that subsequently we punished my poor father severely—we decided not to have children for ten years. Only when we came to America did we plan to have a family. My father never saw his grandchildren. But, at least, he knew about them. And how odd that this should somehow console me.

Why did I have to punish my father? What was his sin? The five extra years he kept me at home? Was he very selfish? Or did he love me too much? (The two perhaps do not exclude each other.) I have never known anyone who was so lonely, so friendless, so companionless as my father was in Devecser. The presence of my mother did not alter his loneliness. His only friend, an Orthodox lumber merchant, moved with his seven children from Godless Devecser to Budapest. He was the only one whom, when they later met, my father embraced and kissed. At home my father conversed with nobody for weeks on end. He would bury himself in his holy books. His afternoon strolls would take him to the fields or to the garden of the postmaster, through the peasants' streets where he knew no one. But in spite of all appearances, my father was an enthusiastic pastor of his flock. Marriages, births, sickness, death—these were the occasions when, as the deputy of God, he could and did communicate with his people. Otherwise, he was always lonely.

Now, about our preplanned childlessness...

In the beginning my wife and I believed that our life was uncer-

tain, unformed. And so it was. We spent our first two years in Munich in a Germany already in the shadow of Hitler. Then followed the first years of practice in Budapest which were very meager. Later, when my friends referred to our childlessness, I tried to explain it with the Jewish situation: it was wrong to increase the number of Jews in the anti-Semitic Hungary of Horthy. This was both true and not true. The truth was that one of the reasons (although only *one* of the reasons) was a certain father-son ambivalence which accompanied me throughout my life.

The fact was that I wanted to punish my father. But at the same time I was also afraid of him. He, too, was afraid of me. My father did not even dare to ask. My mother was the one who, on rare occasions, brought up the subject of our childlessness. During that same time my father wrote and published a book about *Happiness in the Family.* When someone had to improve the style and read the galleys, he asked me to do it. Obviously, he wrote for me and it was to me that he addressed his thesis that "to contract a marriage and to abhor the blessing of children is the ultimate in decadence." But as I said, my father never dared to ask personal questions. He only encouraged us to pray for a child, as the biblical Hannah did before the Ark of the Covenant. When seven years had passed, he even mentioned that after ten years of childlessness a pious Jew was expected to divorce his wife.

I was caught on the horns of a terrible dilemma. In the circle of my friends I was an atheist—atheist and socialist, enemy of the established religions. I was a vociferous opponent of the barbaric rite of circumcision. On the other hand, I knew that I would never dare to stand up and say to my father that "My son, if I ever have one, will not be circumcised." My position in the life of Budapest was also equivocal. After we came back from Munich our life in Budapest, our very livelihood, was anchored in our Jewishness whether we liked it or not. At first, I returned to the Jewish hospital where I did not get very far. Then I became chief ophthalmologist of the outpatient department of the clinic of the Orthodox Jewish community. There was no chance for me to enter the Eye Clinic of the University Hospital. All my efforts to get a job, even with the most modest salary, with the city, the state, or the insurance company of the Labor Union, remained futile. So our life, as well as our survival, was anchored in our Jewishness. I would

not have dared not to have my sons circumcised.

There were many childless couples in the circle of our friends. Most of them were of our age. Our entire social life centered around Friday or Saturday evening parties. One of those parties at which, quite accidentally, we represented the older generation, sticks in my memory. Several physician couples, much younger than ourselves were present. Suddenly one of the young doctors, and then another, pulled out small photographs from the depth of their wallets. They were showing around the pictures very proudly. It was then that I first realized that perhaps something was missing from my life. From there on I was not sure whether or not we did the right thing. Magda, too, was yearning for "the blessing of the womb," as the biblical expression has it. She befriended every kid in the house where we lived, and she showered them with gifts. Yet she always accommodated herself to our situation.

In America the first year was a difficult one, a time of uncertainties. Finally, after more than twelve years of marriage, our first son was born, in December, 1941. We have two sons. My father and mother, as I said, never saw them.

Let me go back to the beginning of my family chronicles. Only thus can I explain why my father got stuck at a very low level in the rabbinical hierarchy. My real mother was the granddaughter and great-granddaughter of leading members of the great Landesberg rabbinical dynasty. My father was born in 1869 in Ó-Beszterce (Alt-Bystritz) in Trencsén county. His father was the owner of a village general store. The sign over the entrance bore the name, *Jacob Links.* My father was the first to Hungaricize his name by spelling it *Linksz.* He was the first among the seven children of Jacob who learned to read Hungarian and who entered a *gimnázium* (high school). Every member of the family was bilingual. With members of their families and with their co-religionists in the synagogue, the Jews of Ó-Beszterce spoke German, not Yiddish; with their customers and the peasants of the village they had, of course, to converse in Slovak. They could read and write in German, and could at least read the prayer book in Hebrew, but that did not count as a language. They did not speak it. According to family stories (my step-grandmother Fanny was

my chief source of information) my father was, from his earliest childhood, a serious, very quiet, very religious, book-loving boy. His real mother, Julia, née Spitzer, died when he was seven years old. Throughout his entire life my father, like me, was raised by a dearly loved stepmother—"Grandmother Fanny." Often—much too often—the village Jews married close relatives; I could point out several first cousin marriages in our family tree. And if the information is correct, my grandfather's second marriage was one of these endogamies: my father's foster mother, Grandmother Fanny, was also my father's cousin, the daughter of one of my grandfather's sisters, probably only about ten years older than my father. Grandmother Fanny was brilliant. She was the real *mater familias* of the large family—imposingly clever, intelligent, determined, even beautiful—the soul of the business, the head of the clan. She could neither read nor write German or Slovak. I do not remember whether she could read the Hebrew prayerbook. I did not dare to ask. The fact is that a hundred years ago the Hebrew alphabet was still very popular among the Jews. German newspapers, German novels, German religious literature were all available printed in Hebrew characters. Thus a Jew who did not know the German alphabet was not necessarily illiterate. Grandmother Fanny lived a very long life. She was still alive when I came to America. I do not know the circumstances of her death. Of our large family in Ó-Beszterce, very few survived the Second World War, Hitler, and the "independent" Slovakia of Tiso.

For reasons to be stated later, after 1923 I avoided Czechoslovakia for almost forty years, and even thereafter I visited it only rarely and for short periods of time. The personal links with the family loosened, memories drifted into uncertainty, details got lost.

Well, to continue. Of his large family my father was the first to enter a high school. He was probably fourteen or fifteen years old when he enrolled in the Rabbinical Seminary of Budapest. How and under what influences he decided to become a rabbi, and a Neolog (liberal) one at that, I do know know.

The Budapest Rabbinical Seminary was the first and only modern teaching institute for the training of rabbis accredited and supervised by the state. The full course took ten years. At the end of the first five years, the student received a *Matura Certificate,* the equivalent of a regular high school diploma. The study of Latin and Greek was

emphasized with the same intensity as in all the other academic high schools. Upon graduation, as I later learned, half of the class usually quit. They either changed their minds about becoming rabbis, or from the very beginning had only wished to acquire more Jewish knowledge than they could have in a secular high school. For this reason my father had classmates who went on to become doctors, lawyers, teachers. I remember especially the name of Emil Makai, a Hungarian poet now almost completely forgotten but famous at the turn of the century. "He was not religious," my father said, "he led a life of debauchery; he died young of a serious disease." In the eyes of my father, who thought in religious clichés, the fate of Makai was the convincing example of the punishing hand of God. What was that life of debauchery? I dared not ask. It is possible that he died of syphilis (as my father intimated) but it is also possible that he died of tuberculosis. And again, it is also possible that all he did was to go to the café and drink his cappuccino without having his hat on. My father had peculiar ideas about the "sinful" life and God's bookkeeping.

It was the second five years of the course which was the actual period of rabbinical training. The seminary demanded that its students be enrolled concurrently at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Budapest, where they could study subjects such as ancient Oriental history, philosophy, archeology and Semitic and ancient Near Eastern linguistics. All the students of the seminary were expected to earn their Ph.D.s at the end of four years. This is how my father, too, became a Doctor of Philosophy.

I remember two photographs among the many which graced the walls of the front room in our house in Devecser, and which were not of members of the family. Both of them may have been my father's favorite professors. One was of Wilhelm Bacher, a famous Jewish scholar and director of the seminary; the other was of a university professor, Mór Kármán. (The name "von" Kármán was made world-famous later by his son, the father of aerodynamics.) My father always mentioned his name with special warmth.

It was during his last year at the seminary that tragedy struck. Nobody in the family ever spoke of it. My Galgóc grandmother did not like my father and could not bear his lack of success. She also approached the subject with circumspection. My father never spoke to me about it; I have forgotten the details; I do not remember the

participants. The essence of the matter was that he somehow caught one of the leading professors in some kind of behavior which could not be reconciled with strict religious standards. Obviously, the man did not comply with some religious rule. It could have been such a trivial thing as turning on the light on a Saturday, or a more serious thing such as taking a meal in a non-kosher restaurant. The carefully chosen professors of the seminary were primarily scholars and not religious rigorists. Anyway, my father made a scene about it. Could it be that they expelled him? Unlikely. It is possible that this is what happened, but it is also possible that only my memory paints my father as a hero. Four or five decades passed since he spoke to me about this subject, and he did that only once. But as I remember, he either refused to let that Godless professor sign his diploma or he tore it up publicly (he "stepped on it," according to my childhood fantasy) or else he simply left the school in protest. The result was that, after ten years of study, my father stood there "all wet," as the old Jewish joke has it, with a Ph.D. but without a rabbinical diploma from the seminary. He never entered the seminary again. He never had a state-accredited diploma from the seminary.

According to my calculations, this must have happened around 1895. What my father did until 1899 when, without a job and obviously without a diploma, he married my mother, I do not know. From the half sentences of my gentle, sweet, humble grandfather from Galgóc and from the grumblings of my grandmother I gathered that it was really my grandfather who made a man of my father. As I was told, my father joined my grandfather as a *bokher,* a talmudic student, in 1898. My father was a handsome man, and my mother, the youngest daughter, must have fallen in love with him. When he convinced his teacher of his seriousness about religious principles and of his scholarship, my grandfather, according to ancient custom, ordained him a rabbi. Jewish tradition has it that the title of "rabbi" has been passed on ever since the time of Moses from master to disciple by "the laying on of hands," in an unbroken line. The Orthodox community of Hungary—according to its official seal the "Autonomous Orthodox Israelite Denomination"—retained the right to recognize the Hebrew document attesting to this act of ordination as a rabbinical diploma. Incidentally, the word *rabbi* is the exact equivalent of *Monsignor,* and the Orthodox rabbinical diploma was called a *Semikha* or *laying-on (of the*

hands). An Orthodox rabbi could have no greater happiness and gratification in life than to ordain his son or his son-in-law. All three of my grandfather's daughters and several of his nieces married rabbis ordained in this manner. I know of at least three of the daughters of my Landesberg great-grandfather who married rabbis. One of his sons also became a rabbi. This is how the dynasty was founded by the great Gaon Israel Isaac Aaron Landesberg, the rabbi of Nagyvárad. In the majority of cases, the women were the links. In the first generation of the dynasty everybody was a rabbi ordained by the laying-on of hands. In the second, there were already two "doctor rabbis," of whom my father was one. The other was Simon Hevesi, who got his rabbinical diploma from the Budapest seminary and was to become chief rabbi of the Neolog congregation of Pest.

I do not know whether a diploma obtained by the laying-on of hands entitled its holder to a state stipend or not. I imagine that the Orthodox Jews, who were such jealous guardians of their autonomy, declined this advantage. For my father, this question became extremely important later. On the other hand, I know that they obtained one thing: their rabbis and even the students of some of the great yeshivas were exempt from military service. My father held his small, hard-covered soldier's book in great esteem. According to the data in it, he was found to be "acceptable for military service." On the other hand, as a candidate for the rabbinate, he was exempted from active service. As a diploma-less Neolog rabbi, my father presented a new kind of problem for the National Office of Hungarian Israelites, the central bureau of the Neolog congregations. It took a long time to resolve the matter, but in the end my father did get the state stipend. My mother did not let him skip the thing. Then, too, a fellow sufferer and comrade-in-arms happened to turn up—Rabbi Grünsfeld of Németújvár. One day he came to visit my father and suggested some joint action. I shall never forget the decorum with which my father received him. He waited for him with a two-horse four-wheeler at the railroad station and put him up in the National Hotel, the best hotel in town.

To return to my father and to my grandfather from Galcóc who was in fact my father's greatest benefactor, I have to add that my quiet, learned, gentle, and highly respected grandfather was able to arrange that, despite the fact that my father was blemished as a

doctor, two other recognized Orthodox rabbis joined my grandfather in signing my father's *Semikha.* Whether or not Father had to make a pilgrimage to them for the laying-on of hands, I do not know. But once this was accomplished, my father became something of an anomaly: a Ph.D. (for Hungarian Jews, the doctor title of a rabbi implicitly meant a graduate of the Rabbinical Seminary) who had no diploma and who, at the same time, was an Orthodox rabbi as attested by his *Semikha.* The *doctor* title made him suspect as a seminarian, and I remember that in his later years he avoided more and more its use. Still, the modest congregation of Devecser and later of Köszeg, basked in the glory of having a rabbi with the title "doctor."

Let me return, at long last, to the pictures retained in my memory. My second memory dates from Balassagyarmat and therefore from the year 1905 at the latest. It is, in fact, a series of memory images, visual in their details, but time plays no role in them. I remember vividly a one-story corner-building where we lived. On one side the windows opened to the street, and on the other there was a narrow alley. I also remember a big double gate set in a high stone wall. It was big enough to admit a horse-drawn carriage: a typical Hungarian one-story country house. The landlord was a master baker of gingerbread. I remember two little girls, the landlord's daughters, especially the younger one. She was a peasant-looking child with blond hair plaited into a thin pigtail. We used to play ball together in the street, under our windows, hitting the ball against the wall. The little girl always fantasized. Her talk was full of tales and dreams. She sang strange songs that spoke of death. The far end of the alley opened into another street and was faced by military barracks. I can even see the ornate iron fence around a yellow-walled two-story house. My first memory of sounds is that of the taps which I heard every evening at exactly the same time. I can still hear the sad trumpet melody. Even now, I can recall the somewhat nonsensical text which went along with it and which I learned from the little daughter of the baker:

Soldier, come home!
What for?
To cook beans for the poor.
For whom?
For the poor *sol*dier.

(The italicized syllable was sung with a loud, long legato.)

I can also see myself sitting in a group of children, but I remember only the little girl. I must have been going to a kindergarten, but in later years I always forgot to ask my parents whether I really was. This series of memories ends with my mother crying as she reads a piece of paper. Whether I remember the cause of her tears or just know about it, I can no longer tell. In any case, the piece of paper was a telegram. My father sent it to inform us that he had been appointed rabbi in a town where he had gone to present himself. My mother always got scared when a telegram arrived. "Um Gottes Willen, ein Telegramm" ("Good heavens, a telegram"), she used to say. Telegrams used to herald trouble, but perhaps she was glad to receive this one.

All my life I have had a curious and also symbolic wish: even as a young man I wanted to go back to Balassagyarmat to see the house, the windows, the gate, the alley, the barracks. Perhaps even to learn the little girl's name. I don't know why but I call her Margit.

Balassagyarmat was not too many miles from Budapest. Years later I had the time, the money, and even a car. Still, I never got to Balassagyarmat. In 1972, when I was in Budapest perhaps for the last time, I decided that I really would go to Balassagyarmat. I had one free day. On the other days the Congress of Ophthalmology kept me occupied. My friend, the Chief of Ophthalmology of Esztergom, invited me. He fetched me in his car and brought me back. He obtained special permission from the ecclesiastical authorities which allowed us to visit the Christian Museum not yet open to the public. I wanted to see an interesting picture from the Middle Ages in which a person is shown wearing spectacles. For twenty years I had been collecting material for a study titled *Eyeglasses in the Fine Arts.* I forgot Balassagyarmat. I believe I shall never return there.

While I was practicing in Budapest, some seven years before I came to the U.S., we lived on the bank of the Danube not far from the Margit Bridge. Every day I saw the streetcars passing with the sign "Óbuda-Vörösvári Street." I never got on that streetcar. I had nothing to do in Óbuda suburb. But I wanted to write a Kafkaesque short story about a man who lives in the city and sees the streetcar every day. He would like to see Óbuda. Some kind of red storybook castle had to be at the end of the line, since the name Vörösvári meant "of the red castle."

The man takes a vacation every summer. He visits Paris many times; he visits the Kalahari Desert; he grows old; his strength is gone. He dies. He never sees the "red castle."

The harvest of my memory is meager. It appears that I do not remember anything significant from the first five years of my life. Yet it was during those years that I learned to talk, and not only in one language, but in two—in Hungarian and in German. And I also became at least aware that there existed a third language, the language of prayer, even if one did not speak it.

All right, I keep telling myself, so you don't remember how you learned to speak. I discovered that other people do not remember it either. We do not even remember how we learned to walk and how we were toilet trained. On the other hand—and this is disconcerting—I don't remember how I learned to read and write.

The Jewish grade school in Devecser as a rule admitted children when they reached their sixth birthday. I, however, was only five years and two months old when I started school. I also remember clearly how the *others* learned to write. First they used a small slate-pencil on a writing slate, then pencil and paper, and later pen and ink. But I did not participate in all this. By the time I entered school I had mastered the Hungarian (that is, the Latin) alphabet as well as the German (Gothic) script and even the Hebrew characters, which were read in the opposite direction.

I remember that Jenö Schlesinger, the son of a poor storekeeper, was very slow in learning and that the teacher, Miss Kaiser, called him "you fathead." In my own mind I condemned the teacher. She did not reprimand other boys, equally slow, whose families belonged to the local gentry. I myself was not part of the class structure: we were neither gentry nor poor. Early, very early, my eyes opened to the order of society and to the injustice of this order. Even so, I always wished to belong to the upper class. I never succeeded. Imre Biró, the son of the beer wholesaler, was my only upper class friend. The first time I was permitted to accompany him to his home I felt very happy. That was the first time I saw how the rich lived. For the first time in my life, I saw an acetylene lamp hanging from the ceiling, a bathroom with a white tub and running water, a well with a pump in the back yard, an ice pit, and *(horribile dictu!)* behind the back yard (of a Jewish family!), a

feedlot for hogs. When we came to Devecser the Biró family was still called Stern. Mrs. Biró was a sister of Dr. Dékány, a teacher of religion in Budapest and schoolmate of my father (or perhaps she was his niece). As I see it today, this connection could have been the factor that broke the class barrier. The Birós, despite their piggery, were kosher—Neolog kosher. The hogs belonged to the fodder business. Even so, I was forbidden to accept even a glass of water in their house. There are many varieties of what is called kosher. At one end are those who fulfill every rule—for instance, the Deutsches from a village that belonged to my father's circuit. Mr. Deutsch sent the chickens to Pápa to be ritually slaughtered because he doubted that Mr. Kohn, who functioned as both cantor and slaughterer in our congregation, could sufficiently concentrate on the *mitzvah* of the slaughtering. Besides, Mr. Kohn's wife wore no wig. This alone was enough for Mr. Deutsch to disqualify him. By the way, in the eyes of the very same Mr. Deutsch, my father, too, was not religious enough to officiate at the wedding of his daughter. My father was a Neolog rabbi. It was considered proper for the Jews to send their chickens to be slaughtered by Mr. Kohn. In the budget of the poorly paid cantor, the few pennies he received for this service were a significant item. Likewise, it was held to be the right thing to do to buy meat at the kosher butcher. In a small town, people kept a careful eye on such things. The other extreme was represented by Dr. B., the lawyer. I remember that one of his sons told us, laughing, that occasionally they even ate ham—but they ate it from the paper wrapper. Thus the plates and the silverware remained kosher.

Mrs. Biró was the first real lady I knew—a person who held down no job, worked neither in a store nor in the household. Most women, including my mother, slaved away their days in shops or kitchens. Even today, I can see Mrs. Biró's well-groomed hair, her powdered face, lace blouse and bracelets.

After the completion of the four years of elementary school, Imre Biró left home. Our friendship became tenuous. Later, Imre was taken into the army. He was one year older than I. He fell in 1918. His name is inscribed on the memorial tablet in the Devecser synagogue. He was one of the ten Jewish boys who died a hero's death.

It is very likely that I learned to read and write in Balassagyarmat and that my father taught me. Who else could it have been? Jewish traditional law prescribes that "it is the duty of the father to teach his son at the age of three the confession of the faith"—that most holy prayer which every Jew must recite thrice every day until the end of his life. Even on his deathbed, he has to repeat the prayer, which begins, "*Shema Yisreal,* Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one."

(A religious Jew prepares for death, beating his breast, he confesses his sins while the attendants from the *Hevra Kadisha,* (the *Holy Society),* whose main duty was to bury the dead, recite from the prayerbook. He asks that God be merciful to him. The attendants come to the dying, not to hold vigil over one who is dead.)

I believe that it must have been thus that I learned to read. I learned the *Shema* by heart, then the other prayers and some Psalms and parts of the Five Books of Moses. My father involved me in his daily ritual more and more, and I came to memorize the Psalms and other parts of the Bible not by rote, not mechanically, for I had to comprehend and be able to translate them into Hungarian or German. Nothing is easier for a child than to associate memorized orally recited words with letters, with written words. If you know the first two words spoken, "*Shema Yisrael,*" then nothing is easier than to find the characters corresponding to the sounds in the written words. This, I believe, is the secret of the educational system of the Orthodox Jews, often bilingual from the very beginning, which has proven itself over the centuries. Among the Orthodox Jews there is no dyslexia. By contrast, the American schools are full of children who cannot read. The other day an intelligent, interesting young lady came to my office. She came from Brooklyn, where many Hasidic Jews live. Her family belonged to the famous community of Szatmár. She told me that recently the rabbi of Szatmár had issued strict instructions that both boys and girls must attend Hebrew school regularly from the age of three, and that it was not rare at all for a three-year-old to be able to read and write in Hebrew.

3

Three Sets of Grandparents— Impressions of Ó-Beszterce and Devecser (1905-1925)

The "grown-up" life of my father begins with that particular telegram and with the tears of my mother. My father was already thirty-five years old, late in maturing. He was to remain rabbi in Devecser for twenty years, from 1905 to 1925.

The "Israelite" congregation of Devecser was rather small. So was my father's income. He seemed to be condemned to poverty. After a few years of petitioning, he finally got the government aid I have already mentioned—an addition to his salary (*"die Kongrua"* as my mother called it) since the salary itself was below the minimum standard determined by the Minister of Religion and Public Education. In my father's eyes, his was also an undesirable congregation. His co-religionists were mostly without religion—small-town Jews, assimilated into the Hungarian society. They did not even understand German anymore. The one grocer who closed his store on Saturday and the very Orthodox dealer in wood soon moved away from a town so indifferent to religion. After they left, only one or two families remained who observed the Sabbath. The small two-room Jewish elementary school was the one major contribution the congregation made to Judaism and to the maintenance of its culture. The school was excellent. Even children of the Christian gentry attended it, and their parents paid tuition for the privilege.

The Devecser synagogue itself was a compromise, not quite Neolog, not quite Orthodox: for my father, only just acceptable. It did not

have an organ. My father would never have set foot in a temple with an organ, where the Sabbath was desecrated, where an instrument made by human hands was played on the Sabbath. On the other hand, the lectern for the Torah was up front, before the Holy Ark. "They copy the Christians," said the Orthodox. Therefore, a real Hasidic Jew would not have entered the synagogue of Devecser either. (What violent life-and-death struggles were fought about these vital issues by Jews in the middle of the last century!) How lucky it was, I often said to myself later, that the Devecser community was small and poor. The piety of the congregation would not have kept it from installing an organ, but they did not have the money for it.

Officially, the congregation was Congressional. It suddenly becomes clear to me how little I know about the religious history of my old country. But I begin to remember vaguely that sometime about the middle of the 19th century, at the time of the "compromise" of 1867, the Jews of Hungary held a congress whose outcome was that they broke into three factions. The most conservative formed the "Autonomous Orthodox Israelite Congregations." The liberals became Congressionals and were popularly called "Neolog." Still other communities, for instance those of Léva and Gyöngyös, where the sons-in-law of my Galgóc grandfather were rabbis, joined neither of the two groups. These were the *status quo ante* (in popular parlance, *status quo*) communities. The community of Devecser, according to its official stamp, became a "Congressional Israelite Congregation."

But at least my father had no superior. I inherited from him my desire for independence. I never became a head physician. I never became an assistant physician either. I did not like either to give or to obey orders, and I did not like partnerships. I never participated in medical group practice, or in health care centers. On the other hand, when I practiced alone in my own office, I was in my element. I can safely state that in Budapest, as well as in New York, I was always successful in my tête-à-tête relations with patients, especially if the patient was female and over seventy years of age. And I had exceptional success as a professor, facing a class of young people (like my father preaching to his congregation), and again, especially if ladies, in this case young ones, were in the audience. If there is such a thing as the sublimation of sexual energies (a process which is one of the cardinal tenets of the Freudians), to teach is one of the highest forms of

this sublimation.

It seems that the items in my memory are not linked together with too much logic. Even so, let me return to the meager memories of my childhood. As I look at it now, I find it significant that my father is not present in these memories, although this entire book speaks basically of one person—my father. No matter how I shape my tale, every memory lane leads to him.

My first visual memory of my father is from Devecser. On the eve of some feast day, he enters the side door of the synagogue. He wears a new suit. I walk behind him. Uncle Silber, the beadle, follows me. I can see my father's suit, how the material stretches on his straight, muscular back. I can even remember its cut and its color. "What a handsome man!" I say to myself. That lady from Chicago was not the only one to remind me what a handsome man my father was. Others have also recalled it. It was one of the most noticeable characteristics of his appearance. He was also well groomed (Uncle Grünwald, the barber, came to the house regularly) and elegant, although he dressed very conservatively. He always wore a frock coat, a white shirt with starched front, a four-in-hand, starched cuffs, and a hard black hat. When he went to the synagogue on Friday evenings, Saturdays, and on the High Holy Days, he wore a top hat.

I was probably sixteen years old when my grandmother Fanny of Ó-Beszterce pointed out an elderly peasant woman entering the store. She had been my wet nurse for awhile, my grandmother told me. Obviously, I should have said something to her, perhaps shaken her hand. But teenage boys usually feel awkward in an unexpected, uncomfortable situation. This incident seems to indicate that I must have spent a part of my year-and-a-half "orphanhood," the time of my earliest infancy, with my grandparents in Ó-Beszterce. How long I was there, I do not know. It also seems that I spent some time in the home of one of my father's married sisters in County Turóc. Many years later, these relatives kept reminding me that I was not grateful. But I cannot recall the time I spent with them. Whether I stayed for any length of time with my grandparents in Galgóc, I don't know. Later on, I heard that I had been weak and sickly; that I went through most of the childhood diseases (scarlet fever came later, after we had moved to Devecser); and allegedly, I had pneumonia twice. When my

mother took me under her care she said I was severely ill with rickets. I had a giant head on a small body. My mother gently teased me: *"Ein Wasserkopf"* (hydrocephalus). Weak, toneless muscles, *pectus carinatum* remained an inheritance from this illness.

During my elementary school years in Devecser I was the smallest in class. True, I was a year younger than almost all my classmates. Later on I lost this one-year headstart. It took five years instead of four, after completing the four-year elementary school, before I finally got admitted to high school to the fifth grade. During that year, I suddenly shot up. Then, until the eighth grade (twelfth grade in America), I again fell behind. Boys like the Barcsy, Hajdani, Vizváry outgrew me.

I was one-and-a-half years old when, as stage instructions have it,

Enter *Zsófia Schindler.*

Mother called herself Sophie. My father usually called her by her Hebrew name, Sarah. From then on, I felt I had a home. I believe it was sometime in February of 1902 that my father and Sophie were married.

My stepmother's mother tongue was German. Therefore, naturally, German became the language of the family, and ever since I have been bilingual. With time, she learned Hungarian, but she spoke it with a German accent. She mixed up transitive and intransitive verb forms all the time, and she never really learned to read Hungarian. The language of correspondence for the family remained German. One of my memories is that I always brought home the discarded issues of the comic paper *Fliegende Blätter* from the Casino for my mother. She read it in the evenings and, in secret, even on the Sabbath. Only reluctantly did she glance into the Yiddish collection of pious literature edited for women and popularly called *Tzene-Rene.* She also read the Lehmann novels. I remember only vaguely that the novels of this German author were published by a Jewish publisher in, I believe, Frankfurt. His heroes were modern, cultured, but religious Jewish men and women. Virtue was always rewarded, while irreligiosity always led to tragedy. My father was a devoted reader and dedicated promoter of these books. He even quoted them in his sermons.

I must interject an anecdotal but true episode. It is the Hungarian speech of my mother which makes it apropos. One afternoon, my mother went over to the Schwartzes, our favorite neighbors in

Devecser, and told them that the day before a "traitor" had visited us. She had bought four sheets and some towels from him. In Hungarian the words "traitor" *(hazaáruló)* and "peddler" *(házaló)* are very similar in writing and pronunciation.

As I remember, every other summer my father went to visit his parents, and later his stepmother, Grandmother Fanny, in Ó-Beszterce.

I remember my grandfather as a shriveled, silent little man, sitting in the sun next to the door of the store under the sign "Jacob Links" and wearing a multi-colored embroidered *yarmulke* on his bald head. He must have been a very sick man. "He has softening of the brain," I heard one of the women of the family whisper. He must have had cerebral arteriosclerosis. From inside the store one could hear an energetic female voice: it was Grandmother Fanny's. She was in charge of the situation.

(The "softening of the brain" of my grandfather remained with me as a permanent phobia: "perhaps I shall have it too.") Grandfather Links died in 1907, but his name remained on the sign until the end of World War I when the villagers, who until then had been customers, sacked the store and drove my grandmother and Uncle Poldi, who had just returned from the military. Nothing else was written on the sign. To state in Hungarian or in German that it was a general store would have served no purpose. Even in Slovak it would have been of little use. Most of the customers, especially the peasant women and the older people, could neither read nor write. Besides, the Hungarian authorities would have looked askance at a Slovak inscription on the sign of a Jewish storekeeper. Some of the customers, local and neighboring peasant women, did not even know our family name. Years before, nobody could remember when, there must have been a brewery in the place where my grandfather opened his store in the fifties of the 19th century. The peasant women continued to call the store "the brewery," and it was to "the brewery" that they went to buy shirts, scarves, skirts, kerchiefs, and odds and ends as long as the store existed.

Aside from Devecser, the real home of my childhood, Ó-Beszterce was in a way also a home. From infancy I was not only bilingual, but also had two homes. For this reason, I saw more of my country than most of the boys who were my contemporaries in Devecser.

The two homes of my childhood were symbolic of an identity

crisis that has accompanied me all my life. I could never give a straight answer to the questions "What am I?" and "Where am I from?" If somebody asked me, "What are you?" I would answer without hesitation, "Hungarian." The questioner sometimes raised his eyebrow quizzically. If someone would look up my name in the official medical listings, he might be surprised to see that I did not register as a Czechoslovak. I *was* born in what after World War I became Czechoslovakia; and I immigrated to my new country under the Czechoslovak quota. My passport also described me as a native Czechoslovak. There were some who wished to know whether I was a Jew, especially when they discovered that I spoke no Yiddish. Nobody expected me to say that I was an American. What should I answer to the question, "Where did you come from?" From Budapest? I spent quite a few years of my life there; it is from there that I came to New York. From Galgóc? I was only born there. From Devecser? I spent my childhood there. There were people who thought I was from Pápa. I went to the high school there. Others said I was from Köszeg because I was the son of the rabbi of Köszeg. I never knew exactly where I belonged.

I would like to interject here a childhood memory. I must have been a first- or second-grader in the elementary school when, for some reason, a boy hit me. I hit him back. My father reprimanded me severely. According to my father, a good, God-fearing child does not hit back, but complains to the teacher, who will then reprimand the other boy and see to it that he mends his ways. To hit back, to fight, is improper behavior for a good Jewish boy. Then came the summer I spent with my grandparents in Galgóc. I can see the place, next to the artesian well beside the synagogue where another boy once attacked me. I complained to my grandmother. And, oh boy, did I get it from her! (She did not like me anyhow.) What? To squeal? No way! To hit back? Yes. Always. I could never decide which was the right way. During my student years in Budapest I read, although only superficially, Marx—*The Communist Manifesto,* the pamphlet about the Jewish question—I never got to *Das Kapital.* Later, in Pozsony, I read Martin Buber and some mystics. Then in Prague, during my medical school years, I studied the great work of Lao Tze. I pored over every sentence, every word, just as one studies the Talmud. The title of the Lao Tze book in the poetic German translation of Alexander Ular was *Die Bahn und der rechte Weg.* I never got to the point of being able to study Maimonides'

The Guide of the Perplexed. Medical study took up all my time. I have remained perplexed. Which one is *der rechte Weg* (the right path)? I still do not know.

Devecser and Ó-Beszterce were part of Hungary until 1918. They were two different worlds, two focuses in the memories of my childhood and the years of my youth. Devecser, of course, was and remained in the sharper focus. But there I was, the son of the rabbi. I was isolated. Apart from my parents, I had no relatives.

My ties with Ó-Beszterce were quite different. There, Jacob Links was one of the Jewish merchants, and in the villages of County Trencsén and the small towns where my uncles and aunts and all sorts of cousins lived, I was, first of all, a member of a family. True, even there I remained an outsider; there, too, I was the son of my father, the son of the *Doctor-Rabbiner Links.* And the two homes? They had a positive side as well. My classmates in Devecser, even the boys of the gentry, knew only *one* Hungary, that of Devecser; my Ó-Beszterce family also knew only one, a different one; the two were far from being similar.

The difference which was most noticeable for me even quite early in my childhood was the relative prosperity of the peasants and townsmen of Devecser and its surroundings in contrast with the poverty, almost destitution, of the peasants of Ó-Beszterce.

I feel I should insert here a word about the meaning and the use of the word *peasant.* The German *Bauer* basically means a tiller of the soil. The Hungarian word for peasant, *paraszt,* is not of Hungarian origin and does not connote a cultivator of the soil. It derives from the Slovak *prosty* which means rude, uncouth, unrefined. As commonly used in Devecser and, in general, in Hungary, the word had no derogatory meaning. So if I say "peasant," I use the word in the sense of "farmer." Peasant streets in Devecser meant the streets in which the farmers lived. Peasant house meant a house of a certain architecture, which obviously evolved in the course of centuries and was well suited to the needs of farmers and herdsmen. In the center of the town the lots were expensive and the windows and stores opened directly onto the street. The peasants' houses, with their large yards, could not be accommodated there.

During my childhood, Devecser had three doctors—the district family doctor, the official public health doctor, and the physician of the

Esterházy estate; later, it also had a private practitioner. There was a very impressive pharmacy with an elegant front and, from about 1910 on, even a hospital—the "Berta Hospital," so named after the wife of Count Esterházy of Devecser, née Princess Berta Lobkowitz.

While speaking of the pharmacy I must mention the two busts which flanked its entrance. I was able to read the names engraved on the bases of the statues in golden letters: one I pronounced Ah-esh-czu-lahp; the other began with H and Y, followed by several vowels—Hygeia—I did not know how to pronounce it. Neither did I know what the names meant.

Devecser was a district center. It had a town judge (a pipe-smoking citizen who always wore high boots), a notary, a district judge, a district court with numerous personnel, and a great number of lawyers. The public buildings impressed me greatly. Nor must I leave unmentioned the two savings institutions, Mr. Löwinger's café, several inns, and of course, the Roman Catholic Church and the synagogue. There were also parsonages and school buildings, a steam mill, and a brothel. We even had a newspaper, *The Herald of Somló and Vicinity*. Gyula Huss was its editor, its publisher, and its printer. One of the causes for which he fought for years was to have the express train stop in Devecser.

Ó-Beszterce was about 18 kilometers from Krasno (in Hungarian, Karásznó), the nearest railroad station. The mail and the occasional passenger was brought from the railroad station by an old one-horse buggy with a wooden bench. The road followed the course of the river Bystrica. It was in terrible repair, muddy in some places, stony in others, it crossed fords and passed through other small villages before it reached the post office of Ó-Beszterce. In Uj-Beszterce (which was not even a real village, but only a sprinkling of houses), the mail was delivered only once a week, on Sunday mornings and, very appropriately, was distributed in front of the church. Further on the road became steeper, the valley narrower, the surroundings more forbidding, and almost all civilization disappeared. The uninhabited pine-covered mountains alternated with valleys through which little rivulets rushed into the Bystrica. Here almost nobody lived, not even peasants. Only a few wooden houses leaned against the mountain slopes, where the dense pine forests were cut through by an occasional creek. A two-day walk across the mountains would have brought the hardy wanderer to Silesia or Galicia on the other side of the divide of the Danube—to a

foreign world. Once a week, or perhaps twice, two gun-carrying gendarmes with rooster feathers in their helmets followed the road to some place, I know not where. The country's border was unguarded and impossible to guard. The gendarmes were the symbols of the state power. On their way back, they always stopped in at my uncle's tavern. They were treated with proper respect.

It was almost painful to see all that poverty—the rickety little log cabins that sheltered in the winter not only the family but also the chickens, the pigs, and the goats, the tiny potato fields next to the hovels and the stubble-cheeked peasants in their *bocskors*—furry moccasins tied with leather straps around their ankles—their felt pants and hempen shirts. The clothes were spun and woven by the womenfolk. In contrast to the Hungarian peasants, the Slovak men wore no mustache. I saw an unusually large number of one-legged men hobbling on primitive peg-legs, others with one arm or with crippled fingers. Most of them made their living not by farming but working in the forest, and obviously that was a dangerous occupation. It was also in Ó-Beszterce that I saw for the first time a case of goiter. It was not rare. And I remember the village fool. Even his memory is frightening.

Devecser was located in a plain blessed with rich soil. The majority of the inhabitants were farmers. The better-to-do considered themselves bourgeois or burghers. They lived in the streets surrounding the downtown area, and their yards were spacious, with gates, stables, pig sties, hay barns, wagons, animals, wells—there was enough room for everything. It was a beautiful place. Nobody was in a hurry. I shall never forget the oxcarts, their spectacular slowness, their almost motionless dignity.

The communities surrounding Devecser were small. Nowhere else in the district was there a doctor. There was no downtown, no citified stores, no offices, no intelligentsia. But even there the grassland and the farms surrounded closely built villages clustered around a kind of church plaza. In County Veszprém there were no detached farms. And the grapes on the slopes of Mount Somló, a long-extinct volcano, looked down upon the villages with a friendly mien.

Ó-Beszterce was a populous town, but it had no place for expansion. Its size was limited by the river on one side and by the pine-covered mountains on the other. In its few central streets were located the office of the notary, the post office, the Catholic church, the small syn-

agogue, the houses of the few Jewish merchants and their stores, the house of one of the doctors, the shop of the shoemaker Manik Ries, and the large house of the rich Löwys, the forest owners, with its white walls, green louvers, and closed gate. All this, however, was but one part of the village. Wherever the creeks issuing from the forests permitted it, there was a settlement consisting of a few houses surrounded by potato and oat fields stretching as far as the sun could reach into the narrow valleys. In Devecser and its surrounding villages, one could see the far horizon in all directions under the great canopy of the sky. In Ó-Beszterce, and especially in the narrow river beds, you could see only a small slice of sky. By August, when the sun traveled along a lower arch, the rainy, humid autumn had already arrived.

Beyond Ó-Beszterce there was really nothing you could truthfully call a village. I remember an interesting store in Uj-Beszterce where everything was available from ax to saw, from horseshoe nails to wagon grease, everything needed by a peasant household. That is where my Uncle Vilmos had his tavern and general store.

My uncle's life was not an easy one. It was not easy to go by wagon and train to Zsolna or Mährisch Ostrau, to do the shopping, to lug everything home, and then bargain over pennies with poor peasant women. But the peasants did not have it easy either. It was not easy to be a peasant in Devecser but there, at least the tilling of the soil provided some joy and dignity. It was beautiful just to watch the sowers, the reapers, the grape-pickers. But those poor Slovak peasants must have had a much more difficult life. It was frightening even to watch as one or two horses, near death from exhaustion, pulled the long and heavy tree trunks loaded on primitive two-wheeled wagons. And those neck-breaking trips on rafts down the flooded rivers! And the many accidents! The men with missing legs continued to do what was difficult even for a man with two legs. For relaxation, these dead-tired peasants, unshaven and exuding a sweaty smell, sat down in the tavern, alone, morose and wordless. They drank their brandy from long-necked glasses of one or two-tenths of liters (a gentleman would not drink this kind of brandy, nor would the peasants of Devecser), and argued about whether the drink was measured honestly right up to the line. In Devecser the taverns were in the hands of Gentiles; the wine drinkers joined in a company, were rowdy. There the wife of the Jewish dry-goods merchant called his burgher woman customers "Missis." In Ó-

Beszterce, the peasant hated the Jew who had expensive merchandise, and the Jew looked down upon the peasant who struggled for a place at the very bottom of civilization, the drunken goy, to whom he sold spirits. It was a tragic situation, this symbiosis of Jew and peasant, that had been going on for many decades. Neither of the two could live without the other, and neither of them could live with the other.

In connection with this tragic Slovak-Jewish interdependence the immortal lines of József Kiss come to my mind:

> The depth of the smooth surface hides a wild vortex
> There is no solution, nor sin, only punishment...

I never really experienced this tension in Devecser, not even later. True, in Horthy's Hungary the district doctor of Devecser was not Jewish, nor were most of the lawyers. The chief local judge, the district judge, the notary, and the superintendent of the estate were all Gentiles even before World War I. The children of the poorer Jews of the peasant-streets moved away—they did not stay on the proletarian level of their parents—but the elite stayed. The upper class Jews and the Christian gentry spoke the same language, Hungarian. They even twirled their mustaches alike. The Jewish boys generally married Jewish girls—I remember only one mixed marriage—and, ultimately, continued their lives in their parents' wholesale tobacco stores, factories, fashion stores, and hardware stores.

After World War I religious life became very lax. Until about 1919 Uncle Silber could somehow gather twice a day the ten male adults required for the *minyan,* the public worship in the synagogue. Later, even that came to an end. Only during the Friday evening and Saturday morning services and during the holy days did a sufficient number of the faithful assemble. After my parents moved to Köszeg in 1925 Devecser could no longer sustain a full-time rabbi. In the Nazi genocide of World War II, the Jews of Devecser, Köszeg and Ó-Beszterce were all exterminated. I can say nothing more about them.

During the last year of the "old" Hungary, 1918, I spent the summer in Ó- and Uj-Beszterce with my grandmother and Uncle Vilmos. I said goodbye to them at the end of August. I visited my ailing grandfather in Galgóc and then started my new life—Budapest, the University—of which I shall give an account later.

Within less than six weeks the "Monarchy," the entire millennial

structure, collapsed like a house of cards. The sign "Jacob Links" over the store disappeared forever. About a year later my Uncle Vilmos and his family dared to sneak back to the store and the tavern and continued where they had left off. But now order in Ó-Beszterce was kept by civil guards who wore Russian military caps (instead of rooster feathers) and were Czech (not Slovak). I again spent the greater part of summer vacations there. By that time I was a medical student in Prague. The rich Löwys no longer lived in their mansion. A new lumber company had an industrial railway siding built for itself. There was no more need for the horses and wagons of the peasants, nor for the backbreaking work they used to perform. Whether that was good for the peasants, I cannot judge. But the number of peasants who used to come in to the tavern for a drink in the middle of work decreased. This did not help Uncle Vilmos' income very much.

Of course it would be out of perspective if I were to mention only this much of the life in the Ó-Beszterce I knew before 1918—the brutal physical labor, the hopeless poverty, the drinking, the illiteracy. Mention must be made of the "American," the peasant who had spent some time in America (some of them went back and forth two or three times) and who wore proper pants and shoes, and even flaunted a few gold teeth. Some of the younger and more adventurous men spent several years in the United States, working in mines and factories. They brought money back, bought land, and could choose young or rich women. The youngsters of military age could easily escape across the mountains. I hardly remember seeing young men in Ó-Beszterce during World War I in military uniform. Obviously army life (and later the war against the great Slav brother) did not create any special enthusiasm.

In Devecser, conscription belonged to the memorable events of the year. It was conducted in the great hall of the "Bellavits Tavern and Restaurant," very close to the Jewish elementary school, and we could hear from our classroom the joyous shouts of the young men, especially of those who were admitted. Peacetime military service lasted three years. The inductees, dead drunk and decked out in ribbons, yelled and sang until the small hours of the morning, disturbing the usual quiet of the small town.

The "American" peasant of Ó-Beszterce very likely completely forgot the few Hungarian words he had learned in school as a child. On

the other hand, he learned some English. In this connection I remember something told me by one of my relatives. It seems that during the last parliamentary elections of pre-World War I held in Hungary in 1910, one of the candidates, a Baron Lévay. did not know Slovak, the language of those he wanted to represent, and they could not understand his Hungarian. So he gave his campaign speeches in English.

This is all I know about the elections in Ó-Beszterce, and what I know comes secondhand from one of my cousins. But I clearly remember the 1910 elections in Devecser. The candidate of the National Labor Party (also known as Government Party, Tisza Party, and "67" Party) was a Dr. Károly Magyar, a lawyer and landowner in Kiskamond in the Devecser district. The candidate of the "Justh Party of '48" was Tamás Malonyay. I believe he was a district judge from Upper East Hungary. His chief *kortes* (campaign manager) was Dr. Kálmán Buzás, a lawyer who had risen from the ranks of the peasants.

The term *"Kortes"* is interesting. I believe I have not heard it since. I do not know where it comes from. *Cortes* of Spain? Neither do I know why the "Independence Party of '48" split into two. But I do know that there was one section led by Gyula Justh, and another whose leader was Ferenc Kossuth, the son of the great Hungarian patriot and leader, Lajos Kossuth. To be a parliamentary candidate, especially for the opposition, was very likely an expensive and exhausting thing. Poor Malonyay stumped the villages for weeks and knocked on almost every door in Devecser, including ours. My father, who was a great patriot and favored the spirit of '48, received him with joy and respect and called his attention to the red feather with a green leaf attached to my hat, signifying that I, a child aged ten, was one of those who belonged to the party of Malonyay. The government party members wore red, white and green feathers.

I no longer remember how the news of my father's political stand spread. It created a great deal of consternation among the leaders of the congregation. Mr. Herman Mauthner, the director of one of the savings banks, was at that time its president. A few days before the election, he appeared in our home and practically forbade my father to vote for the candidate of the Independents. I can still see my father, crushed and humiliated, his chest heaving, almost as if he were sobbing. In the end, my father did not vote. Of course, at that time (1910), open voting was the order of things. It seems to me that it happened during the twenties

or thirties that Prime Minister Count István Bethlen said that the secret ballot did not agree with the Hungarian character. On election day, the servants and the laborers of the estate, dressed in their Sunday best with clean boots, stood about in a crowd before the district court on the Deák Plaza. Under the leadership of a manager of the estate, they marched en bloc to the polling place and, of course, voted unanimously for Károly Magyar.

I was standing in the crowd in the yard of Dr. Buzás when the results were announced. Our candidate must have spent something like 10,000 crowns on his campaign, and as I remember, he broke into tears. Never again did I hear the name of Tamás Malonyay. I do not know what happened to him. But I do remember one thing. In 1952, when Adlai Stevenson conceded on television that he lost the election, the two images merged before my eyes—that of Stevenson facing the world, and that of Malonyay in the Devecser yard as retained in the memory of a 10-year-old boy. Years later Stevenson became my patient, and I told him of the fusion of the two memories.

But enough of Devecser and my father's family. Now I would like to cull the few remaining memories I have of my mother's (that is, my stepmother's) family.

My mother's parents lived in a smallish town of Moravia named Mährisch-Weisskirchen. We visited the place occasionally—once perhaps in the summer of 1908, and again in 1913. There, too, I had a grandfather, Moritz Schindler, who according to my mother was *"ein Flachshändler"* (a flax merchant). They were poor, or at least people of modest means. My mother was their only child. I can remember quite well some discussions and strolls with Grandfather Schindler. It is not likely that as an eight-year-old child I was able to understand much of what he told me. And it is also true that I had little contact with that branch of the family.

Mährisch-Weisskirchen (at present its official name is Hranice) was a beautiful little town, quite different from Galgóc, and even more different from Devecser that in many respects was still village-like and rustic. Its streets were lined with beautiful, old-style two- and three-story houses. My mother was especially proud of the fact that it was there that one of the most exclusive officers' schools in Old Austria was located, the *Kavallerie-Kadetten-Schule* (School for Cavalry Offic-

ers). The elegant, golden youths preparing to become cavalry officers really put their stamp on the place. The river Bečva flowed through the town, and in the middle of the river was anchored the first fenced-in swimming pool I ever saw. The swimming pool of the officers' school was open to the general public during certain hours of the day. My father found out that there was a lifeguard on duty, and that he also gave swimming lessons. Since according to the Talmud and the Jewish codes it was the duty of the father to teach his son to swim, during our second visit to Weisskirchen my father signed me up. The lifeguard swimming instructor was a non-commissioned officer, probably with the rank of sergeant. My father paid in advance for the ten lessons, at the end of which I would be declared a swimmer. My father always came with me to the lessons. I remember well that I had to stretch out on a net-like contraption suspended from a long, flexible pole and practice the breast stroke. After four or five lessons at the most, my father found that we had to return urgently to Devecser, and thus I would have no time for further lessons. After a long discussion the swimming master agreed that I should be permitted to swim the length of the pool at its shallow end without the training gear, and so my father received the certificate which declared me a swimmer. We got, of course, nothing back from the pre-paid tuition fee. That was the end of physical exercises for the rest of my life, but the only sport I like and still practice on occasion remains swimming. I still like to swim a few lengths with old-fashioned breaststrokes. I have never belonged to an athletic society or a rowing club. I am sure that I could never master the so-called crawl that is generally used today.

It was from Grandfather Schindler that I heard for the first time of the autonomy of the old Jewish communities of Moravia, which still existed, at least symbolically. The Jewish street was officially called *Judenstadt,* and the president of the congregation was styled *Bürgermeister.* The beadle was the Jewish policeman; he wore, in fact, a policeman's uniform. Rumor had it that he even owned a sword. The Jewish quarter had a gate which was locked every Friday evening. The city police had to obtain permission before entering the "Jewish city." (The German university of Prague also had such extraterritorial rights, with the result that the police observed the bloody fights we had with the anti-Semitic students' associations from the other side of the street. They were Czech policemen. They enjoyed seeing that "the Germans

were killing each other.") The beautiful old synagogue was in the Jewish quarter, but the richer Jews no longer lived in its narrow streets in the very old houses. Rather, the riff-raff made its home there. Mr. Rudolf Haus, a well-to-do relative of ours, explained laughingly how glad these people were about the extraterritorial status of the quarter. The autonomy of the Jewish city almost guaranteed security to thieves and fences.

I have quite a few interesting reminiscences about the places and the times of our visits, although at that time I could not have been sufficiently mature to appreciate them. It was at that time that I first became aware of two movements: Zionism and anti-Semitism. Weisskirchen was part of the Czech language area, and even the *Kadetten-Schule* and the German-speaking and German-leaning Austrian government officials could not change its Czech character. The Jews, of course, were unconditional supporters of the good old emperor and of the monarchy. They spoke German and they were devoted admirers and propagandists of German culture. Still, the Austrian bureaucrat class wanted them neither as friends nor even as allies. The German *Turnverein* (Sports Association) and the German *Gesangsverein* (Choral Union) did not admit Jews as members. In this situation a movement was born that was looked upon with no favor by the older Jews but was enthusiastically endorsed by the younger ones—Zionism, the important Jewish national movement of the last decade of the 19th century (*nota bene:* the decade of the Dreyfus affair). It was Zionism that bound my mother, who was not deeply religious and who grew up during that decade, to Judaism. I learned from her Zionist songs, as well as some German anti-Semitic satirical songs. For my father, Jewish sports associations, choral unions, cultural societies, discussion evenings were all senseless aberrations. The essence of Judaism was for him the study of the Torah and the fulfillment of the commandments. As stated in the *Chapters of the Fathers* on which he published a commentary at that time, "The world stands on three things: on the Torah, on the divine service, and on the exercise of charity." To make things even more complicated, as I already mentioned, he was a Hungarian patriot, a fervent adherent of the "Party of '48," and at the same time, he was awaiting the Messiah.

In one of my conversations with Grandfather Schindler he came to discuss family names. The subject possibly came to his mind in

connection with his theories of anti-Semitism. In regard to his own name, Schindler, he told me that his father, of course, was called Schindler. On the other hand, his father's father had the name Alt. My grandfather's father was an "illegitimate" child. The explanation? During the reign of Maria Theresia, only the first-born son in every Jewish family was permitted to marry in Moravia. "This was the way they wanted to keep down the number of the Jews," he said. And so the youths who were not first-born would contract marriage in secret before the rabbi. Of course, as far as the lifestyle and the fate of the small storekeeper or the peddler who made the rounds of the villages with his wares on his back were concerned, their "illegitimate" birth made little difference.

A few years after the death of my Weisskirchen grandfather, his widow, Amalia (née Haus) moved to Devecser to live with my parents. It was there that she lived out the rest of her life in leisure and unhappiness—an old tree, transplanted, unable to strike roots in a strange environment. The poor thing wanted to keep busy in the kitchen. But my mother constantly nagged and fussed and, I felt, treated her badly and unjustly. My father, however, took my grandmother's side. In the end she moved into a separate apartment and came only occasionally to visit us. She died in Devecser. About 1960, when I was there the last time, I could no longer find her tombstone.

One of the peculiarities of my life was that I had three sets of grandparents. In the beginning I could not understand why the grandparents from Galgóc accepted me with such an astonishing generosity. My Galcóc grandfather was entirely different from my father, although he, too, was a rabbi. He wore a long black coat that reached well below his knees. It could even be called a caftan. His graying beard was wild and unkempt, not neatly trimmed like the beard of my father. But his synagogue was at least ten times as large as my father's, and was built entirely differently. The large dais, following Orthodox rules, stood in the middle. Grandfather even had an assistant rabbi, *"Herr Pollak, der Dayen,"* as my grandmother referred to him contemptuously. To be an assistant rabbi was obviously not a bed of roses, even under my gentle grandfather.

Of my Galgóc grandfather I remember only that he spent almost all his day in his bedroom that was also his study. In the middle of the

room there stood a round table loaded with sheets of writing paper spotted all over with ink. From morning to evening he wrote, dipping a scratchy metal pen into an old-fashioned inkwell. Not only the papers, but his hands, too, were always covered with ink spots. I could not imagine who would be able to read those awe-inspiring, tightly written Hebrew lines. But ultimately they were published in several bulky tomes. This grandfather of mine was a "great" rabbi. The mantle of the Landesbergs rested on his shoulders invisibly. Among the Orthodox Jews who had come to America from Hungary (a considerable part of my practice, especially in the early years, came from among them) the titles of his books, if not his name, are well known even today. In Jewish tradition this is the greatest mark of pious achievement. The really great rabbis are known not by their own names, but by the titles of their books. One often finds some kind of hidden meaning in Hebrew book titles, a reference to something quite different from their obvious meaning. In the title of one of my grandfather's earlier books, *Atereth Tzevi,* my Hebrew name is preserved. He wrote it in the year when I was born and my mother died. His magnum opus, *Havot Yair,* was written much later. Its title, according to custom, is taken from the Bible, in this instance, from the Book of Judges, and the second word (with slightly changed spelling) hides the initials of his own name—Joseph Eleazar Rosenfeld.

I was five years old when we moved to Devecser. The rabbi's house in the yard of the synagogue was for some reason not at our disposal for a year. Therefore, we lived in one of the backyard apartments of the postmaster, Otto Szalay. The postmaster was a corpulent, elderly gentleman with a beautiful white Vandyke. He looked remarkably like Mór Jókai, the famous Hungarian novelist. He was non-Jewish. For the son of a rabbi this was an understandably important distinction. He was totally different from the men I had known until then—a country squire, always dressed in hunting clothes with a feathered hat, resourceful and self-assured. He even had a gun. One of his sons became later the district doctor of Devecser. Another son was deaf and mute. With him I struck up a great friendship. Mr. Szalay had a wonderful garden full of fruit trees, grape vines, vegetables and beehives. The beehives I remember well: it was there that, for the only time in my life, a bee stung me, above my eyebrow. I can still see myself tearing the bee away in panic while the stinger remained

embedded in my forehead. The Torna Creek flowed through the garden. A narrow, graceful, Japanese-style wooden bridge spanned it. In the summer the two girls, who worked as mail clerks, used to do needlework in the garden after office hours. They talked to me about Budapest. Our apartment opened onto that beautiful garden.

Muszka, the gentle old horse, was the first four-legged beast with whom I ever became friends. Three times a day he pulled the mail-cart between the railroad station and the post office. My friend the coachman, who was at the same time the mailman, let me sit with him on the driving box. The house next to the post office also belonged to Szalay. At one time it served as the gentlemen's casino. It had a beautiful, formal garden with large leafy trees, a creek, lawns, and benches. The Christian gentry, from the district judge to the pharmacist, frequented it, as did a few Jewish notables—the lawyers, the doctors. My father was soon also voted in. I think the chief district judge was a member, as well as the parish priest, Father Derdák, the director of the Esterházy Estate, and his honor Xavier Ferenc Szentgyörgyi, the Imperial and Royal Chamberlain. But I never saw them come to the casino. The name Xavier impressed me tremendously. I had never heard anything like it until that time. My father was interested in politics but he did not have enough money to subscribe to the newspapers from the capital. The casino received the papers and so, about twice a week, my father would walk over there to read them. While I lived at home, I, too, would go with him. He read the *Pesti Napló* and the *Magyarország.* I remember the name of Barna Búza; I think he was the editor of one of the papers, or its chief editorial writer. Most of the time my father agreed with his opinions. As for me, I leafed through the *Tolnai Világlapja* and perhaps the *Érdekes Ujság.* I especially liked the drawings of Károly Mühlbeck in the *Új Idők (Modern Times).* During the afternoons and in the evenings, card battles were fought, and the evenings were occasionally reserved for social events. From all this my father always kept himself away. In the mornings the casino was empty. Even today I remember with a certain admiration the excellent library of the casino of that small town.

The "middle class"—the merchants, artisans, restaurateurs, shopkeepers—belonged to the "Citizens' Reading Circle." I do not know whether the circle had Jewish members, but since my father did not go there, I have no memories of it. The youth of the burghers (in

Devecser, they called the better-to-do smallholders "burghers") belonged to the Catholic Youth League. Occasionally I spied on them through the window: I saw long, empty, wooden benches and tables. After Sunday mass the young men would congregate in front of the great tavern of the Esterházy Estate to flirt with the girls. The people of the estate (half of the town was owned by the Esterházy Estate) did not belong to any group. Neither did the "poor" people, the washerwomen, the woodcutters, the shepherds, the roadmenders, the day laborers, those who lived in thatched mud-houses and, of course, the gypsies. The gypsies, incidentally, were not wandering gypsies; they lived permanently in town. Devecser, with its 5,000 inhabitants and 100 Jews, was a small-scale image of the Hungarian world, of the half-feudalistic, half-burgher world of Hungary that I suddenly discovered at the age of five.

Until that time it was as if I had lived in a vacuum, sheltered under a glass bell. Inside it there was, besides myself, only my mother (my stepmother) and in my earliest memory of Sátoraljaujhely some kind of policeman. The memories of Balassagyarmat are more detailed: there is a house, a street, a little girl who plays ball and talks about death, and the military barracks with the taps that haunt me even today:

> Soldier, come home.
> What for? What for?...

There is a weeping woman, my mother, who may have cried because something new and unknown was about to begin. There is the telegram which signaled that there was an outside world, that of my father and of Devecser.

How fascinating, how exciting was that Devecser-land—the outside world, of which I became suddenly aware as if I had awakened from a dream to a reality of which I could be part, parcel and participant. In this world everything was new, and it was as if everything had been ordained forever. Everything had a reason. The geography—let me repeat it: downtown, estate, peasant-town, poor people, gypsies. The social structure in which everybody had his God-given place and

rank: the Count, whom I never saw alive, only lying on his catafalque, the first dead person I had seen in my life through the glass window of his casket; the chief judge, who never walked the street alone—a *hussar* in full uniform followed him at a respectful distance; the highly regarded Mr. Barcza and his family; the judge of the board of appeals, Mr. Perczel; and all sorts of office holders, artisans, merchants, Jews, peasants, poor people, even beggars. All appeared to be so stable, so foreordained and immutable as the reign of our good old King itself. During the Saturday morning service in the synagogue, standing before the open Ark, my father recited a Hungarian prayer for the life and happiness of our King, His Majesty Ferenc József I, and of the royal house. I am sure that he not only uttered the words but sincerely felt what he said. Yes, in reality, there was no need for the coming of the Messiah. Which Devecser Jew had wanted to exchange Jewish Devecser for Jerusalem? And Zionism? Oh, come on! Who needed that? Perhaps things would have to come to a head with those evil Austrians, those wicked Austrians who falsified even the name of our good Hungarian King. At the age of five I thought that the name of our King was Ferenc József; Ferenc, the family name, and József, the first name—did not the people refer to him familiarly as Ferenc Jóska?

Ferenc Jóska stands at the gate:
Tearfully watches his son the recruit.
Ferenc Jóska spits into his fist...

To this day I can sing this song and I hear the words *regruta* (recruit) and *pök* (spits) in these folksy forms. And those evil Austrians falsified the good Hungarian name to Franz Josef. There was a time when I almost made myself believe that the great men of world history had Hungarian names. I adored reading historical books—that was permitted. Such original Hungarian names as *Nagy Sándor* (Alexander the Great), *Szép Fülöp* (Philip the Handsome), *Kopasz Károly* (Charles the Bald), *Tengerész Henrik* (Henry the Navigator), remain in my memory.

Among the memories from my first year in Devecser, my sixth year of life, the "shoebox" occupies an important position. My mother got sick (I cannot say that she "lay in," since I did not understand the meaning of that word). She stayed in bed for several days, and, as I remember, I was not allowed to go to her in the bedroom until one day

when Uncle Silber, the old beadle, came out of the room carrying a box not bigger than a shoebox. When I questioned him—I hung around there all the time—he told me that he had to take the box to the cemetery to bury it because the little newborn thing did not live long enough to be given a Hebrew name during the Sabbath morning services. This is how I found out that I almost had a little sister.

When I asked my father—or perhaps Uncle Silber—what would have been the little child's Hungarian name, he told me: Margit. From that time I occupied myself a great deal with my sister, an imaginary Margit. I was alone a great deal, and always envied those who had siblings.

In a modern memoir it is almost impossible not to write about the parents' bedroom. So let me add that in the tiny bedroom of the small apartment next to the post office there was no room for a third bed, and, therefore, during that year I slept in the anteroom leading to the bedroom. The rabbi's house was much more spacious, and in it a large, long room facing the garden became the bedroom. One end of it was occupied by my parents' beds. Among Orthodox Jews the conjugal bed was unknown; one could not even find two beds placed next to one another—there is a time each month when one must not touch one's wife. My bed stood at the other end of the room. And the conveniences? They consisted of a large porcelain chamberpot, which stood somewhere between my parents' beds. I do not remember whether my father ever used it. He was very bashful, I could say prudish. As for my mother and me, at least for a time, the common pot was a natural part of our lives. My father always got up at dawn and, as prescribed by the religious laws, he trained himself so that before the morning prayers, or if possible even before the auroral Talmud lessons, his body should be "pure." And since there was no plumbing in the house, my father took water and a cleaning rag along with him to the outhouse. All that was prescribed. Old codes of proper behavior regulated every single activity of the life of the religious Jew, down to the minutest details. They had been doing so for many centuries. And always, in all circumstances, one had to pray or recite a benediction of one kind or another. For instance, after doing one's "duty" one had to rinse one's hands and thank the Creator for the orifices which He created in His infinite wisdom, "because if any of them were to open or close in a faulty fashion, we could not serve you properly, O Lord." "Ignác," my mother

would grumble, "why do you sit there so long? You will catch a cold!" And, *"Narrischkeiten"* (foolishness), she murmured when my father was washing and drying his rags.

I couldn't have been more than six or seven years old when, quite independently from Freud, I discovered the Oedipus complex. It was sometime after my sixth birthday that we moved into our permanent quarters and there, as I have just mentioned, I slept in my parents' bedroom for awhile. On Saturday mornings my mother did not get up early and I did not have to be at the morning prayer until 7 o'clock. Whether she invited me into her bed or I begged to join her, I do not remember. But I know that those visits belong to the most pleasant memories of my life, and the happiest of my childhood. Then, one such morning, my father appeared at my mother's bedside and in very definite terms banned me from it. I am sure that I never dared to transgress his command, and that at that time, for the first time in my life, I hated my father, even if only for one moment.

In spite of all this proximity I never saw my mother naked. (Among the recollections of Freud, one of the traumatic memories is that once, perhaps when he was three years old, he saw the *matrem nudam.* It appears that he did not even dare to write it down in German.) I never saw my father naked either.

Of course,to expose the nakedness of the father, and not to cover him, belongs among the most mortal of the mortal sins. As the Bible tells us: Ham, the youngest son of Noah, and all the descendants of his son Canaan, were cursed by Noah for this sin. Shem and Japheth, Noah's other two sons, covered their father with a blanket, walking backwards, so that they should not see their father's nakedness.

The memory of this event brings me directly to 1938. A few months before I left Hungary for America, my father, almost sixty-nine years old and then rabbi of Köszeg, suddenly came down with a high fever. The doctor had to be called. As far as I can remember, this was the first and only occasion on which my mother made use of the telephone. If my memory is correct, even then, she asked a neighbor, Mrs. Deutsch, to make the call. To the best of my recollection, neither my mother nor my father ever spoke into that infernal machine. In any case, the doctor came. He diagnosed erysipelas and made a long-distance call to me in Budapest. I had my own practice at the time, but

immediately cancelled my office appointments, and, upon the advice of my internist friends, obtained some of the new miracle drug known by the name of Prontosil, in both injection and tablet form. I was still able to catch the afternoon express train and reached "home" by the evening. As far as I know this was my father's first and only illness. What with his miraculous moderation, the strict routine of his days, his regularly observed religious fastings, the single glass of wine on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings (this was part of the religious ritual), he always enjoyed excellent health. The whole occurrence comes to my mind *here* only because he did not permit me to give him an intragluteal injection, which would have required exposing part of his body. In the end, we compromised. He was to take the pills, and if by the morning his fever had not dropped, he would permit the injection. Whether I or his doctor was to give it, I no longer remember. The fact is that by next morning my father was free of fever. He took no more medication and I returned, much relieved, to Budapest. (Next year, Professor Domagk, inventor of Prontosil, received the Nobel Prize. He fully deserved it. The Nazi regime did not permit him to accept it. This was a frightening decree. At that time we could not even fully comprehend how frightening—the first denial of free international exchange in the healing arts.)

As far as I remember, after the "shoebox" affair, my mother was never again quite healthy. She began to gain weight. On Saturday mornings I had to help her get into her fishbone stays—I even joked occasionally that it was forbidden to perform such hard work on the Sabbath. She had frequent headaches. Later she complained of hot flashes radiating into her head. I remember the term *Wallungen* (hot flashes). She became grumpy, and my father withdrew more and more into his study, into the holy books. As far as it was possible he included me in his private life. On one occasion I was sent to the pharmacy: the medicine I brought home was Richter's Ovary Tablets. Its label read, "Prepared from the ovaries of freshly-slaughtered hogs." I understood only the word "hogs," not "ovaries." I debated in myself whether or not I should remove the label. I knew that according to religious law, if there was danger to life, all but three prohibitions of the Torah could be disregarded. On the other hand, I did not know whether my father would declare my mother's condition life-threatening.

To return to my short-lived sister Margit, I can only say that her

place in my memory is unique, and so is the event that formed its basis. How odd: I believe that I had not noticed that my mother was pregnant. Whether that was my mother's first pregnancy, I do not know; that it was the last one is almost certain.

Only when I was nine years old did I become more enlightened about sex. I do not know who enlightened me, nor when it happened. This is even harder to believe because I had seen copulation (if one could call it that) at least two years earlier. The Schlesingers lived in a peasant house with a small garden (they were poor folks), immediately adjacent to the post office building. (In Devecser they termed "peasant house" a house the length of which ran perpendicular to the street, with its narrow end facing the street and its gate opening onto the yard. The townhouses, the gentry houses, bordered the street with their long sides, their windows faced the street, the roofs slanted toward the street and the gate usually led from the street into the house itself.) I used to play in Mr. Kollin's large grain storehouse with the two Schlesinger boys, whose father was the warehouseman. One of them, Jenö the "fathead," who learned to read and write with difficulty, was my classmate; the other, Béla, was perhaps a year or two older. They were not "upper class" boys; they ran around barefoot like the peasant children. One of the barefoot daughters of Kollin's coachman was their playmate. On one occasion they called the little girl into the stable. They laid her on the straw next to the wall, took out their small members, and pulled up her skirt. Little girls in Devecser wore no panties in those days. When Roza, the grocer Weiszberg's daughter, sat down on the ground in the schoolyard, her "everything" could be seen. What exactly the boys did, and why, I did not understand. I believe they tried to imitate their parents or other grownups. In the one-room apartments, certain primal or archetypal events to which psychoanalysis assigns such an extraordinary significance counted among the everyday occurrences for the children of the poor. I remember only that one of the boys asked the other, "Is it going?" I did not understand what could be so good in "peeing" on that little girl. I thought that was what they did. That the apparatus was also good for something else, I did not know at the time.

My enlightenment was a great shock for me. "Why did God Almighty choose this particular despicable way? Wouldn't one of the fingers have been better for whatever the purpose? Or some other

alternative not yet thought of?" I did not understand either why it was necessary for my father or the Reverend Derdák to bless an engaged couple so that the procedure should succeed. In any case, I urgently enlightened Guszti, the son of our neighbor, Béla Schwartz, who was about two years younger than I. (Poor Guszti, he perished in one of the labor camps.) He immediately reported to his parents what I told him. Of course, I was severely reprimanded.

I do not know how disappointed my mother was following her pregnancy which ended so sadly, but after that event she often said, amidst sighs, how sorry she was that I was not a girl. What is more, she began to sew clothes for me of the kind boys did not usually wear in peasant towns. Perhaps that was the reason, at least one of the reasons, that my classmates would often beat me up. I usually blamed these beatings on the fact that I was the smallest and the youngest in class and that I already knew everything they were only then being taught. But possibly this was nothing but conceit. The outlandish clothes may have been the more likely reason. The nickname they gave me, *Cica* (Kitten) seems to point to it. I remember well that on the day of the examination at the end of the first school year, which happened to be my sixth birthday, my parents took me to school in a white sailor suit with a blue collar. On my head I had a broad-brimmed white straw hat adorned with a large red artificial flower and a wide colored ribbon. I am sure that this impossible outfit was my mother's idea, and not that of my puritanical father. My schoolmates made merciless fun of me. I ran from the school in tears, tore the flower off my hat and never again, no matter what the occasion, could I be persuaded to wear that outfit. But the nickname "Kitten" pursued me throughout my school years.

That nickname caused me much bitterness. I felt that it marked me as oversensitive, girlish, and later also contained a suspicion of homosexuality or impotence. True, I was never physically strong or athletic, nor was I pugnacious. Only in final desperation, when they tortured me too much with their teasings, did I pitch, with mindless anger, kicking, scratching, and biting, even into Sándor Berger, the peasant bully, son of the tavernowner of Puszta-Miske, who was two years older than I. Sándor had to walk four kilometers each way, summer and winter, because his parents wanted him to attend a Jewish school. Theirs was the only Jewish family in that village. If

there were enough of them present to make up a soccer team, the boys did not admit me to the game—I would have weakened the team. If I was needed, they accepted me as a quarter-back, who did not have to run and attack as the linemen, or to throw himself fearlessly upon the ball as did the goalies. "Oh," I often said to myself, "if only I could be a lineman once!" In the foot races I always came in last; but in the third grade I advanced to the place of the last but one. At that time, a new poor Jewish family moved to Devecser. The father was a clockmaker. They had a boy who was very short-sighted and wore thick glasses. Up to that time I had not seen a child wearing glasses. He was an albino, flabby and feeble. This boy was even slower than I, and when I was paired with him, I won.

During the ten-minute breaks between periods I used to saunter alone among the boys who were shooting marbles or spinning their tops, and I looked with longing toward the girls who were holding hands and dancing in a circle, and singing their ditties. I thought how wonderful it would be to be a girl. This desire to be a girl was an oft-recurring motif in the dream-life of my childhood. I don't know whether I should dare to talk about this. Certainly it does not match the Freudian hypothesis which has become a classical tenet with psychoanalysts and according to which the woman envies the anatomy of the man. Is it proper for an old doctor to talk about these things? It seems to me that this constantly recurring desire-motif of my youth—to be a woman—is linked to an episode that actually occurred.

Needless to say, we had neither a bathroom nor a flush toilet in our apartment. An ordinary latrine at the far end of the yard, *der Abort,* as we called it, filled the need and we, the "men," if we wanted to do our "number one" had to be careful not to wet the wooden seat around the circular opening. On one occasion, while we lived in the renovated "Rabbi's House,"—I may have been six or seven years old—I was doing my "number two" when my mother knocked on the door and said, "My little Arthur," (as she called me), *"Ich muss pischen,"* (I have to pee), and added after a minute *"Aber sehr,"* (but very much). I opened the door. My mother stepped in and lifted her skirt and her multi-layered underskirts. At the time she wore drawers which opened at the bottom. She sat down and without further ado, she did what she had to. Obviously, women did not have to be careful how they did their "number one," they did not have to "direct" it, nor,

for that matter, their lives. In truth, how easy it was for them! I am reminded suddenly that years later, when I was resident physician in München, we were invited to dinner by my chief and his wife, the *Herr* and *Frau Geheimrat.* How difficult must have been the life of that man, extremely talented, doggedly diligent, not quite free from the taint of Jewish blood, bitter, hostile and tired, fighting to raise himself from lowly beginnings, until he became a professor and "privy councilor" in the murderous university competition in the German world order! By that time, (1929-1331) Nazism was quite vociferous, and the assistants were already on the lookout figuring who of them was going to get the position of "The Chief." And the *Frau Geheimrat?* She did not have to exert herself. Wasn't the whole thing a matter of sheer luck? That the one who married her became a *Geheimrat* and not a goose merchant in a German village? Moreover, so I decided for myself, a woman cannot be impotent. She does not have to perform. She does not have to "direct it," to be careful. And women did not even have to go to the synagogue and always study, pray, study, pray.

An Interlude: Hedvig Kaiser and Piano Lessons

A great many memories tie me to Hedvig Kaiser, the school mistress. She taught the first and second grades in the Jewish school, both of which shared one room. She certainly had no problems or extra work because of me. To read aloud the children's poems in the first and second grade readers caused me no difficulty. Even today, I can remember the refrain of a poem about animals: "Péter Dombóvári of the Mosquito House, of the Cricket House."

When we moved into the renovated rabbi's house, we discovered that one of the rooms belonged to the school mistress and that she even had kitchen privileges, including the use of the range during certain hours. My mother of course hated to have to share the kitchen facilities and tried to discourage Miss Kaiser as much as possible. My father did not like her either. She was not too religious and was the follower of a cultural trend which he could only condemn. To supplement her meager salary, Miss Kaiser gave piano and French lessons to children of the upper classes. That boys and girls should

learn French instead of immersing themselves in the Bible, and especially that they should spend their precious time practicing the piano (*Klavier spielen*—to *play* the piano) could be considered nothing but playing and was something my father could never reconcile himself to. Even in his sermons he preached against it.

Hedvig Kaiser spent a good many years in Devecser. She was engaged to a certain "Sigi" from Vienna, and willy-nilly, I witnessed the changes in her moods depending on whether or not the postman had a "Vienna letter" for her. I do not remember how her romance ended.

From my early teens I remember two other school mistresses. My father made sure that both of them came from Orthodox families and communities. One, an attractive young woman named Margit Krausz, was the daughter of one of my father's friends in Pápa. I am still on friendly terms with that family. Before long the position of school mistress was terminated. By 1918 or 1919, there were not enough Jewish children left to fill two classrooms. After the death of Jakab Szepesi (I think in 1918), the Jewish grade school became a one-room school. Whether or not, after the departure of Hedvig Kaiser, someone else took over her "cultural work," I do not remember anymore. About 1916, when I was already a student in Pápa, girls in Devecser who had finished school wanted to organize a course in German language and literature. The beautiful, white-skinned, red-headed Ilus Berán was their leader. They asked my father to become one of the teachers and it was only because of his obstinacy—he was always a bad politician—that the entire experiment fizzled out. The girls, of course, did not want to study only grammar. They wanted to converse, and read some of the German classics as well as some modern books. My father ordered several of Lehmann's novels for the library of the congregation, and chose the Book of Ruth from the Bible to be read in class. From his own point of view, my father was right. For studying German grammar and increasing one's German vocabulary, the German version of the Book of Ruth was just as good as one of the poems of the apostate Heine or the *Erlkönig* of the irreligious Goethe. But Ilus rebelled. "The rabbi wants to force religious education on us under the guise of German education," she said. Soon the whole thing came to a halt.

Oh yes... the piano lessons. Our Hedvig insisted that the girls

should begin to play the piano early, at the age of six or seven. In Hedvig's chamber there was room only for one piano. For years I had to listen to finger exercises linked with the name of Szendi and Chovan, and to the repetitious etudes, especially during the milder seasons when the doors and windows were open. I don't think there was any great talent among the students. Bözsi Steiner, the youngest daughter of the shoemaker who lived across from our apartment, comes to mind. Steiner was poor and uneducated, and it never crossed his mind to teach his children French or piano. One of us noticed that Bözsi (thirteen or fourteen years old) used to stand for hours under Hedvig's window, soaking up the sounds, even those of the endless etudes. She told us in tears that her only desire was to sit down at that piano at least once in her life. And indeed, the miracle occurred. Bözsi Steiner sat down at the piano and before long, first with one hand, haltingly, and then with both hands and freely, she played Hungarian tunes and other hits without the written music. This example proved, said my father, how unnecessary it was to waste the time of a child on music. "When the child matures, he or she can learn music easily and quickly." I do not know what happened to Bözsi Steiner. Some years later I heard that she was a pianist in a night café of dubious reputation, I think in Székesfehérvár. The people of Devecser raised their eyebrows. "Well yes," they said, "she was not of a good family." But no one doubted her God-given talent.

As for violin, only the town gypsy played it; he fiddled for the wine drinkers in the tavern of the Estate. I even remember one of his tunes. I shall never forget his little five- or six-year-old son. He followed his father on the street and carried a small violin in his hand. He could not yet read and write, and he certainly did not learn how to play the violin from notes.

About 1960, when I visited Devecser (it was a Sunday afternoon), I looked into the tavern, which I had been prohibited from entering during my childhood. A single gypsy was playing. It is quite possible that he was that little boy. He remembered my father.

But let me return to playing the piano and to the French lessons. To know how to play the piano and especially to know how to speak French—for me, these have remained the symbols of a good upbringing and of belonging to the upper class. If someone, a colleague, a friend, or a patient knows how to speak French, and especially if he or

she also plays a musical instrument, even today it is the source of a gentle, heart-stirring envy for me. And oh, those amateur quartets of doctors—those *musicales!* They are the Garden of Eden of a gentlemen's civilization from which I remained forever excluded.

4

The Great Secret About My "Two Mothers"
The Birth Certificate of My Grandfather
A Legend About Feivel Narr the Klezmer, One of My Great-Great-Grandfathers

It may be comical. It may be unbelievable. But it is a fact that for quite a long time I never ackowledged to myself that my mother was not my "real" mother. In general, whenever possible, I avoided talking about it. I kept it even from my friends. In the foreword to the first textbook, *Optics,* I wrote in English, I dedicated it "to the memory of my father and mother, who perished at Auschwitz." Of course I meant my stepmother. I loved her.

Until my tenth year my father never spoke to me about this, nor did my Galgóc grandfather. But I remember one incident from which I deduce that the fact could not have been unknown in Devecser. On the occasion of one of the Jewish holy days, on the last day of the feast, the most important part of the divine service is a prayer commemorating the deceased parents. When the rabbi and the cantor intone this prayer, those whose parents are alive must leave the synagogue. It is quite likely that for a while I really did not suspect anything, and, therefore, it was natural that before the beginning of the *Yizkor* prayer I too walked out. But then, somehow, the secret filtered down. With those extra grandparents in Galgóc, and the numerous Rosenfeld relations, it was inevitable. In spite of that (at first, perhaps half consciously, and later in full knowledge of the facts), I continued to pretend ignorance, and I left the synagogue together with the other children. (It was very pleasant to stroll in the sunny synagogue garden with the young people. Only the older folks stayed inside.) My father,

the taciturn, never made any kind of comment. On one of these occasions,one of my classmates asked me why I did not stay inside. Obviously he knew that my mother was dead. Without a word I punched him in the stomach, and this despite the fact that I was definitely a non-fighter. I remember that quite a scandal developed from that act of mine—a formal declaration of "eternal enmity," and parental intervention. To fight during the services! I do not know whether my father was told the reason. But following this incident I still left the synagogue when the *Yizkor* prayer began.

We celebrated the family anniversaries according to the Hebrew calendar, and according to my father's book I was born on the 26th day of the month of Sivan, in the year 5660 counted from the creation of the world. On my tenth birthday, that is on Sivan 26, 5670, my father solemnly called me to his study. He closed the door and told me that shortly after my birth my mother "unfortunately" died, "but you must continue to love and respect your stepmother." On the next anniversary of the death of my mother (to my shame, I have forgotten the date according to the Hebrew calendar, the so-called *Jahrzeit*) I would have to stand before the congregation and recite the orphan's prayer, the *Kaddish.* Even today, I can still see myself reciting this prayer for the first time in the synagogue. (I was always something of a showman; I liked to brag about my knowledge.) I recited the prayer aloud and, of course, by heart. I spoke like somebody who understood the unusual and strange-sounding Aramaic text. I strictly observed the pauses during which the congregation responded loudly, like an ancient Greek chorus. There was no problem with this *Kaddish* recitation. The *Jahrzeit* fell on a weekday, when the congregation was composed only of men, in fact there were only a small number of regulars. But then came the High Holy Days of the fall, the *Yom Kippur,* when the rabbi and the cantor, dressed in white shrouds, recite the prayer of remembrance for all parents.

Let me mention here for the sake of my "illiterate" readers, and because somehow it demands to be written, that an observant Jewish male wears his *Kittel,* the white shroud, for the first time at his wedding, and the last time at his burial. In between, he wears it on the "Days of Awe" in the fall and on the *Seder* evenings of Passover when the great Exodus from Egypt is commemorated.

I do not remember whether my father told me on that occasion

that I must stay in the synagogue during the *Yizkor* recital. I myself knew that this was now inevitable. I did not exchange a word about it with my mother. I am sure that the number of the candles lit for the dead parents was one more than in the previous year. I, too, lit a candle. We did not talk about it. Women generally attended the Sabbath and holiday morning services in the synagogue. My mother, the *Rebbitzin,* followed this custom rather strictly. At that time in Hungary, even in the Neolog "temples," the women sat in a separate section. Only during wedding ceremonies did they mix with the men. From her place in the first row of the women's balcony, my mother could see my father's rabbinical chair, and she could see me, too—my place was on the bench behind my father's. The presence of my mother always gave me a feeling of joyful security and intimacy during services that were dominated by my father and conducted according to rigid rules. Occasionally, in a way barely noticeable by anyone else, I winked at her. My mother was not an expert in the labyrinth of the lengthy festive prayers, and if she signaled to me that she had lost the page, I tried to indicate to her with my fingers the number of the page we were on. But during the High Holy Day services following my tenth birthday, I was desperate. What will happen when my mother notices that I stayed inside for the *Yizkor?* It would immediately become obvious to her that I, too, "knew it." I was extremely nervous. I could barely stand the tension. So, as soon as my father left his place and stepped up to the pulpit, I rushed like crazy between the pews toward the back benches, where I could see my father, could listen to the prayer and recite it. Thus I did not violate piety. On the other hand, my mother could not see me there. My father said nothing when, at the end of the ritual, I sneaked back to my place. From then on (however comical this might sound), for years and years I continued to play my role—I left my place and sat down in one of the last pews for the duration of the memorial prayer.

In the end, I even had a document which gave my mother a *quasi*-legal status. During World War I, foreign travel (even to Austria) was severely restricted and I was approaching my military age. My parents, as well as I myself, needed passports. My parents had some business in Moravia—they had to liquidate the household of my third grandmother. I had to go to Teschen, Austrian Silesia, the nearest place to Ó-Beszterce where I could have my teeth taken care of, and for

that I needed a certificate of domicile. Such a certificate proved a great blessing later, when during the Horthy era of the twenties and thirties, everybody, and especially Jews, born outside "rump Hungary" had to prove that they had "opted" for Hungary in time. And to do this was not always easy. So my parents applied for, and received, a certificate attesting that they were from Devecser, and I received a copy of it which included my name. In this manner, due to an innocent mistake of the notary, I came in possession of a document, according to which Arthur Linksz, a high school student, the son of Dr. Isaac Ignatz Linksz and his wife, née Sophia Schindler, was born on June 23, 1900, in Galgóc in County Nyitra, and was a legal resident of Devecser, it being the domicile of his parents. Later, in 1924 when, after five years of absence, I reappeared in Devecser, I again needed a passport. I was a medical student in Kiel, Germany. Everything went smoothly. My legal residence in Devecser was proven without doubt, and the subprefect's office of Veszprém county authorized the issuance of my passport. Then, in 1938, when I applied for a passport to emigrate to America, I again stated that Devecser was my legal domicile. It was at that time that the first "Jewish Law" was issued. I had to report to the police headquarters in Budapest and fill out a detailed questionnaire. I remember that they gave me all sorts of papers, and instructed me to report in America to the Hungarian consular authorities, so that my address, and eventual changes of address, should be duly registered, and I should not lose my citizenship and with it the ability to return home. I even remember that they recommended me to the goodwill of the semi-official World Union of Hungarians (Magyarok Világszövetsége). To the question of why I wanted to leave my country I replied, "I am a Hungarian. I love my country and I respect its laws. If the lawgivers of my country consider that the large number and influence of Jews are detrimental to my country, then I think it is best that every Jew who can do so, leave, and thus obey the law as soon as possible." Perhaps such an explanation was unusual, and the young police lieutenant who handled my case settled everything quickly and politely. I did not have to report anymore. My visa number and my affidavit were all in order.

After 1939, the situation of the Jews worsened in Hungary and my father and his younger brother Poldi, who lived in Budapest, started to hunt for further papers to prove that they were not "infiltrated ele-

ments." One such document was the marriage certificate of my grandfather Jacob Links from Ó-Beszterce; late in the 1850s, or early in the next decade, he married Julie Spitzer; the document even mentioned that he was born in 1836 in Hlinik in County Trencsén, which at that time was part of Hungary.

Another affidavit-like document is even more memorable. According to it, two witnesses had certain knowledge that Jacob Links was born to Wilhelm (Wolf) Links and Rebeka Lustig, in 1836 in Hlinik in County Trencsén, where the original documents were destroyed in a fire. Here was clear proof that the Links family, too, fulfilled the requirement of having lived in Hungary for a hundred years. Not as if that was of any use later. Uncle Poldi survived; my parents perished in 1944.

I often wondered how paleontologists dared to reconstruct an entire extinct animal from two tibiae. But here I am, doing the same thing with that fragment of a document in which the birth registration data of my Grandfather Links are summarized. The authenticity of the document is questionable; the data are based on two witnesses and not on the original entry in the register. But if only two tibiae remain, one must build the reconstruction upon them. They are certainly more than nothing.

That in 1836 the Hungarian Jews already had family names, I really should not have to explain. They were obliged to obtain family names much earlier by order of the Emperor Joseph II, and it also appears that the names had to be German. The reign of Joseph II (1780-1790) was an era of forced Germanization. The Emperor himself was dubbed "the king with a hat," because he never cared to be crowned king of Hungary. Very rarely, one could find a Jewish family with a Hungarian family name, the origin of which could not be traced. The name of the husband of one of my nieces was Farkas (Wolf). He was from an Orthodox family in Debrecen. They claimed that the name of the family had always been Farkas. And unforgettable for me is another memory: one of my patients in Budapest, a huge, bearded Hasidic Jew from Ung-Bereg, or perhaps Máramaros County, with long sidelocks, had the name Abraham Rézmüves (Coppersmith)—

and it was the original family name as far as he could remember. I believe that the noted medical family, the Temesvárys, who wrote their name with a "y," also bore the original name. Debrecen, the County Ung, Temesvár, were, it seems, much too far from Vienna. On the other hand, neither in Devecser nor in Ó-Beszterce, nor in Galgóc, do I remember a Jew whose original name would have been Hungarian. The Jews of the western part of Greater Hungary (from the Uplands, from Burgenland, and from the Transdanubian districts) all were Ashkenazim, that is Jews of German origin. I don't know why, but I always considered the Jews of the western part of the Hungarian Uplands, of whom I myself was one, "Moravian" Jews. My great-grandfather Wilhelm (Wolf) Links lived in County Trencsén and could not have been born too far from there. The only great-great-great-grandfather on my mother's side whose name I know was Meir Landesberg; he, too, was probably from the western Uplands. He was rabbi in Bazin in County Pozsony.

It is very likely that up to the times of Joseph II most Hungarian Jews had only first or given names and generally identified themselves by the addition of the name of their father or the name of their habitation. Most of the Jewish given names were Biblical and served as both religious and official names, but, for the sake of variety, other Hebrew words also appeared as first names—for instance, the names of animals. A good example of that is my own Jewish name *Tzevi,* which means "stag" in Hebrew and appears in the Song of Songs. When they called upon me in the course of the synagogue services to participate in some kind of ritual, they referred to me by the name *Tzevi ben Yitzhak.* Slowly, as the position of the Jews began to normalize and they adapted to their surroundings, in which the German language had a great role, the name *Tzevi* became Hirsch, at first to be used in governmental offices, then as a preferred first name, and finally as either a first or a last name. Two other examples are *Ari* or *Arye* (lion), which became the German Löw or Löb, and *Ze'ev,* in German Wolf or Wolfgang. Had I grown up among German-speaking Jews, I could have been called Hirsch. The famous and popular Viennese professor of otology was nicknamed in the popular Jewish usage Herschl or Haschl Neumann (later: von Neumann). One of the first signs of Jewish assimilation, at least among the German-speaking

Jews, was that they began to adopt such German names which, however, were traceable back to Hebrew originals. And since assimilation, once begun, leads farther and farther, the Jews took not only to using German translations of Hebrew names, but also such names as were current among the non-Jews, had no meaningful link to the Hebrew, and at most were reminiscent of the original Hebrew names only by having the same initial letter. This is the background of the name Wilhelm (Wolf) of the father of my grandfather Links mentioned in the latter's birth certificate. In the eyes of the law, in documents, in official transactions, my great-grandfather Links wished to be known as Wilhelm, a good Christian name and the name of kings to boot. It is very likely that at home he was called Wolf, and also very likely that if asked to participate in some liturgical function in the synagogue, they called him up to the reading desk as *Reb Ze'ev, Ze'ev* being the Hebrew original of the German name Wolf. As for *Reb,* that was an appellation to which every adult Jewish male was entitled and was nothing more than the English Mr. or the German *Herr.* If they called him, according to centuries-old custom, by his full name, they added that he was the son of another *Reb.* And here I am getting into trouble because I have no information as to the name of the father of my great-grandfather, Wilhelm Links. As for my grandfather, he used the name Jacob as both his religious and his official name. It served well both purposes. So did the names Isaac, Joseph, Israel, David, Simon, Aaron, all of which appear in my family tree. On the other hand, in both my paternal and maternal ancestries names which have no Hebrew connection at all, such as Wilhelm, Leopold, Friedrich, Ignatz, Hermann, Adolph, and Isidor appear quite often.

But let me continue. My father's oldest brother, who was born in the early 1860s, was called Wilhelm, after his grandfather. This indicates with absolute certainty that his grandfather Wilhelm (Wolf) was no longer alive when he was born. Jews did not give their children the names of living parents or grandparents. On the other hand, to immortalize the name of a dead forebear was almost an obligation. My Uncle Wilhelm's name also shows that he was my grandfather's *first* son, born after the death of Wilhelm (Wolf) Links. This is how Wilhelm became my uncle's name. If I try to follow this process back into history, I reach the conclusion that, in all probability, the name of the father of my great-grandfather Wilhelm was also Jacob Links, since

he must have been named after his own grandfather. Grandfather Jacob was the youngest of his father's children. According to family legend, the first six children of great-grandfather Wilhelm were all girls, which tradition is strengthened by the fact that I knew personally at least twenty of my father's female first cousins, and none of them had "Links" as their family name—they were all descendants of great-grandfather Wilhelm Links through his daughters.

Apparently, Wilhelm was no longer young when his son Jacob was born. One can easily imagine that in 1836, when his seventh child was born, he must have been nearing forty. If he was born in the late 1700s, his father, perhaps another Jacob, must have been born during the reign of Maria Theresia, who reigned from 1740 to 1780, and either he or perhaps already *his* father may have received the Links name as a family name. The word *Links* itself is German, and it means "left." Perhaps my first ancestor who got it was lefthanded. If this ancestor infiltrated from Moravia into County Trencsén, he was possibly illegitimate, and it was his mother, not his father, who had the Links name. But this, of course, is mere speculation. The most I can add to this speculation is that, in general, the infiltration from Moravia could be one explanation for the German language and culture of the Jews of the Hungarian western Uplands, or West Slovensko, as the region was called. As a matter of fact, the Linkses were Moravian Jews and not Slovak Jews. The Jews of Hungary who spoke Yiddish came from the east, and brought an entirely different tradition and culture with them. Even their names were different, and so was their liturgy. From my childhood I remember the terms *Oberländer* and *Unterländer.* The Jews of the old Uplands used them to designate these two very distinct tribes of the Jews, the Moravian and the Polish.

Our name was very rare. I looked up the name Links in telephone directories throughout the world, and those whom I have been able to contact had come to their new countries from the Trencsén, Túróc, or Órva counties of the old Hungarian Uplands.

The rule of skipping a generation in Jewish given names involved both males and females. My father's mother was Julia Spitzer. Grandmother Julia's daughter, Lenka, who was eight years older than my father, married uncle Knöpfelmacher, the older brother of grandmother Fanny. Their first daughter was called Julia. A daughter of my uncle Wihelm and another of my uncle Poldi were also called Julia.

Other examples: the father of my grandfather Josef of Galgóc died in the year in which I was born, while my two grandfathers, Jacob and Josef, were still alive. Thus I got the Hebrew name *Tzevi,* the name of the father of my grandfather Josef. But when my true mother Riza died, a few weeks after giving birth to me in 1900, the next year one girl on the paternal side and one on the maternal side received the name Riza. My grandfather of Galgóc lived quite a long life and, therefore, among his numerous grandchildren, only one of my cousins, the son of Uncle Isidor Rosenfeld, twenty or twenty-five years younger than I, was given the name Josef. My grandmother from Galgóc was called Hanna. She survived my grandfather by many years and, as a consequence, not a single granddaughter of hers could bear her name—only one great-granddaughter, a young medical doctor, is called *Anyicska,* one of the Slovak forms of the Biblical Hanna.

I, myself, with my ambivalent attitude to tradition, having been both its enemy and its upholder, wished to continue this ancient custom and wanted to give the names Jacob and Joseph, the names of my two grandfathers, to our firstborn son. But my wife did not like the name Jacob, the Hungarian version of which, *Jakab,* had become unpopular in our generation. "Why," I argued, "can an American millionaire have the name of Jacob Astor?" Alice Hevesi, my dear cousin, took my wife's side. She gave a different example: Rebecca McCormick—the name of one of her American friends—was a beautiful name, but who would want to name his daughter Rebecca Weiss or Rebecca Schwartz? We finally compromised and gave him the popular English form James of the Hebrew name Jacob. James (the name of the English king under whom the English version of the Bible was published), the Italian *Giacomo,* the Spanish *Jaime,* the Portuguese *Jayme,* and even the very popular Jimmy or Jim are really all historical and phonetic variations of the Biblical name Jacob. The numerous other variations, from *Yago* or *Iago* to *Santiago,* all testify to the exceptional popularity of this name. As for the name Joseph, we easily settled on it. Szigeti, the famous violinist, my uncanny look-alike (I was several times mistaken for him, and during our peregrinations we often met) had Joseph as his given name.

Here I must make a confession. It was characteristic of my admittedly-not-quite-normal relationship with my father that I thought I would do a good deed by engaging in a little pious cheating. When our

son was born in 1941, in Hanover, New Hampshire, I informed my parents in detail of the festivity during which my son was "admitted into the Covenant of Abraham," when in reality, in the hospital of Dartmouth College where our son was born, circumcision was simply a routine preventive surgical procedure. They did not even ask us whether or not to perform it. My father answered in a happy letter, sent the Hebrew blessings customarily extended to the newborn, and wholeheartedly approved of the names Jacob and Joseph for his first grandson.

To come back to our family name for a moment, let me explain that it did not contain the letter "z" in its original German spelling. But in Hungarian the letter "s" is pronounced "sh," so that the original form *Links* was pronounced in Hungary, *Linksh.* As far as I know it was only my father and his younger brother, Uncle Poldi, who lived in Budapest, who began to spell the name in the Hungarian manner with an "sz," which in Hungarian is pronounced "s." This, of course, caused confusion here in America, where, I guess, there are more "Polaks" than "Hunks." In Polish the "sz" is pronounced like the English "sh," so that I am often called *Linksh.* Still, my sons do not wish to give up the letter "z" at the end of the family name. "It is a conversation piece," they say if they are asked about its origin. "Some crazy Hungarian spelling."

Cardinal Newman, the famous 19th-century English theologian, titled his autobiography, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua.* No more profound meaning could be found for an autobiography. After all, what is an autobiography good for if it is not confession and self-criticism? Yes, as Frigyes Karinthy, the famous Hungarian-Jewish humorist, put it,

> I cannot tell it to anyone,
> Therefore, I am telling it to everyone,

This is the only legitimate reason for claiming the interest and attention of a possible future reader: to do penance and to ask forgiveness for our sins of commisssion and omission.

Well then, it is a fact that lack of sincerity, of openness (to say it outright: lying), remained a permanent part of my relationship with my father. I kept on telling and writing home half-truths, half-lies. Not even adulthood, or more importantly, emigration to America, changed

anything in this respect. (Neither the ocean nor the wider-than-ocean "Nevermore.") The unwillingness to face it remained until the very end a characteristic of our relation to each other, as well as of my relationship to the world at large. I have always shied away from straight, open talk, decisions, frank dialogues, discussions and confrontations in which no punches are pulled. In truth, not even the death of my father changed this. Even now, a dream—the *tefillin* dream—returns, although less regularly: I arrive home, perhaps to Köszeg, perhaps to Devecser. My father and I are going to the synagogue, and that is when I discover that I am not wearing the *tzitzis,* (the rectangular piece of undergarment with the fringes which a faithful Jew wears throughout his life), and that I forgot to bring along the *tefillin,* the phylacteries one is supposed to tie on the forehead and the left arm before the prayer. I try to cover up the omission, and my father sagaciously tries to give the impression that he noticed nothing.

I came to America alone; my wife followed me only half a year later. It was not sure as yet that this hegira would be final. I was stranded in the Bronx, which at that time was still inhabited by a high percentage of Jews, including my golden-hearted cousin who lived in rather modest circumstances. This cousin never forgot the single heroic deed of my life. Let me tell about it; let me tell also something good about myself. I promise to be brief. Aunt Rosa Munk and her children—two boys, one girl—spent the fine summer of 1918 in the home of Grandmother Fanny, and so did I. I remember a walk. Perhaps we went fishing near the sawmill, where a dam formed a deep lake from the waters of the Bystrica. One of the boys, Józsi (Joe), ten years old and unable to swim, fell into the water. The current swept him toward the spillway. There was no time to think. Fully clothed, I jumped after him and managed to pull him out before we were swept under the wheel. In my relations with the Munk family this rescue always remained an important feature. Well, it was with this cousin, Joe Munk, and his newly-wedded wife Rose, that I stayed in the Bronx, and while there, I was able to prepare for my examinations without any care and worry.

The Bronx was a great experience. In the Hungary of the Jewish laws and the anti-Semitic regime one could not even imagine such an open, free, intensive, almost loud, Jewish life as the one I saw here. At that time, the five day work week had already been introduced. It was,

therefore, possible to write home in an enthusiastic letter that in America every Jew observes the Sabbath. Our folks from the Bronx mostly belonged to the lower middle class; they were secretaries, seamstresses, teachers. They really did not work from Friday afternoon until Monday morning, and, in fact, many of them went to the synagogue. In the neighborhood where at that time quite a large number of my relatives lived, there were hardly any streets without a synagogue. Small, old-fashioned, Orthodox prayer-houses alternated with large modern synagogues, veritable culture palaces, well-organized centers of the social life of the young. The older folks, those of my father's age group, still spoke English with a foreign accent. It was the younger generation that frequented those palace-like Jewish centers. No Ericksonian identity crisis seemed to bother them. They were Americans. That was their birthright. If somebody asked them what they were, they almost certainly answered "Jews." To go to the synagogue and observe the rules of *kashrut* belonged, so to speak, to the *bon ton*. In a Bronx restaurant frequented by Jews you did not ask for, and did not get, a ham sandwich. In sum, in the letters written home to my parents I did not even have to prevaricate too much—perhaps only about my own participation.

By fall, I had passed all the necessary examinations and we planned to rent a small office. But suddenly our life took an unexpected, miraculous turn. I was invited to join one of the best and oldest universities in America: the Eye Institute of the Medical Faculty of Dartmouth College. The college and the institute were in a small town called Hanover. Not counting the 2500 students, a population of another 2500 constituted the inhabitants of the town, and of them over 2000 were faculty members, administrators, and other university people with their families. In the small town in the state of New Hampshire, in the heart of New England, of old, Protestant America, only a few faculty members were Jews, and there were no more than one or two Jews among the artisans and merchants outside the college.

It is characteristic of the liberal atmosphere of Dartmouth that among the faculty there were several German refugees. Some of them were half-Jews, who had never thought of themselves as anything but Germans. A few had pure Aryan wives and lacked all interest in and even the slightest emotional link to Judaism. One of the most famous among them was Professor Bielschowsky, formerly the Professor of

Ophthalmology at the University of Breslau, who knew me from Europe. He was the one with whom I had corresponded while we both were still in Europe. He left Germany soon after Hitler came to power, and ultimately settled in Dartmouth.

To write home about this change of affairs presented a serious problem. There was no Jewish community or synagogue in Hanover, let alone a kosher butcher. It would have been impossible to bring together a *minyan,* the *quorum* of ten adult men necessary for the services. There were about 100 Jews among the students, and for them a young rabbi from Boston held short services once or twice a year during the High Holy Days, in the inter-denominational chapel of the college. In my letters home, I appointed him rabbi of Hanover. But the fact is that it soon became very difficult to report untruths from Hanover. The Jewish Community of Hanover was really my invention out of thin air. It was fortunate that Hanover and Köszeg were so far from each other. Before long World War II broke out, and intensive correspondence, even through neutral Switzerland, became difficult. The last brief communication I received from my father in 1943, was an expression of joy over the news of the birth of our second son, David.

Of course, there was always at least some truth in my reports. It was true that our apartment was in the house of a professor of mathematics named Silverman. He and I became close friends. He was born in Lithuania, but was educated at Harvard. He was well versed in Judaica and, symbolically, even observed the Sabbath. I could also write about Feldman, a professor of economics. Professor Feldman's hobby was the Bible. Together with his friend, Professor Chamberlin, the Protestant chaplain of the college, he published a fine annotated edition of the Bible, containing both the Old and the New Testaments, the well-known *Dartmouth Bible,* which for the past quarter of the century has been one of my favorite readings.

For me, the attachment of the New England Protestant Puritans to the Bible, and especially to the Old Testament, was a great experience. In fact, it was through them that I learned to love the Bible. Of this, too, I wrote home. And I did not even have to lie about it.

Let me go back for a moment to the birth certificate of my grandfather Jacob Links. That document meant much more to me than the

proof of our hundred-year residence in Hungary. The name Rebeka Lustig, which is mentioned there, is the only thread of reality that links me to a legend, to a nebulous figure that has been with me since my childhood. Jósef Kiss, the now almost completely forgotten Hungarian-Jewish poet, has a cycle of poems titled *Legends About My Grandfather,* the opening of which reads:

Neither "don" nor "von" nor "sir," only "reb."

That grandfather's name, if I remember correctly, was Reb Mayer Litvak. I, too, have such a legend. Ever since my youth, I have heard again and again about a great-grandfather or great-great-grandfather (nobody bothered to find out which of the two he was). According to the document from Hlinik, apparently he could have been the father of my great-grandmother, née Rebeka Lustig. He was perhaps called *Feivel Lustig* officially. This ancestor survived in my memory and also in the memory of the Jews of County Trencsén, as *Feivel Narr* (that is, Feivel the Jester). He must have been well known in his life. As I figure it, he must have been born well before the end of the eighteenth century, perhaps during the reign of Maria Theresia or the Emperor Joseph II. It is likely that Rebeka, the daughter of Feivel, gave birth to my grandfather Jacob in 1836. If Rebeka was thirty years old at that time, then Feivel, her father, must have been perhaps fifty-five. But where was he born? *Lustig* is a straight German name that could be given to anyone — not necessarily a Jew. But *Feivel* sounds foreign. It is a Yiddish, perhaps a Polish-Jewish name. It is likely that it was not even his official name. A gypsy musician is called *Jancsi* (Johnny) *Rigó* or *Pista* (Stevie) *Dankó* and not *János* (John) or *István* (Stephen). It is possible that, in the eyes of the law. *Feivel* was not even *Feivel.* It does not really matter. It is too late now to try to find out for sure.

Digression Added in December, 1975

It is about two years now since I wrote the above lines. Even today, I do not know much more about Feivel Narr, but at least I know that he was a maternal grandfather of my paternal grandfather, i.e., one of my great-great-great-grandfathers. The thread upon which his

existence hangs has become considerably stronger. Jacob Links knew me. There is no reason to doubt that he knew his grandfather, Shrage Lustig = Feivel Lustig = Feivel Narr.

And, at least, I know now somewhat more about the name of an ancestor that has not disappeared from the Ó-Beszterce family. Only the search is very difficult. As I have already mentioned, my grandfather Jacob Links had six sisters. Their descendants were called Gold, Kohn, Braun, Holtzman, Brichta, Schlesinger, etc., and, more than one Knöpfelmacher.

My cousin, Márta Knöpfelmacher, died in 1974. She was an old maid, past eighty. She could have been one or two years old when her folks moved from Ó-Beszterce to New York. It was during Márta's funeral that the name Feivel suddenly reached my ear, as the rabbi recited the prayer for the dead. According to him Márta's father was called Shrage Feivel—at least that was his Hebrew name. This Shrage Feivel came to America before I was born and was long dead when I arrived here. It would have been good to know more about him. But at the end of the ceremony all the mourners rushed off to their jobs. I tried to find the rabbi to learn where he got his information, but had no luck. Even today I shudder when I recall the almost completely abandoned old synagogue. The neighborhood had changed a lot during the thirty-odd years since I first knew it. Blacks and Hispanics lived in the old and neglected houses formerly inhabited by Jews. A Jew had become a rarity; only a few old and poor Jews remained. I stood alone in the hot sun before the synagogue. I was looking for a taxi, because everybody had left. But where can one find a taxi in a neighborhood of poor Blacks and Hispanics? Especially a licensed taxi with a medallion? Finally, a friendly Black boy helped me to flag down a gypsy cab, an old broken-down vehicle.

I see only once or twice a year my American-born doctor cousin, who gave me the affidavit that enabled me to come to America. During our last get-together—it was a rare and joyful occasion, the seventieth birthday of a mutual cousin—I spoke to him about my latest mania for genealogical research, about Feivel Narr, and about the suddenly found but uncertain relative, Shrage Feivel. Upon hearing this, he informed me that, to my great surprise, while he had never heard the name Feivel, his own Hebrew name was also Shrage. He did not know why. He was not the "church-going kind." He had never thought about

it, and did not even know what the name meant.

And here my good luck entered. Professor Sándor Scheiber, the living encyclopedia in all fields of Hebraica—not to mention any other of his great qualities—was the first to read and criticize this book when it was still a half-finished manuscript. He told me that the name Feivel was the equivalent of the Latin Phoebus. For those unversed in linguistics, let me mention that the same phoneme is spelled either *F* or *Ph,* and that the *b* and the *v* are not kept apart in every language. The Hebrew letter *beth* is read either *b* or *v* according to its position, and when the Spaniard writes "Habana," we clearly say "Havana." In Latin, the *-us* is nothing but a nominative noun ending. In Yiddish *-el* is a common diminutive ending. Thus *Feivel* or *Fayv-el* equals *Phoebus* or Phoibos in Greek, meaning bright, an epithet of the sun-God Apollo.

But my beloved friend, the learned professor, could tell even more. He could quote the Talmud to show the existence of an Aramaic word, which sounded like Shrage, and meant light, or lamp. Thus it appears that Feivel, from the Greek Phoibos, was originally the translation of the Aramaic Jewish name Shrage, and thus but another example of the same assimilatory process which produced the German Hirsch from the Hebrew *Tzevi,* and the German Löw(e) from the Hebrew *Ari* or *Arye.* It is simply a much older example dating from the time of the meeting of the Talmudic and Hellenistic cultures.

Recently I had a chance to talk with an Orthodox patient of mine of Transylvanian origin. According to him, Shrage was quite a common religious name. He added that he had just realized that the name often appears as Shrage-Feivel. He knew nothing about the meaning of the two names and the connection between them. But by then I knew that the given name of my great-great-grandfather, Feivel Lustig, meant "bright" or perhaps "bright light." It is a beautiful name, and it is a pity that my teenage friend Terus did not know about it. She believed, whether seriously or not I do not know that the soul of Feivel Narr had migrated into me.

My legendary forebear Feivel might have been some kind of itinerant folk musician. During my childhood in County Trencsén, one could still see such itinerant fiddlers, but they were all Slovaks, not Jews. At peasant weddings, I occasionally listened to and watched such a fiddler, entertaining the infinitely strange and yet infinitely attractive

Breughelian crowd. His entire repertoire consisted of a few tunes which he kept grinding out on his old violin for hours and hours.

It can be that my great-great-great-grandfather was also such a wedding entertainer. And since they called him *Narr* (jester?), obviously he did more than just play an instrument. Did he compose rhymes? Music? I shall never know.

To his fellow sufferers, to people who spent their lives slaving away in their narrow village environment, a *Narr* like that could bring some joy. As I remember, the old Jews of Ó-Beszterce called the profession of our Feivel that of a *Klezmer. "Er war ein Klezmer,"* they said. Among the poetic fantasies of Marc Chagall we can find such characters, such motifs: poor peasants, poor Jews, peasant homes, a church, a tavern, an engaged couple flying upside down in ecstasy—and the fiddler. When his famous painting, *Fiddler on the Roof,* is exhibited in the Guggenheim Museum in New York, I often go to see it, just as when I am in Chicago, if it is at all possible, I always go to see his moving painting of the Saviour on the cross, wearing tallis and tefillin. The violinist of Chagall is an ugly Russian Jew in a black caftan, with a wrinkled black proletarian cap on his head. In his pictures only the flowers have color, and the bethrothed couples. Everything else is presented either in muddy colors or in a ghastly fluorescence. *Feivel Narr, the grandfather of my grandfather, my dreamt-about ancestor, you certainly were not like that. Terus, who already during my high school years "knew" that I would be at least a Goethe (!) helped me to build an entire cult around Feivel Narr. She knew that it was Feivel Narr's soul that migrated into me and not that of some other artisan great-grandfather. Yes, Feivel Narr, you are one of my great responsibilities. I must see to it that your name should not disappear into perpetual obscurity. My Grandmother Fanny, through whom I learned about you, is long dead, and now even my Uncle Poldi has left us. I am the only remaining witness, the last one. It depends on me alone that you die not the "third death" of that old church-song.*

As I said, ever since my high school years the memory of Feivel Narr has haunted me. I had tried to approach my grandmother, several uncles, and some elderly Jews from County Trencsén to learn what they knew about Feivel. I always wanted to visit that village, Hlinik, where there might be a gravestone, a tax book, or a synagogue register—if indeed there was a Jewish community, a synagogue, a Jew-

ish cemetery in such a small place. I yearned to learn something about that ancestor of mine, my only true ancestor among the innkeepers and store owners, with the exception of my father, who, let me confess, was also a *Narr,* and as my mother said, wasted his life on *Narrischkeiten. Feivel Narr, I am trying desperately to save you from the third death, from eternal oblivion. I want to prevent that "your soul be extinguished from the community of your people." You will, you must, remain alive, as long as there is an image labeled "Feivel Lustig" in my brain—however dim, however lacking in detail.* But what will happen after that? What will happen when this image sinks into that sad and inevitable oblivion that is the common fate of every human notion, since (as my father used to recite during funeral services): "Dust thou art, and to dust shalt thou return."

On my Mother's side (that is, on the side of my real mother) the curtain of dark unknowing is somewhat less impenetrable. I have a great-great-great-grandfather on that side of whom written and even printed relics remain. He was Meir Landesberg, about whom I know that he was a rabbi in Bazin and about whom even a few data can be found in the *Who's Who* of Hungarian Orthodox rabbis. Perhaps there even exists an archive of the Bazin congregation. If so, I could find out who was Meir Landesberg's father, who was his wife, and perhaps, who were his brothers.

I still have in my Hungarian library a volume titled *The Jews of Bazin.* It is one of the masterworks of Lajos Biró, who was a well-known Hungarian writer in the days of my youth. The story itself is taken from real life; it is the artistic rendering of the blood libel of Bazin, an actual episode from the sixteenth or seventeenth century. Even today, some of the characters of the novel live in my memory. I never dared to read it again.

I also know from that *Who's Who* that my great-great-grandfather had connections with the famous Hatam Sofer of Pozsony. Perhaps the Yeshiva of Pozsony headed by him had registers as did its Christian equivalent, the College of Pápa, in which one can easily find data about Petöfi or Jókai.

Of course, when we come to the son of Meir Landesberg, the founder of a great rabbinical dynasty, there is no obscurity at all. The Landesberg clan remained a living reality through both its male and

its female branches, at least in the consciousness of my generation. There were two women among my patients here in New York who were born Landesberg and knew their family tree precisely, dating back to the great Israel Isaac Aaron. However, neither of them knew about Meir.

In conclusion: every person has eight great-great-grandfathers and sixteen great-great-grandparents. Among the great-great-grandfathers, there are four on the paternal side. But of my four paternal great-great-grandfathers there is only one whose family name is the same as mine. Which only goes to show that to search for one's ancestors is not a simple matter.

5

The Son of the Rabbi of Devecser in the Pápa Calvinist College (1914–1968)

It happened on a Saturday morning, during the school year of 1916–17, in the junior class of the Calvinist College of Pápa. The first period was Physics. Professor Elemér Császár started the day in an excited mood. He announced that His Excellency, the District Superintendent of Studies, would appear in a few minutes. (For a young teacher, I believe such an event must have been very important indeed.) World War I had been raging for two or three years. The younger teachers had joined the army long ago. Most of our professors were elderly. Some had families, and were burdened with worries; some were alcoholics and single. But most of them were already wedded to poverty—without ambition, without a future. Professor Fejes, an excellent young physics teacher, was called to the army back in 1914. By 1917, if I remember correctly, he was a prisoner of war in Russia. For a short time physics and mathematics were taught by an old teacher recalled from retirement. Never before did we have such a bad teacher. Under him, hardly anyone in the class learned anything of physics and mathematics. Most of the boys were from the country, many of peasant stock. In general, they were a few years older than the "urban element." Most of them were preparing to become theologians, and physics did not interest them too much. With time they were inducted, and joined the army after a quick final examination, a "war *matura*." The most important subject was Latin, which everybody had to suffer through six hours a week for eight years. But, in this respect

we were fortunate: our Latin master, István Borsos, who later taught us also Greek, was a wonderful teacher. For him Homer and Virgil were the acme of culture, the epitome of human accomplishment, and the library of the college with its 100,000 volumes was the most desirable place in the world. He was an enthusiastic lecturer; he worshipped his subject. His eyes shone humorously behind his pince-nez; when scanning the great lines of the Iliad he tapped out the rhythm with an ivory-tipped pencil on his little red notebook. But, since most of the juniors had already been recruited, who cared about the fall of Troy, let alone the three theses of that ancient astronomer Kepler. All we knew about that man (at least those of us who had read Madách's *The Tragedy of Man*) was that his wife cuckolded him.

We had two new teachers in the junior class. We were sure that for both, this was their first apprentice job; neither of them could have been more than 25 years old. One was Dezsö Trócsányi, who taught Hungarian literature. He was a tall, good-looking young man who moved fast and forcefully. His hair was cut in a manner favored by students. He dressed carelessly. He was a member of a well-known literary family, and had his doctorate. The other, who taught us physics and math, was much shorter, thin, and ugly. The good Lord seemed to have forgotten to give him a normal-looking nose. He was very pedantic, always most carefully groomed. His hair looked as if it had been baked into the shape of a snail. I remember his cuff-links and his cuffs, which were not tube-shaped as were, for instance, the cuffs of my father or of Professor Borsos. He was gentle-voiced, well-mannered, always with a mildly ironic expression. He viewed the class with unlimited contempt. I felt that he disdained teaching as well. His name was Dr. Elemér Császár.

Professor Császár remained in Pápa only two or three years. Then, I believe he returned to Budapest. Later I heard that he became a lecturer, and then a full professor, at the Péter Pázmány University. He got far in life.

When I first returned to Pápa from America in 1960, the ancient college no longer existed, nor did the Theological Academy. The college had become some kind of industrial school for girls. Of course, the notable fact that Petöfi, Jókai, the brothers Pulszky, and many other famous men had been its pupils, was still engraved on a marble plaque above the gate. I found Dezsö Trócsányi in a run-down office

of the Calvinist diocese (that still existed). He wore frayed pants, worn-out military ankle-boots, had had his first cancer operation, was widowed, alone. He was all skin and bones, employed in some kind of ecclesiastical position given him simply so that he should not starve. I had sent him from America a few CARE packages for which he thanked me in touching letters.

Well, as I said, it was Saturday morning, and His Excellency indeed appeared within minutes. For awhile, Professor Császár continued his carefully prepared lecture, but then it appeared His Excellency wanted to examine the students rather than listen to lectures. Obviously, he was interested in the homework, or the progress, of the students. The class waited with bated breath: whom will His Excellency pick to answer his questions? But the superintendent asked Professor Császár to call upon someone, and Császár called on me—I was the acknowledged best student in the class. A great weight fell, almost audibly, off the mind of the class: the threat of a catastrophe was averted. "Linksz, come to the blackboard," Császár said, "and work out the mathematical equation of harmonic vibration." This was quite a difficult task, and the greater part of the class, by then somewhat undisciplined, did not exert itself too vigorously to master it. It is quite possible that Professor Császár made no special effort either to make it clear to us. However, occasionally, he conducted a kind of private discussion with me about some equation he planned to present, which I found quite flattering. On one occasion Sári, the first female student in the school, gave me as a gift Frigyes Karinthy's book *Tanár úr kérem (Please, Professor),* in which a teacher and an arrogant, unbearable, best student conduct "private discussions" (the phrase comes from Sári), which are totally incomprehensible to the other students, and do so, I believe, precisely during a physics class.

As for the schoolwork of Jewish students on Saturday, it was regulated by a decree of the Royal Hungarian Minister of Religion and Public Education, for which credit is due to the "dark" epoch of Franz Joseph. I cannot quote the decree verbatim, but essentially it stated that Jewish students were not obliged to do any writing in class on Saturdays and Jewish holidays. Very few were aware of the existence of this decree. The parents of the Jewish boys attending the college were in general not religious, and moreover, Jews did not like to request special privileges from Christian institutions. But my father

knew the law and so did Professor Marton, the teacher of Jewish religion. My father had reminded the principal, Dr. János Faragó, of the decree in a polite but firm letter in which he quoted the date and number of the decree. He did this when I completed the four years of the *polgari* (junior high) school as a private pupil (there was a Jewish junior high school in Pápa where I took my examinations). I became a freshman in the college in 1914, to the boundless sorrow and despite the strenuous opposition of my father, and to the great consternation of his Orthodox friends. I must confess that by the time I reached my junior year I was a confirmed atheist. Children of Orthodox families like myself often became atheists, free thinkers, or socialists; Orthodox parents obviously had good reason to keep their children away from the secular secondary schools and to look with suspicion upon those who chose that wrong turn. Having become an atheist, as far as my own conscience was concerned, it would not have bothered me to write on the Sabbath. But officially, in the eyes of the class, I continued to be a "Sabbath keeper." And, let me add here that it was only because of my deep love for my father (and because I did not want the Orthodox to be proven right), that I continued to observe certain outward forms of religion, even in my adulthood, as long as I lived in Hungary. My father was unhappy anyway; I did not want him, in addition, to be ashamed in front of his flock and friends.

But to return to that Saturday morning, Professor Császár called on me to work out the mathematical equation of harmonic vibration in front of His Excellency, the Superintendent—me, the son of the rabbi of Devecser, who was well known to be a strict follower of the Law; me, about whom the other Jewish boys knew that twice a week I went to Mr. Baum, the learned Hebraist, to continue (in accordance with the compromise my father and I worked out) my Talmudic studies; me, from whom everybody expected in Pápa that even if—*horribile dictu*—I attended classes on Saturday, at least I would not write on that holy day. "Your Excellency," the words spilled out of me (I believe I said it humbly, but firmly), "I am of the Israelite religion, and according to a ministerial decree I am exempt from doing written work on Saturday." The face of Professor Császár turned ashen, his ugliness became sadness, and he said: "Well then, Linksz, go back to your place."

But the *tableau* lasted only a second. "Professor Császár, please," I said (and said it almost with compassion). "It doesn't matter that I

am not permitted to write. I can work out the equation orally, from memory. I do not have to write it." Hurray! The fatherland was saved. And, indeed, I managed to do what I had never tried before, and recited the entire series of algebraic formulas by heart, without a mistake. There are some moments in a person's life that require super-achievement and produce it. No matter how childish it sounds, for me, in my memory, this was one of those moments. I still recall it with joy and with some pride.

Of course, it is possible that my memory has embellished the scene. The whole thing may not have been such a super-achievement. I earned money for room and board by tutoring. From the income of the rabbi of Devecser we could not have afforded my education. And, apart from that, I wanted to be independent. Even if not formally, I went to the school against the wishes of my father. I frequently explained mathematical equations to Sári, and then to Lajos, the son of a well-to-do landowner, who was and remained a friend (later he became a professor in one of the country's agricultural academies), and finally to Zoltán, a very poor student, the son of a provincial physician (he ended his life in a forced labor camp somewhere in the Ukraine). Hence it was almost impossible that I should not know the material by heart. I was generally well prepared in the subjects I was teaching.

A Digression About Algebra, the Curriculum, Rodin, Professor Losonczy, and Many Other Things

On occasion I myself was the pupil. In fact, I could call myself an autodidact. After having passed the final examination of the junior high school, I stayed at home, I guess to the great joy of my father, for another year to prepare myself for the Latin transfer examination that was still required. (There was no Latin in the junior high school.) My morning hours were strictly devoted to Hebrew studies. From eight in the morning until lunchtime (except for the two days a week when my father and I went to the gentry's casino for a couple of hours to read the newspapers), my father taught me. But he was bored with the secular subjects, and so, for instance, I had to struggle through astronomical geography alone. I must admit that I have never understood the geome-

try of the eclipse of the moon as well as I did at that time. And algebra? For me it was an unforgettable experience when I suddenly understood the purpose of using letters instead of ciphers. I shall never forget the simple example that, once and for all, illuminated the problem. It is true, I said to myself, that using numbers one gets

$$(6 + 3) \times (6 - 3) = 27$$

but it is an even truer truth that

$$(a + b) \times (a - b) = a^2 - b^2$$

because this is true in every case for every number. From there on everything went easily, although I remember the long and tedious hours until I could somehow accept as logical that minus 1 multiplied by minus 1 equals plus 1, or that the zero power of a number (any number) equals one. I had to study algebra while I was preparing for my last examination in the fourth year of the junior high school, in the 1912-13 school year, and during that year I was not alone. My cousin Árpád, a good year older than I, spent that year with us, mainly to improve his limited Hebrew knowledge. My father was a zealous missionary of Hebrew. He was happy and indefatigable when it came to saving a soul, to contributing to the religious education of anyone. Of course, officially it would have been my father's duty at the same time to prepare Árpád for the final examination of the fourth grade of the junior high school. Up to that time Árpád went to a public school in Pozsony and was not a good student. But as I said, my father was bored with secular subjects (and algebra was no exception), so that I had to shoulder not only the burden of understanding, but also the burden of explanation, and that was how I learned the Latin proverb, *docendo discimus* (we learn by teaching). This is how I became a teacher of algebra when I was 12 or 13 years old. The fact that, even in my junior year, in the subjects of Professor Császár—math, geometry and physics—I was better than average had its explanation in my past as a junior high school student and tutor at the same time.

I must mention here that the so-called *polgári* school was an excellent institution. One had to study harder and discipline was stricter than in the *gimnázium,* the academic high school. In the fourth (last) year of the *polgári* the 14-year-old pupils had world his-

tory, not only algebra and natural history. German language and literature was an obligatory subject for at least two years, possibly throughout its four years. I do not remember for how many years German was mandatory in a *gimnázium.* Poor Professor Jenö Futó! His tour of duty in the army ended in my sophomore or junior year, and how difficult it was for him to beat into the trans-Danubian "iron-heads" (this is what my mother called them) the rules of *der-die-das.* For me, of course, German was a second mother tongue, and even if I knew nothing at all about the historical grammar of Middle High German, I spoke German more fluently than the teacher. And then, in my fifth (senior) year in the college, I had to study ancient history again. Having studied it five or six years earlier, this was familiar material for me. It was almost a case of *déjà vu,* a repetition of my experience in the first grade of elementary school: again, I already knew what we were taught. The main difference was that in the college I was not the youngest. As I said, five years had elapsed between the fourth grade and the eighth grade. My father gained and I lost a year. Even in Latin I was not behind. On the contrary, the rules of grammar and the irregular verbs shone brightly in my mind. Without even noticing it, I came to occupy the unofficial position of "best student." (But I never became a youth leader!) And there was one more difference. In the first and the second grades of the elementary school, my classmates, Jewish boys, used to beat me up and tease me. Here, even the city boys, the gentry boys, the anti-Semitic boys, somehow accepted me, even if they did not become my friends. And as for the villagers, the peasant boys, they clasped me to their breast. What distinguished the student in a senior high school from a student in the junior high was, of course, the study of Latin and a certain class pride: the *gimnázium* led to the prestigious *matura* certificate. Even a *matura* from a *reál* school (a high school for modern languages and sciences) did not give the right for admission to a medical school. And after the four years in the *polgári?* At the most, one could be a teacher or continue in a commercial school or become an Orthodox rabbi.

I remember that in my youth the state demanded that even an Orthodox rabbi complete four years of secondary school. I am not sure when this decree was issued. But I am certain that my grandfather of Galgóc did not finish even junior high school.

Looking back across a distance of more than sixty years, I can see today that I did not always give my father his due. Occasionally, a few words, a few sentences, are sufficient to open up a path to concepts stretching into infinity. The concepts of negative numbers, of the linear sequence of numbers, and of zero, and the possibility of adding and subtracting negative numbers—all this was made clear to me by my father with very few words and the simplest example, that of debts and the liquidation of debts. If we owe the grocer eight crowns at the end of the month (which situation actually occurred very often, especially in those months when we had to pay the premium for the life insurance), and we pay him five crowns, then our assets were still less than zero, although minus three is more than minus eight; and if we pay him eight crowns, we arrive at the zero where assets and debt are equal.

After all these years, how many more examples come to my mind! The memories crowd upon each other.

A few days ago I read a review of an autobiography in which the critic asserted that it was impossible to remember conversations from fifty or sixty years ago. Which, of course, only proves that the reviewer was still very young and did not know too much about the physiology and physiopathology of memory. There are things one remembers with equal clarity after forty or even sixty years. The memory itself can be false, but at the same time crystal clear. Of course, it is possible that one does not remember, that is, does not think of something for years, or even decades. Take, for instance, the numbers I just mentioned. It is possible that the amount of the debt mentioned by my father was not eight crowns. He may have said seven, or ten. But that doesn't matter. What matters is that now, suddenly, after several decades, certain numbers come to my mind, numbers which "I could swear to." I remember that every three months I had to go to the post office—this was in Devecser before the First World War—and to pay into an account of the postal savings bank exactly 69 crowns and 69 *fillér*s for my father's life insurance. During those third months we were always in debt to Mr. Kollin, the grocer. My father's monthly salary was 100 crowns, and the annual supplement from the state was 400 crowns. Only when I returned home after several years of absence did I learn that the mandatory war loan and

the inflation wiped out his life insurance. My almost pathological aversion to financial manipulations and insurance companies dates from that time. While we were living in Budapest I never bought any kind of insurance, and only when our first son was born here in America did I obtain a very modest life insurance policy.

In my early years I could not understand that one could invest money. My father finally explained it to me, when I asked him what those two clerks did in that office-like building which had "Savings Bank of Somló and Vicinity" written in large decorative letters over its door. And what about those peasants and artisans who would go in and doff their hats? Never during our years in Devecser did we have anything to do with that establishment. I understood that the merchant sold, and the artisan worked—making clothes, resoling shoes, baking bread, shoeing horses. But as I peeped through the window of the savings bank, I could never see anybody doing anything. They were writing or talking. My father explained that saving meant that someone who had saved money could put it there for safekeeping. This completely confused me. I thought that if one put money there for safekeeping, one should pay for it, since the money was being kept for him in a steel box; I simply could not understand why somebody who had savings that needed to be guarded should receive some kind of reward. Finally my father was able to make me understand that the money deposited there could be lent to others who needed money, and it was for this that the bank paid interest. But I had learned from the Bible that lending money at interest was not permitted; it was even a sin. It was a long time before I was at peace with the facts.

There were two Jews in Devecser who did not go to the synagogue even on Yom Kippur—Steiner, the shoemaker, who was a socialist, and Dr. József Pollák, the honorary chief physician of the county. This Dr. Pollák was also a director of the "Savings Bank of Somló and Vicinity." (Oh dear, what will happen to him when his soul appears at the foot of God's throne for reckoning?)

There was no real bank in Devecser. I never learned what banks were for. In truth, I don't know it even today. But it is time to return to my story.

As I have said, I had to pass a special transfer examination in Latin, and in preparing for it, I was again my own teacher. I addressed

myself to the task with tremendous ambition. I had to catch up with four years of material. Even today I can see and hear myself walking up and down in the gardens of Count Erdödy's chateau as I recite Latin grammar in a loud voice. I still know by heart that

> *Aequor, marmor,* and *cor*
> Are always neuter
> Feminine are *or*
> and the name of a live tree *arbor.*

A Catholic priest wrote the textbook in mnemotechnical rhymes. I have forgotten his name. For me, his method worked well. And the Latin-Hungarian dictionary of János Burián has stayed with me for a lifetime. I bought it in a shop full of old books. On its fly-leaf was pencilled (by now it is barely readable)

> Neményi Nusi Gimn VIII.

Nusi Neményi, your name is buried in the book, and in one of my cerebral cells. Buried there (the thought is frightening), you still live for a while. Nusi Neményi—the only thing I know about you is that you lived sometime, somewhere in Hungary, and that you were a senior. I am searching for you, Nusi Neményi; where didst thou go?

In addition to Latin I had to take special transfer examinations in two other subjects. One I have forgotten. The other was freehand drawing. Evidently it was not part of the curriculum of the *polgári* school.

I drew fairly well, and in that subject I even had a teacher—Béla Friedbauer, about whom I shall have more to say in another place. Béla's father, Lipót, was a master housepainter, an old and poor artisan who had many children. He was religious, and a faithful follower of my father. I can still remember his tall, gaunt figure, and his thick glasses. Béla was perhaps three years older than I. He had been drawing since he was a small boy, and had always wanted to be an artist. He had never taught anybody until that time. From whom he inherited his talent, I do not know. I think he did not continue studying after completing his grade school. I believe he served as an apprentice to his father. I learned from him the basics of pencil drawing, pen drawing, the use of crayon, ink, and watercolors. Later, the family moved to Pápa. They continued to be followers and friends of my father. Then

Béla disappeared from my sight. That happened in September 1914, about the time I began to take the special entrance examinations, just after the outbreak of the war. Probably he was taken by the army.

The art teacher (his name was Losonczy) was reasonably satisfied with my work. I had to draw the plaster copy of some Greek or Roman bust. Whether he really liked my work I do not know, but he took me immediately to his heart. He explained where my mistakes were, and I was amazed to see how he could correct them with a single line. Not counting Béla, Losonczy was the first artist I met in my life. He was probably an unhappy man. I soon learned that he was single, a toper, and the constant butt of the mockery and impudence of cruel youngsters. Later I thought that perhaps when he was young he dreamt of becoming a Michelangelo. It was obvious that he was disappointed in himself. Of course, at that time, I did not understand, did not think through any of this. But it was uncommon that he could be so friendly to a strange, unknown youth who spoke to him politely and with respect.

I never had any official contact with Professor Losonczy. At that time, one could choose in the ninth grade between Greek and the optional subjects of literature plus freehand drawing in place of Greek. Professor Losonczy wanted to persuade me to sign up for the literature and drawing alternative. I did not do so; I chose Greek. Basically, I have always been a snob, and I respected tradition. Anyway, usually it was only the poor students who signed up for the substitutional courses. Naturally those who wanted to become theologians had to choose Greek. In this case my father approved my decision. He said that in the Aramaic language of the Talmud there were many words borrowed from the Greek. I remember two or three of the examples he mentioned. The word *Sanhedrin* in the Talmud is a variation of the Greek *Synhedrion; apikores,* the word describing an atheist, a person without faith, derives from the name of the Greek philosopher *Epikuros;* the word *gematria,* designating the popular letter-and-number game of the Kabbalist, is a version of *Geometria.* Professor Losonczy asked me at that special examination whether I had ever read anything about art and artists. He urged me to buy a book titled *Rodin's Conversations About Art.* I did buy it. It was the first book I had ever read on this subject, dealing with art as such. *Habent sua fata libelli* (books have their own fate) says the Latin proverb. In my case books

were always fated to appear in my life when I was mature enough for them mentally or when my emotions required them.

Since that time collecting books has been one of my enduring passions, and I have always bought more than I could read. I would have to live a hundred years before I could read all the books I purchased and only glanced at once, books which (as I keep telling myself) I should read eventually. I began early to collect art books and catalogs of exhibitions. While I was still in high school I bought *Modern Art* by a certain Henrik Fieber and *Rembrandt* by Emile Verhaeren in Stefan Zweig's German translation. I still have the *Rembrandt;* the other is lost. I was permitted to borrow books from the magnificent college library. I was every librarian's pet. Professor Borsos was the chief librarian. Professor Pongrácz, who taught theology, was his deputy and was my first English teacher in my sophomore or junior year. English was an elective subject; only a few signed up for it. Most of the students took French if they had planned to take any foreign language at all. Even today I do not know why I chose English. (Yet I guess I do know!) Knowing French was characteristic of the gentry. The young ladies of the upper class families of Devecser—the refined girls, as a *bokher* (student) of my father classified them with much contempt—studied French after they left the grade school or the girls' finishing school, the prep school, or the girls' high school, and were sitting at home, waiting for their future husbands.

Even today if a colleague or a Hungarian or German patient in my own age group knows French, I assume that he belongs to this upper class. Among the "refugee" colleagues from Germany, a surprisingly large number of my own age knows French. In the liberal social circles of their childhood and, later, in Weimer Germany, it was almost expected that one know French.

When, finally in the thirties, I settled for good in Budapest ("I will open a practice," I decided, "there will be no scientific or university career for me"), one of the first things I did was to find a piano teacher and a French teacher. I did not get too far with either study, but at least I know what a score is, and can read a French medical journal. With the help of a dictionary I can even enjoy Verlaine and Baudelaire. But I can hardly speak French beyond what I would call "Pidgin French." It is the same with Hebrew. I know by heart pages

from the Bible and from the prayer book. My eyes can quickly scan the lines. But I would not be able to ask for a glass of water in Hebrew, and the present official Sephardi Hebrew pronunciation is totally unintelligible to my ears.

The book about Rodin occupies an extraordinary place among the book-experiences of my youth. Unlike the seed scattered by the sowers of the Bible, every single seed of this book "fell in good soil and brought forth fruit." For me, everything in the book was new. Until that time I had only seen, with a primitive eye, the subject matter, the story told by those few artistic creations I had known—*The Death of Petöfi,* the *Angelus* of Millet (cheap colored prints in the workshop of our neighbor, the shoemaker), or the patriotic pictures of Gyula Benczúr and Árpád Feszty (in the history textbooks).

I had only one other book that was such a first. Every episode, every character in it touched a new chord in my soul. It was *The Silenced Bells* by Viktor Rákosi, the first novel I ever read. I was nine years old. I still possess a copy of it, although it is not the original copy. I bought the one I have years later, in the early thirties, for no other reason but in order to have it. I bought it, but I have not dared to open it. Such a book, I think, must not be re-read.

The second novel I read was *The Invisible Man* by Géza Gárdonyi. I received a new copy of it as a gift a few years ago. At first I was afraid to open it, but then I started reading it and enjoyed it immensely. During the long months in the fifties I had spent in the hospital with a broken leg, I reread Jókai—*The New Country Squire, The Man of Gold, The Sons of the Heartless Man.* Every one of them was a great joy, and the re-reading a new experience.

It is an interesting coincidence (coincidence? Is there such a thing as coincidence?) that I got hold of those first two books, one right after the other. It happened in 1909 during a summer vacation in Ó-Beszterce. I know that it was in the Rákosi novel that I first encountered the word:

Szerelem
(Love)

I felt that it meant something great, majestic, special, but I did not know exactly what distinguishes it from "love" in general (neither in German nor in English is there a special word for this). In Hungarian,

there is a world of difference between *szerelem,* love between lovers, sweethearts, man and woman, and *szeretet,* the affection one has for parents, siblings, children, friends. There must have been something frightening in *szerelem,* something painful, since in both books, it drove a woman into self-chosen death. From the Rákosi novel there is still a memory alive in me—the memory of sea, fog, the screeching of gulls, and a young girl starting out towards the sea, towards death. Since that time, gulls have meant something ominous, something frightening for me. In Ferenc Körmendi's, *Adventure in Budapest,* one of my favorite books, the hero chooses a similar death. In the Gárdonyi novel, a woman seeks death voluntarily after the funeral procession for Attila the Hun. I remember many more exciting things from the Rákosi novel: the young preacher, the Greek Orthodox pope, and the destruction of the Hungarians in Transylvania. (I have never been able to get over the pain of the mutilation, the dismemberment, of Hungary at Trianon). Another unforgettable image: again, *szerelem,* love. The young Hungarian preacher knocks on the window of the pope's beautiful daughter. There are iron bars on the window, and as they kiss each other, the unyielding iron leaves a painful impression on the forehead of both. An unforgettable image.

A New Digression About Digressions and About More Books

"This is impossible!" I say to myself. "You will never get to telling about your encounters with Professor Császár if you allow every association to interrupt you." But then I reassure myself. "After all," I say to myself, "the title of this chapter is not 'My Encounters with Professor Császár.'" I promised to tell of my years in the Pápa College—my own, personal, cultural history, if you will, in those four years during which, having got away from home, I became essentially what I am today. And if in this development, next to people, books played the most important role, then I must speak not only about people, but also about books, even at the risk of creating the impression that I am bragging about how well-read I am.

I cannot help it. Occasionally I have an almost fetish-like veneration of books, or, more exactly, of certain types of books (I always say

that my den is my private chapel). Other people, too, perceive me, primarily, as closely associated with books. I have often received books as souvenirs, as tokens of gratitude, or as bon voyage gifts, from friends, lovers, or patients, and I feel that those few books on the shelves which bear my name as author belong to my own personal, short-lived immortality in almost the same way as the two boys who bear my name.

I must admit that I myself no longer know in how many directions I am being pulled by various associations. I began to speak about the library of the college, and about the fine art books I was permitted to borrow. I remember especially well a series titled "Art Library," or rather two titles from the series: *Pál Szinnyei-Merse,* the forerunner of the Hungarian "plein-air painting" (I remember a painting depicting a picnic, and another titled *Skylark,* with red poppies in green fields) and *The Barbizonians,* the book that first brought me the news of the glorious 19th-century French painting. I remember also a volume about four modern Hungarian artists, but I remember only the names of two of them, those of Mednyánszky and Nándor Katona. It is possible that it was in this series that I read for the first time about László Paál, who is still one of my favorites.

Here, of course, that "associative rope" would like to pull me toward Professor Pongrácz, but it is not going to be this time. For again, completely unexpectedly, a stranger intrudes, a stranger who has not come to my mind for more than fifty years—a Dutch Calvinist philosopher called Geulinks or Geulincx (I no longer remember the unusual spelling). And again I see dear Uncle István Borsos, as he kindly, but cynically, smiles behind his pince nez. Whence and why did this name surface so suddenly? It is connected with an episode that occurred either in my junior or my senior year in Pápa—and is as clear as if it had happened yesterday—again an example of the truth of the thesis that we never really forget anything.

On the bulletin board of the college library there hung for years a "Notice of Competition," which promised a prize of 200 crowns to the author of the best essay on the life and philosophy of Geulincx. At one time I toyed with the idea of entering the competition (obviously, both the money and the glory aroused my fantasy), and I began by reading up about the history of philosophy in encyclopedias, concentrating on the entries under Geulincx's name (perhaps that is why Uncle Borsos

smiled so cynically). As it begins to dawn on me now (as I said, for fifty years not even the name ever came to my mind), this Geulincx was an adherent, a disseminator, perhaps even the founder, of some kind of theory called *occasionalism.* In my initial ignorance about all this, all I could make out from these secondhand sources was that Geulincx was preoccupied with the relationship between body and soul, the material and spiritual spheres, and their action and interaction. Since the philosophy then in vogue maintained that the principle of causality (the laws of nature) was valid only in the material sphere, it appeared impossible that the two spheres could have any effect upon each other. Therefore, according to Geulincx, it was necessary for an extranatural force—specifically, the grace of God—to intervene occasionally (hence *occasionalism*) in order to establish interaction between the two spheres (for instance, between our body and our soul). For my primitively atheistic approach of that time, all this appeared to be comical and absurd. And when I also noticed how many difficult Latin texts I would have to tackle in order to gain firsthand knowledge about the wisdom of Geulincx and to be able to write about it, I abandoned the entire plan.

Only much later, during my medical student years in Prague, while listening to the unforgettable lectures of the physiologist Professor Tschermak, did I realize that interactions of body and soul (or call the latter consciousness) remained a perpetual problem in both philosophy and biology. We really have no idea how, in the famous dog experiments of Pavlov, about which Professor Tschermak spoke, do vibrations of the air *and* the sound of a bell (a parameter of consciousness) *and* the memory-images associated with it, jointly produce a nerve stimulus affecting the gastric glands. The existence of these interactions is beyond doubt. And Geulincx at least knew that things like that can happen only through the grace of God. We might as well admit that today we don't know even that much. We are just talking and adding new words to the vocabulary—such beautiful expressions as *psycho-physiological parallelism* and *psychosomatic.* Of course we do not talk anymore about body and soul. We leave this duality to the theologians, and rather say "body and mind," which does not clash with the teachings of any church. (Poor Descartes feared the Inquisition so much that, next to "body" and "consciousness," he squeezed in even God.) Our good old Geulincx (as I realize today) at least raised *a*

question and *the* question. My father, I believe, did not. Neither did Samson Raphael Hirsch, nor did the official Orthodox Jewish philosophy of religion, if there is such a thing, with its naive primitive, I might say childlike, faith in the existence of the soul. (Mr. Schwartz "returns his soul to his Creator," while "the vessel of dust stays behind.") Good old Geulincx! What a pity that you did not come to my mind when, about twenty-five years ago, I met Professor Pongrácz in the library of Pápa for the last time. Now I shall never know whether, after my time, there was anybody in Pápa to undertake to write an essay about you.

But let me go back to Professor Pongrácz. And you, you devilish, darling István Borsos, don't grin so sarcastically!

Professor Pongrácz spoke English well. Following a centuries-old tradition of Pápa, he went to the University of Utrecht and to another school in Scotland. For the theologians of Pápa, Holland was almost second home. The same might have held good also for the theologians from other colleges. Géza Antal, the Calvinist bishop of Pápa, had also been educated in Holland. His wife was a famous Dutch poetess. I have forgotten her name.

When I returned to Pápa from America for the first time, around 1960, I found Professor Pongrácz (by that time I was permitted to call him Uncle Józsi) in the old library. His hair was white, but he was rotund, ruddy-faced, and in good health. He was approaching 80. Through the foreign connections he had made during his youth, he was able to maintain the standards of the library to a degree. There was no shortage in new works on theology and philosophy in English and in German. He received these books regularly and without cost from American Protestant institutions. As Uncle Józsi told me, towards the end of the war many books were destroyed. (I do not wish to repeat what he told me. The war made both victor and vanquished inhuman. There is some inexplicable hatred or compulsion that induces soldiers to tie up their horses in libraries and set folios on fire to heat food in their pots. So, the library suffered during the war. Why should we recall all that today?) When, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of our graduation, I visited Pápa again, Uncle Józsi had already passed away, and I had no time to revisit the library.

How odd. How very odd. I attended a Calvinist school; I have

never been a bigot, not even while I was still religious; yet, the New Testament remained essentially unknown to me. I did not know even those of its episodes which cry for being presented in pictures, and which became the subjects of great art. I am once more reminded of Verhaeren's book about Rembrandt. Even today the picture I best remember from it is *The Youths of Emmaus.* It was with a peculiar piety that Verhaeren described and analyzed this picture, and I could sense its mysterious, haunting mood, even in the small black and white reproduction. I liked it very much. But at the same time, I really did not know who sat down to have supper in Emmaus, or for what reason, or when. And while talking about pictures, titles such as *The Prodigal Son* and *The Annunciation* produced no association in me—not for a long time. It is almost unbelievable, but for a long time I had no idea of what the famous *Ecce Homo* of Munkácsy depicted. Which leads me to an even earlier and different recollection: in the reader of the junior high literature course I found a few lines about *The Parable of the Sower.* I liked it very much. Even today I remember it by heart (just a little while ago I quoted from it), but I had no idea at all about who Matthew was and what the ciphers (chapter and verse) after his name signified. And yet another recollection belongs here: perhaps in my senior year I read Oscar Wilde's play *Salome.* I knew who Herod was, but I did not know of Jochana'an. What subsequently I came to recognize in myself as the civilizational schizophrenia (or, to be more specific, the Judeo-Christian civilizational schizophrenia) was, for a long time, complete. That the New Testament might be read by a Jew (even if he was an atheist) was for me almost unimaginable, and so it remained for a long time. It took me years before I could fill in the vacuum to some extent.

I learned to understand and love Rembrandt through his illustrations of the Old Testament. I shall never forget the first picture under which I saw the name Rembrandt. It was *The Sacrifice of Isaac.* I came across it in a volume called *Illustrated History of the Bible.* It is unkind to make fun of my father, but in connection with this painting, I must describe an utterly comical, unforgettable episode. I did not know why I wished to show this particular picture to my father—there were scores of beautiful illustrations in that attractive book. Today, however, I can sense those exciting and mysterious associations which were connected with the "near-sacrifice" of our forefather Isaac.

(Abraham was ready to sacrifice Isaac, "his only one," when God asked it. Would "Isaac"—my father's name was Isaac—sacrifice his "only one"—that is, me? And what kind of God would demand such a thing?) The picture itself is well known. It is one of the important canvases of Rembrandt (its original is in the Hermitage) and it depicts the moment when, as the King James Version puts it, "the angel of the Lord called unto him out of Heaven," and Abraham "lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son." This was the picture whose reproduction I showed my father. He just glanced at it and said only, "This picture is not good." Surprised, and somewhat disappointed, since I thought it corresponded in every detail to the Biblical description, I asked why was it not good. He answered: "Well, don't you see that Abraham's head is not covered?" From there on I carefully avoided talking with my father about any problem concerning the fine arts.

I must confess that during the fifteen years that followed my secession from Orthodoxy, during which time I proclaimed with juvenile passion that I was an atheist, I took no serious interest not only in the New Testament, but even in the Hebrew Bible. It was only during the middle of the thirties (when I was a physician in Budapest) that I again turned my attention to the Bible. The book *Wüste und Gelobtes Land,* by the German-Jewish historian Auerbach, made me understand that one does not have to *believe* in the Bible in order to take it seriously, and that the discrepancies which emerged in the course of centuries do not render the historical data contained in the Bible either meaningless or useless. (The awareness that the Bible is beautiful—that one can read it as great literature—and that, for instance, the Psalms and the Book of Job belong among the most noble creations of the human spirit, came even later.)

It was during the thirties that I got hold of the books of the famous British archeologist, Sir Leonard Woolley, which discussed the excavations in the area of Ur in Mesopotamia. His findings impressed the entire scientific world. The picture on the jacket of one of his books showed a ram—a ram "caught in the thicket." A great number of the beautiful finds from the Woolley digs are in the British Museum and in

the University Museum in Philadelphia. It so happened that every fall I used to spend a week as a visiting professor in Philadelphia, and I made a point of visiting that fine museum each time. I even used to imagine that perhaps it was this particular statue that inspired the author who described the awesome and solemn story of the sacrifice of Isaac.

An insignificant and almost humorous episode is linked in my memory to the excavations of Ur and to that unforgettable statue of the ram caught in the thicket. In 1937 or 1938 I read in the paper that Sir Leonard was coming to Budapest and would present a lecture accompanied by slides in the Museum of Industrial Art. Of course I went to hear him, but for some reason (or simply from lifelong habit) I was late. The projection was already in progress. I quietly opened the door of the lecture hall and all I could see in the dark was that there were some empty seats in the first row. I sat down and listened to the lecture. Most of the illustrations shown in the slides were familiar to me, so that I was able to follow the lecture without difficulty. When it ended and the lights were turned on, I noticed that the first row was indeed empty. There was only one person sitting in the middle of the row—Admiral Miklós Horthy, the regent of Hungary. Surprised and embarrassed, I sidled away toward the back rows. I ought to add that there was no policeman or bodyguard in sight. Nobody stopped me or said a word. (I saw the regent on another occasion, at the Budapest Academy of Music at a concert featuring Helge Lindberg, the great singer, who died so prematurely. But if I were to write about him or about the *lieder* of Händel,

> *Lasst mich wandern durch das Grün*
> *Lasst mich wandern, lasst mich zieh'n . . .*

I would never get back to my story.)

There was a reverse side to this civilizational schizophrenia. An almost comic example of it remained stuck in my memory. The Hungarian vocabulary (like the vocabularies of almost all fundamentally Christian-rooted civilizations) is full of expressions and phrases taken from the New Testament. On one occasion when my father gave a beautiful sermon on the theme of faith, hope and love, neither he nor I had the slightest idea that the juxtaposition of these terms occurred in one of the Epistles of Paul.

Let's see, where was I? I believe I was talking about becoming a teacher, about starting to give lessons, about my rather difficult life, and also about my quite quickly acquired independence. During the greater part of my first year away from home I was still dependent on others. As the graceless but still commonly used Yiddish expression has it, I "ate days," which meant that every day of the week another family provided me with a warm lunch: Monday it was family A, Tuesday family B, etc. I remember the name of only one family, that of a Mrs. Ambrus, the widow of a teacher. I have every reason to cherish her name lovingly, although I "ate days" at the Ambruses for only a short period of time. According to the Reverend Marton, the teacher of Jewish religion at the college, they were not "Orthodox kosher," and therefore he provided me with another "meal-day." All in all, this "eating days" was a rather miserable situation; and it is understandable that I was quite happy when some of the professors started to recommend me for tutoring. Pretty soon I found myself very busy with a considerable practice. The most difficult time I had was at Zoltán's house. On the other hand, there I got four or five hot meals a week. Things were easiest in the home of a family called Stern. I believe I was a junior when I was provided with room and board in return for tutoring; the room actually was a bed in the room of the two Stern boys. They were good students; the younger one took schoolwork somewhat lightly. They hardly needed me. The Sterns were only superficially religious and that made my life easier. In the last year I roomed with an Orthodox family named Krausz, friends of my father. Mrs. Krausz was Argus-eyed when it came to making sure that the roomer fulfilled all his obligations and observed all the religious rules. I remember her two daughters: they were a few years older than I. In their own way, they also contributed to the filling of gaps in my education. Their obsession was reading the sexy novels of a French writer called Georges Ohnet (and of course I shared this pleasure with them). I believe they were also the ones who acquainted me with the long-forgotten works of a minor writer called Szomaházy; also, with Renée Erdös, and with a spy story of the Baroness Emma Orczy, *The Scarlet Pimpernel.* (Later I encountered it again in the form of an

English movie.) But I remember best two works of art in the girls' room; two large and beautifully framed monochrome prints of female heads. The name of the artist was Ferenc Innocent. At that time I found the sentimental naturalism of this type of picture quite attractive, and I envied the artist for his beautiful name. (Never again did I hear of him.)

During my years in the College, I occasionally had some other types of students as well. A few were hopeless cases: students who could not learn the Hebrew alphabet, a basic requirement for the final examinations. I needed the money. It was not only for room and board that I needed it—my thirst for culture turned out to be an expensive addiction. At one time I tutored boys in Hebrew grammar and Biblical translation, but I did it without receiving any payment, out of friendship and with a certain pride. The program of the Academy, the theological branch of our school, required that the future Calvinist preachers be familiar with the Hebrew language. I helped them. Occasionally I helped them to "cheat." I completed their assignments. As a matter of fact, I did it gladly; the underground railroad in class passed on my "crib" to students who got stuck. I remember that for one of the assigned Greek essays, my tutee, poor Zoltán, was given a failing grade (without any comment), although there was not a single mistake in it. I received an "A" for the same essay. But Professor Borsos, our Greek teacher, said not a word to either of us. I believe both teachers and students liked me. I was a popular, eminent student.

I believe Professor Császár also liked me. To have poor looks and to be poor too is an unforgivable sin. (I do not know where I learned that Professor Császár came from a poor family; but I know that, by contrast, Trócsányi exuded the confidence of one belonging to the elite.) Yes—an unforgivable sin. But at that time I did not comprehend how difficult it must have been for Professor Császár to appear relaxed and friendly. He was not a popular teacher. I remember that for about a year and a half following the memorable Saturday morning, until our final examinations, he never called upon me to present my regular homework. I believe this was his way of letting me know that he realized that I knew the subject. In the semi-finals I received an "A" in both mathematics and physics. What is more, once he brought along the book by university Professor Manó Beke titled *The Elements of*

Differential and Integral Calculus that he had taken out from the school library. He gave it to me with the remark that junior year algebra was most likely boring for me, and that if I did not understand anything in Beke's book he would be happy to help me. It must have been a disappointment for him that during a year and a half I never once approached him with questions about the calculus.

The junior and senior years were the most enchanting, most fertile, and most exciting times of my life. Having gotten away from the Spartan life at home, and even from the inner bonds of religion, I suddenly started to blossom. Earlier, my father did not permit me to read novels. (I did so in secret. Once he found out I was reading *The Lady of the Camelias*). Even later, he did not approve of my reading novels, for quite apart from their frivolous content, the time spent reading such books was, so he felt, taking me away from religious studies. And the fine arts? "Immoral, naked figures." They were incomprehensible for him. The intellectuals of Pápa, most of them older than I, took me under their wings and led me into never-never lands. Among them I remember Imre Lázár, who later became a physician, and how terrible, how very terrible, that I must again add the awful refrain, "he vanished in the Holocaust." He was the one who first showed me Ady poems in the literary magazine *Nyugat (West),* unknown to me until that time. Mihály Török, the social democrat lawyer, my great teacher, the most erudite person of Pápa, put the books of Anatole France into my hands, as well as *Madame Bovary,* which he called "the world's greatest novel." Later he gave me Margit Kaffka's *Colors and Years,* which in his opinion was second only to *Madame Bovary* in beauty and importance. He called my attention to Ervin Szabó. Through Géza, my later idol, I got hold of Hofmannstahl's dramas. Even today I can almost recite from memory his "Fragment" about the death of Titian. I shall have a lot more to say about Géza in later chapters. And more than anybody else, it was Sári who opened up totally new worlds for me.

It is difficult even to enumerate the great names. I could start with Rilke's story of the "Cornet," with the *Buch der Bilder,* with the Russian novels, and with the poems of Richard Dehmel *(Zwei Menschen).* I could continue (what a great contrast!) with Otto Weininger and Peter Altenberg. Then came (in German translations) Ibsen, Strindberg, Oscar Wilde. And Sári was the one from whom I first

heard the name Freud. I don't know how I was able to absorb all this in two short years. I remember it was through Terus that the novels of Knut Hamsun and Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* came into my hands. I remember the great enthusiasm with which I began to read *Zarathustra.* I felt it was an exceptionally beautiful forbidden fruit, but I did not understand it yet. In my junior year, when I was living with the Sterns, I read *Aranyember (Man of Gold)* by Jókai. I remember that I read it all night, to the great irritation of the boys, and next day I skipped school because I simply could not put the book down. So I lied and said I had been sick. Since I was a good student, conscientious and respectful, no proof of my illness was required.

As I have already mentioned, I developed an early, intense interest in the fine arts. To my good fortune, I became friendly with Imre Herz, the art teacher. One of his drawings, dedicated to me, still hangs in my apartment. His son Felix Herz, a literary figure in Budapest under the pen-name Bódog Halmi, also became a friend of mine. A few of my early poems appeared in a short-lived literary magazine edited by him. I kept no copies of them and have long forgotten the title of the magazine. The only thing I remember is that my name was misprinted "Lenksz." I was quite upset. One day Trócsányi, the young professor of literature, brought to the classroom the *Problems of Literature* by Mihály Babits, which was practically banned by the authorities. It included two essays about Vörösmarty. Trócsányi asked me, to my great satisfaction, to read it aloud for the class. The official textbook, written by Zsolt Beöthy, presented an entirely different Vörösmarty. Intoxicated and overwhelmed, I embraced the arts, world literature, Hungarian literature, and the ideas of social reform. No wonder that I myself was led to writing poetry, very much under the influence of Mihály Babits. In the opinion of Terus, Ady and Goethe wrote mere trifles compared to my poetry. Clearly I could take no interest in differential and integral calculus, or indeed, in physics. I knew of physics only as much as my last two students were supposed to know. (Lajos was very soon taken into the army.) I think I hurt Elemér Császár very much. For weeks he barely spoke to me. Occasionally he made a subtle, ironic remark about my literary ambitions and about my varied preoccupations. That was all. (He was also dismayed by the fact that my five female classmates were often seen clustering around me.)

A Digression About Books: Habent Sua Fata Libelli

If I ever got to writing a history of my library I would enumerate my various *hegiras* (as I call them), my numerous migrations: my escape from Pápa to Budapest, from Budapest to Pozsony in the autumn of 1919, my switching from the University of Prague (1920-1923) to that of Kiel in 1923, my unsuccessful move in 1929 from Budapest to Munich, and back again to Budapest in 1931. My little savings were wasted on what was at first an unsalaried, and then a very poorly salaried assistantship in Munich, on the lawyers who promised everything, and on futile efforts to become a German citizen. I wanted to have my M.D. degree validated for practice in Germany. I wanted to do research and become a professor there. For me, the Weimar Republic represented the top of the world, the apex of cultural achievement. (Most fortunately, these efforts to settle in Germany were unsuccessful.) And then came the great, the final, hegira—my emigration from Budapest to America in 1939. A major part of the books I had collected was each time left behind. In 1919, Géza and I left a good-sized library in Pápa in the apartment we had subleased. In 1923 in Prague I said to myself, "I shall return to Prague soon. In the meantime the books can stay with friends." When I emigrated from Budapest to America most of the books were rescued, but still, many had to be left behind. I was able to replace quite a few of them, but they are not the *real* ones. I have practically all the books of Ady except his volume of short stories; most of them, however, are not the *original* ones. I sold the first editions during my years in medical school. I needed the money. I sold his collection of short stories, the one that contained the unforgettable *The Kiss of Rozalia Mihályi.* Other first editions were lost or misplaced. The Vörösmarty volume I have is still the original one. A note on the flyleaf says that I received it from Uncle Adolf for my bar mitzvah in 1913. I have several Vörösmarty books (he was my favorite) in various editions. János Arany's Shakespeare translations are the original ones. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the great soliloquy of Hamlet still speak to me in Hungarian, in

Arany's words. I appropriated it from my father's six-volume set of Arany. As I mentioned, the Rodin book is not the original one either, although I had bought the German version fifty years ago. The Hungarian, the *original* one, is lost. The majority of my Rilke volumes are not original either: I replaced some of them twice, once following the hegira from Pápa and once after I left Prague. Some of them I bought here in America. The *Cornet* is original. The thin hardcover edition, the first volume of the *Insel Bücherei,* was the first Rilke Sári lent me. Later I purchased a copy. I still know parts of the poems by heart. A funny little detail: since Rilke's full name is Rainer Maria Rilke, Sári thought for quite a while that he was a woman. Neither she nor I realized that in countries and circles where the cult of Mary is widespread, men often receive the name Maria as a second baptismal name. The collected works of Franz Kafka are originals, too. I brought them with us from Budapest, but they are not completely original. I used to have the real original editions. Today a first edition of a book like *Die Verwandlung* would be worth a fortune. To my regret, I left it in Budapest. "I have the collected works anyway," I said; "space is scarce." The collected poems of Mihály Babits are a new acquisition. I bought them several years ago in Budapest. I had almost all the originals, but I lost them. *Problems of Literature* is the only Babits book I brought along. I have almost all the Béla Balázs books. I collected them over the years. Several of them were gifts from my friends. The original ones were all left behind in Pápa in 1919. The famous and infamous work of Otto Weininger, *Geschlecht und Charakter,* was left behind as early as my hegira from Pápa. I bought it again in Budapest; we brought it with us. It stares at me from my library shelves along with another volume of Weininger's that I received as a gift from one of his brothers or brothers-in-law. I know that I shall never open either one of them. But to throw a book away? Even the thought is horrifying. The Ibsens are still the ones from Budapest. They are almost complete, but they are not the same German translations I read the very first time—the one that in my memory is still tied to Sári. I have never replaced my Strindberg and Oscar Wilde volumes. Somehow they got lost. Neither did I replace Hamsun, although there are reasons for re-reading some of them.

If I wanted to give an account of all my books there would be no end to it. I know the provenience of each and every one of them: the

names, the dates, the dedications. I also have a few books with only a date, a few words, without a name, reminders of old loves and lovers from my student years. In some the writing has faded so much that I can remember rather than decipher the dedications. Well, yes,

> Where art thou, where art thou
> who loved me?
> Far away, far away . . .

Am I quoting from a poem of Béla Balázs? How painful it is that I am no longer sure even of this.

Why do all these things come to my mind now? Among the non-original books, there is one with a long story, a story which demands to be told. The *real* one, the genuine edition, was given to me by Sári, my pupil Sári (Oh, heavens, how difficult it was for her to "take in," how she hated math and physics!). Yes, by Sári, my teacher and master. At the end of our high school junior year, and again at the conclusion of our senior year, I got a beautifully bound book from Sári. One was the famous volume of dramatic encounters *Die Renaissance,* by Gobineau, inscribed with the date of our graduation. I still have it. It is the original one. On the flyleaf she copied, in her inimitable, large, clear, back-tilted hand, a few lines from a poem, perhaps by Dehmel. When she gave me the book (a good sixty-five years ago) I read it carefully. It presents the larger-than-life principal figures of the Renaissance—Michelangelo, Savonarola, the great popes. For me, it is one of the eternally great books. Of course, I cannot judge its real significance. For me it did not mean filling a gap—there is no gap in a vacuum—it created a new world; it opened new horizons. (Later I read and heard much about Gobineau. He was one of the earliest apostles of racist theories.) The beautifully illustrated, leatherbound *Insel Verlag* edition contained many pictures, portraits of the great men of the epoch painted by great artists. Until that time I had known of the Renaissance little more than what could be found in the history texts. I have been lugging this book along ever since. I have not opened it for decades. Perhaps the last time was in 1965 or so, when Sári was in New York for an international psychoanalytic congress and was our guest. I showed it to her.

I received another ornately bound book from Sári at the end of our junior year. It was *The Treasurehouse of Hungarian Poetry.* In it her

dedication reads simply, "Tanár úrnak" ("To Mister Teacher"), with the date. The words were put in quotes, obviously to soften the formality, the keep-your-distance, of the phrase. I do not want to write now about this book. On rare occasions when we held a poetry memory contest with old friends (with Sándor and Zsuzsi, and while they were still with us, with Anna Lesznai, Aladár Farkas, and Klári Lax) it was good to know that in my library there was a "Bible" to which one could turn: "Let's see, who was the one who wrote 'All alone I listen to the murmur of the sea,'" or "Just how do those two last lines sound in the *Pán halála (Death of Pan),* and wasn't it Gyula Reviczki who wrote it? And who was this Gyula Reviczki anyway?" or "Was it Mihály Tompa or János Arany who wrote the poem *A rab gólya (The Captive Stork)*?" Klári was usually right, and Aladár never made a mistake. Aladár knew by heart the whole *Tündérálom (Fairy Dream)* of Petöfi. I quoted:

> *Csak lassan szállj és magasan énekelj,*
> *Haldokló hattyúm, szép emlékezés*
> (Fly ever slowly and sing, sing aloft,
> My dying swan, beautiful memory.)

But he corrected me: "Petöfi," he said, "wrote not *emlékezés* (memory), but *emlékezet* (remembrance)," and he was right.

But all this is just divagation. The *Kincsesház (Treasurehouse)* with Sári's dedication was around for twenty years. When and how it landed among my father's books, I cannot recall, but during all my wanderings it graced his library. I knew it was there. Perhaps it was better that it was not with me. On that Sunday morning, in January 1939, when I last saw my parents, I protested, "After all, I am only going to America to look around; Magda is staying; I will be back home long before December for Father's seventieth birthday." I went to the bookcase and wanted to remove the book stealthily, without saying a word. I wanted to take it with me. But my father noticed it, turned to me, and said quietly, "Now I know that we shall never see each other again."

Almost angrily, I pushed the book back in its place. How can one utter something as cruel as this? My taciturn father—he had never said that he loved me, that he longed for me, or that he missed me. I remembered only the scoldings: "You worthless brat!" Perhaps he would have loved me even if I had not played the comedy of being religious, which I feel today he always recognized for what it was—even if

I had dared to speak to him as man to man? True, I too never told either of my parents that I loved them. A certain rigidity and restraint in communication was part of the Orthodox Jewish way of life. But who started the silence? He never said that he loved me. I remember one exception, though. During my Bar Mitzvah celebration in the synagogue, my father addressed me as "my dearest son." Neither before, nor after that occasion did he ever call me "my dearest son." And that one time he did it in front of the congregation, in a formal sermon.

Only when I last saw him, when I reached for one of my favorite books, did I understand that he loved me. (How curious: while I am writing this, an English expression intrudes: I want to say "he cared," which is both somewhat more and somewhat less than "loved.") "He cared." He was always generous. When I really needed him, he always supported me, although he not only never asked, but never accepted a penny from me, from us. *Habent sua fata libelli*—the *Treasurehouse* remained in Köszeg in my father's library.

Perhaps I should mention here that the retired elderly mayor of Köszeg lived in the same house and on the same floor as my parents. Baron Fülöp Schey, the patron of Köszeg, left a two-story house to the Free Royal City with the stipulation that the two apartments on the second floor must go rent-free to the mayor and to the rabbi. That Baron Schey (I note that his memory is completely lost in today's Köszeg) must have been a great dreamer. Obviously his wish that the mayor (the retired mayor) and the rabbi should be neighbors in one house and on the same floor was symbolic. (Even the toilet had to be shared; it opened from the common corridor. At least one did not have to cross the courtyard in the dead of winter.) The first floor was divided into one-room apartments for the poor of Köszeg. The house was called Albertinum—after a brother of the Emperor Franz Josef, Archduke Albrecht, the patron of Baron Schey. A white marble bust of the Archduke stood in the courtyard.

After the end of the war, in 1945, I wrote to the mayor of Köszeg, and in reply received official notification that, together with the entire Jewish community of the city, my parents had been deported in boxcars. From that time on I tried to salvage whatever I could from my father's library. There was nothing else to save. But somehow I still hoped that everything was not lost. I even asked Uncle Poldi, my father's only surviving brother (who "pulled through" in the ghetto of Budapest) to

go to Köszeg and save what could be saved. I don't remember anymore what he found. But the manuscripts of two of my father's books survived. I still have them. I do not know what happened to the folios of the Talmud, the Bibles, and the Bible translations. I do not know what happened to the Hirsch books, the biblical and talmudic dictionaries, the Jewish history, the books on Palestinian archeology. Subconsciously, if never openly, I always hoped that the *Treasurehouse* with Sári's dedication would turn up.

When, for the first time, I visited Hungary in 1959 or so, I asked my friend Zsiga to accompany me, first to Devecser, then to Köszeg. I had to apply for a special permit from some military authority in Szombathely to visit Köszeg, which was on the Austrian border. I received permission to spend four or five hours (between trains) in Köszeg. Despite my American passport, the police or military commander treated me politely and with understanding. My friend Zsiga, being a Hungarian citizen, received no permission to accompany me. I spent a morning in Köszeg. All the passengers' documents were checked on the train. I traveled in the "wooden bench" section (third class). I was interested in what the people were discussing. The border patrolman was taken aback, could hardly believe his eyes, when, together with the official permission from Szombathely, I pulled out my American passport. But soon he became friendly and talkative. It was a pleasant incident. I believe the purpose of travel was given as "visiting a grave." I told the driver of the bus that ran between the railway station and the city that I was the son of the last rabbi of Köszeg. After a short while he stopped and politely deposited me in front of the dry goods store which was owned by the only Jew still living in Köszeg. To tell the truth, I have forgotten his name. He was old, had a cardiac condition, and was constantly short of breath. I heard from a New Yorker who hailed from Köszeg that the man died soon after my visit. In his company I went first to the synagogue, then to my parents' apartment. Secretly I still hoped that in some miraculous way I would find some books, and that the *Treasurehouse* would turn up. It did not. While there, suddenly the question came to my mind (not that I dared to ask around) what happened to the jewelry and the valuables of my father, my mother, and all the other Jews of Köszeg. Did they turn in those objects? Did they leave them with neighbors for safekeeping? Who knows? Not that, in the case of my

parents, such items had any significance. My father wore his old-fashioned silver pocket-watch around his neck on a long, thin gold chain. My mother hardly had any jewelry—a wedding band, small earrings. What else could they afford? The ceremonial objects, the wine goblets, the candlesticks, the Seder plates, and the spice boxes were of silver. They were trifles. But how many thousands and thousands of people had gold watches, earrings, silver goblets? What happened to all that? Where are they? During our walk my companion told me that my parents' three-room apartment had been divided. Two families were living in it. We knocked on the door of one, the old kitchen door. There was no answer. Obviously, the tenants were at work. I knocked on the other door, the one that used to lead into the parlor. Before I set out on my journey I had decided what I would say: "My parents used to live here. May I come in? Would you allow me to look around in the attic to see whether any of their books are still there?"

We knocked. I opened the door. I stepped in. A beautiful young woman, who could not have been more than twenty (perhaps she was not yet born when my parents were dragged away) was nursing a similarly beautiful infant. The room contained, crowded together, the bedroom furniture of my parents, as well as the pride of our guest room, the carved maple cupboard, the *kredenc,* my mother had nagged my father to buy. It was an undescribable, unforgettable, heartrending, breathstopping, ghastly moment. I stuttered something, turned around, closed the door behind me, and rushed down the steps and out of the house. I had not even inquired about the books.

I took the afternoon train to Pápa. The hour of dusk found me in the diocese office where I paid my respects to Trócsányi. On the street level of the building was our junior classroom, memorable to me because of that long-ago Saturday morning visit of the superintendent. The larger part of the main building of the College had become a military hospital. On Trócsányi's bookshelves were the yearbooks of the College, among them the one of 1917–1918. It gave me a good feeling to see my name with all the highest grades. I spent the better part of the next morning in the library with Professor Pongrácz. Then I went with him to the headmaster's office, the old office of János Faragó, where the glass bookcase contained the *Book of Merit,* in which I found buried my poems in my own handwriting. (János Kovács, did you win

or did I?) At the end of my visit, I told Professor Pongrácz of the painful episode in Köszeg on the day before. He promised to get me another copy of the *Treasurehouse,* and he kept his promise. A few months later the book arrived in New York by surface mail. I thanked him and sent him a CARE package. Of course, this copy of the book did not have Sári's dedication. In 1965—I think—when Sári was our guest in New York, I showed her the copy and told her its story. The most disillusioning part of all was that Sári remembered neither the gift nor the inscription.

Which brings a story by Anatole France to my mind. Pontius Pilate, an old, retired Roman chief magistrate, busy with taking the waters to find relief of his gout, is visited by a younger official, just back from the Eastern provinces, who gives him a report about unrest in Palestine, and speaks about a troublesome sect which consists of the followers of a certain Jesus of Nazareth. "Wasn't he crucified during your procuratorship?" the younger man asks Pilate. "I don't have any recollection of him," Pilate answers. And there the story ends.

Anatole France was a kind but somewhat superficial sage. He did not try to delve into the subconscious. All he wanted to say was that even the greatest world events are small at the time they happen. The participants, the contemporaries, often don't even know about them. Peter Breughel the Elder, one of the greatest philosopher-painters of all times, let us call him humanist, was agitated by this theme. There is, for instance, his painting of the fall of Icarus into the sea. One of the key figures appearing in it does not even look up from his plow. Another does not turn toward the plunging figure. One must search the picture, which encompasses a broad landscape, until one finds the barely noticeable, lightly sketched, small figure whose fall gave the artist his theme.

But all this, even if true, is only half true. The question, "How did Pilate get into the Creed?" goes much deeper. Yes, how did Pilate obtain immortality? The answer is simple. Pilate, who committed the offense, forgot it; but he who was injured does not forget. Had there been no Jesus, nobody today would know who Pilate was!

Yes, Sári did not remember either. In Pápa she belonged to the upper class; I was one of the *plebs.* When we met again in New York she voiced (how odd!) the common tirade of leftist intellectuals about the

racism, the colonialism of America, while, I, in rebuttal, tried to emphasize the international generosity and idealism of my new country. Yes, Sári did not wish to believe that she could ever inscribe a gift book, a book given to me, with such a cold, impersonal phrase as "To Mister Teacher."

Of course, it is quite possible that the entire thing is only hypersensitivity, or paranoia on my part. It is possible that the dedication "To Mister Teacher" symbolized just the opposite, some kind of respect, but it is too late to argue about it now. The hired tutor in the house of his upper class student is, of necessity, paranoid, especially if he is never invited to the musical gatherings held in that house. He is the injured one who cannot forget, even if nobody really wanted to cause him injury. Yes, Sári was part of the upper class in a natural way; she was born into it, while I was poor. I worked to earn money. I was always conscious of that, and so was Sári's mother.

There were two *korzós,* (promenades) in Pápa, one on Main Street, the other on Lajos Kossuth Street. One we called, with some humor, the two-crown promenade; the other, the one-crown promenade. On the two-crown promenade everybody who counted in Pápa—the Society—strolled up and down from five to six in the afternoon. Nobody could have prohibited us, Zsiga, Iván and me, from taking a stroll there; but there were things one simply did not do. *"Man tut es nicht,"* my mother would have said. On the one-crown promenade strolled the factory girls, and especially those aristocrats of the proletariat—and there is such a thing—who worked in the state tobacco factory. To mingle with them there was almost a natural and accepted thing to do, although, with my split personality, I could not do that with much success either. I was much too refined a youngster for that, too polite, full of inhibitions, well-mannered. There was nothing I could talk with them about. (They did not know who Rilke was.)

I remember Sári as a smallish, thin, anemic little girl, some ten or more years younger than her beautiful, blooming sisters. She had to take iron, arsenic and other blood-building medications. Obeying the doctor's prescription, at four o'clock in the afternoon (the lessons I gave Sári were between three and five, three times a week) her mother brought her a cup of chocolate with a sandwich or a piece of pound-cake. I no longer remember whether she ever offered anything to me, but if she did, I surely could not have accepted it. Sári's family was

non-kosher and I was not allowed to eat anything in a non-Orthodox home.

Although she never discussed it with me, I am almost certain that Sári was in love with Zdenko, the toast of Pápa society—Zdenko, whose family moved from the border provinces (from Slavonia or Croatia) to Pápa during the war. Zdenko was a few years older than we were; by that time he may have been a medical or music student in Vienna. He had not been taken into the army because of a heart valve problem. He was one of the most handsome men I had ever seen: olive skin, heavy black hair, black eyes—a dream of a man from the Southern Seas, and very cultured to boot. He was torn between becoming a concert violinist and a doctor. His family pushed him toward medicine. For me, he was and remained the object of distant adoration. I have no way of judging how talented he was. I know that he excited Pápa and not only the upper class. He had a beautiful mother and a beautiful sister, and I suspect that perhaps it was their German culture that filtered down to me through Sári. All the German writings found a fertile ground in me. I knew nothing about music and they never invited me to their musical gatherings. Such names as Brahms and Bach reached me only as distant echoes through Sári. That was the first time that I had heard of them. Otherwise, Sári never or rarely spoke about Zdenko and the musical afternoons. Whether it was tact or inhibition, I have no way of knowing.

In the end Zdenko became a dentist—a very unhappy dentist. Later he once said to me that dentistry was something one could do on the side. He remained forever wedded to music. He lived either in Belgrade or in Zagreb, I do not remember where. He was one of the pillars, the sponsors, of musical life in his city. I do not know whether or not he remained an active musician himself. He died young. (All this is third-hand information, and I don't even know why I am telling it.)

6

Reminiscences About the Time When I Became a Poet (1917-1919) The *Ode on March* (1918) About Books, Other Things, and Elemér Császár

Once one is elected to that very distinguished and very exclusive society, which even today has fewer than 250 members (I mean, of course, the American Ophthalmological Society), the secretary enters in the minute book a sort of biography with a photograph that ultimately is to serve as the basis for one's necrolog. However, whether my necrolog will be long or short, it will certainly not mention that at one time I was also a poet, a Hungarian poet. Perhaps it would be best to forget the whole thing and let it remain buried. But then it was not for nothing that, starting with, say, Vörösmarty and Ady, and down to Tamás Emöd, countless poems churned and seethed in my mind. It was almost impossible that all that huge quantity of words, rhythms and rhymes should not produce some new, even though imitative, lines. The names of one or another of those poets are today, indeed, covered by the veil of sad oblivion. Whose mind is still agitated by Géza Gyóni's powerful poem of indictment *Send Them to the Battle Fields Only for One Night?* Who remembers the pseudo-naive, sentimental, and yet heartrending words of Tamás Emöd:

> When all of them will finally return,
> The world will be better and happier . . .

Or the great ode of József Kiss, *Tüzek (The Fires)?* Way back, in my student days, I began to plan an anthology, but, of course, never completed it. Its title was to be *Világversek (World Poems),* and it would

have contained the world's most beautiful, and for me, most unforgettable poems. József Kiss's *The Fires* would, of course, have been in it. I can hear it even today, as my friend Pali Hoffner—he was a sophomore when I was a senior—presented that magnificent poem during a poetry recital contest of our "Educational Society."

But how far I got from all that during the past sixty years! It took the courage of an Anna Lesznai, our great friend, to publish a collection of Hungarian poems (love poems) in which the only criterion was that she loved them. One copy of that small book, with a personal dedication from my dear Aunt Mali, is still among the treasures of my library.

The poems in my planned collection would have been either in Hungarian or in German. Even today poems speak to me mainly in these two languages. Even today I converse with myself about my changing moods in poems or in songs. My solitary evening walks in the streets of New York near our apartment house are almost the only times I can spend with and by myself. Then I sing old, old tunes, or recite poetry to myself in Hungarian or German. I am incapable of really enjoying English poems. Even Shakespeare speaks to me in German. The line,

> The rain, it raineth every day

sounds in my memory with the voice of Moissi. (Who knows today who Moissi was?):

> *Und der Regen, der regnet jeglichen Tag . . .*

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* are, to me, *Sonette nach dem Portugiesischen* in Rilke's transposition. On the other hand, the great chorus from Sophocles' *Antigone* speaks to me only in Hungarian and only in the re-creation of Gergely Csiky (I have even forgotten the name of another Hungarian translator):

> There are many wonderful things on the earth,
> The most wonderful among them is Man . . .

The Psalms are, of course, an exception. The 23rd, the 91st, the 137th, I hear them in my father's voice in Hebrew. But the 42nd? I almost like that one better in the old Hungarian translation of Albert Szenci Molnár, or in the King James Version:

As the hart panteth after the water brooks,
So panteth my soul after thee, O God.

The trouble with my poetry was not that I wrote poems nor that I took it seriously, but that there were others who also took it seriously. I don't even remember my first experiments. The College of Pápa, like every good high school, had an Educational Society. The one in Pápa had higher standards than most others due to the fact that its members included not only the high school students, but also the older ones of the theological academy. Traditionally, the student president was a theologian, and the secretary, the actual executive, was a senior. The school encouraged creative work. Every work submitted to the secretary was sent out for evaluation; then at the next session, it was read and the jurors graded it. My first really quite successful poem was titled *Spring 1917.* It was a sentimental piece, a few stanzas about a soldier's grave which the spring will cover with flowers. I still remember a few of its lines. The jury recommended that it be inscribed in the society's *Book of Merits,* and the vote of the audience was favorable. The tone of the poem was unusual only in the sense that it was neither patriotic, nor was it the "Tremble, tremble, you dog Serbia" kind of "hurrah" verse. It was neither a pro-war poem, nor the folksy kind of pseudo-peasant song. The outstanding feature of the *Book of Merits* was that it contained manuscripts of Petöfi and Jókai. And not only was I permitted to copy my poem in my own handwriting into the *Book,* but the *Pápai Hirlap (The Pápa Herald),* the semi-official organ of the Calvinist Church and of its school, published it. *The Pápa Herald* went on to publish several more of my poems. Some, as I mentioned, appeared in the short-lived magazine of Bódog Halmi. I do not remember them. In Budapest there was a little-known Jewish monthly for young readers titled *Remény (Hope).* One or two of my sentimental poems on Jewish subjects were published in it. Early in 1919, two of my poems appeared under the pen name Arthur Ádám in *Mult és Jövö (Past and Future),* the foremost Hungarian Jewish monthly for art and literature. But all this does not belong here; I am just trying to exorcise János Kovács.

Let me mention here one very precious book in my library: the pocketbook *Tavasz (Spring)* which was printed in Pápa "with the font of the Calvinist Academy, 1845." I picked it up from the trash heap in front of Kálmán Barcza's house in Devecser.

Kálmán Barcza was a member of Devecser's small Protestant minority. It is quite likely that he had been a student of the Pápa College. He lived in a large mansion on Deák Square. I must have been still a student at the College, or perhaps already at the University, when he died. I remember that after his death the house and some of its contents were auctioned off and a whole heap of books was thrown on the sidewalk. Apparently no one had any use for them. I was permitted to take as many of them as I wanted. A few of them now occupy a small separate shelf in my library. Among them are such Hungarian classics as Balassi, Miklós Zrinyi, Berzsenyi, Csokonai. The Barcza name is inscribed in two places in *The Battle of the Frogs Against the Mice.* There is also a first edition of the *Death of Buda* by János Arany and an early edition of *The Tragedy of Man* by Madách. However, I could not bring along everything.

Inevitably, the famous Egyptian Geniza of Cairo comes to my mind—the treasure found in a storeroom of the old synagogue where Hebrew manuscripts too old to use were deposited because one was not permitted to throw away or desecrate anything written in the holy tongue. But I must mention one more book. A hundred or so years ago, it seems to have been the custom to write poetry in souvenir books, small, decoratively bound albums with blank pages. One should think that such albums were kept as family relics. But one was among the books I picked up from the trash heap. I still have it. The New York air has eaten into its flowery canvas cover, its binding is falling apart, the ink on a few pages has already faded away, but on the first page one can still read,

> To Kálmán Barcza belongs
> This collection of poems
> Which he wrote in the early winter of 1845.

I leaf through it quite often. It is interesting to see what an educated Hungarian read at that time. He still spelled the name of Petöfi as Petöfy. On the other hand, the name Kálmán Barcza makes me uneasy. Is it possible that Kálmán Barcza whom I still remember vaguely was identical to the one who copied the poems in the book? Is it not more likely that there was a Kálmán Barcza Senior? This book too causes some concern. János Kovács, to whom should I leave it?

Of course I am still on the subject of that small book titled *Tavasz (Spring)*. According to the Foreword written in Pápa on December 10, 1844, an Educational Society was organized in 1841 under the chairmanship of professor Lajos Tarczy for the purpose of "enabling the members to try and exercise their competence, in accordance with their inclination, in writing poetic or scientific works and in reciting poetry." The Foreword goes on to describe accurately and in detail what could be called a democratic procedure with which "the majority of the members can decide about entering the better essays into a so-called Book of Merit." There are in the book four poems by Petöfi and a piece of prose entitled *Chitchat* by Móric Jókay. Jókai, at that time, had not yet discarded the "y" ending of his name denoting nobility. The "i" ending attested to his democratic feelings, and obviously, he was a Calvinist. A member of another branch of his family, Miklós Jókay-Ihász, one of the chief judges of Devecser and likewise an alumnus of the Pápa College, retained the old spelling. But then he also had himself driven in a four-in-hand from his farmhouse to his office. He was not a democrat and his nobility came to him from both sides of his family tree.

After my initial success I could hardly write anything that would not gain at least a commendation from the Society. Thus it was almost natural that when we entered the senior class I became the secretary of the Society and won the first prize in the "Ode on March" competition. (I don't remember whether anyone else competed.)

The National Freedom Day of March 15 was the highlight of the academic year. The night before there was a gala performance in the city theater (called the Jókai Theater). One year the amateur student dramatic group presented the play *Disappointments* by Károly Kisfaludy, author of numerous comedies. Another year it was the turn of the operetta *The Students of Igló*. In the morning there was a public meeting in the square in front of the College, addressed by fiery orators. Then a student who had been chosen by the winner recited the prize-winning ode.

The fall of the Tsar and the collapse of the Russian front took place during our celebrations in March 1917. Great optimism lifted up the hearts. The ode of 1917 was written by a senior, Baron Leó Gudenus, who was the secretary of the Society for that year. It was filled with an optimistic patriotic spirit. Later I learned that Gudenus

became a rightwing journalist. The feast of March 1918 was already marked by apathy and a desire for peace. Mihály Babits, who up to that time was preoccupied mainly with esthetic problems, became the voice of the new yearning for freedom and peace:

> Let there be peace at last,
> Let it end at last

he said in one of his great poems. And in another:

> Your most holy name:
> Peace—
> Let your kingdom come.

In yet another of his poems there are these lines:

> Why is He not if He is,
> And why is He if He is not?

It is possible that the sequence of the words was the other way around; I quote from across a distance of sixty-five years, from his poem *Fortissimo.* Babits was actually accused of blasphemy for these two lines.

My own prize-winning ode was also written as a sign of our yearning for peace. Of course it did not have a really mature voice. Every stanza ended with the same line:

> Let there be peace, peace.

or perhaps

> Let it end, let it end . . .

It would be ludicrous to compare my ode with the great poems of Babits, but its atmosphere and what it wanted to say were surely much closer to the expectations, hopes and doubts of 1918 than those earlier patriotic odes which I still remember. Nineteen eighteen was a tragic year. I always felt that the Hungary of my youth, the Hungary of Franz Josef, collapsed in 1918—not in 1914 or in 1916 (when he actually died). Although the four years from 1914 to 1918 were war years, I spent them in the College, emotionally still in the lap, in the security, of pre-war Hungary. And more than that: I spent the summer following my *matura* exam with my Upland relatives, with the families of my

grandmother Fanny and my uncle. Late in August 1918 I said goodbye to them. About six weeks later, soldiers returning from disintegrating fronts looted and destroyed the houses and the stores of both families. Fortunately, they themselves were able to escape in time. That was the end of great old Hungary; it was the *prevrat,* which I believe means "chaos" in Slovakian; it was the beginning of the new times.

But let me return to my ode. Since the refrain I used consisted of almost the same words as Babits' poem,

> Let it end at last,
> Let there be peace at last,

my ill-wishers and those in the school who were jealous of me (that was really the first time that I noticed there were such people) began to whisper that I plagiarized my ode from Babits. Since these gossips did not seem to cease, I wrote a letter to Babits (I addressed it to the editorial offices of the journal *Nyugat),* in which I asked him to be the judge of whether my ode could really be considered plagiarism or not. In a short, polite and rather cool letter Babits acquitted me of the charge of plagiarism. But I could feel that he did not think too much of my versification. (I am still sorry that his letter was lost.)

This success of the *Ode on March* (or should I call it half-success?) bred one more dissonance. When it became clear that my ode was the winner, I promised my classmate, my friend Iván (he was a poor Jewish boy, a good poetry reciter, quite a good student, and a great admirer of mine) that I would choose him to recite my poem in the theater and at the great public meeting. Several people objected, albeit not openly, to the "complete Judaization" of the Society and of the patriotic festivities. I remember that even the professor-president made a point of expressing disapproval of my selection. I, too, felt that perhaps I had gone too far. I had a bitter taste in the mouth. Nevertheless I kept to my promise, and it was Iván who recited my poem.

As I am writing these lines I have to think more and more about Iván and my ambivalent relationship with him. Iván was also an only child, and he, too, had a childless stepmother. His father clerked in a fashion store—the only adult man in my memory who worked as a clerk. Somehow, in Devecser, even the poorest Jew was his own master. So were Uncle Friedbauer, Mr. Ungar, the grocer in the

peasant section, and even Mauthner, the coachman. Iván's family lived in a rented apartment in the backyard of the Hoffners' townhouse. Both of his parents were small and slim. Iván himself had a sort of birdlike head. His parents impressed me as if they were constantly apologizing for their unsuccessful existence. Iván's voice had a tone of contempt when he talked with his father, and I felt he hated his stepmother. His face became distorted whenever he entered the door of their apartment, and instead of greeting her he barked at the poor little woman. I often reproached him for his rudeness to his stepmother, who happened to have been a Viennese and hardly spoke Hungarian. How lucky I was, I thought on these occasions, that I loved my stepmother and that she loved me.

My friendship with Iván was not affected by the *Ode on March* episode. For our first year at the University of Budapest, we both matriculated in the law school. Later Iván became a bank clerk. The marble hall of the Inner City Savings Bank aroused admiration and respect in me when I first looked up Iván there. He was proud and elegant. Following the first year in Pest, during which I was an absentee student, soon to become a drop-out, we did not see each other for several years. He turned up one day during the thirties, by which time I was practicing in Budapest. He had become a lawyer and had never married. He settled in a village near Pápa. He got involved in bad debts and needed help—a loan. I saw him for the last time a few weeks before my departure for America. It was already winter but he was wearing only a light coat. And—oh, my terrible visual memory!—I do not remember his face, only the rust-colored overcoat and a frayed top buttonhole. The only thing I learned about him over the years was that, at the end, he was deported to forced labor and never returned.

Among the Jewish intellectuals of Pápa there were quite a few who were happy about my victory. Mihályka (Mike) Török was the only one who had recognized my poetry from the beginning for what it was: a childish and futile pastime. I think Sári did not take it seriously either.

In the senior year the number of private women students increased to five. One of them was Elsa Wallenstein, a beautiful, rosy-cheeked Amazon of a girl, with the voice of Mari Jászai, the great tragedienne of the Hungarian National Theater. At the traditional

March ball of the Jewish Women's Society she recited my *Ode on March.* Her success, my success, was complete—it was the zenith of my poetic career. Then came the final exams, and the stage changed from Pápa to Budapest. The Educational Society was neither a forum nor an inspiration anymore. During the summer I wrote a few more poems. Then came the October revolution of 1918, and Sári's eighteenth birthday that same month. My very enthusiastic poem written for this double occasion was published in the *Pápa Herald.* October, 1919, found me already in Pozsony. The revolution was dead; I was a fugitive, not knowing what to do next. The poems written for Sári's nineteenth birthday and, later, for my father's fiftieth, were never completed. I remember only vaguely a few sentences.

After all these digressions it is time to return to my main theme. It was the spring of 1918; all of us born in 1900 had reached the age of military service. Most of our classmates had already been inducted in the early spring after an early special and cursory final examination. For those few who stayed behind, the regular final examinations were held earlier than usual, in the first week of June. I think there were about eighteen of us, including five girls, who took those finals. Discipline was lax, the harbinger of greater troubles. And there was not too much to eat anymore. Being a poor, lean, often hungry, borderline consumptive, I was classified "unfit"; I took my final examinations with a temperature of about 38 degrees centigrade. My pupil, Zoltán, was also found unfit for military service. So was Iván. Zsiga had been taken earlier. In any case, it was necessary not only to cut short the school year, but to simplify the finals. That the subject of the written essay in Hungarian Literature should be Mihály Tompa was entirely obvious. Tompa was a protestant minister. The College, or rather, the theological faculty, celebrated the centennial of his birth during my senior year, and Professor Trócsányi spent more time than usual on the analysis of his poetry, perhaps more time than it deserved. The title of the essay to be submitted as part of our exam was *The Lyric Poetry of Tompa,* and I easily scrambled up a few highfalutin pages. If I remember correctly, I also prepared some kind of essay for my pupil, Zoltán, to learn by heart. Professor Császár also simplified; he was obliged to do so, and he put together a list of eighteen questions for the orals in physics. He limited the material he gave us to study to these

questions; at the finals each of us had to pull one question out of a hat. And since my pupil, Zoltán had a somewhat thick skull, while tutoring him I learned the entire material by heart.

During the oral examination in physics, His Excellency Dr. Hamar, the King's representative, was present. Why such a high dignitary sent to us I no longer remember. At that time I thought that perhaps they did not trust the competence of the young physics professor. Today I believe that only the opposite could have been true. I do not remember that a royal representative was present in Trócsányi's exams. Trócsányi came like Caesar; he only had to be seen and everybody was conquered. I was convinced that he was soon to become at least an *ordinarius* (a full professor) in Budapest—a worthy successor to the Pál Gyulais, the László Négyesys, the Zsolt Beöthys. I even imagined myself as Trócsányi's assistant, and later his colleague at the university. I never thought of becoming a doctor. In any event, Trócsányi "got stuck" in Pápa. This was the way I felt about it. He became a professor of philosophy in the theological faculty and remained in Pápa until the school was closed down. Later he became the archivist for the ecclesiastical district; at least he did not have to face starvation.

When it was my turn, and I was about to draw a question from the hat, Professor Császár intervened: "Thank you, Mr. Linksz," he said (he addressed the seniors as "Mr.") "you do not have to draw a question. Please go to the blackboard and demonstrate the mathematical equation of the harmonic vibration." It was a truly gentlemanly gesture; now I understand it. And even more than that: it was a symbolic handshake, an expression of thanks, a secret greeting, which was understood only by the two of us. On the other hand, as I have just said, there were so many other things on my mind at that time—the university, the choice of a career, poetry, literature, illness, love. Physics was so far from me that I really did not excel in my answer. It was as if I had pushed away the friendly hand extended to me by an inhibited man. "Excuse me, Professor," I finally stammered, "but this was not among the listed questions." I could see the disappointment, the sadness, in his pallid face. But despite this setback, my final certificate was *praeclarus praematurus:* not only in the subjects of the final exams, but throughout all the years, I was straight "A." I could already see myself receiving the "Royal Ring." Why then did I not get

it in the end? That is a long story—the story of my life. At any rate, I passed all the first examinations in medical school with "A"'s, including physiology. And this in spite of the fact that Herr Hofrat Armin Tschermak, Edler von Seysenegg, the professor of physiology at the German University of Prague, was not at all happy with all those Hungarian Jews who flooded the school after the war, and was inclined to flunk many of them. Years later, when I finally nostrificated my Kiel diploma in Pécs—I had to repeat all the clinical examinations—Dr. Elemér Scipiades, the professor of gynecology, passed me with a "satisfactory" grade. (He had no basis for flunking me.) There was no further talk about the *sub auspiciis* ring. At another time I shall describe my encounter with Scipiades, my examination by Pál Heim in pediatrics, and, in general, the history of my nostrification in Pécs, although that story is perhaps somewhat boastful.

Following the *matura,* I saw Professor Császár only once more. In the meantime a great deal of water flowed down the *Marcal,* although it is much smaller than the Danube. First I must speak of several episodes in my life, some of which happened before the final exam, and some after it. In the original title of the chapter on Pápa, the date was 1914-1918. In fact, I was a regular student of the College for only those four years. In a long life that is a short period indeed. But then, the time covered by the chapter kept expanding: the ties between the College and the son of the rabbi were not severed, even though on the surface it would seem otherwise. Only once did I attend the monthly gatherings of the alumni of Pápa, in the Sipos Restaurant of Óbuda, perhaps about forty-five years after my final examination. Zsiga took me there on the occasion of one of my visits home. I took part only in one of the decennial homecomings on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of my graduation in 1968. But all that is quite irrelevant. My emotional ties with Pápa, with the College, and with those I had known there, always remained strong; I could almost say, painfully strong.

As I just mentioned, I saw Professor Császár only once after that final examination. It was twenty years later, or to be more precise, during the first or second week of January 1939. It is difficult for me to explain it here (perhaps I shall have a chance to do so later), but the fact is that for twenty years after 1919 I avoided Pápa, my former class-

mates, and the professors, especially Trócsányi. As my father put it, I "got into bad company" during the revolutionary times of 1919. During the weeks following the collapse of the short-lived Dictatorship of the Proletariat it happened to me for the first time that my father slapped me, a young man of nineteen: both of us started to cry, and thereafter we did not see each other for years. I did not even receive invitations to the 1928 and 1938 class reunions. This was quite a blow for me because it was I who composed the flowery phrases of the beautifully printed document in which we solemnly promised that we would meet every ten years. But I have to give credit to my classmates for never having tried to harm me in any way. How it was decided not to invite me to the tenth and the twentieth anniversaries, I do not know. I know that Trócsányi, too, voted against inviting me, although he remarked to Sári on the occasion of the tenth anniversary, "I know that neither money nor blood soiled his hands." And let me add one more thing: although the year of 1919 in Devecser is full of bloody memories (first the Red and then the White atrocities made the name of Devecser infamous), no harm ever came to my father, to my admirable father. The so-called rabble did not even break our windows (in contrast to the way they treated many other Jews). The Christians respected "Mr. Rabbi" more than did his own co-religionists. On good and bad days alike, my father went to the synagogue every morning and every evening. By that time he prayed mostly alone, or with me when, years later (after my absence between 1919 and 1924), I came home once in a while. The regular morning and evening prayers were discontinued. During the troubled times the faithful of Devecser preferred to stay at home. And then they completely lost the habit of attending the services. From the synagogue my father would go home and open the holy books. He was completely alone; with my mother—alone. (One can be alone, even when there is a spouse in the house.)

As I said, it was in 1968 that I first went to a class reunion, to the fiftieth anniversary. Trócsányi was no longer alive. Neither was Elemér Császár. Uncle Józsi Pongrácz, too, was dead. Only Professor Sándor was present, the teacher who had hired me as a tutor for his nephew Lajos, and thus had launched my teaching career. For the 1948 homecoming I did not even want to go back to Hungary. The loss of my parents was still a new and painful wound in my soul. As for the 1958

reunion, although I received an invitation, I had so many engagements that a trip to Europe was out of the question. It so happened that I was elected and installed in the very same week as president of the New York Society for Clinical Ophthalmology. I was the first physician with a foreign diploma to hold that office.

Another Digression: A Few More Things to Boast About

I am beginning to notice that in this chapter I have done nothing but brag. The basic tone is one of bragging. But as I continue these remembrances it will become evident that there is not much to brag about in my "dark" past. However, free association is the essential thing in every analysis; therefore, let me continue to brag a little more. The fifties were the golden age of my professional life in America. My great (or rather, let us say, bulky) work about the physiology of vision was published in 1952. In 1954 I was elected a member of the American Ophthalmological Society—the one limited to 250 members. In the fall of 1958, at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Ophthalmology, I gave the Edward Jackson Memorial Lecture. In that case, I was the second foreign diploma holder to do so. Two years earlier it was given by von Sallmann, formerly professor of ophthalmology in Vienna, also an immigrant. Although it does not belong here, and it is nothing but bragging, let me add that, in 1953 I was the president of the American-Hungarian Society of Physicians, and in 1968 my friends honored me by asking me to present the Semmelweis Memorial Lecture. A greatly expanded version of that talk (*On Writing, Reading, and Reading Difficulties* was its original title) was later published in book form.

Let me mention here one more of my lectures—*Ophthalmology and Art* was its approximate title. I spoke on this theme often and in many places. As the decades passed, my notes on the subject grew and added up to volumes of material. I have always promised myself that one day I would write a book on this subject. But many other things kept me busy, and so it was not until 1981 that my book *An Ophthalmologist Looks at Art* was finally published.

So finally, in June 1968, I attended our fiftieth class reunion. Except for my friend Zsiga, I had not seen anyone of those present for fifty years. Some fifteen of us were there. I remembered most of them to some extent. IBUSZ (the Hungarian Tourist Office) and the organizing committee—Laci Szily, a retired engineer, and my very agile friend Zsiga—did a good job. There was a banquet, rooms for the night—some with modern bathrooms. We met in the physics lab that, during the last year of World War I, when several of the classrooms were used as a military hospital, served as our homeroom. From there we went in a group to the church for divine services. For me, it was surprising that the beautiful little baroque Jókai Theater (linked in my memory to so many successful amateur student performances) no longer stood in the park in front of the College—nobody could tell me or cared to tell me what happened to it. It was from its stage that my friend Iván recited my *Ode on March* in 1918. The theater's place was taken by a new Calvinist church. I do not know when it was built. I have rarely seen a more painfully repulsive, unimaginative *classical* building.

It was the dialogue with Endre Tóth that lent a certain dramatic interest to the class reunion for me. Endre Tóth was by then the retired director of the Calvinist Theological College of Debrecen (formerly the Theological Faculty of the University). It was a near miss not having encountered him two years earlier, in 1966, when I was the guest of the Eye Clinic of Debrecen University, and during a conducted tour, visited the main building of the campus, the Old Church, and the theological faculty—the only Calvinist theological school still functioning. (As I have already mentioned, the one in Pápa was closed down.) Of course I had no idea that my classmate Endre Tóth had spent most of his life—and right then was still living—there. His name had not even come to my mind for years.

It was remarkable that, except for me, all those present were retired. I, who had a weak constitution, who was sickly in my youth, was the only one still working. Although I was limping, due to repeated bone fractures, I still lived a very active life: saw patients, wrote, lectured, attended congresses, traveled, even performed minor surgery procedures. Following the official luncheon and reception, Endre Tóth sat down next to me and began to talk—without any beating around the bush. What he had to say sounded to me interesting, wise, and frank. For the first time in *his* life—the first and last

time in *our* lives—he was analyzing the understandably ambivalent relationship of the class toward me, the Jewish boy, who was constantly bragging about his brain, his knowledge, and later, about his writing talent. (Evidently, Frigyes Karinthy with his satirist's insight saw the person of my type more clearly than I myself did. I must confess that I had always imagined that I was the prototype of politeness and humility.) Then Endre changed the subject and started to talk about the 1919 events in Pápa, about personalities, and specifically about what happened in Lovászpatona, events that, according to all circumstantial evidence (and also according to him) were and remained an open secret in Pápa and in College circles. He did all this in a cautious manner. He was a serious intellectual, a diplomat, one of the leading personages of the Calvinist church. During our school years we were always ten feet apart. Even in those days he played a leading role in class affairs. (His father was the school's music teacher and director of the church choir.) True, I was the better student, but not one of the upper class. Understandably, it was of interest to him to learn what direction my life had taken.

In other ways as well, the get-together presented an odd tableau. I, the former revolutionary, the socialist, had become the representative of the capitalist world (and, by the way, I was the only one who owned a camera). On the other hand, the conservative Endre Tóth was now a high-ranking official of a Communist state. It was he who greeted those present in the name of the official bodies and the school. It goes without saying that for me that fifteen minutes' talk between us remains unforgettable. We parted as friends. Next summer Endre sent me a picture postcard from Pápa. He must have gone there for the summer vacation. I sent a reply. Then, a few months later, I received an obituary notice sent by his wife.

The other participants at the meeting were less interesting. Still, I was glad to see especially two of them. One was Feri Gáty. He was a clergyman, retired by that time. He gave the sermon in the church. Feri was a semi-professional musician during our high school years, had much fervor, little talent, a fine character, a liberal disposition. Even during his student years he was a puritan, a deeply religious Calvinist. I had been on rather good terms with him. Now he lived in one of the neighboring counties as a retired minister, and lightened the burden of his poverty by giving violin lessons. It appeared that Endre

Tóth was the classmate who got the farthest. The majority of those present surrounded him with great respect. They let me know their disappointment over the fact that Endre had not become a bishop, "although he deserved it." There were a few engineers, one was a pensioned railroad man. Another was a former *Kulak* (as he characterized himself jokingly); his life had not been tragic, although as I gathered, not much of his farm remained in his hands. He still had, and brought along, the original of the document which I authored in 1918. I read it. What foolish ideas about eternal friendship were wrapped in that flowery language. I was ashamed. The most colorful, that is, most interesting, among the rest was Gyula Pacsay—a little bit of a dandy, somewhat affected, who had been my bench-mate during our sophomore year. He was now a retired small-town actor and journalist, the only one who really had seen the world, having traveled in Europe. But his home address was still the same as during our student years. He explained that his one-story home was located in one of the poorer suburbs of Pápa, and was the only asset he could "hold on to." To me, the wandering Jew, this seemed fantastic. I almost envied him: here was a man who had his home at the same address for fifty or sixty years! He proudly showed me his flowers and his vegetable garden in the yard of the house, and the coat-of-arms of his noble family, displayed, not too noticeably, on the wall of the inner room. He offered me some weak and harsh wine made by himself from his few clusters of grapes.

Most of those present had never crossed the borders of their country, but even those who had traveled in the world could no longer do so after World War II. Not so Pacsay and family! A picture postcard they sent me from "another long auto-tour in Italy" had its sociological basis. During a European medical congress, a neurosurgeon from Frankfurt fell in love with Pacsay's physician daughter, and the affluent Westerners made it possible for her father to talk to me about Venice and Florence.

When the church services of the reunion ended, I heard that on previous occasions some participants made a pilgrimage to the grave of Professor Borsos, the only teacher who carried the class for eight full years. But this time everybody was rushing to have lunch and go home. Nobody had a car. I must confess that I would have loved to go with them to the cemetery. Basically, I am a sentimental person, and

even if I do not believe in the immortality of the soul, I have always understood those who visited graves. I would have taken off my hat, I would have bowed my head, in memory of Professor Borsos.

But again, I have wandered off my subject. I must return to my college years.

Ever since the great wave of sexual freedom hit the Western world, it has become impossible to publish a biography or a memoir without describing in detail some events connected with puberty. Since there is not too much I could brag about, nor complain about in this field, it is an odd thing that the theme pushes itself under my pen right here, and, specifically, in connection with the memory of dear, cufflinked, Professor István Borsos. But there is a reason for it. What I am about to say belongs among the very, very important events of my junior year in Pápa. So I'd better begin. There is much to tell.

One of the roomates of my tutee Lajos, the mediocre student son of a well-to-do landowner, was a Jewish boy, the oft-mentioned Zsiga, my classmate and friend who, even today, has a fatherly and protective attachment to me. Zsiga became a lottery salesman in Kispest. He came home in one piece from the hell of Auschwitz, or perhaps Buchenwald. It really does not matter which one it was; the name Auschwitz has become a generic concept, the symbol of the incomprehensible man-made inferno. Lajos and Zsiga were inseparable friends, and Lajos was truly generous in sharing the food parcels he got from home with Zsiga, with a few poor theologians, and after I "converted" from Orthodoxy, with me, the tutor. Lajos was one of the first Gentile boys with whom I formed a really intimate friendship, although Professor Sándor, his uncle, hired me to provide him not with a friend but with an instructor. I shall certainly speak somewhere about Gyula Szelestey, my very first non-Jewish friend from way back in grade school. But that was an entirely different relationship. Zsiga was the one who led me into "corruption." He adopted the atheistic creed earlier than I did. Many years later Zsiga had a big laugh while telling my wife that I put my hat on when I first bit into a ham sandwich. He did not say whether I also said the blessing over it. I never believed that the story was true. In any case, we had a good laugh over it.

I learned through Lajos and Zsiga that a sizable section of the

non-gentry teenagers in the class regularly frequented certain houses in one of the side streets of the Bástya, the poor ghetto quarter. The students dubbed these localities "Hades," and, at the end, very fittingly, Zsiga became my Charon, who led me to Hades. "What is it?" he said. "Are you a coward, buddy? Do you still fear God? Would you rather masturbate?" I descended into Hades only once. I dreaded the possibility that the strict janitor of the school who, it was rumored, would unexpectedly raid these places, would find me there. The whole thing was not worth enduring the terrible fear. By the way, one of the établissements was rated "one crown," the other "two crowns." I do not remember to which of the two my Charon took me. It is only my fear I remember. And the feeling, when I got over it and was back on the street, that from now on, somehow everything would have to be irreversibly different. I was marked: I had lost my virginity.

Another, basically much more innocent, relationship with a girl called Mariska, a few years older than I, complicated my life much more. She was looking after the household of an older widower whom we shall call Mr. Schwarz. This was the particular event in which Professor Borsos was also involved. It, too, occurred during my junior year, perhaps earlier than my excursion into Hades. I am not sure. As I mentioned, the junior year was the most eventful year of my life—from eating ham to visiting a house of ill repute and to the great intellectual liberation, everything happened during that year. It is not necessary to describe how Mariska and I got to know each other. It was a friendship dating from an earlier time, from my naive, inexperienced freshman year. To begin with, old Hungarian folksongs provided the connection. The gist of the matter is that Mr. Schwarz spent a certain evening every week in the café with his card-playing friends, and after a while, Mariska permitted me to visit her during such times. I was still quite innocent, quite awkward and inexperienced, as was, I believe, also Mariska. We barely reached the stage which in America is called petting, and which for me appeared as far, far advanced, when (like in old jokes!) something went wrong.

Mr. Schwarz came home earlier than usual, and apparently, while he was turning the doorkey, he heard somebody jump over the fence. Poor Mariska was summarily dismissed. I have not seen her again, but I shall never forget her. She taught me a great many beautiful old Hungarian folksongs. During my solitary evening walks,

even today, I often hum them as I stroll in the streets of my block. Next morning, Professor Marton, the religion teacher, unexpectedly appeared in the school, and I saw that during the ten-minute break before the Latin class, he was explaining something to Professor Borsos. Even today, I can see Professor Marton. I feel as if I were very small, and I see him from a "worm's-eye view" (if there is a "bird's-eye view," why shouldn't there be a "worm's-eye view," also?): a threatening, larger-than-life figure, coming from Main Street toward our school. When the class began, Professor Borsos immediately pointed to me. That year, in addition to translating from Latin, we also studied a textbook entitled *Roman Antiquities;* from it we could learn about the Roman governmental organization, the military, the economic and social structure. Professor Borsos never asked me questions about these subjects. I was able to translate Tacitus without a dictionary (I am bragging again!), and he did not bother me with the rest. At first, I did not think that whatever he would ask me would cause me any problem. I thought that, even without preparation, I could manage to translate the Latin lesson for the day. But my teacher (oh, what a shrewd fellow he was!) asked me about the Roman antiquities for which I was not prepared. "Professor, I am not prepared," I said defiantly. At that moment I knew that they would expel me. I knew that Professor Marton would write to my father, and then only God knew what would happen. "Then, my boy, you will get an 'F' mark. And thus, a double-underlined "4" (that is, F) was entered into his little red notebook with the ivory-tipped pencil, following the series of "A"'s. It was a big sensation; "Linksz got an F," screamed Zsiga at the end of the class. (Of course, it is not at all certain that Zsiga actually said it. I cannot help it but in my recollections of the eventful years of Pápa, Zsiga remains the "chorus" whose voice expresses the popular sentiment. He is Sancho Panza, who represents rationality vs. my foolishness. Zsiga, my beloved good old buddy, don't blame me for it!) I believe the class liked me even more after this event.

But this incident had a more serious side as well: the possible loss of the stipend that the failing mark made doubtful, and, of course, of the "royal ring." The class almost demanded of me that I should be straight "A," and that, at the end of my university studies, I should receive my doctor's degree with the "royal ring," *sub auspiciis,* for which one had to be a straight "A" student from beginning to end.

Professor Borsos never again mentioned my failing grade; nor did Professor Marton discuss the case. He certainly did not mention it to my father. I would have known about it if he had. In general, I did not have to report in his class either. (It was really not due to any magic that I knew a lot more about religion than my schoolmates.) The following year, when I was a senior, I was elected president of the Society of Jewish Students of Pápa; Professor Marton, the teacher-president, approved it. I got off scot-free!

The question of the stipend never even came up. Could it be that Professor Borsos smoothed over the whole thing, and did not even report my one failing grade at the teachers' meeting? It would have been typical of this sweet, shrewd old man. In any case, my mark in behavior also remained good. Professor Borsos obviously liked me, and also trusted me. A few weeks, perhaps a few months, after the incident he forgot his little red book in the teachers' lounge. That room was always locked; entering it was prohibited. He gave me the key to the teachers' lounge, and sent me to fetch the notebook containing all the secrets, all the grades. I must admit that I peeked into it. There was my "F" grade, twice underlined. "You idiot," said Zsiga, "why didn't you have a look at my grades, also!"

So, I survived even that, although not entirely unscathed.

This entire description lives vividly in my memory in every detail. It is one of those memory image packages that (just like the memory of Balassagyartmat) I was always easily able to open up and lay bare before my inner eyes. For almost sixty years, never until now, have I ever doubted the trustworthiness of my reminiscences. But now, as I describe this episode (I have never told it to anyone until now; why should I have done so?), as I expose in writing this beautifully packed-away memory-tapestry, I see with alarm that my testimony would not stand up under the cross-examination of an investigating magistrate. It is certain that I visited Mariska. It is certain that on hearing the key in the door-lock, I jumped over the fence to escape. It is also certain that the next day Professor Marton appeared in the schoolyard, and, during the ten-minute break, spoke to Professor Borsos. It is also certain that Professor Borsos called on me at the beginning of the period and that I got an "F." But how do I know what Professor Borsos discussed with Professor Marton? Perhaps, coincidentally, they had some quite different official matters to discuss. Why should Professor Marton have

turned specifically to Professor Borsos? It is, of course, possible that he would have complained about me to any other teacher who happened to be in charge of the class. And how did I know that Mr. Schwarz had talked to him? But, again, it is certain that from then on, whenever I saw Mr. Schwarz on the street, I steered clear of him. And, how do I know that Mariska told them who it was who had visited her? It is also quite possible that Mr. Schwarz did not even hear anybody jump over the fence. And, finally, I knew only from second- or third-hand that Mariska was made to leave. Perhaps she was not fired at all? Perhaps the truth is only—and there is something in this—that out of cowardice, and bothered with a bad conscience, I avoided thenceforward that poorly lit side street out there in the suburbs, in the vicinity of the evangelical church where Mr. Schwarz lived. And as for my relationship with Professor Marton, why did it cool? I have always explained it with the theory that Mr. Schwarz reported my transgression to him. But is it not possible that I was projecting my own inhibitions into his behavior? As I think back today, I see that the Mariska affair was not a prerequisite for the cooling of our relationship. It was impossible for Professor Marton not to see that, in the junior-senior years, my behavior had suddenly changed. It was impossible for him not to notice my sudden lack of religious fervor. Whenever possible, I skipped going to the synagogue; whenever possible, I skipped the private Talmud lessons with Mr. Baum. It could not remain unnoticed that I fraternized with Christian boys, and even more, with irreligious Jewish intellectuals. At the same time, I kept away more and more from the Orthodox families, from my father's friends, from the generous providers of the meal-days of my first year in Pápa, and especially from those few religious girls and boys who lived at home with their Orthodox families and went to high school but still remained Orthodox. No matter how I tried to play-act, it was impossible that they should not notice all that.

Finally, to return to my affair with Mariska: it is quite possible that the sequence of the memories presented here does not tally with reality, although it contains a great deal of truth. It is a mixture of memories, fears, and bad conscience. Or perhaps a play of coincidences? Or, do I perhaps harbor a special talent for writing fiction? A talent which transforms unconnected memory fragments into a connected sequence of events? I do believe that this is the ultimate secret

of the novelist, the talent for creative fiction. *Caveat emptor!* Be careful, dear reader!

My story has not yet reached its end. For a while, however, that "royal ring" did fade into uncertainty.

Our school had an interesting system of grading. At the end of every year there was a class examination, but it had to be taken only by those whose standing in any subject placed them halfway between "A" and "B," or between "B" and "C." It depended on the results of the exam which of the two grades would appear in the year-end certificate. I had never had to take an examination in any subject, but this year, in Latin, the many "A"'s and the one "F," twice underlined, placed my average between two grades, so that, to my great embarrassment, I had to take the exam. ("You angel, you sweet devil, István Borsos!") Without the benefit of a dictionary, I had to translate a very difficult text, perhaps an ode of Horace. I managed it. I remained a straight "A" student. Then came the great, the everlasting, Platonic (or Wertherian) one-sided "love affair" with Sári. To visit Hades, or even Mariska, would have meant the desecration of ethereal pure sentiments.

What I really had to be concerned about was to get a satisfactory grade in behavior so that I should not lose my stipend. This became even more of a danger, since I could have been considered a recidivist. A year earlier, during the first half of the sophomore year, it happened to me once: I got a satisfactory in behavior and it resulted in losing my stipend for one semester retroactively, although my grades remained straight "A."

It was during my sophomore year that the formerly unheard-of event occurred: the class went on strike. A young substitute history teacher slapped one of our classmates, an older boy from a peasant or artisan family who was preparing for theological studies. The class rebelled. I do not remember whether we actually walked out of the class or not. Jóska, the son of Professor M. (a lanky, unpopular character), opposed the strike. In general, the upper class boys, too, were against it. Zsiga, generally the voice of the *plebs,* loudly supported it. The principal, János Faragó, came into the classroom to investigate

the unrest. I did not like him, although he never hurt me. He was a very polite, and, I felt, insincere person. Obviously, a principal had to be like that, I said to myself. "What an inefficient principal Uncle Borsos would be!" When the principal called upon the class to explain itself, nobody volunteered. My benchmate, Pacsay, whispered, "You are straight 'A'. Nothing can happen to you." Finally, I, the new Jewish boy, stood up and complained about the teacher. In general I was quiet, polite, and respectful to my superiors. The teacher was transferred and soon disappeared from the campus. On the other hand, instead of "good," I got a "satisfactory" in behavior in my semester certificate. The principal apparently believed that I was the instigator or the chief organizer of the trouble in class. He called me in *ad audiendum verbum*. I should have reported, he said, instead of striking. There was no hearing. I would have been too proud to explain or involve anybody else. But I learned my lesson well. Never again did I play a leading role in any movement in public life, not even in the physicians' tourist organization. During the Sunday excursions I have never been a tour guide; I always joined the flock. When I lost my stipend retroactively, I did not want my parents to know about it. I conspired with my friend, the mailman of Devecser, and suppressed my report card and the letter that informed my parents about the "satisfactory" and the loss of the stipend. I paid the tuition fee, sixty crowns, from my own income. For a few months my diet was even less satisfactory.

But now it is really high time to return to my story and report about my last meeting with Elemér Császár.

You may think, dear reader, that I am trying to play cheap tricks on you. I am reminded of the American TV episode in which Superman jumps out of the tenth story window. You are waiting breathlessly to see how he can escape. But the story is suddenly interrupted and first you have to hear what merchandise will, with absolute certainty, stop underarm odor and make your future, or at least your sex life, an instant success. No, dear reader, I do not resort to tricks. The fact is that I embarked on writing my autobiography unprepared. I thought that one wrote memoirs as a writer writes a novel. That is not the case. Autobiography is a form of self-analysis, and I believe Freud's most heroic deed was that he dared to analyze himself with his technique of associations. To quote once more the remark of Ibsen (in a somewhat

modified form): "To write an autobiography means to pass judgment over oneself." (Actually, Ibsen said: "To write poetry . . .") Yes, if only I could be a Kafka! I would present the whole Elemér Császár story in two or three pages; in objective, dry, impersonal, simple sentences; pared to the bone, without place, without time (the story could just as well have occurred a thousand years ago in Kamchatka, as in a small Hungarian town at the beginning of the century), reduced to its Platonic essence. But then, where is there another writer as great as Kafka? Think of Thomas Mann. His Hans Castorp must be given hundreds of pages, filled with sentences two pages long, to get to the essence. For him, of course, this is permissible. But then, again, where is there another writer as great as Thomas Mann? Kafka is the rock. Mann is the jungle. Who can say that one is more beautiful, more true, than the other? Merciful reader, I want to write about Professor Császár, but my pen wants me to tell something else.

As I will have to tell in a different connection, I spent the greater part of the years 1919 to 1931 abroad: in Pozsony (by that time already Bratislava) as a rabbinical student, then in Prague and in Kiel as a medical student, and in Munich as an ophthalmology assistant and resident. It was only in 1931 that we settled permanently, as I thought, in Budapest. I had my practice. Our life went well; I adored Budapest. I avoided Pápa. In February or March of 1938, one Friday evening we had company. One of the guests came with bad news. When the radio announced that the Austrian government had resigned and that the Nazis had occupied Vienna, Magda called me aside and whispered in my ear that first thing next morning I must go to the American Consulate for a visa. By doing this she saved my life. Of the eleven Jewish boys with whom I started my studies at the College, only Zsiga and I remained alive—Zsiga, who survived the concentration camp, and I in America. The party continued for a while. Still, at eight o'clock Saturday morning I was at the Consulate. Already a great many people waited in line. The two young receptionists happened to be my patients—young Hungarian women born in America. I noticed that they discussed my application form with the Consul. When my turn came, the Consul was nice to me. Since I was born in Czechoslovakia (a country with a "good quota"), he said I would receive my visa within three weeks. Even for my Budapest-born wife, I would only have to get

an affidavit. This, too, proved to be easy. A large part of my father's family lived in America, and one of my American-born first cousins, a well-established Bronx physician, sent the necessary papers within a few weeks. But then I kept putting the matter off for almost three-quarters of a year, even though I had my valid passport and my visa. It was difficult for me to tear myself away from my beloved Budapest. And, of course, from my parents. Finally, in December, we decided that I would leave in January, and my wife would remain for a while longer. Before I left I prepaid my membership fee in the Medical Society for two years, so that, God forbid, I should not lose the continuity. I kept saying, although I knew it was nonsense, that I would be back again long before next December (my father's seventieth birthday). By that time, Hitler would certainly be finished. Feri Klauber, the neurologist, said mockingly goodbye to me at our usual table in the Abbazia Café: "We shall send you an affidavit, should you need one." Poor soul, he did not survive, either. By the end of 1938 bad omens were gathering. After a few pious explanations, even the Prince Primate, the head of the Catholic Church in Hungary, voted for the first Jewish Law. Leo Liebermann de Szentlörinci, professor of ophthalmology, committed suicide because the Jewish Law applied to him, too. And then I, too, began to worry. What will happen if they start investigating? What will happen if old things come to light? Lovászpatona?

A few days before my departure (I believe it was January 14, 1939) I went to say goodbye to Emil Grósz, the retired professor of ophthalmology. He lived in the vicinity of the Museum Boulevard, and the Institute of Physics of the University was there too. As I walked along Museum Boulevard, a slim man with almost no nose on his face, in a gray winter coat, approached. ("He had not changed at all.") He did not recognize me. Perhaps he did not even notice me. I hesitated; but I did not dare to address him. ("Perhaps he does not like Jews; perhaps he will call a policeman; perhaps he will yell 'Communist!' or 'The murderer from Lovászpatona!' What would happen to my visa? And perhaps I will be late for my appointment with Emil Grósz?") Even today, I regret it. I should have talked to him. I should have told him that I had not forgotten Manó Beke and the questions in physics in our final examination... *Wenn du ein Wort der Liebe hast, Verbirg es nicht im Herzen*... (If you have a word of love, don't hide it in your heart.) I did

not obey the injunction. It was my last chance.

We did not mention our plans to my patients. I spent the last Saturday in Köszeg with my parents. Sunday afternoon I returned to Budapest. My father blessed me at the station with the biblical triple blessing, as he did every Friday evening during my childhood, placing both his hands on my bent head. My mother cried. The *Treasury of Hungarian Poetry* remained on the bookshelf.

Sometimes it almost seems that there is a God. That Sunday morning, suddenly, unexpectedly, Józsi Grossmann appeared in Köszeg. He was an enthusiastic follower of my father from the Devecser years. He loved my father almost like a son. He had a simple, cheerful goodness in his two-meter frame. (Later my parents were to bring him together with my niece, Kornél, and so, in the end, he became a family member. They survived the Holocaust. He died only a few years ago, sated with years and happy, in Jerusalem.) He accompanied us to the station. As the train began moving, I looked out of the window and I saw the three of them standing there. In the middle stood the giant, the Archangel Gabriel, extending his protective wings over the two little old ones. It is thus that they remained in my memory.

On Monday and Tuesday I continued to see patients until seven o'clock in the evening. I made arrangements for a colleague to take over their treatment. Wednesday morning our neighbor and close friend, Tibor Bató, a patriot and officer decorated for valor (killed in 1944) accompanied me to the Southern Railroad Station. Next afternoon, after changing trains in Trieste and Milan and using my transit visa in Switzerland (I had no desire to travel through Germany), I arrived in Strassburg. My friend Professor Weill was waiting for me. Then I set out for America. And I did not return for my father's seventieth birthday.

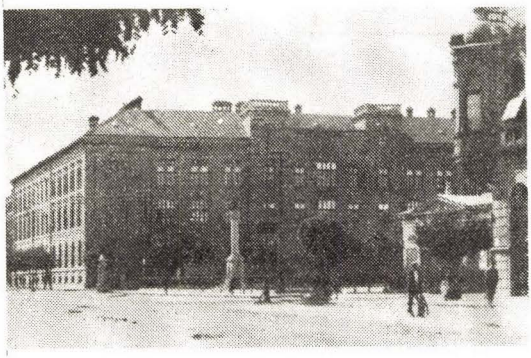
When I first returned to Hungary (in 1959, or perhaps in 1960; the years are running together and I was so often in Europe), Professor Császár was no longer alive. I checked up on it. I would love to know how he lived. Did he have a family? Was he happy? All I know is that he did become a full professor. I never knew what kind of family he came from. From a poor one? When, where, and how he died—he couldn't have been too old—I do not know either. I shall never know.



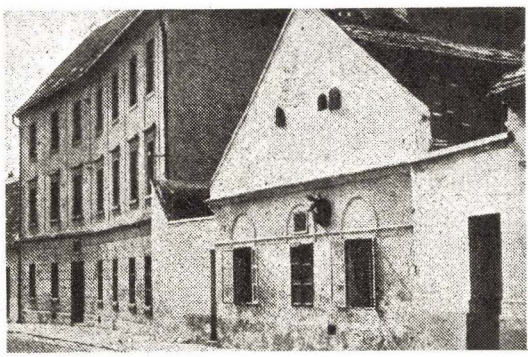
Portrait of the author as a young man, 1918



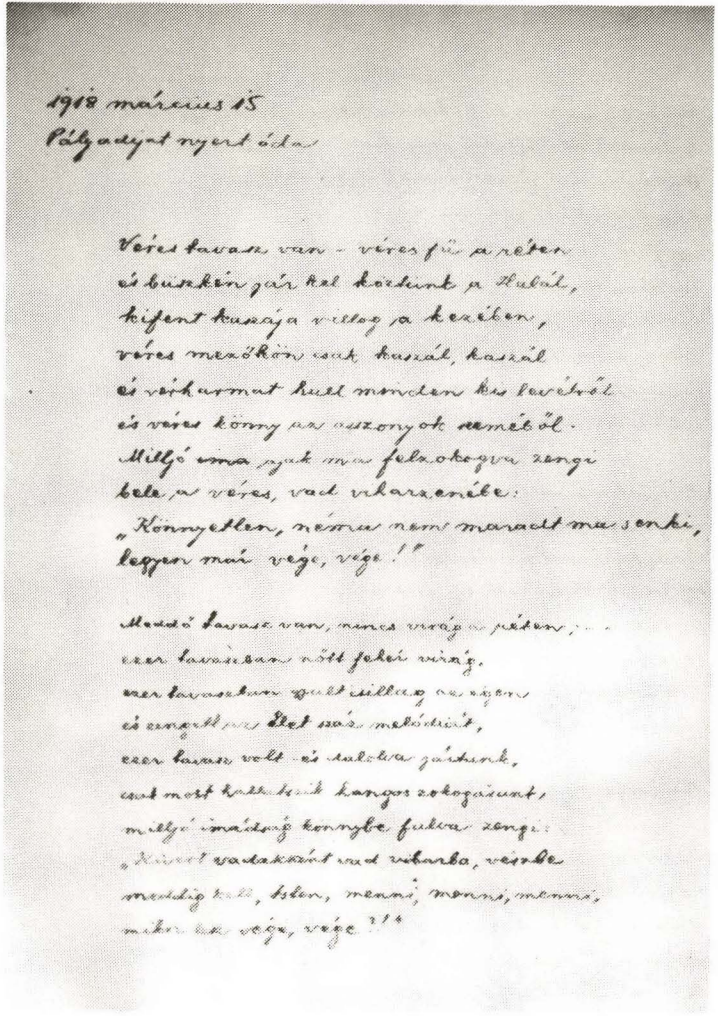
View of Pápa, 1936



Calvinist College, Pápa, 1936 (has not changed since 1914)



Petöfi, the great Hungarian 19th century poet lived in this small house while he attended the Calvinist College of Pápa.



1918 március 15
Pályadíjat nyert óda

Véres tavasz van – véres fű a réten
és büszkén gázkel borzunk a hubál,
kifent kasza a villog a kezében,
véres mezőkön csak kaszál, kaszál
és vérkarmot kell minden kis levéről
és véres könny az asszonyok szeméből.
Milyó ima nyak most fel-alkotva zengi
bele az véres, vad vihar-zenébe:
„Könnyetlen, nézzük nem maradt más sorsunk,
legyen már vége, vége!"

Mondó tavasz van, nincs virág a réten,
ezer tavaszban nőtt fekete virág,
ezer tavaszban dúlt csillag az égen
és ezerszer az Élet más melódiát,
ezer tavasz volt – és dalolva zúgtunk,
csak most kell tenk hangos zokogásunk,
milyó imádság könnybe fulva zengi:
„Kövek vadakként vad viharba, vérbe
mondjátok meg, Isten, meddig, meddig, meddig,
mikor lesz vége, vége?"

Küldj egy tavaszt, mint akkor Márciusban,
új élet felé hogy nézzen a szemünk
s örök jogunkat élni boldogabban,
hogy megszülessen dolgos két kezünk
s rózsák nőjenek a sírokon
s mi hozzá lejövünk egyre ritkábban
s élyen szívünkben pirul majd ősünknek
örökszépségű mindenben emlékképe:
Szabadság, Napfény, Munka, Képesség, Élet
meg Béke ... Béke ... Béke! ---

Pápa 1918 június 14

Sinkovits
Vil. o. t.

First and last strophes of the original manuscript of the *Ode On March* by Arthur Linksz, 1918 (Book of Merits, Calvinist College, Pápa)



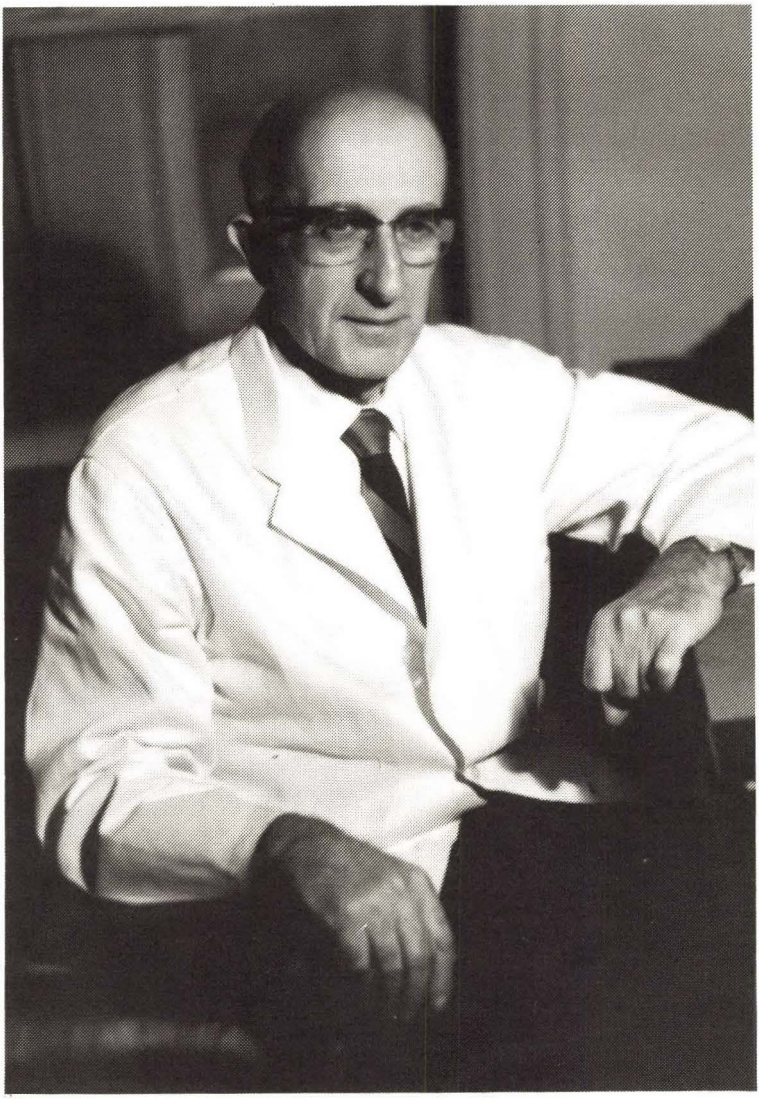
My father (in his early thirties)



My father, 1939



Gendarme leading *all* Köszeg Jews to a train which will take them to concentration camps. My father is somewhere in the middle of the group. (1944)



Dr. Arthur Linksz in his New York office in the 1950s.

Appendix: About a Book, Its Author, and a Letter by Freud

That memorable Saturday when I applied for my quota number at the American Consulate was the day when I was handed down the sentence that I would live. A week later I heard the Czechoslovak quota was filled. Had I not applied on that particular Saturday morning, the chances that I would be here today to indulge in reminiscing would have been slim indeed. We had tickets that Saturday evening to a concert at the City Theater, and I must confess I do not remember who played what and who conducted. That I did not entirely forget that evening had a different reason. It was customary, and even pre-arranged, that after the concert our neighbor and friend Tibor would wait for us with our car. (We owned jointly with him a small Steyr car.) On that particular evening Tibor was late. Everybody had already left, the doors were locked, the taxis, too, had left, and we were shivering in the cold. In the end we found a taxi somewhere on Rákóczi Avenue. Or perhaps Tibor finally arrived; I do not remember clearly. It does not really matter. On the other hand, I do remember well the reason for his tardiness. That morning he had received a telegram saying that Rachel, his mother's sister, was to arrive on the rapid train from Vienna. Tibor went to the station to meet her. The train was late, and he watched as hundreds of desperate people streamed out of the cars. The panicky flight of Jews from Vienna began within hours after the Nazis occupied Austria.

Rachel (she pronounced her name in the French way: Rachelle) must have been about sixty years old (at that time people of that age seemed to me ancient). She was divorced, lived on alimony and on income from some family fortune salvaged long ago, without cares, and, what is more important, without obligations. But she was always complaining, always found some reason for a gripe. She had some connection with the Freudian circles. Even in his eighties, Freud was still surrounded by a coterie of adoring young women,

analysts and analysands, professionals and not-quite-professionals. I no longer remember to what extent Rachel was a part of the group—whether she had just "gone through" analysis, or was "working." Ostensibly, she was a writer. She was educated in the German and Jewish cultures, and although she came to Budapest quite often, she spoke Hungarian poorly and with an Austrian accent. She often mentioned, somewhat mockingly, that she could not produce a report card from the first grade. Her well-to-do parents, provincial landowners, had her educated at home. Our neighbor Tibor and her sister, Tibor's mother, were the only people close to her. Tibor, in fact, was like a son to her. Soon I, too, became a friend—a young well-read doctor-neighbor with whom it was possible to exchange ideas *über die letzten Dinge* (about metaphysics) and who was not unversed in Jewish folklore and history either. Although Rachel professed to be a writer, as far as I can remember, not a line of hers had ever appeared in print. She spent some thirty years writing a book: it was finally finished by the end of 1937. It was her only existing work: a poetic novel, a real masterpiece, I judged, of style and expression, in which every sentence, every phrase, every word shone like a crystal, polished a thousand times throughout the long years. But even so, with all the beauty of style, with all the plasticity of the descriptions, and with the historical truth of the details, the book was a philosophical book rather than a novel. It reminded one of Martin Buber, who was both a philosopher and an artist of writing—an inimitable master of the German language. Rachel's novel had no story-line, and the characters were symbols rather than individuals, although some of them, including the great, and to this day enigmatic, Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, were historical figures. The essence of the book consisted of discussions and conversations.

It is interesting that I do not remember that we ever exchanged a word about Plato's *Symposium* or about the great religio-philosophical work of the medieval Jewish poet-philosopher, Jehuda Halevi, *The Kuzari,* although such associations would have been not only flattering, but also obvious. Also, in *The Kuzari,* the action is played out in a royal court, in the court of a legendary medieval Khazar king (hence the name of the book); its main point is a discussion among the representatives of the three monotheistic religions, one Jewish, one Christian, and one Muslim. That the

representative of Judaism is the winner is, of course, to be expected in the work of a Jewish philosopher. By the way, the actual historical background of the story is that a pagan Khazar ruler, together with his court, adopted the Jewish faith in the eighth century.

Ultimately, Rachel's book was published, but a little too late. The copyright notation of the Viennese *Saturn Verlag* dates from 1938. It must have been printed at the very beginning of the year, since in late February or early March the Nazis had already overrun Vienna. I doubt that the book ever really reached the bookstores. Which bookseller would have had the courage to put it in the window, and who would have had the nerve to buy and the time to read such a book? The Nazis loved to burn books. I wouldn't be surprised if Rachel's book was also thrown on the bonfire.

I think Rachel never returned to Vienna. How many copies of her book she was able to save when, panic-stricken, she packed her valises, I have no way of knowing. One copy, however, is in my library. For awhile Rachel lingered in Budapest and then tried London, perhaps because, in the meantime, Freud and his family also got to the British capital. In the end, she settled in Zurich. The good Swiss people did not mind extending hospitality to those whom they did not have to support. Thus it came to pass that, in spite of the war, through Tibor, our friend from Pest, and through Switzerland, we were able to maintain some kind of connection with my parents. I could still notify them in July, 1943, about the birth of our younger son. The response with the best wishes from my father was his last message to reach me.

The copy of Rachel's book, preserved in my library, is still in its dust cover. The blurb says that the story is set in the court of the brilliant Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, the atheistic crusader, the sovereign of the Holy Roman Empire, who played host to the representatives and the ideas of East and West. The last sentence, almost completely untranslatable, speaks of motley happenings and mystical realities in whose mirror, eventually, the outlines of "the transcendental *(die letzten Dinge)* become visible." Ideas like these can only be expressed in German if they are to make any sense. "The Hungarian," as Dezsö Szabó, one of the great modern Hungarian authors, put it, "speaks in pithy sentences."

In the year 1957, the year following the Hungarian events of

1956, my family and I went to Vienna for the first time so we could meet Imre and Kati (Magda's brother and sister-in-law) and present to them our two American-born sons. From there I alone flew on to Zurich for a day to visit our old friend Rachel. By that time she was close to eighty, but she had hardly changed. And, as if no time at all, let alone twenty years, had passed since our last meeting, her whole being still revolved almost monomaniacally around two points—that she ought to finish her second book (according to a lady companion living with her, she had not written a single word for years), and that Freud liked her book and praised it, and even said so in a letter to her. Rachel, it appeared, was still living a relatively carefree life in a beautiful old hotel named Sonnenberg or Sonnenhof on the outskirts of Zurich, and was still complaining of how tight-fisted her former husband, who had been living for a very long time in New York, was with the alimony. This same husband had in his possession "the treasure," the letter from Freud about the book. Right then and there, Rachel solemnly bequeathed the letter to me. I had to promise that I would settle the matter in New York. Of course, I found it embarrassing that, over a mere letter, even if it was a holograph of Freud, I should get into a legal argument with the person who, after all, had been for decades the trustee of Rachel's fortune and the chief manager of her life. Nevertheless, I made one phone call to Mr. Berdach and his wife (they lived in a modest hotel patronized by refugee German Jews; earlier we had met a few times), reported to him about my Zurich visit, but did not mention the Freud letter. In any case, for the benefit of future bibliographers searching for letters by Freud, let it be noted in this obscure place that there exists somewhere a letter from the master, addressed to Rachel Bardach or Berdach or perhaps R.B. Bardi, which contains an obviously friendly critique of the addressee's book.

Perhaps it is proper that here, finally, I should say a few words about the book itself. *Der Kaiser, die Weisen, und der Tod (The Emperor, the Wise Men, and Death)* is the book's title. On the title page the name, R.B. Bardi, appears as that of the author. It has no foreword, no notes, and no statement on the jacket or in the book itself discloses (as is customary) the identity of the writer. Rachel insisted that the name should not give away the fact that the writer was a woman. This she explained to me *expressis verbis.* The initials

R.B. obviously stand for Rachel Bardach or Berdach. Her parents called themselves Bardach. The other branches of the family, including her former husband, who was a distant relative, used the Berdach form. The name Bardi is a *nom-de-plume*—a good, simple name; it could be Hungarian or Italian, easily pronounceable.

I used to fantasize (oh, you wicked János Kovács!) that perhaps there was only one extant copy of this book, the one in my possession, and that the memory of Rachel survived only in a few brains, mine among them. But then, years later, I found that Rachel's memory was immortalized in a book incomparably more important and more likely to survive than mine: in the biography of Freud by Ernest Jones. It is a wonderful biography; the name of anyone who ever had any kind of connection with Freud can be found in it, including Rachel's name. In the volume discussing the last years of Freud's life, in the chapter dealing with the months he spent in London, we read that in one of the letters Freud addressed to Marie Bonaparte, "he was strongly recommending some books... among them, *Der Kaiser, die Weisen, und der Tod* of 1937 by Rachel Bardach Bardi."

It is not clear whether Jones himself ever read or even saw Rachel's book; and, of course, neither is it clear whether the Princess Bonaparte followed Freud's advice. (It would be interesting to look into that.) Jones adds that Rachel Bardach Bardi was in London as a refugee, and that she visited Freud and told him that she was writing another book. The book in question dealt with life in the court of Frederick II, and Freud must have read parts of the manuscript since, according to Jones, he called it a "remarkably beautiful book steeped in analytical wisdom and, of course, with a true Jewish background."

The literature about Freud is endless. Perhaps somebody has already written the history of Freud's library. Perhaps in the library of Anna Freud, or in that of the Princess Bonaparte, or of Barbara Lantos, there is a copy of Rachel's book. And was there ever anyone who wrote a review of the book? I repeat Freud's words: "A remarkably beautiful book steeped in analytical wisdom." Rachel deserves more than one sentence in one of the biographies of Freud or in this appendix.

Postscripts by an enthusiastic bibliographer:

1. In the quote from Jones the date is 1937. On the book itself, 1938 appears as the year of publication. I know, of course, that it is the habit of publishers, in the case of books which come out in the last few months of a year, to print the following year as the date of publication. Thus the book remains "new" longer. It is therefore possible that Rachel's book was actually printed in 1937. It is also possible that Freud read it in manuscript form, or perhaps read the galley proofs, in 1937. That would mean that the relationship between Freud and his adoring disciple was warmer, more intimate and personal, than one can deduce from the dry sentences of the Jones biography. Perhaps the letter itself was dated in 1937, and was an encouragement rather than a purely congratulatory note.

2. If somebody would like to know what happened to the letter, one would have to track down Mr. Berdach (not Bardach). As I mentioned, about fifteen years ago Mr. Berdach lived in a hotel here in New York, and his name was listed in the phone book. But thereafter he has not come to my mind for years, and in the new phone book the name Berdach no longer appears.

One More Appendix: Again About Books and Ignotus

There is a small corner in my library with a few books in it; they were gifts and souvenirs from Ignotus, when, during the middle forties, he arranged to move back to Hungary. (There is another such separate corner in which books, pictures, and articles about Semmelweis are gathered. But about them I have nothing important to add here.)

Do I have to explain who Ignotus was? His name appeared as that of the editor-in-chief of *Nyugat (West)* for years. I will be brief. It is not his writings I want to talk about. Late in 1943, when finally and permanently we moved to New York, I attended some weekly lectures given by Ignotus with old friends who constituted the circle of Anna Lesznai. The lectures took place Saturday evenings in the New School, the university of refugee European intellectuals. This is how we became friends. Ignotus was old and sick. He appreciated the attention

of a much younger fellow countryman—especially since this new admirer of his was a physician. Ignotus had Parkinson's disease, and the miracle drugs (which I myself have now taken for years) were unknown at that time. His hands shook badly. He lived alone in the romantic Greenwich Village (the *Quartier Latin* of New York) on a high story of an old house with no elevator. He cooked for himself on an old kerosene stove, and, on two or three occasions, set the apartment afire. He was making serious preparations to return home. He displayed proudly and happily his correspondence with Minister Gyula Ortutai, and was only waiting for some travel documents. In the meantime, the otherwise nice neighbors got fed up with the fires he caused, and finally called the police. Ignotus had difficulty in making himself understood by the officers who arrested him and took him to Ward Island, to one of the old state mental institutions that has been demolished since. Fortunately, I went to visit him that evening and, not finding him at home, I soon discovered his whereabouts. Next day I went to see him. I looked for the doctor on call. At that time, only a desperate refugee doctor or an American M.D. who was good for nothing else accepted a position in a mental institution.

The doctor on call was one of the latter kind. He told me in a loud, amused voice that my fellow countryman had an unusual megalomania. "The old fool" insisted that in Europe he was an important, even famous writer, editor, journalist, and what is more—ha, ha, ha—a personal friend of Freud and one of the first of those who, as a layman, dared to stand up for the validity of Freud's ideas. When I told him that every word of this story was true, the doctor became very quiet. I must have made a good impression on him because, at the end, he accepted my signature as my medical guarantee that the old gentleman's friends would look after his safety as long as he was still here. I do not remember now whether they let him go immediately. I don't even know what we did with the kerosene oven. A few days later Ignotus left. His friend, the writer and journalist, Miklós Halász, accompanied him to Hungary. Halász certainly knows more about the last months (hardly years) of Ignotus. I will not waste words. Ignotus obviously came to like me and valued my services, and, as a souvenir, he gave me some eight or ten books and pamphlets. I guard them with reverence. One of them has a handwritten dedication. One cannot know to whom. Another was not authored by Ignotus, but is a reprint sent to him by

Aladár Komlós, inscribed "To Ignotus, as a sign of his homage and love, Bpest, Febr. 1941, Aladár Komlós."

By the way, Ignotus is mentioned three times in Jones's Freud biography. All three remarks describe events that happened back in 1910. Ignotus recognized Freud's importance earlier than the medical scientists. In one of the notes, Jones calls Ignotus "the friend of Freud," and reports about an article Freud wrote for the *Nyugat* in 1917. In any case, if somebody ever wants to write the life story of Ignotus, there are here some, perhaps unknown, data: the day (days?) of Ignotus in the mental institution of Ward Island, the suspicion of pyromania, and Parkinson's disease.

Note to Chapter 7

This has become the longest chapter in the book. Even so, had I written down all the accumulated memories and associations, it would have become twice as long. Moreover, it is a chapter with no subject. The bout with Orthodox Jewry opened the floodgate of memories. The bout was friendly. It was but a game. I did not really join the fray. My old resentments are like last year's snow. In the chronological sequence of the story this chapter does not sit well. It has no specific place in the autobiography. Nothing happens in it. I could have started it anywhere or ended it anywhere. It could even be left out in its entirety. But, kind reader, I don't have the heart to omit it.

I must make one specific comment. I prefer to use the term *Pharisee* rather than *Orthodox.* Orthodox Jew, in its modern sense denotes a person belonging to one particular trend in present-day Judaism. The term is of Greek origin, whereas the word *Pharisee* is derived through the Greek, Latin and old French, from a Hebrew word. *Parush,* or in the plural, *Perushim* was the name of one of the old Jewish sects of Judea which observed strictly the Law of Moses, including the Oral Law. It means *separated.* Opposing the Perushim-Pharisees were the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection of the dead, rejected the Oral Law and sympathized with Hellenism. In no way does the word *Pharisee* mean hypocrite. When I say that Hillel was "the greatest of the Pharisees," it is respect and admiration for the great sage which makes me say so. It is high time that the term be restored to its original meaning.

7

Reflections About the Jewish Telegraph and More Philosophizing

I still carry with me a heartwarming memory from the summer months of my childhood spent in Galgóc. I was permitted to accompany my grandfather, old Rabbi Rosenfeld, on his habitual weekday evening walks that always took him toward Szentpéter, a neighboring village (perhaps just a suburb) in the direction of the "Jewish telegraph," as far as the railroad bridge which spanned the River Vág. What was this "Jewish telegraph?" My grandfather explained to me: it was the name the peasants gave the wire stretched on the tops of tall poles all around Galgóc. It indeed looked like some forgotten telegraph wire which, crossing the roads, led from nowhere to nowhere. The name "Jewish telegraph" remained forever in my memory. What is more, in my later years it grew into something of a symbol. There is no encyclopedia in which one can find any reference to a "Jewish telegraph." And it seems that in the whole world I am the only one who knows about it. I just cannot let it happen that this word, this idea, should get lost with me.

My grandfather explained that such a contraption, called *eruv* in Hebrew, closes in the community and makes it as if it were one courtyard—of course only from a Jewish ritual point of view. It marked the extent of Galgóc (as was done by the walls around the old cities), and inside it one was allowed to carry things on the Sabbath, although on that day of rest it is strictly forbidden to carry anything outside one's private domain. It was only years later that I comprehended the cunning—or human wisdom, depending on your viewpoint—

of the Orthodox (meaning Pharisee) rules of conduct. In my young atheistic period I scorned Orthodoxy for this cunning (I called it cheating God). Today, of course, I can only smile about my anger. To make the strict laws of God more humane, more performable, and more bearable, one needed a little cunning for that. The greatest of the Pharisees, Hillel, found a way to relax the rigor of the law, to lighten the yoke. If the law says that one is not permitted to carry anything on the street on Saturday, but does *not* say that one cannot do that in one's own yard, then one can make a yard out of the street. Then you can carry things there, and the pious shrewdness obviously does not bother the Lord God Himself either. This is what was accomplished by the "Jewish telegraph" which symbolically united the whole town into one single oversized courtyard.

After one crossed under the "telegraph" the street was already rural. No Jews lived there, only poor farmers. On one of our summer strolls we saw the wheat being threshed. I do not know why that evening should have stuck so vividly in my memory. Even today I can see the peasants—half naked, barefooted, dirty, sweaty, beautiful, strong, cheerful, happy. They are rhythmically swinging the flails, consisting of pieces of wood attached to the ends of poles—I can still hear the rhythm. They are threshing the grain right in the middle of the street. There is no traffic. Stout peasant women with scarves are sitting in a circle around the working men. They are talking; they are laughing. An alien world. How good they have it!

I remember that the evening train from Lipótvár usually passed just as we arrived at the river. It crossed the iron bridge with a deafening noise. Even today I could find my way straight there, starting out from the rabbi's house. If we arrived earlier, my grandfather let me wait for the train. He also allowed me to go down to the river's edge and stand under the iron trestles at the foot of the bridge. I looked up as the train sped above me with earsplitting rumble, spewing sparks. What an experience it was!

I have a host of other memories from those summers in Galgóc. Most of them I cannot assign to any particular year. They are composite memory images. I can date only one with precision. No matter how I strain my memory, I do not know the reason for it, but one fall (and I know exactly that it was the fall of 1907, because I had to enroll in the third grade), my father did not come to fetch me.

Galgóc had a large Jewish congregation. Each class of the Jewish grade school, unlike the Devecser Jewish school, had a separate classroom with its own teacher. The third grade was taught by Mr. Abraham Galgóczi. I also remember a teacher called Almási, and the beautifully white-bearded Mr. Vajda, the principal, my grandfather's Sabbath promenade partner. I do not know whether, by that time, I noticed that the teachers had Hungarian names. Those were the days when the suppression of ethnic minorities was at its height and the authorities expected, especially in areas where the ethnics were numerous, that they should change their foreign names to Hungarian ones. For all that, of course, Mr. Galgóczi remained Abraham. At that time I mused a great deal about names. The first name of Uncle Szepesi, the Jewish teacher of Devecser, was Jakab. They appeared so dissimilar—Szepesi and Jakab, Galgóczi and Abraham. Somehow the two kinds of names did not add up.

It is inevitable that I should insert here a humorous childhood episode I remember. I noted that the Jews generally had German names, which I accepted as a historical fact. I had known since my early childhood that Emperor Joseph II (the king with the "hat") had decreed that the Jews must have family names, and that those names must be German. But the strange thing for me was that, for instance, my father's older parishioners in Devecser, usually with German family names, had first names like Adolf, Jakab, Vilmos, Samu, Hermann, Miksa—that is, Hungarian first names. The German family names primarily characterized "our kind," the Jews of Western Hungary, most of whom were of Moravian descent. No Jew in Devecser or in Ó-Beszterce was called Moskowich, Horowitz, Reuben, Shapiro. I do not remember such names in connection with Galgóc either, but there I did not know every Jew. People with such names were Eastern Jews, Polish Jews, toward whom there was a not-too-laudable intolerance on the part of the Jews of Western extraction. I have often heard them being called *Galicianers*—infiltrated elements. It was within my memory span that the Jews of Devecser Magyarized their names from Stern to Biró, from Schönberg to Széphegyi, from Fleischhacker to Fábián. They were Trans-Danubians, Neologs, and Hungarians. Assimilated ones. Even the traditional connection with the German language and culture was dying. Towards the end of World War I a socio-political study, *A Zsidókérdés Magyarországon (The Jewish Ques-*

tion in Hungary) was published. It may have comprised the minutes of a symposium edited by a university professor from Kolozsvár called Ágoston, possibly Péter Ágoston. Some of the contributors belonged to a group whose position was that in Hungary such a thing as a Jewish question simply did not exist. For the Devecser Jews there was no Jewish question, or if there ever was one, "it had already been solved." In Galgóc, in an Orthodox community, in a basically non-Hungarian environment, the Magyarization of names was unusual or even unknown; hence the Hungarian-sounding names of the teachers were even more noticeable. They were obviously the result of some kind of official pressure, of a planned policy toward the national minorities. And it could not have been too recent, either.

Uncle Silber, the old *shammes* (beadle) of Devecser, whose stories I could listen to for hours, even during my student years, could recall names and people going back several decades. According to him, the Budapest theatrical dynasty of the Faludis descended from a Jewish teacher from Devecser who changed his name. He knew also of a literary family called Devecseri, of which the recently deceased writer and poet, Gábor Devecseri, could have been a third-generation descendant. In this connection it comes to my mind that my mother never ceased to enjoy telling that once I asked at what age did people change their juvenile names to adult names? Apparently I believed that there was some sort of rule, and that Laci became Hermann when he came of age. And, since I am at this point, I must mention that I never learned how I got that odd juvenile name, Arthur. In connection with my name, my mother often quoted the expression *König Arthur von der Tafelrunde* (King Arthur of the Round Table), but for a long time I did not understand what she was referring to. Only later, as an adult in America, did I read for the first time the Arthurian legends. But from that time on I understood even less how I got the name Arthur. Neither among my direct ancestors nor among my lateral relatives was there anyone called Arthur. Nor was there any Arthur in Devecser. Apparently it was my real mother who chose this strange-sounding name—but why? It is impossible that my father would have chosen such a non-Jewish name.

As for my Hebrew name, it is almost certain that I inherited it in accordance with the previously mentioned custom, from one of my recently deceased great-grandfathers who died shortly before my

birth; most probably from my Rosenfeld great-grandfather. As I have said, this name, *Tzevi,* means "hart" in Hebrew. It is a biblical word. I was very proud when I discovered it in the last verse of the Song of Songs:

> Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a hart or to
> a young gazelle upon the mountains of spices.

I have also mentioned that in the Germanized or Yiddish form, Jews often used the German equivalent of the Hebrew name, Hirsch or Hersch, even as an an official or family name. Polish or Russian Jews named Herskovitch were obviously the sons of such Hersches or of men nicknamed Hersko. Therefore, it is possible that the great-grandfather in question (the father of my maternal grandfather Rosenfeld) had Hirsch as his official name. Once, I remember, I spoke with my father about my name. The oral tradition in the family had it that one of my four great-grandfathers had the Hebrew name *Tzevi,* and he apparently died about the time I was born. The official name of great-grandfather Links was Wolf (Wilhelm), and this name, as I have said, was inherited by one of my uncles. The famous Landesberg great-grandfather was not called *Tzevi.* The lexicon of the rabbis mentions him as Israel Isaac Aaron. Aaron is, of course, a little bit suspicious. (Aaron? Arthur?) Of course, it is possible that *Tzevi* was the Rosenfeld great-grandfather, or my fourth great-grandfather, the father of Julia Spitzer, my father's mother. My father certainly knew their names. I must confess I have forgotten them. And today there is nobody whom I could ask. But my memory leans toward the Rosenfeld great-grandfather, if for no other reason than because the name of one of the books authored by him was titled *Atereth Tzevi.* In the word-play favored by traditional Hebrew authors this title would mean not only "crown of beauty," the literal meaning of the two words, but also "the crown of *Tzevi,*" *Tzevi* being the name of the author. I have retained a vague memory of my grandfather showing me this book and telling me that, in its Foreword, the selection of the title was explained. Then, as my father explained it further, the name Hirsch or Hersch is similar in sound to Hermann, and, therefore, the *Tzevis* were often called Hermann or Henrik in the official registry, just as Wolf was called Wilhelm.

As I am writing, a little more of my discussion with my father

comes back to me, and I seem to remember being told by him that his original choice for my name was Hermann. But the name Hermann (*Heer-mann* means army-man) would have been too Germanic for the Jews of the turn of the century who wanted to become Hungarian. On the other hand, the name of the legendary German hero Hermann, from the time of Christ, was transliterated Arminius by the Roman historians, and thus the name *Ármin* became a very elegant Hungarian Jewish name to substitute for the German Hermann. Therefore, had there not been a cousin a year older than I whose name was Ármin Linksz, I would have been called Ármin. From here it is easy to weave the thread of suppositions. The name Arthur, just like Ármin (and what's more, even like Aaron!) begins with the letters A and R, and it is really a beautiful name—I never regretted having it.

In the fall of 1907, after my habitual summer vacation was over, my father did not come to fetch me, and I spent the first semester of the school year in Galgóc. Why did I remain in Galgóc? I do not know. I know that in the previous year I suffered from ill health. I remember that I had pneumonia twice. Perhaps my food intake had to be improved. But my parents, even if they were poor, never suffered from hunger. It is possible that I needed a change of air, and in fact, that year my grandparents took me along on their summer vacation. It is possible that my mother was sick. But if so, I ought to remember it. Perhaps she had another unsuccessful pregnancy? I recall that it was that summer that my grandfather Jakob Links died. But that was no reason for me to stay away from home. As I recall, I was pleased to stay in Galgóc. I started out without strong Socialist convictions, despite all my latter-day protestations, and I liked and respected affluence. Not that my grandfather was anything but an unassuming, humble person. But even so, it was obvious that they lived in relatively comfortable circumstances. Of course, my father had a place of honor in the synagogue, just like my grandfather, an ornate chair to the right of the Holy Ark, to which the rabbi was entitled. But the synagogue of Galgóc was large; the one in Devecser would have fitted into one of its corners. And then, my grandfather had an assistant rabbi, *"Herr Pollak, der Dayen,"* as my grandmother called him. (The Yiddish word *Dayen* dripped with contempt.) Therefore, my grandfather did not have to worry about trivia: he did not have to inspect the slaughter-

house, to go out to the butchering plant, to analyze the innards of sick chickens for the purpose of kosher evaluation, to supervise the ritual bath or the baking of the matzos before Passover, as my father had to do.

Of course, my father's rounds of inspection also had their exciting interest. I liked to go with him to the slaughterhouse; I watched how the muscular helpers of the Christian butcher, Mr. Antal Sárközy, stunned the ox to be executed, and how, in contrast, Uncle Vilmos Kohn, the cantor, who doubled as ritual slaughterer, cut the throat of the kosher animal. "How much more humane" said my father. What exciting details! My father and Uncle Kohn inspected the edge of the knife three times. They ran the nail of their left middle finger over its edge to detect and correct even the slightest chip which would have rendered the animal *trefe* (unfit), and hence forbidden for the Jews, causing a great loss to poor Mr. Károly Schaeffer, the kosher butcher who had purchased it at considerable expense.

The building of the ritual bath was one of the victories of my father's life in Devecser. Never until then was there any ritual bath in this Neolog community, so that the men did not have the benefit of the mystery of the "living waters" which cleansed body and soul. What really pressed heavily on my father's mind was that the women were conceiving and delivering without the purifying ritual of the monthly immersion. My father was sure that one of the children whose education was supported by public funds, who suffered from bedwetting, and could not pass the second grade in school, was conceived in impurity. Or that the slight handicap of the son of M., the photographer, was the consequence of his parents having violated the mortal prohibition concerning the night of Yom Kippur. And besides, that "shady character" of a photographer did not divorce his first wife according to religious rules.

The ritual bath was housed in a beautiful edifice. I remember its location next to the bridge along the bank of the brook Torna. The garden of the gentry casino, the water mill, and, pardon my mentioning it, the house of ill repute, were all nearby along the bank of the Torna. An architect well versed in religious matters designed the bath, for which the river supplied the water through an underground pipe system. For a ritual bath, one was not permitted to draw the water. It had to be supplied with naturally flowing "living" water. The bath

also contributed to the hygiene of Devecser. It was the first and only public bathhouse where, for a low price, one could bathe in warm water—men and women in separate rooms of course—in enamel tubs. The sisters Kosztbár, both unmarried, aging, poor seamstresses, and their bachelor brother, were the supervisors of the bathhouse in return for free quarters.

Oh, how the images from Devecser crowd and whirl in my head! My brain is a retina, and at this moment it is the picture of Janka Kosztbár that is projected onto it. She was the *pauper* of the congregation. I also remember the institution of the *children of the state,* the charitable Women's Association, the organized begging, and finally, Uncle Reich, the Jewish beggar and *Minyenmann,* who was paid to attend the religious services. During the cold winter mornings, Uncle Silber had difficulties getting together the ten adults necessary for the religious services. Thus the presence of Uncle Reich was required. At that time I could hardly wait to reach my 13th birthday so that I could also be counted among the grown-ups. Today I ask myself, how can I save all these people from oblivion? And is it really worthwhile to *save* Uncle Reich and Janka Kosztbár from that third death?

Well, even so, please allow me a few words, János Kovács! You do not want to become their murderer. Uncle Reich was a favorite of the children. One could always joke and converse with him, as with one of one's own age. He was blind, at least officially, although I remember that with a cane in one hand, he was able to move safely about town. Rumor had it that in his younger years he was a great womanizer in Budapest, and that he became blind from "that." Uncle Reich was the only Jew among the *official paupers,* with a police permit to go from door to door on Friday mornings (but only on Friday mornings) and collect alms. It was my responsibility to open the door to everyone who rang our bell and give each one a penny. Only Uncle Reich was to be given two.

Uncle Reich was always kind, modest, friendly, polite, and satisfied. He was the exact opposite of Janka Kosztbár. She was the descendant of a once well-to-do family. Once or twice I had heard the adults snicker and whisper about her past, her loose morals. I remember well her sharp features and her distinguished, elegant German speech. I did not like her. She was too humble when she came to us with some kind of request (my mother, the *rebbetzin,* was the

ex-officio president of the Israelite Women's Charitable Society), but she reviled people behind their backs. None of this is interesting. There is only one comical thing that secures for her a certain funny immortality in my memory: she consistently addressed my mother as *Frau "von" Rabbinerin.* Quite early in my life I understood and valued the importance of the word *von,* but as Janka used it, it had no meaning at all, except as a transparently phony flattery. I do not know whether my modest, kindly mother even noticed it. At any rate, this *Frau "von" Rabbinerin* title remained in my memory forever.

How much the *mikveh,* the ritual bath, was really a triumph for my father, I cannot judge today. I have no way of knowing to what extent the women utilized the opportunity for ritual purification. Very vaguely I remember that, until it was built, only one religious woman used to go to Pápa once a month. And with whom among the ladies of Devecser who were more Neologs than the Neologs, would my father have dared even to broach such *intimate* things? With the wife of the president of our school board (the memory is very dim), who looked like a beautiful puffed-up pigeon, and about whom everybody knew that she was having an affair with the chief judge? I remember their splendid living room, but mainly its unusual scent. The drawing rooms of the upper-upper families usually had a distinguishing scent. Our own front room, furnished with a dining room set we never used and two cabinets, and later also a cupboard, all carved pieces, had no smell at all. Is it possible—the question startles me—that perhaps the entire *mikveh* memory is not true? Perhaps I just imagine that ritual bathhouse? But then again, it makes no difference. Memories are sometimes based on fallacies. (My father was so terribly inhibited; he became agitated when any discussion touched on sexual matters.) Can it be that once I saw my father in the *mikveh?* I know that one had to immerse oneself completely naked. My father took off even his small skullcap, which had always remained on his head, even when he removed his hat. How he could have stepped down into the water without letting me see him naked, I do not remember. On the other hand, I also remember another occasion when he took off even his *yarmulke.* I was the one who insisted that he take it off in the vestibule of the office of the much-feared chief justice Miklós Jókay-Ihász. Whether this happened during the years of World War I or in the

middle of the 1920s, when I needed a passport and was still haunted by the memory of the events in Lovászpatona, I cannot recall. But the later date is the more likely. That was the time when I was really scared. When, some other time during the war, we went together to the office of the judge, there was no reason for being so scared. My father always had a rock-like belief in the correctness of his acts. After all, there was a book of rules that described everything, step by step. He always gave Caesar what was due to Caesar, but whatever was due to God, on that he would not yield an inch. When, in the matter of being permitted not to have to write on Saturday, he wrote to the principal, János Faragó, he did not petition, he simply referred to facts.

It must have been as late as in the third year of World War I that my father learned that there were three Jews among the Russian prisoners of war who worked in the Estate of the Count. How did my father find out that some kind of international agreement provided that Jewish prisoners of war had to be excused from work on the day of Yom Kippur (perhaps even allowed to go to a synagogue), I do not know. But I remember clearly that he appeared in the judge's chambers with the text of that agreement and requested a pass for the three Jewish prisoners of war. It was impossible not to grant the request—the document was there—although even my father's friends opposed the step: to *fraternize* (I know the word is of later origin) with the enemy, even if he happened to be a Jew! As it happened, the entire affair ended in a painful disappointment: three (possibly only two) unshaven, muddy-shoed, unattractive and primitive little men appeared. It was impossible to communicate with them: they knew only a few words of a strange, almost incomprehensible, Yiddish. They could only speak Russian, were not familiar with the prayer book, and probably did not appreciate the special treatment given to them. I don't remember whether they stayed with us for any meal.

The Russian prisoners of war, the labor battalions, left with me an entirely different memory: large, blond men in the prime of their lives, with scythes and hoes. Some kind of non-commissioned officer must have been their leader. They were singing Russian songs as they marched to work in military formation in the morning, and back to their quarters in the evening. Apparently they performed the same work in Devecser as in Russia along the Don or Dnyeper, and the peasant girls' scent was the same also.

I wonder whether I can permit myself one more digression. But I must hurry: I feel that I do not have many opportunities left. Therefore, I want to mention here that József Kiss was probably among the first to write war poems not in the war-like, jingoistic vein, and to see a human being even in the enemy. I remember that in his volume of poems, *Avar,* there is one, *Serenades,* which read in part:

> I wander quietly in the battlefields,
> and drop a flower on every grave
> . . .
> I ask not whether an enemy or a friend
> is hidden in the grave.

My own poem, entitled *Spring 1917,* was written in March 1917. I do not know whether I already knew József Kiss's poem or not. I dare to mention only very hesitantly that, although both of us were Hungarians, both of us were also Jews. Perhaps this, after all, does have some kind of significance. Perhaps our horizons were broader—perhaps our humanism was more deeply rooted?

It is a fact that I, the Jewish boy, wrote in 1918 the first non-jingoistic patriotic *Ode on March* to be recited in a college. József Kiss was not considered a great poet. It was Babits and not he who wrote *Fortissimo,* and Ady, not he who wrote the *Emlékezés egy nyári-éjszakára (Remembrance of a Summer Night).* I certainly talk too much about my own poems, but by the way of excuse, let me say one thing—something important: I still know by heart the József Kiss poem. I also know, more or less, two other Kiss poems. On the other hand, I remember only the first and the last lines of my own poem *Tavasz (Spring),* and as for my *Ode,* I don't even know anymore whether the refrain was, "It should end by now," or "There should be peace by now." I need say nothing else about my relationship to my own poetry.

The irreconcilable class differences between the chief rabbi and the *dayen* disturbed me very much even when I was a teenager. Mr. Pollak sat much farther back in the synagogue than my grandfather—behind the reader's lectern. I still remember his graying, black beard, his piercing eyes, his silent mouth and his long black caftan. Obviously he had no hopes left that he would ever advance to the

position of chief rabbi. After the death of my grandfather, they chose a new, younger, more modern chief rabbi. My queenly grandmother, she with the Landesberg halo, would have never had any social contact with the *Pollaks.* In my library I have a volume containing the biographies of the Hungarian Orthodox rabbis which was re-published not too long ago. As I have already mentioned, I can trace the family tree of my Galgóc grandmother to her grandfather, the rabbi of Bazin, Meir Landesberg. How he acquired the Landesberg name, I do not know. It must have been the name of a town or a city. Jews liked to take the names of places as their family name: Frankfurter, Berliner, Hamburger, Guggenheim. There is a village named Landsberg in Bavaria. An unverifiable family legend has it that a refugee from Spain was the earliest known ancestor of the family. But one cannot be certain of that. Some Christian noblemen fancy that they are the offspring of earls and kings; they even accept the implication of illegitimacy. Jews, even those with German names, imagined that their ancestors were Spanish Sephardim, especially if the family was famous.

The fame, though not the name, was brought to the family by the father of my grandmother, the son of my great-great-grandfather Meir, whom I have already mentioned. He was Israel Isaac Aaron Landesberg, the rabbi of Nagyvárad, who rated an entire column in the book on rabbis, a much longer biography than even Meir or my grandfather, upon whom the Landesberg halo descended only through his wife, my grandmother. Among my polite Orthodox patients, who are well versed in Hebraics, there were a few in the past who mentioned that they knew that I am a Landesberg grandchild, which really is not quite correct. Sometimes, when I have the time or I feel like it, I also brag: I show them the references to my rabbinical ancestors and relatives.

The relation between the *dayen* (or to give the name the original Hebrew form, *dayyan,* with the accent on the second syllable) and the chief rabbi occupied me throughout my entire life, albeit transferred to a medical environment. *Herr Hofrat von Tschermak,* or more precisely, *Herr Hofrat Armin Tschermak, Edler von Seysenegg,* the famous professor of biology at the German University of Prague, was the equivalent of a chief rabbi—an *ordinarius,* holder of a chair at the University, with all the trappings of an important professor, holding

forth in a large auditorium, surrounded by white-coated assistants. And he, too, had a *dayen, Herr Professor R.H. Kahn,* the permanent assistant professor, who looked very funny with his small goatee and his short hunting or golf pants. Only over-zealous students like myself signed up for Professor Kahn's non-mandatory weekly Saturday morning biology lab exercises. All students spoke to him in a kind of relaxed manner, while none of them would have dared to address the *Herr Hofrat* without strict adherence to the formalities. *"Herr Hofrat, gestatten . . . "* as prescribed by the official formality of the Austrian imperial and royal protocol. Even *"Herr Hofrat, gestatten Sie"* would have been too informal. I remember quite well that he addressed me as *"er"* in the style of King Frederick the Great of Prussia. *"Was hat er heute zu berichten?"* he asked when he came to the laboratory to check on my experiments.

The memory compartments in my mind have strange furnishings. Willy-nilly, another, contrasting episode ties in with my musing about *dayen* Pollak. During one of my summers in Galgóc, Aunt Janka, also a Landesberg grandchild, arrived, I think from neighboring Pöstyén, impressively elegant in a coach, in the company of three or four of her sons. Their names were Hevesi; her husband Simon Hevesi was the great (to me as a child, mythical) chief rabbi of Pest, and through his wife, a member of the Landesberg clan. I remember vividly only one of the sons. Even now I can see that tall, lanky boy, perhaps three years older than me. Even now I am dazzled by his beautiful, white suit with long pants, with a sky blue sailor's collar and sailor's hat—it was a kind of extraterrestrial phenomenon. I always thought that I had never seen a more beautiful man (boy). Is it possible to say about a 7- or 8-year-old boy that he "fell in love" with another boy? His name was Feri. (Much later, during our adulthood, we met very often. I always felt somewhat uncomfortable in his presence. It was not only the "love" memory that disturbed me. Feri became a rabbi, and I had abandoned the Landesberg flag.)

Digression: About Proust, or the Compulsion to Record Everything

I am fully aware that the author of a literary work, just as that of a scientific study, must know not only what to write, but also what to leave out. There are details in this autobiography that are neither important (why should they be important?) nor interesting, but they would be irretrievably lost with me if I had not written them down. Yes, I do understand Marcel Proust (I know I am not Marcel Proust, dear reader). There is a compulsion that drives me to search for my own "lost times." I feel that if I do not write something down, it was useless for me to have stored it in my memory, to have kept it stored for fifty, sixty or perhaps eighty years.

Yes, it has been eighty years (perhaps more) since the sunlit steps where lost little Arthur sat crying, had been stored in my mind; and it has been almost eighty years that the taps sounded in my inner ear and I saw my mother reading and crying. All that would disappear when I die. It is awful that I do not believe in the immortality of the soul. How good it was for my father. In the evening he offered his soul to the hands of God, in the morning he gave praise for receiving it back. He believed that one day he would "return his soul to his Creator," and that he would leave behind only the "vessel of dust." (Even today I can hear my father reciting at funerals the Hebrew words, "because you are of dust and unto dust you shall return.") And I? I know only (and do I really know it?) that these memory images are stored somewhere in my brain—in my "brain soul," yes, in my "brain soul"—even when I am asleep, and as long as I live, somehow they too live. When I die, my brain will be deprived of oxygen and nutrition and will be transformed into some kind of chemical compound—I should say, into a material for which neither time nor consciousness exists. From then on there are no steps, no taps, and no one will know about that crying woman with a telegram in her hand, nor about the meeting with Elemér Császár on the Museum Boulevard, nor about the 126th psalm. Is this not terrifying?! Yes, yes, yes. "Blessed are those who believe and the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven." (Forgive me, my Father, that I quote the New Testament.)

My father had no assistant rabbi. His immediate subordinate was Vilmos Kohn, who was, in general, addressed as "Mr. Cantor." My father laid down the rules, Vilmos Kohn carried them out. The nearest other Jewish congregation, that of Ajka, was even smaller and poorer than Devecser. In Ajka the rabbi and the cantor were one and the same person. Once we went there with my father to pay a courtesy call; I vaguely recall the rabbi, an old man with a white beard. He lived in a sort of peasant house. I do not remember the synagogue at all. Uncle Kohn was the *totum factum* of ritual life—he was the leader in community prayers, the cantor. Devecser could not afford a choir; neither did we have an organ. Uncle Kohn was also the Torah reader and the ritual slaughterer. For all this (he had five children) he received a smaller salary than my father (and that was not very much either) and if they went to the synagogue together, my father went through the door first, although he was younger. Poor Mr. Kohn had to "moonlight" in order to make ends meet. He bought goose feathers and goose livers from the peasants. The livers he exported to Strassburg; I don't know how he managed it. He had five children, and his wife and oldest daughter (she never married) worked as seamstresses in their apartment and raised beans and lettuce instead of flowers in their garden. Which reminds me that our own yard had two rows of mulberry trees, as well as jasmine and lilac bushes. ("Oh, the wonderful scent of spring, the scent of May," sighed my mother; my father never even noticed nature.) A quaint little detail comes here to my mind: at about eye level or higher, a round pole was placed between two blackberry trees; we called it high bar, and performed pull-up exercises on it. We grabbed the bar with two hands, pulled ourselves up until we could hook our chin over the bar, and dared each other to let go with the hands and hang on only with the chin. Obviously, the bar was not put there for this purpose. I think they used it to hang the rugs across it while beating the dust out of them. But it doesn't matter. This brings back to my memory a cousin who was two or three years older than I, Ali Feigl by name, the son of the rabbi of Gyöngyös, who spent part of a summer with us. Ali was a small, slim and muscular boy, fifteen or sixteen years old. I had just had my bar mitzvah a few weeks earlier. But Ali was a much better gymnast than I, much more agile, stronger and more graceful. It was from Ali that I heard for the first time in my life that it is not true that there is a God.

My God, what is going to happen if I continue here with Ali Feigl? He, his sister Riza (the bearer of my mother's name) and Riza's son were the only ones who survived Auschwitz from among a large family of three generations. My God, what is going to happen if I begin to recount my encounters with Ali Feigl in Budapest, in Vienna, in Hamburg, until his cardiac arrest and death in Vienna in the sixties. My God, what is going to happen if I begin to talk about this wicked boy, who dared to disobey when my father wanted to draw him into the Bible lessons, while I accepted quietly, gently, never daring to argue. Oh, what will happen if I begin to talk about him now, about this Satan who planted the first seed of doubt in me. His was an admirable mind, and for me, completely incomprehensible. He spoke several languages and read a great deal. He was an energetic business genius; a lawyer (or at least a doctor of jurisprudence), a factory owner. He played the stockmarket. He was an agronomist. He was somebody who always survived and lived well, everywhere and in all circumstances—he was wealthy, or at least elegant in style, with a flair of superiority—how much I admired him! His only problem was that he was short of stature and loved women. My God! If I could speak here about Hamburg and Berlin and Ali Feigl! But I am with Uncle Kohn and, what is more, in the backyard of the rabbi's house in Devecser. My God, what can I do? Ali, I still owe you twenty crowns and a book about the conquest of Mt. Everest that you lent me in Hamburg in the fall of 1923 and that I did not return to you, and even today I still carry it with me. I simply cannot throw it away, although it does not interest me at all.

Next to the garden we had a poultry run with a wooden shed where my mother kept her chickens. It was there that I first observed the fights among cocks, the encounter between hen and cock, birds hatching eggs, and the birth of little chicks. The hens laid eggs every day, confirming (as my father explained it) that "God created the living creatures," I remember the Hebrew words vaguely, "so that the sons of Man may find in them joy and usefulness." And, oh yes, I can see my mother with the goose imprisoned under her leg and thigh and stuffing it with corn (and with a copper penny so that "it can digest better"). The work was no great glory for the rabbi's wife, but we were poor and my mother was very proud of her fattened geese and of their livers weighing a kilo for which Cantor Kohn paid enough in cash so

that the meat was almost free.

While speaking of Mr. Vilmos Kohn, our cantor, I should mention that the blowing of the shofar, the ram's horn, was also one of his duties. I can still hear him struggling to produce a sound. What is more, as a *cohen* (a descendant of the high priest Aaron) he delivered the priestly blessing on the High Holy Days. I can see him with his head covered with his prayer shawl, juxtaposing his fingers in a mystical kabbalistic geometry and emitting ghostly sounds, while my father dictates aloud the text of the Triple Blessing. Mr. Kohn was indeed the jack-of-all-trades of the congregation. The religious life of Devecser stood with him, and, at the end, fell with him. With the departure of my father, only the decorum left, the style, the preaching, the charisma of the religion.

Mr. Kohn was a tall, gaunt man with the sunken face and the pallor of a victim of a gastric disease. His short, trimmed, black beard was frosted with gray. I shall never forget the autumnal High Holy Days of one of the latter years of World War I. For those Days of Awe the congregation usually employed an assistant cantor. There was enough to do for two people. On Yom Kippur, termed "long day" in Hungarian, the four-part services lasted from six in the morning until seven in the evening, and our cantor would save his voice and his strength for the four or five hours of the main part. The assistant cantor led in the morning and the afternoon prayers, and my father in the closing prayer. On one occasion, our cantor undertook to conduct all the services of the day. The poor man badly needed the extra remuneration. I shall never forget it. The tall, thin, elderly man stood at the pulpit literally from morning to evening, often in complete immobility for hours on end, and, of course, without food and drink.

Naturally, Mr. Kohn himself, as an employee of the congregation, conformed to the ritual rules. Still, it was quite possible that he and his family were not *really* religious, and my mother occasionally repeated some gossip about their alleged transgressions. Truly religious women never showed themselves in public without their heads being covered. My mother, following the custom of Orthodox Jews and my father's demands, cut her hair short and wore a wig. The wife of the cantor did not observe this rule.

I have one more memory of Mr. Kohn. There was a piano in his apartment. I saw him once, just prior to a feast day or a wedding,

practicing from a book. He was learning a new melody. He was reading the text and the music, hitting the keys with one finger as he hummed the tune. For this I respected and admired him tremendously. My father was never able to learn a melody properly. He always recited the prayers, the Psalms, in the synagogue and at meals at home in a sort of half recitative style.

The three Kohn boys changed their name to the Hungarian Komlós. None of them attended an academic high school. In my childhood only the children of the upper classes and classless youngsters like myself attended the *gimnázium* (high school). Lipót, the oldest Komlós boy, studied in a commercial high school. "A complete man; he passed his *matura* examination," boasted Jenö, the braggart second of the three boys. Lipót got a job at one of the savings banks and went to his office even on Saturdays—no matter how my father thundered against it. A year later he was taken into the army. He was eighteen. One morning he was sent to the Isonzo front in Italy with his company. By evening he was dead. A dead hero. Jenö was one grade below me in the grade school, received (instead of me) the twenty gold crowns of Mr. Pechner (elsewhere I shall speak about it), became an apprentice, and later a clerk, in a dry goods store, and still later a soldier in the Red Army. In the fall of 1919, he was one of the victims of the massacre of the Prónay gang in Devecser. Only Gyula, the youngest boy (he was about three grades below me), survived Hitler and Auschwitz.

No matter how trivial this whole thing appears (and no matter how little these contemplations have to do with my so-called autobiography), I feel I have to pause here once more to explain in greater detail the meaning and the significance of the "Jewish telegraph." What is involved here (I know the whole thing sounds comical) is whether to carry on the Sabbath is one of the grave sins, a violation of the Sabbath, to the same degree as, let us say, keeping your store open. But please, do not mistake the word "to carry" to mean "to lug," and especially "to haul a heavy object." If you carry a handkerchief in your pocket on the Sabbath, that is also a sin. Somewhere in the Fourth Book of Moses it is written that God gave an explicit command to Moses that the whole community should stone a man to death because he collected some kindling on the Sabbath. But man, or as my father would have said it, the mortal, is fallible, forgetful, and can easily

commit a sin which at the end may even cost him his eternal salvation. Of course, one does not have to fear being stoned to death today. There is not a single case in the 2000 year history of Pharisaic Judaism of anyone being condemned to death for gathering branches, for carrying a handkerchief, or, for that matter, for any other ritual transgression. Still, one must try to eliminate even the possibility of transgression, but without impinging in the slightest on the letter of the law. Therefore, if by accident, while on the street, you happen to find your handkerchief in your pocket on a Sabbath day, you must quickly tie it around your neck as if it were a scarf, because it then becomes a part of the clothing you wear and not an object that you carry, and it is only "carrying" that is prohibited in halakhic law, not "wearing." The same logic was followed by my Orthodox patients, who often ordered bifocals even when they needed glasses only for reading. They wore the bifocals on their nose and then used them in reading the prayers in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Separate reading glasses would have to be carried in their pocket, which would have been a sin. This rule made it easy to recognize Orthodox women among the promenaders on Saturday afternoons; they carried no handbags, and wore their gloves instead of carrying them in their hands.

Then, the halakhic law provides that it is *on the street* one is prohibited to carry. Hence, it is permitted to carry in one's own yard. I imagine that Hillel, the great humanist and sagacious Pharisee, who always tried to ease the burden of the law, would have interpreted the rule in this manner. Thus, it is only a question of interpretation as to what you call a yard. Certainly, you could call a yard an old Jewish quarter, a ghetto, such as the *Judenstadt* in Weisskirchen, separated by a gate from the outside world. Or even those old medieval cities like Köszeg, where even today there is an inner city surrounded by a wall. In fact, it was permitted to carry in the old city of Köszeg, and one did not have to fix up any kind of "telegraph." After that, there is nothing simpler than to erect a symbolic wall out of just anything, for instance, a wire, and thus to close off the streets and turn them into a yard. Once this is done, it is, of course, no longer a sin to carry in those streets. This is the "Jewish telegraph."

This elucidation I am presenting is of course my invention. But, as the old Italian proverb has it, it is certainly "well invented." Questions such as this are discussed in a rich literature almost 2000 years

old. Ever since the time of Hillel and Shammai, the two great antagonists, Jewish scholars have argued about the question of what religious rule has to be followed, where and how. Hillel lightened, Shammai tightened, each did what he considered right. I assume that within the rules of Sabbath observance the question of carrying and the question of walls have their own place, and even what constitutes a "gate" is discussed in detail. How high can one place the wire and still refer to it as an enclosure? In doubtful cases, the faithful must have turned to this or that famous rabbi for a professional opinion, just as physicians turn to the professors, and lawyers to higher tribunals. The opinions, if they came from high places, are immortalized in those endless volumes of *Responsa,* in whose study Talmudists can spend their entire lives. For me, from my earliest years, this was the part of the body of Hebrew lore which I could digest only with the greatest difficulty. I hated the *Halakha* and adored the *Aggada,* and in spite of all my respect, I could not hide this from my father. Today I can no longer tell what I despised more — the minutiae, too often lost in ridiculous detail, or the obvious cheating of God ("everybody knows that that 'wall' is not a wall," I said to myself even then).

In this respect, too, my poor father belonged to the "neither-fish-nor-fowl" faction. He was neither Neolog nor Orthodox. He belonged to the circle that followed Samson Raphael Hirsch, and obeyed the rules not merely because "they are written in the Torah." Such simple, typically Orthodox reasoning may have been satisfactory for Adolf Mauthner, the Sabbath-observing grocer of Devecser, but it was not satisfactory to a man of Hirsch's philosophical bent. According to him, every rule had a moral, philosophical, and above all, symbolic significance. Every act a person performed had to be an act of divine worship, filled with symbolism, and not merely an observance of rules. Thus, for instance, according to the Hirschian interpretation, one carries no handkerchief in the pocket not because it is "work." In general, the reason for observing the many Sabbath prohibitions — don't pick up branches, don't turn on the light, don't lift the telephone receiver — is not that those acts constitute work. "Yes," I can hear my father's voice as he said once during a Sabbath meal, "it is far heavier work to break the leg of this goose," which is permitted. On the Sabbath you "return the creation to its Creator." (You do not have time to think about this during the six working days of the week.) But on the Sabbath you

destroy the false impression that the world, the creation, is yours. All creation belongs to the Creator, you are only allowed to use it, but you must leave it one day every week, as the Creator, blessed be His name, had left it when He rested after the six days of creation.

Of course, this symbolism was not without contradictions. Precisely because it was the day consecrated to the "Queen Sabbath" (*Shabbath ha-malka*—I remember it from our Friday evening prayers), we ate better, and we even had some wine to drink. So that the world which, according to the blessing, God created for "the sons of man to find pleasure in it," belonged to us after all. Therefore, it was permited on the Sabbath to enjoy that particular tasty fat goose, even to break its bones at the table; but to kill it according to ritual, and to cook it on the sacred day of rest was prohibited.

I must interject here a few words about a mysterious sect, whose life and history has intrigued me since I was a child. Regrettably, I never had time to research it. I no longer remember how I first heard about it or from whom. The sect, that of the Karaites, my father told us, still had a small number of followers in Russia, in the Crimean Peninsula. Today it seems to me that the Karaites were the *ad absurdum* followers of Shammai, Hillel's great antagonist. They observed every commandment contained in the Torah with all its consequences. If the Torah said that you are not permitted to work on the Sabbath, then they did not even leave their houses on that day, because perhaps even carrying the clothing on the body was work. Since the Torah said that it was not permitted to light a fire on the Sabbath, they sat in the dark, freezing. In our home candles burned Friday evening until they burned out—it was not permitted to extinguish them—and the Sabbath noon meal was kept warm from Friday evening in a charcoal burning food warmer—for the greater glory of the spirit of Hillel.

My interest in the Karaites once prompted my father to make a disapproving remark. He could see through me, through my religious duplicity.

My father studied unceasingly, every single day, the laws of religious behavior. Not the great *Shulhan Arukh, (The Prepared Table),* the supreme code of Jewish law in its four big folio volumes, but one of its condensed forms prepared for everyday use. He always carried this book with him, even while traveling. He did that for two

reasons: first of all, because the study of God's law was itself a divine commandment one had to fulfill (it was the greatest *Mitzvah*); secondly, so that he should be able to obey the commandments better and more accurately. Once I began to nag my father for details about the life and teachings of the Karaites. I often wanted to demonstrate with such questions how interested I was in things Jewish—it was a form of *captatio benevolentiae.* In response, my father told me, sadly but sternly, that the dogmas of the Jewish religion were not a subject matter for scientists to analyze and explain. One must study the laws, the *Halakha*, the rules of Jewish conduct, because they were God's words. It was not enough to know the law; one must observe and obey it. Comparative religion might have its justification when applied to other religions; they were products of the human mind, man-made. The Jewish religion, however, was the word of God, His will, the expression of His commands—given to Moses, our Master, on Mount Sinai.

That "gathering of sticks upon the Sabbath day" lives in my memory as one of the paradigms of the philosophy of Samson Raphael Hirsch. It is possible that my father actually read to me the relevant passages from Hirsch's complicated, but beautifully written, German Bible commentary. Or, perhaps he preached about it on the appropriate Sabbath. The Five Books of Moses are divided into weekly sections, so that in the course of one year all of them are read in the Sabbath morning services. I remember none of this any more. My father and Hirsch, the words of my father and the exegesis of Hirsch, the materials I studied with my father and his Sabbath sermons are all mixed up in my childhood memories. In contrast, the history of the wanderings of the Children of Israel in the desert, and the story of Moses, are still vividly alive in my memory in practically all their details. I read the last chapter of Deuteronomy, the Fifth Book of Moses, at least a hundred times—the one in which Moses goes up Mount Nebo and looks across into the Promised Land which he could not enter. He was 120 years old, but his strength had not waned; his eyes had not dimmed. For me, Moses was the eternal symbol of "wrestling with God"—Jacob, after all, wrestled only with an angel. My tears flowed uncontrollably.

The entire forty-year period of wandering in the desert was

transmuted in the Hirsch commentary into a symbolic, moral lesson; it taught Israel to put its trust in God. When Pharaoh pursued them with his armies, God divided the Red Sea. When they had nothing to eat in the desert and murmured, which they did readily, and on such occasions daydreamed about the "flesh pots" of Egypt, He sent them quails which covered the earth to a depth of two feet. And, of course, there was the manna in the morning: like hoar frost on a winter morning, it covered everything as far as the eye could see (I adored reading the details). But they had to learn to trust God that He would provide something to eat day after day. They were not permitted to keep manna from one day to the next, and were allowed to gather only as much as was needed the same day. The good Lord had odd preferences, I thought. Why did He have to choose these hard necked, dissatisfied, constantly murmuring Jews? Why didn't He, rather, choose those splendid, fearless, old Hungarians with their seven chieftains?

But not only the commandments were symbols; the trespassing of the commandments must also be interpreted symbolically. It was not the gathering of the sticks which was a sin, but the faithlessness, the lack of trust in God. That particular Jew gathered sticks on the Sabbath; therefore, he did not recognize or believe that the universe belonged to God, not to us. Symbols, symbols. I was sure that all this would have been completely beyond Uncle Adolf Mauthner, who was only a simple, honest, pious Jew.

I shall never forget that once, at the very beginning of our days in Devecser, my Father wanted to honor Mr. Mauthner, and one evening, after the closing time of the stores, stopped by at the Mauthners. Uncle Mauthner and a few of his friends were sitting around in shirt sleeves playing cards. Uncle Mauthner even had a cigar in his mouth. My father, of course, had hoped that this very religious Jew, for whom nothing in Devecser was kosher enough, would be spending the evening studying the Holy Books. It was a great disappointment for him. I do not remember after that if my father ever again stopped by at anybody's house unexpectedly. My father was really quite upset. That somebody should spend his free time playing cards rather than studying the word of God was totally incomprehensible to him. One of his favorite quotes was a verse from that interminable 119th Psalm (I translate from memory):

Misery and misfortune have fallen upon me,
but Your commandments are my delight.

Once, when I was about twelve, the newspaper wrote that the workers of Budapest had demonstrated for the introduction of an eight-hour work day.

Eight hours work,
Eight hours entertainment,
Eight hours sleep,

said one of the posters shown in the paper. The event inspired my father's Sabbath sermon that week. He, too, was wholeheartedly for the eight-hour day, he said. (What?! Has our rabbi turned socialist?! The grocery stores of Devecser were open from 5 in the morning until 8 in the evening.) That way, said my father, people will have more time for "entertainment,"—for studying the word of God.

That verse has a personal meaning for me. According to an old (obviously Kabbalistic) belief, there is a Biblical *pasuk* (verse) hidden in every person's Hebrew name. It begins with the first letter of the name and ends with its last. Since my Hebrew name, *Tzevi*, begins, like verse 143 of that Psalm, with the letter *Tzade*, and ends with the *Yod*, that particular verse is my *pasuk*. If I remember correctly, I shall need to know and recite this verse to serve as the password when, *bis hundert und zwanzig,* my soul will knock on the gates of the heavenly Garden of Eden. By the way, here, still in connection with Mr. Mauthner, I am reminded that my father frowned upon smoking and smokers, and it never occurred to me, even as an adult, to smoke in the house of my parents, especially in the presence of my father. I simply didn't dare to. And, further, I am reminded that never in my life did I shake hands with my father. Even when I last saw him, just before I came to America, he only extended his right hand to be kissed.

I think it is in his *Traumdeutung* that Freud says that a man really grows up only after his father dies. I suddenly realize that it is more than forty years ago that my father and mother were taken to Auschwitz, in the summer of 1944. It also startles me that my fear of my father (which manifests itself even today in a recurrent anxiety dream, though less frequently) apparently did not end even with his death. I am eighty-five years old, but it is only now that it has become

absolutely clear to me (and it is too late to change it now), that I FAILED TO GROW UP. (And, now, having made this dramatic public confession, I ought to quit writing right away.)

Suddenly, I see that in the preceding paragraph I used the expression "I did not dare." I did not dare to smoke in the presence of my father. Even as an adult!

Well, why did I not dare? I was an adult, a doctor, independent. Was I afraid? What was I afraid of? I am completely confused. Perhaps it is not even true that my often inexplicable and irrational behavior was due to my soft heart? Did I not want to offend him? Or did I not wish to embarrass him in front of his friends? Perhaps I was not that considerate—was I, rather, a coward? What was I afraid of? That I would lose my father's love? That he would disown me? Obviously, there was something else I was afraid of—frankness. We had never talked things over with each other.

After all these many years, something comes to my mind. A trifle. Until now, I have never mentioned it to anyone. It is a very small thing, but a characteristic one. No matter how much I protested, I really did not keep the Sabbath. While I was a student, and later while I was a doctor living in the Jewish Hospital in Budapest (elsewhere I shall speak about it), I did not have to lie too much. In the Jewish hospital, there was no out-patient clinic on the Sabbath, and with the exception of emergencies, even the operating rooms observed the Day of Rest. Naturally, the meals were kosher. But during my years of practice in Budapest I kept office hours even on Saturdays. The thing that comes to my mind in this connection, as I said, is a trifle. But it is characteristic of me: whenever I wrote a prescription on Saturday, I dated it from the day before or the day after. (Perchance it might get into my father's hands!) "Oh, my God, I always have trouble with dates," I exclaimed if somebody happened to notice the "mistake."

But, to steer the flow of words back to Freud, perhaps it is important not only that the father should be dead, but even more so that the son should bury him. During those sanctimonious times of Franz Joseph, one needed courage to write or even discuss such things. Perhaps it is not the father's death alone which plays such a decisive role in the final development of a man's character. (Freud himself reached this conclusion after analyzing his own feelings.) Perhaps it is

also significant that the son should witness the death of his father, live with him through the inevitable end. (Jacob's preparation for death in the presence of Joseph and the sons of Joseph—what a drama, and without any sentimentality!) And, finally, perhaps it is necessary that the son should bury his father. This, Auschwitz spared me. I did not see my father and mother die. I could not bury them. I only *know* that they are not alive. I have no memory of them in death.

What a pity that Freud, that great genius, knew the Bible so little. What secrets are hidden in the text! The tragedy of the older and younger son begins with Cain and Abel—with the very first brothers. The special relationship of the youngest son to his mother was, of course, noticed by Freud. He mentioned it and even explained it in his last book, *Moses and Monotheism.* The Bible is a masterwork. It tells that Isaac and Ishmael jointly buried Abraham, their father. It was the last time they met, when mandatory piety brought them together as brothers. Then they separated. After that, only a short, sketchy chapter is devoted to the family of Ishmael, to his fate, his future, and the text turns to the main story-line—the life of Isaac.

The description of the death and burial of Isaac is very similar. The father's death brings Esau and Jacob together for the last time. One notices that, on that occasion, Esau's name is mentioned first. Esau, of course, was a full brother of Jacob, whereas Ishmael was only a half-brother of Isaac, and not even the son of the "mistress," but (as my father put it) that of the "companion." Here, too, following the father's burial, the ways of the brothers separate forever. About the generations of Esau the biblical author speaks only summarily, so that he can turn his attention to the life of Jacob, his family, and his future. Also, as in the previous example, piety itself is not enough to help the brothers remain brothers. Yet, according to that majestic 133rd Psalm:

> Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
> When the brothers dwell together
> It is like precious oil up on the head.
> Like the dew of Hermon
> That cometh down upon the mountains of Zion.

It seems that Freud did not notice that Moses himself was a younger brother. The elder, Aaron, was to become the high priest, but

Joshua, the disciple, was to be the leader who finally led the sons of Israel into the Promised Land.

Even my father was not free of minor "God cheatings," and I must admit that during a certain *Sturm und Drang* period of my life it made me look down upon him. The Bible says that on the day of Sabbath you must not make your ox work, nor your ass, nor your servant. (I would have to look up the exact text.) Therefore, we were not allowed to instruct our Christian housemaid to make fire. But the problem was simply solved: my Father sent me out to the kitchen to call Mary in (*"Narrischkeiten,"* murmured my mother), and said to her only, "Mary, I am cold." Mischievous as I was, when I called Mary, I told her with glee, "When the Reverend says he is cold, he means that you should light the fire," thereby, in effect, vitiating my father's effort to observe the letter of the law.

Those poor servant girls of ours—their official title was *mindenes* (maid-of-all-work)—were not permitted to work on Saturday. For instance, they could do no house cleaning. On the other hand, they were not allowed to leave the house. They spent the day sitting around in the kitchen. They had little to read, except the missal. Perhaps they put things in order; I don't remember. The going out time was on Sunday from ten a.m. (when, dressed in their best, they went to hear mass) until four p.m. My mother made a tremendous fuss if they came back late. She was the guardian of the chastity of our maids. The girls spent the Sunday afternoon on the servants' promenade. They walked up and down linking arms in long chains, in front of the estate's pub on Church Square, where the peasant boys were competing to see which one of them could spit farthest in the direction of the promenading girls.

During my revolutionary period, when I was eighteen, I was very upset about the exploitation of the servants by my evil capitalist parents. Who knows how much they were really "exploited?" I remember that sometime during 1916, Mr. Nagy, the road inspector of Noszlop (he still wore boots, but was literate and an "official" just like the village judge of Devecser) sent his daughter, Julcsa, to us to learn refinement and order in a "gentleman's" house. Julcsa had a ruby-red

face and was always laughing. She was beautiful in a peasant way, and desirable. At that time, for the greater part of the year, my parents were alone, just the two of them. I was at home only during the school holidays. There was not too much to do. I was on excellent terms with Julcsa. She screamed loudly when I pawed her, and it was from her that I learned the most bawdy peasant songs, which even today I would not dare to put in writing. We were about the same age. Before long she left us and got married, but even years later, even during the time of the anti-Semitic regime, she would pay us a visit when she came from Noszlop to Devecser. Obviously, she was not class conscious, and certainly she did not become an anti-Semite.

Well, this side trip is getting a bit too long, but there is one more humorous episode I would not like to see forgotten. I couldn't have been more than six or seven when an elderly woman called Terka was our maid. She always addressed me as "Art," and when my mother tried to explain to her that my name was Art-ur and not Art, she answered, "My lady, I am not going to call such a young child *úr*" (the word means "sir" or "mister" in Hungarian).

But to get back to Galgóc and to that eventful summer, my grandparents always went to a spa called Luhacovice in Moravia to spend part of the summer there. It was characteristic that Orthodox Jews, or at least the rabbis, usually planned their summer vacation so as to include the "three weeks of mourning," from the Seventeenth of Tammuz to the Ninth of Ab. For the rabbis, this was the "cucumber season," when there were no feasts and no weddings. During those three weeks one was supposed to mourn the siege and the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, but during the vacation the mourning was not strictly observed. The Reverend, after all, was "taking the waters," under doctor's orders, *"für die Kur,"* to put his body and spirit in order for the fall High Holy Days when he would have to serve God in strict devotion. I remember that we took a coach from the railroad station to the hotel, took frequent walks among beautiful houses with gardens with gorgeous, tall trees and multi-colored flower beds in between. We drank some kind of water and Grandfather did not scribble.

Of course the summers in Galgóc were not always idyllic. My grandmother took care of that. I felt that she did not like me and did not like my father either. I think she never forgot my sin, the death of my

real mother. Because of some kind of prohibition which is not quite clear to me even today, she could not speak openly, and so she made oblique references to the lifesize picture—an enlarged photograph—of a young woman which hung on the wall over the sofa in the "small room." (I slept on that sofa.) She constantly spoke of my indifference and my father's ingratitude. At that time, I had no idea that my father really had good reasons to be grateful to my grandfather. On the other hand, even today I do not know what he was expected to do so as not to appear ungrateful. Out of sheer stubbornness, I did not ask whose picture it was. Perhaps for a while I really did not know, but then for a long time, I only pretended not to know. I remember, although only very indistinctly, that during one of the summers in Galgóc, a neighbor of my grandparents (perhaps their name was Nagel) said to her husband, *"Ganz wie die arme Riza."* My looks evidently reminded her of my mother. Her husband poked her in the side and I pretended I hadn't heard. As I have already mentioned, I was ten years old when my father officially revealed the great secret. No photographs survived of my real mother. Her tombstone in the Jewish cemetery of Galgóc and I, her sole child, are the only things that prove her existence. There was no way for me to remember her. I am not aware of anyone alive today who could have known her during her short life.

Yes, I must confess that, inwardly, I was greatly troubled by those mortal sins of violating the Sabbath, and at the same time I was extremely worried about the wrath of God. Even now, I can hear my father reading from the Hebrew prayer book during the Sabbath morning worship that whoever commits this or that sin, "that soul should be extirpated from the community of his people." Not only the body, I said to myself, but also the soul is going to be executed by that vengeful God, even for such a trifle as carrying a handkerchief in the pocket and not around the neck. The symbolism of Hirsch, which views all these from philosophical heights, did not sit too well with me at the time. I was much too young to be able to appreciate it. You cannot believe, I fumed, directing the flow of my thoughts toward my father (I did not dare to express my doubts, of course), that to carry a handkerchief on Saturday is really as grave a sin as, let's say, "to know" (in the Biblical sense) the wife of one's father. Perhaps it seems peculiar that in this imagined sentence I should have used the expres-

sion "the wife of one's father," but it is the Bible itself which uses this expression, expanding the prohibition to all wives of one's father, who, in my case, meant my mother (that is, my stepmother).

Anyway, I judged Hirsch's entire theory of sin spurious, and this hurt me even more because I knew that I could not possibly find a man with a purer soul than my father. Somewhere, however, my father was not completely candid. Mr. Adolf Kollin, the former president of the congregation, kept his store open on the Sabbath, although he attended the Sabbath morning services. Mr. Herman Mauthner, the next president, transacted business in the Savings Bank even on Saturdays, and went to the synagogue only on the High Holy Days. Mr. and Mrs. Mór Biró, the parents of my friend Imre, raised pigs. And my father was the spiritual leader of these people; he lived for them, and made a living from them. True, he was not on friendly terms with them; he did not visit them and did not eat at their table. And it is also true that he was very unhappy. Just imagine, I continued my silent mono-dialogue, if the Messiah should come (I believed in His coming) and there would be a Jewish country: would we have to stone to death all these people? "How lucky," I said once ironically during a religious debate with one of my theoretically bloodthirsty Talmudist relatives—"How lucky that we do not have a Jewish state, that there is no country where the Jews have the power of life and death! Thus you are free to discuss for 2000 years how one has to put to death a person who carries a handkerchief, when for at least 2000 years nobody has been executed for committing such a mortal sin."

But to continue my theme, I grumbled a lot about the reasons for the laws of my religion. I found the dietary regulations incomprehensible. I knew that God was omnipotent, watched everything, and could strike me down if I bit into one of those sausages whose seductive smell tickled my nose on the weekly market days. The market opened on Thursday mornings and brought delightful variety to my days, otherwise spent with my father and with the Holy Books, for I had to help my mother carry a basket. But why did God make these prohibitions? Would it not be a matter of indifference to an omnipotent God what I ate? And could I not be a good man, a good Jew, even if I did eat of that provocatively sizzling barbecued pork sausage? Even in my early life I found the tremendous amount of studying, praying, going to religious services, very burdensome. What bad luck that I was born

among the "chosen people." How much less did the Christians, a Kölcsey, a Lessing, or a Károly Eötvös have to push themselves in order that they may get into Paradise. And what bad luck that I was not born a woman—how much easier was my mother's life. And that prophetess, Deborah! What a great woman she was, the liberator of her people, even though she did not have to delve constantly into religious books and to pray with the *tefellin!* And the mortal sins of the Sabbath? (Somehow my mind keeps returning to them.) Well, those I really loathed. Let us take a two-kilometer mortal sin and see how we can go around it with some special "*eruv* trick." The philosophy of Hirsch, of course, explained the thing away! If you go less than one kilometer outside of the city on Saturday (or 2000 feet—the exact figure is not important, I have forgotten it), then you are just "strolling," but if you go farther, then, obviously, you have a "goal" you want to reach, and that is a violation of the Sabbath rest. Of course, here, too, there is a sophisticated way of cheating God. Even for this, there is an *eruv,* or whatever its name is: walk out one kilometer on Friday afternoon and somewhere along the road hide a *Halla,* a braided Sabbath bread. Then, next day, when you get there, sit down, recite the blessing of the bread, eat and bless the Creator. Thus that spot becomes your "house," and you are permitted to go from there one more kilometer. I did not dare to ask my father about this, but I ruminated over the question of whether this could be made into a relay-walk: could one place several *eruvs* at a distance of two, three, four, etc. kilometers? How far then would one be permitted to "stroll" on Saturday?

A tragic occurrence, which really shook the Jews of Devecser, remained forever in my memory. I was probably sixteen or seventeen when I rejected the strict observation of the rules of religion and ceased to believe that the punishments of God had some kind of mathematical relationship with our sins, and especially that God punished only those whom He loved. My father, I am sure, had this belief when he explained to me that God punished only the good ones, the religious people, during their earthly life. God would deal even with the small sins of the pious, so that their salvation in the Other World be guaranteed. As for the "wicked ones" (meaning those who were not observant, such as Mr. Kollin, the president of the congrega-

tion, the rich grain dealer and steam mill owner), the Omnipotent God rewarded them "here" for their few good deeds. But woe to them, the sacrilegious violators of the Sabbath, when they have to give reckoning in the Other World!

Well, what happened was that one of my father's followers, a religious merchant of Somlóvásárhely (his name does not matter) was coming home one Friday afternoon on the local train from Veszprém. It was mid-winter, the days were short, and the train was late. Everything was covered with snow. By the time the train got to Devecser it was already dark. The next station, that of his home town, was four kilometers farther away, but Saturday had arrived, and a religious Jew must not travel on Saturday. Our man, therefore, alighted from the train at Devecser, and apparently (all this can only be surmised), started walking the four kilometers along the rails. He never arrived in Vásárhely. The gendarmes found him dead, frozen in the deep snow, next to the rails. Very likely, he wanted to get out of the way of an oncoming train. The congregation raised an outcry: Is there a God in heaven? Is there justice on earth? In the mind of my father, there was a ready answer to all these questions, and in his sermon the following Saturday he explained to his faithful from the pulpit that the unfortunate man had, indeed, committed a sin, or at least he was about to commit a sin. "The ignorance of the law is not an excuse," my father thundered from the pulpit. It is true that he was a pious Jew who kept the Sabbath, but he did not immerse himself in the study of our holy religion, and therefore did not know that to walk four kilometers on the Sabbath, and to carry his suitcase, were just as mortal sins as to travel on a train. Our friend was right in getting off the train, but he should have stayed in Devecser with one of his religious friends with whom he could have celebrated the Sabbath. I shall never forget this case. I never forgave my father for this sermon. Of course, I did not dare to say anything to him, but I could not help thinking that our man could have traveled on comfortably and calmly to Vásárhely, and then, with the mortal sin on his conscience, could have quietly waited for the Day of the Atonement and repented it, as prescribed in the traditional liturgy.

I had heard the outcry "there is not justice on earth" once before. Across the street from our home was the shop and house of Steiner, the cobbler. (I have mentioned his name several times.) From the window

of our front room, I could see into his shop. It was in that shop that I saw the first piece of "fine art." It was a cheap, smoke-covered color print with the title *The Death of Petöfi* printed at the bottom. It showed Petöfi fallen on the ground and writing with his fingers in the sand, using the blood which flowed from his wound,

My country!
My country!

Few pictures have ever made a similarly deep impression on me. Of the three Steiner girls, the middle one, Irma, must have been about twenty-one years old; she suffered from dropsy. We heard that the doctor came every few days, stuck a big needle into her belly and drained off several liters of fluid. It was summer; the gate was open. I can still see the sick girl in the yard, lying on some kind of sofa, covered up to her neck. When she died, her mother rushed over to our place, wailed and repeated over and over, "There is no justice!" I can hear the words even now in her voice. My mother's voice, also. She was trying to calm her in strange sounding Hungarian, "Mrs. Steiner, don't commit a sin!" And she, too, cried.

Steiner, the cobbler, was old, unkempt, dirty-handed, unpleasant, and a man without religion. He did not go to the synagogue even on Yom Kippur. Neither he nor his wife ever asked my father to say a prayer for the recovery of their daughter, although this was one of the duties of the rabbi, just as it was to pray for rain if there was a drought. Steiner (nobody called him "Mister") was a socialist—at that time, I did not understand the meaning of the word—I thought that it meant something like not believing in God or in the order of things.

I also remember when Ilonka, the daughter of Mr. Schönfeld, the grocer, became ill. She was a beautiful sixteen-year old girl, with a skin almost transparent and as white as marble. Supposedly she had tuberculosis. She just wasted away. I remember Uncle Silber, the beadle, trying to gather together ten adults for an urgent and extraordinary afternoon prayer where my father read aloud the supplications for her recovery. I remember best that my father, in a loud voice, gave a new Hebrew name to Ilonka. Later, when I asked him, he explained that the purpose was to confuse the angel of death with the name change so that he should not find the person for whom he was looking. Not long afterward Ilonka died. I remember the white marble monu-

ment placed over her grave. In 1959 or 1960, when I went back to Devecser, I saw the monument still there in what remained of the Jewish cemetery. I looked at it with great attention to see if Ilonka's "new" Hebrew name was also engraved on the stone. It was.

I remember only vaguely that at the beginning of a trip my father recited a number of prayers and Psalms which were printed only in his large prayer book. Travel belonged to the "dangerous" things, and, therefore, it was a must for men to invoke various guardian angels. I remember also that if the traveler escaped some kind of actual danger, the following Saturday he had to say thanksgiving prayers standing before the Ark. Those prayers are also omitted from my "ordinary" prayerbook.

A few pages back I wrote that I could never forget one of the Saturday sermons given by my father, and somewhere else I said that I even scorned him for some kind of innocent "God-cheating" inconsistency. All this is indeed true. The ambivalence and the fluctuation of emotions tolerate such contradictions. In spite of all his human greatness, my father was not a "great" man, neither a great scholar, nor a profound thinker, nor a brilliant orator. He studied the Talmud and would use a dictionary if he needed it. Still, his studying was a religious service rather than research, or a gathering of information. Learning meant spending time with God, just as praying, reciting the Psalms, or reading of the weekly portion of the Torah were activities performed in the service of God. The books he had written were homilies of an innocent, naive, pure-hearted preacher rather than essays on the philosophy of religion. They had no scientific value, but that was not his purpose in writing them. In the game of generations the cards were stacked in my favor. Shall I dare to state that I was the more gifted, and that after a while, if an issue was not strictly religious, it was my father who tried to accommodate? When I tried to pluck socialist chords, he quoted the book of Psalms: yes, God himself prefers the poor. Or he quoted the prophets (I forgot which one), who also condemned the injustices of society. As for me, I, too, was eager to influence him, even if I could not expect to convert him. When, during my junior or senior year, I would come home full of enthusiasm, with books of poetry by Ady, my father would listen meekly and without objection as I read out a few poems to him. Of course, I did not read the

Black Piano, or the *Alone with the Sea*—"immoral," my father could have said (after all, the latter mentioned a hotel room and a couch), but rather one of the socialist poems ("If my Divine Father did not want it, there would be no rich men") or such worshipful poems as those of the *On the Margin of the Book of Isaiah* cycle. We even reached the point where, whenever my father read a poem with a Jewish theme, he was likely to express his approval by saying, "this poem has an Ady flavor, doesn't it?" To present to him something like the blasphemous *Fortissimo* of Babits ("God is Angry and Hopping Mad") would have been tasteless and without any purpose—and I would never have dared to do it.

And now I must record a very important, unique piece of memory—the history of a poem. Actually, this particular poem has no history. I shall be talking about my father again and about a poetess: Elly Alpár. Who was Elly Alpár? I have been searching for her for a long time. Actually that is not quite true: I have not been searching for her. For more than sixty years I did not know who was or is Elly Alpár. Why then did I not search for her when it would have been easier to find her? Today, it is almost certainly too late; it would be futile to put an ad in a paper crying, "I am looking for Elly Alpár. Who knows about her?"*

Elly Alpár's name appeared under a poem titled *Quo Vadis.* It was published in the Budapest daily *Az Ujság (The News).* It was a long time ago. I carefully cut out the poem from the paper and pasted it in one of my father's books, into the German Bible translation of Zunz, on the inside of the binding. My father adored the poem. He read it, he recited it aloud, he quoted it in his sermons. I liked it too. I knew it by heart, I listed it among my "world poems." Even today, I know by heart most of it, and during those solitary evening strolls in New York I still keep reciting it to myself. It was almost the only poem about whose beauty my father and I agreed, although very likely it said something different to each of us—for him, it was a profession of faith, for me, a yearning—just like those universal "world poems," the

**What a quirk of fate! Elly Alpár happened to be the aunt of the translator of this book, who knew her well. She died during the early fifties and she continued to write poetry until the end.*

Psalms: "The Lord is my Shepherd," which even today, speaks to me with the voice of my father, or even more so, the one that begins: "Like the deer that yearns for running streams." (I shall not go on reciting it, although the last verse of that most beautiful Psalm practically forces itself on the tip of my pen:

> Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why moanest thou within me?

I can still hear the words as Cantor Kohn sang them on Friday evenings, during the prayers which usher in the Sabbath.) "Isn't it Ady-like?" my father once said about this poem, too. My poor father, how he was striving to understand me, to reach me, to adapt himself to me, and, at the same time, to convert me.

The first time I returned from America to look, among other things, for my father's library in Köszeg (vain hope!) I also tried to find Elly Alpár's poem (in addition to the *Treasurehouse of Hungarian Poetry*), inside the cover of the Zunz Bible. Of course, I did not find it (or rather, as I have mentioned, I did not even get to the point of actually looking for it). But then there are still miracles. Arriving in Budapest I told the sad story of my excursion to Köszeg to one of my Devecser friends, Jolán Frommer. Jolán thought that one of her friends who worked in the National Széchenyi Library could help me find the poem. I considered it impossible—but I was wrong. How the friend did it I still cannot quite understand, but the fact is that I do have in my possession a photocopy of the first page of the section titled *For Women* from the Sunday, December 4, 1910 issue of *Az Ujság.* The title of the lead article (believe it or not) is *Women and High Prices,* and the lower part of the page contains the poem *Quo Vadis* by Elly Alpár. By now the copy has become very frayed, but there it is, pasted on the inside cover of the *Treasurehouse.* And, Elly Alpár, as long as these lines of remembrance live somewhere, you, too, are alive, although I still don't know who you were.

It is terrifying how much the thought of death occupied me in my early youth. There is a fragment of a poem that even the lady of the Széchenyi Library could not find, and that, too, has haunted me for 60 or 70 years. Of it, I remember only the title, *Porzó egy régi papiron (Pounce on an Old Sheet of Paper)* and one single line:

Ami nem él, az él tovább...
(The thing that does not live, lives on...)

The poem is about an old letter, it speaks about a piece of writing; the person who wrote it has died long ago, but the tiny granules of sand from the pounce are running merrily across the piece of paper in the hand of the reader. I think the author was Gyula Vértessy. It is possible that the poem appeared in Devecser's weekly, the *Somlóvidéki Hirlap*—but all these are only faded memories. They are sand on an old piece of paper. I don't even know for certain anymore where the poem is buried. But I remember quite well why I retained it in my memory. Sometime during the 1910s, the higher authorities appointed a minor conservative poet to be superintendent of educaton of the county of Veszprém, and I am almost certain that his name was Gyula Vértessy. (For *cognoscenti:* the "ssy" ending of a Hungarian name denotes that the bearer is a member of the gentry class.) I am sure that the Devecser weekly, *Somlóvidéki Hirlap,* published the news about his appointment and described him as "the outstanding poet." I also looked into the *Treasurehouse,* and found that Gyula Vértessy is represented by one short poem. In János Horváth's more recent anthology, *The Book of Hungarian Poems,* Vértessy is not mentioned at all.

But, to return to the Angel of Death, it did not seem to me likely that he could be misled by such a simple trick as changing a sick person's name. It was only an expression of my antagonism that I pestered my father with such a painful question. I could accept the notion of the effectiveness of prayer. God was omnipotent and if He wanted to, He could restore Ilonka's health. Why then did He not do it? Who was punished for whose sins? It was, rather, the faith in the existence of angels which somewhat confused me. Only today do I realize how senselessly. Why does one have to disparage the faith in angels as "superstition?" If God Omnipotent was able to create man in His own image, why should He not be able to create angels, seraphim, cherubim, beings of a higher order, more similar to Himself? Beings who, for instance, can fly? After all, flying is what makes an angel an angel in the first place. How very strong is the desire in man to be able to fly! Hence, his imagination equips the angels with wings. Man

would like to live forever, therefore, in his fantasy the angels are immortal. How good it was to believe in them! True, there is no word about the creation of angels in the biblical story of creation, but a few chapters later mention is made of "the sons of *Elohim,*" who obviously were creatures of a higher order than man, and who "came in unto the daughters of man" because they saw that they were beautiful, and of the offspring of these unions who were a kind of titanic demi-gods. (My father glossed over such "piquant" sections.) And then there is the story of Abraham and Isaac, when an angel intervened to stop Abraham in the very last moment from killing his son. Orthodox Jews who genuinely believe what the Bible says, therefore *must* believe in the existence of angels. They must also believe in Satan, who likewise appears in Scripture, and whose role in the divine order of things was an enigma for me until I read Goethe's *Faust.* In the beautiful *Shema* prayer recited before going to bed, much is said about these superior beings. I remember every word of it, having heard my father recite it every evening, for many years, in a loud voice. It speaks of the four guardian angels, Michael, Gabriel, Uriel and Raphael, who stand guard around us, and includes Psalm 91, one of the most beautiful psalms, which assures us that we need not be afraid of the terrors of the night because God will give His angels charge over us and they will carry us upon their hands. This was followed by the blessing of Jacob—a prayer in which our forefather asks not God, but his own guardian angel, to bless his grandchildren. And at the end, using God's own words, my father even rebuked Satan. During winter evenings, in the warm room, protected by the prayers of my powerful father (while darkness was lurking outside), it was good to be—to be alive, to go to sleep. It was safe to extinguish the paraffin lamp, and we all slept, sound and safe, in the palm of God and the hands of angels, in security, like King Solomon, whose bed was guarded by sixty warriors, each with a sword on his side against the terrors of the night.

However far I drifted from the "Jewish telegraph" I must follow the thread of my memories, since after all, they are my subject, the remembered events, thoughts and feelings of my childhood, even if they include some pious God-cheatings. Where are you, where are you, the hostility of my childhood? "Sorrow has caught up with me," with me, too, as it did with Ernö Szép in his beautiful universal poem. Soon I

will get back to where I left off. But first I must again interject something. Older Hungarians, my contemporaries, for whom János Arany's poems are still very much alive, have perhaps recognized that, a little while ago, I quoted, even if not verbatim, a line from the poem, *To My Son.* This, too, belongs among the few poems of which both my father and I were equally fond. The actual line reads, "Outside lurks the dark." Both of us knew the whole poem by heart. Lines like: "For faith is a precious treasure to the poor," or "Let religion stand on the scale," belonged to the vocabulary of my father's sermons, just as did a few lines from Kölcsey's *Parainesis.* That was a book my father would have loved to list among the holy writings, and he constantly quoted from it. More than anybody, Kölcsey belonged among the "pious of the nations of the world," as well as among the thirty-six saintly people whose piety sustained the world.

The year of a religious Jew is a miraculous, structured, never boring symphony of twelve movements, of which perhaps the most moving is the vernal feast of Passover, the anxiously awaited, always new, victory celebration in the month of Nisan in the spring.

For decades I kept thinking that perhaps, "when I have time," I would look into the meaning of the names of the Jewish months. My Webster's *Dictionary* mentions only that Nisan is the name of the seventh month of the Jewish year, without any additional comment. The *Britannica* says that the Jews borrowed the names of the months from the Babylonians, and gives the older Babylonian versions. But even that does not explain much. I still don't know why the month Nisan is called Nisan. My first encounter with the problem took place in or about 1934 when, still in Budapest, I read the first volume of Thomas Mann's great Joseph Trilogy. It was then that I encountered the name of the god Tammuz (since that time, of course, I have seen it quite often), and I thought, how peculiar it was that the name of a Jewish month should commemorate a pagan deity.

During the spring feasts I noticed that the Jews and the Christians treated each other with consideration. Passover and Easter are close together. I was still a child when I noted that *they* celebrate basically the same feast days as *we* do, although in the case of Passover and Easter, our feast talks about the Exodus, theirs about Resurrection. Actually both celebrate the arrival of spring. I would like to speak

about the eight-day celebration, the unleavened bread, the pre-holiday preparations (what a fantastic string of excitements, of memories!), or about the *Seder* evenings, when, sitting on the lap of my father, I was permitted to sing with him the Aramaic folksong about the little lamb. I listened to the history of the Egyptian slavery, of the Redemption, of the long discussions until dawn, engaged in by the great Talmudic sages. I, as the youngest, was assigned the task of asking the "four questions," inquiring why this night differed from all other nights, and even got some wine to drink—four sips—until I became drowsy with the singing and the wine and fell asleep in my father's lap. (Oh, my God, great is my sin! My sons never had a chance to participate in such mystery-filled evenings!) Because of the housecleaning before the holiday, the apartment was turned upside down for weeks. The pots and pans were put away, the flour was carried to the basement. We had to store the dishes used for meat separately from those used for milk throughout the year, and to bring the corresponding two sets of Passover dishes out of the wooden shack. We had to place them on freshly laid lining paper, placed on the freshly scrubbed wooden shelves. We could afford only newspaper, and I competed with my mother to see who could cut it into the most appealing patterns. Because all this exciting work was performed "in the service of the Creator," we had to study less on those beautiful days.

The most exciting evening was the evening of the day preceding Passover eve, when my father put a burning candle in my hand and, armed with whisk of goose feathers and a wooden spoon, we went on a hunt, since man—especially woman—is fallible, and it was possible that, despite the thorough cleaning, some crumbs of leavened bread remained undetected. Although my mother mumbled *Narrischkeiten,* she cooperated by placing one or two morsels of bread in corners where my father was sure to find them. I cannot describe how happy my father was when he "discovered" these crumbs, swept them onto the spoon, and then ceremoniously burned them together with the spoon.

But what is the relationship between these bittersweet memories and the "Jewish telegraph"? Yes, this is exactly what I want to talk about now. First of all, here were the many pots and pans, the kneading trough, etc., which were considered quasi "soiled" (at least temporarily) by leaven, because we used them during the year. There are long discussions in halakhic literature about what one can and what

one cannot render "unleavened," that is, usable on Passover. Evidently, none of the dishes and utensils packed away for the duration of the feast can.

Then there were a small barrel of wine, a bottle of plum brandy, and during the years of the war, a sack of flour, and another of dry beans; all this was considered leavened. How can one get rid of all this? Well, even here the wisdom of Hillel helped (if you look at it that way), or the God-cheating (as I thought of it when I was mad). In a Jewish bookstore of Budapest, in the Király Street, one could buy Hebrew, Hungarian or German "buy and sell" contracts which the faithful could use to rid themselves of this touchy problem. On this printed form, which contained all the necessary details, my father could fill in the name of, say, Mária Kovács, maid servant, whereby she stated that she bought from my father everything that could be found in the basement, in the shed, and in all the other places accurately enumerated, for so and so many crowns (one had to name a huge sum for the sake of safety), and that, in confirmation of the above purchase, she gave so and so much as a deposit (in general, two crowns). I had my doubts about how the simple little maid could dare to negotiate with "the Reverend," but I explained to her that when the Reverend gave her a paper to sign, she could safely sign it, and handed her the two crowns which my mother had given me, and which she, in turn, had to give to my father when he asked for it. After Mária signed it, my father would lock up the "document" and the "down-payment" with great care, and only after the end of the eight-day holiday did he call Mária in for the "final" discussion: was it yes or no, did she really intend to buy everything? If not, the deal was off. Occasionally, there was some trouble. It happened that the maid said during the first discussion that she really did not want to buy anything. Occasionally, even during the final discussion, she did not know that she was expected to say "no." On such occasions, I was gripped with apprehension: what will happen if she says yes? In that case, I imagined, I would argue with her, what will you do with all these goods? Do you have a thousand *forints* to pay for them? But I remember that things never got that far. As a rule, the transaction went smoothly, especially when my friend Julcsa, the daughter of the road-master, was with us. In the end, my father returned the down payment of two crowns, with an extra two crowns added as a bonus, and tore up the contract. Thus the wine, the

grains, the brandy, the kneading trough again became our legitimate possessions.

For the sake of completeness let me add that I have known a rich Orthodox textile factory owner who "sold" his factory every Friday afternoon to the Christian foreman so that work should not have to be suspended for the duration of the Sabbath.

I ought to say a word about a rather common institution, with which I was never able to make peace, that of the *Shabbes-Goy.* This term designated a non-Jewish employee of the congregation whose only qualification was that he was not a Jew. But then, I believe, I have spoken just about enough of these various subterfuges.

All at once, the word *Goyim,* which refers to those who do not belong to the "chosen people," becomes associated in my mind with anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism. The concept is part of the experience of every Jew. It is almost impossible, almost unimaginable, that somebody who is a Jew (that is, not a *Goy*) should never have encountered it. In my personal storehouse of experiences, anti-Semitism begins with two small peasant boys, and it does not end with Hitler, Szálasi, or Auschwitz. It is very difficult for me to talk about all this.

Oddly, I remember even the place where I met those two boys. Even today I could locate the street corner where the nearest peasant street opened into the boulevard behind the synagogue. Boys like me rarely went there. I can see myself at the corner, the corner of the Bellavits Inn. Next to me stands another young Jewish boy, perhaps Sándor Weisz, the grandson of Uncle Silber, the beadle of our congregation. I do not know where we were going, nor what we were looking for there. On the opposite corner I can see a white-washed, somewhat peasantish house, with a small, inconspicuous sign next to its gate: the shingle of an elderly lawyer without the *Doctor juris* title. On that corner two peasant boys are standing. Suddenly I can hear them yell a primitive obscene rhyme which can only roughly be translated as "Stinky Jew, my ass you chew." And I can hear Sándor (if it was him) yelling back almost the very same moment, "Peasant pig, my hole you lick."

The vulgarity of the words shocked me. I could never fully conquer a certain verbal inhibition. Never, not even today, could I without great difficulty pronounce such words, terms used by men today when

among themselves, describing, without the least constraint, the organs of the lower body, their parts, and their functions. Nor is all this taboo anymore in contemporary American literature. I don't remember whether in my late twenties, during my year-long analysis, this question had ever been raised. Of course, my analyst—he was a Victorian gentleman—was at least as inhibited as I, his "patient." Suddenly I realize now that all my life, whenever I got undressed and dressed in a men's dressing room, I did so in a rather bashful manner. I inherited this from my father. He was the most prudish person I have ever met in my life.

That verbal duel remained in my memory as my first encounter with anti-Semitism. What shocks me even today is not the vulgarity of words used—I learned soon enough how far the poor, the uneducated, were from all genteel refinement. They call a spade a dirty shovel, and without any particular emotion, will snap at you that you should perform a sexual act with your mother. What disturbs me today is something entirely different. At that time, not only the use of the words was new to me, but the readiness with which my friend Sándor answered back. Obviously, such verbal fights were everyday occurrences among children. They must have thrown dirty words at each other for generations.

Two other early images which belong here (I don't know why) are linked to the same street corner. (Suddenly a "memory dossier" about Bellavits Inn is thrown open. But don't worry, dear reader, I'm not going into it.) Once more peasant boys are standing in front of whitewashed houses. Even now I can hear them screaming at me (or at us), "You killed the Lord, Jesus."

On some other occasion (I don't remember clearly) they were singing a mocking song which I have been trying to recall for the past 80 years, but only its refrain comes back: "Moses in the swill." (Has anybody heard this song before?)

The fact that Sándor (if it was he) had the ready-made rhyming response to the anti-Semitic obscenity of the peasant boys also showed that the Jewish boys were not more tolerant than the others. Perhaps they were not as rude, not as aggressive. After all, they were a very small minority. Mostly it was rather behind the backs of the peasant boys, and in a humorous way, that they gave vent to their feelings.

I never heard an unrefined word from my father. He was the

epitome of correctness, and he really believed that, as the Talmud says,

> The pious of the nations of the world have a share in the World to Come.

Of course, the nations had to keep only the "seven commandments of the Sons of Noah"—how lucky they are, I thought, God gave them only seven commandments, whereas we, the "chosen people," must observe 613, among them 365 prohibitions, in order to be worthy of the World to Come.

My father respected the religious Christians. He felt himself close to them. "After all," he said "they worship the same God." In his sermons he often referred to believing Christians as examples worthy to follow: "Yes, our Christian neighbor is not ashamed to hold the rosary in her hand when she goes to Church, but we Jews hide the fringes of our ritual garment, we are ashamed of the *mezuzah* attached to the door-post which brands (this was the word he used) us as Jews in the eyes of the world."

Of course, it was also true that my father never took the name Jesus (or Christ) on his lips. If it was inevitable, if, for instance, he had to mention a date, he said "before the common era," never "before Christ," and, likewise, never "Anno Domini." Whenever it was possible he counted the days according to the Jewish lunar months, and reckoned the years "from the creation of the world." Thus the year of my birth, 1900, was entered in the family calendar as the year 5660 of Creation. We celebrated the birthday of my father that, according to the birth registry, was December 8, on the second day of Hanukka, which I believe coincides only once every 18 or 19 years with that calendar day. Why this should be the case I have forgotten. To understand the Jewish calendar is not a simple thing.

As for my mother, I cannot say that she was equally "delicate." She represented the vernacular in the family. I did hear the name Jesus from her, corrupted in Yiddish to *Joizl.* (The "l" suffix in Austrian-German dialects is a diminutive.) And, for instance, if during the Corpus Christi or Resurrection processions, the Main Square was jam-packed with worshipers, she let out a deep sigh in which a certain amount of envy and admiration was mixed with sorrow, and kept repeating, *"Ja, der Joizl hat eine Gewure."* (The Yiddish word *Gewure*

means might, talent, and perhaps success.)

Here is the place to record another memory that has to do with Christmas Eve. My father never said a word about its significance. But he did not open his holy books on that night. Why, he did not say. He would read some other kind of book, or a newspaper, and I, too, was free to read. I suppose that this was a custom popular in Orthodox Jewish circles. I do not know. I never had the opportunity anywhere to stay with Orthodox Jews on Christmas Eve, and I must confess, I never inquired. Vaguely, I remember that my mother apostrophized this evening as "the evening of *der Gekreuzigte,*" and she had a Yiddish word for it. Also, it is interesting that in our father-dominated life, and in my father-dominated memories, Jesus and Christmas are linked exclusively to my mother.

Otherwise, the phenomenon of anti-Semitism barely figures among my personal memories of Devecser, my childhood, my Hungarian "paradise." The emancipation of the Jews at the time of Hungary's reconciliation with Austria (1867), and the reception of the Jewish religion among the recognized denominations some three decades later, shine as bright stars on the Hungarian heaven. Even today I can hear references to them coming from my father's mouth. Our good-hearted, God-fearing king Franz Joseph shone like a sun which warmed Jews and non-Jews equally. Why should a Neolog Hungarian Jew become a Zionist? After all, our wanderings had ended. For the Orthodox Jew, the situation was somewhat different. For him it would have been much more satisfactory if he had remained only "tolerated," so that he would not have to adjust emotionally to the aims of the state, to the environment, to its ambitions, problems, and pains. My poor father, again, sat on the fence: in his feelings he was a Hungarian patriot, but he was also waiting for the Messiah. And he was *really* waiting for him; he said so every day in his prayers.

I don't say that I did not know about the blood accusation of Tiszaeszlár, about Móric Scharf (the accused) and Eszter Solymossy (the victim). But there was a Károly Eötvös, a Christian lawyer, the author of *The Great Trial,* the defender of truth. And there was the Hungarian system of justice, which, at the end, acquitted Móric Scharf. (Of course it also acquitted the Zsilinsky boys although they did kill a man.) But all that happened a long time ago. I also knew that the Jews in Rumania had no citizenship rights, that in Russia the Jews

could live only in the Pale of Settlement, and that in Germany a Jew could not be a military officer. All this was simply unimaginable in my country. Here, the Schultheiss boy of Devecser became a lieutenant general, the commander of an army corps, and was even ennobled with the title "Devecseri." (True, it seems that he "left the faith," at least that is what Uncle Silber said about him). The Russian blood libels and pogroms occurred within my memory. I remember a city called Kishinev or Kishenev, and an unlucky, simple-minded young Jew (perhaps named Beylis?) who was accused by evil provocateurs and superstitious peasants of having killed a Christian child because the Jews mixed Christian blood in the Passover *matzo*. It was different in Devecser, in Hungary, where my father and I could go safely into a peasant house, into the courtyard where a Christian baker had a special oven that was cleansed with fire, and made kosher every year for baking *matzos,* while Uncle Silber, supervised by my father, watched with Argus eyes lest (heaven forbid!) a crumb of bread fall into the dough. I can still see the wooden roller used to press and stretch the dough. And then there was a nail-studded implement that one had to run across the dough to make holes in it so that it should bake without bubbles and more uniformly—I was permitted to take it into my hands. I remember also what a disappointment it was for me when, during World War I, the leaders of the congregation decided that it would be simpler (and perhaps cheaper) to bring ready-made *matzo* from the Budapest *matzo* factory than to spend time on the baking. Even today I can still see the five kilogram packages wrapped in blue packing paper. The factory *matzos* were, of course, machine made. This was the first example of the intrusion of industrial civilization into the romanticism of self-sufficiency. Something got lost, disappeared, and remained only in memory. I remember that my father ordered separately one kilogram of special *matzo* made by hand—it was thicker, coarser, and round. Its name was *sh'mire matzo* (preserved *matzo*). He placed this ultra-kosher *matzo* on the Seder dish during the two evening services held at home. This was an interesting illustration of the belief that the spiritual somehow affected the physical, especially if food was involved. The *sh'mire matzo* was made, from reaping to grinding, from kneading to baking, only by religious, Sabbath-observing Jews. Thus it was more hallowed than the other *matzos*. Something similar seemed to be true about the wine that my

father blessed before the Friday evening meal. I was always grumbling what could make wine kosher or non-kosher? As for the bacon, that I could understand. The eating of pork was forbidden *expressis verbis* in the Torah. One could not think about that. It belonged to the so-called *hukkim,* laws whose reasons we simply don't understand. But why was it necessary for the grapes of the kosher wine to be squeezed by the bare feet of religious Jews and not by a machine? And what difference did it make whether the maid (heaven forbid!) touched the wine bottle? Of course, at the time I did not yet know about Freud, and did not understand the meaning of taboos, the rational basis of the irrational.

I have already mentioned that ultra-Orthodox family whose members did not eat the poultry killed by our cantor, no matter how scrupulously he observed every rule of the ritual slaughtering. Why? Because his wife wore no wig. My poor father's heart bled when he saw this. As for himself, he really never knew where he belonged. He observed strictly all the laws and customs. But at the same time, he explained the meaning of the commandments and prohibitions in accordance with the ethical rationalism of Samson Raphael Hirsch. I can only repeat that he was waiting for the Messiah with great ardor, but he was also a Hungarian patriot. It is difficult to explain this. But so it was! Basically, Orthodox Jews were not "patriotic," and that is why the Orthodox feels more comfortable in America where it is not expected of a person to be patriotic, than in Israel where patriotism is the meaning of life, and heroic death is not a phrase. (Of course, I don't want to give the impression that Orthodox Jews are without patriotism. Far from it! "Unpatriotic" and "not patriotic" are two entirely different concepts.)

I shall never forget the anti-Semitic old Count Zichy, who, following the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic, quickly swore allegiance to the new state's constitution. When asked how could he, a Hungarian count, do that, he answered that if God ordained that his home and estate should be in Czechoslovakia, he must accept it and must adapt himself to it. Likewise, I shall never forget Ernö Schor, a high school teacher in an Eastern Hungarian town, who arrived in Pápa with his family, having left behind almost all his possessions because, after all, a Hungarian will not betray his country and swear allegiance to a

foreign state. I know of several such cases, each an interrupted and broken career. (But they were Neolog Jews, emotionally assimilated.)

As far as I can judge, the Orthodox Jews of Slovakia in general took the position of Count Zichy, even if they did not rush to offer their oath of allegiance. The Czechs cleverly expected of the Jews only one thing: that they should not be pro-Hungarian, and especially not irredentist, and that they should not make the Czech population statistics look worse by giving their nationality as "Hungarian," instead of "Jewish." They knew that the Hungarian Jews could not state, be it only for census purposes, that they were "Slovaks." Thus, to register as Jewish was all right. A Jew could even be a Zionist. During the Hungarian regime the situation had been much more delicate. In pre-World War I Hungary the Magyars reached a 51% majority only with difficulty, and had the Jews not declared themselves Hungarians, the latter would have become a minority. As I have mentioned before, in a village near Zsolna the older brother of grandmother Fanny (Knöpfelmacher) was the only Jew. He was the village judge, and as I remember, the only citizen who declared, or had to declare, himself Hungarian in the census of 1910. The fact was that he knew not more than a few words in Hungarian, but at least he was literate.

I cannot leave unmentioned here the memorable war diary of a young Orthodox Jew published in installments, I believe in *Hagyomány (Tradition),* the official paper of the Orthodox congregation of Pest. I have never read anything like it. That young man served four years in the army. Everything he wrote in his diary revolved around one theme: how he was able to keep the Sabbath even in the midst of the gravest difficulties, how at the price of the greatest sacrifices, he managed to recite the prayers at their prescribed times, and observe the dietary laws. For him, the global cataclysm had no other aspect, he allowed nothing else to enter the compass of his consciousness. The issues of the paper were mailed to me by my father, on whom the writing had made a deep impression. I showed it to my friend Ernö Hirschfeld. (He was to be among the first physicians about whom I learned that they perished in labor camps.) Ernö hit the nail on the head: *"Vier Jahre unter Gojim"* ("Four years among Gentiles"), he said. "That would be the proper title."

For my father, the diary demonstrated what one can do with a

strong will. And, of course, in that he was right. He even included it in one of his sermons. One of the episodes described elicited my father's special admiration: "You see, God watches over His pious children!" Our young man was saying his prayers in the trenches, and reached the Eighteen Benedictions, which must be recited standing and without moving from one's place. (One of my childhood fears was, what would happen if, inadvertently, I would move my legs while saying that prayer? And will Cantor Kohn be able to hold out for hours while reciting its long Yom Kippur version?) The Eighteen Benedictions end with a joyful praise and request. I should really put it here in Hebrew, because only that way does one get its full meaning. (My father used to overdramatize it.) Its English translation would be something like "He who creates peace in His heights, may He create peace among us, too." The exact wording doesn't matter. What was important was that when one reached that passage one made a sudden break in the prayerful rigidity, took three small steps backward, and then again three steps forward, thus signifying the end of the prayer. Well, the dramatic part of the young soldier's story was that the moment he stepped back with the words, "He who creates peace," (I can hear and see my father recreating the scene) enemy machine guns sprayed the trench but our friend was not hit. It was a miracle (or as my father said, the miraculous will of God. The point is that the story could even be true. Life and death in the trenches depended on seconds, on when and whom the bullet happened to hit.) My father's other favorite story was about the soldier who carried a small Bible in the left upper pocket of his uniform, "over the heart," and that Bible once stopped a bullet.

Although no charge of ritual murder was ever made against the Jews of Devecser, anti-Semitism did exist in Hungary. I remember vaguely a tabloid titled *Uj Lap (New Journal),* which I once saw in the waiting room of the "gentlemen's tailor" Kulcsár. It contained ugly caricatures of Jews with noses like the number 6. And from a later time I remember a newly opened general store that advertised itself as "Christian Consumers' Cooperative."

In this connection, I overheard a reference to the anti-Semitic Count Zichy: "He would like to starve the Jews to death." Of course, at that time I had no clear idea of the relationship between the "Consumers' Cooperative," and the "Jewish Question" or anti-Semitism. But since that cooperative declared itself to be "Christian," it must have

wanted to make survival difficult for the Jewish storekeepers, and it would not have admitted a Jew even as an apprentice.

That life in its totality can be a service of God, and every day can be a holy day, was almost made a reality by my father. I think only the life of the great Hasidic rabbis could have been more God-centered. His days indeed rested in the lap of God. Of course, "it was easy for him," I used to say grumbling to myself. After all, he was a rabbi, and really had nothing else to do. Easy for him to serve the Lord. Were I still to think this, I would be unjust to the spirit of the great moralist Hirsch, to the principles laid down in his religious-philosophical work, *Choreb.* (My father worked for years on its translation into Hungarian, but the manuscript disappeared.) Every work, whether you are measuring goods, cleaning chimneys, or repairing shoes, can be divine service if its final purpose is to serve the Lord and your fellow man, if you earn enough to support your family, and if it permits you to immerse yourself, during the rest of your days, in the word of God. I must make a confession here: no matter how much I had been fighting, from the very beginning, the kind of life my father led, ultimately I got from him much more of an emotional viaticum, much, much more than I could give to my sons. And I must add once more (even if I am repeating myself): my taciturn, inhibited father could bring his feelings to the surface in the formality of liturgy and rite; they always broke through from beneath the forms. If, on Friday evenings, he placed his hands on my head and recited the triple blessing, he *really* wanted to bless me. I have already described one of my most cherished memories, that about the festive Psalm he recited on a weekday—on the evening of my return home after several years of absence. My eyes still fill with tears, even today, when I think of it.

Yes, yes! Life as a religious service. Take, for example, the ritual of awakening in the morning, rising, getting up—they were all parts of a religious service. For as long as I can remember, my father rose before dawn, at 4 a.m. during the summer months, somewhat later in the winter. By the time he woke me, about 45 minutes before the communal morning prayers, he had already recited all the prayers to be said individually, including the Psalms of the day, and had reviewed the

portions of the Talmud and the Codes assigned for that day. He had also taken care of his bodily functions. He had trained himself to comply with the rules governing religious comportment which advised the pious to appear in the synagogue, in the face of God, in a state of cleanness. Hasidic Jews even went so far as to wear a rope around their waist to separate the "clean" upper part of the body from the "unclean" lower part. My father would never have done anything like that. He did not like the demonstrative Hasidic behavior, the extremism. Hirsch and his school, to which my father counted himself, were rationalists, philosophers. Nothing could have been farther from them than the Hasidim, with their emotional outbursts, their holy men, and their ignorance of religious laws. When he woke me up he called, *"Tzevi, steh auf,"* ("get up,") in German, and added in Hebrew, "to serve the Creator." As I woke up, it was not my father whom I was supposed to greet first. Even before opening the eyes, and before completing the ritual washing of hands, I had to give thanks to "the living and everlasting King" (I still remember every word of the Hebrew sentence) for having, in His great compassion, given me back my soul that, the night before, as soon as I had fallen asleep, had gone up to heaven and reposed in the hand of God. Before washing one's hands one was not permitted to recite the regular blessing, the one which begins with the name of God (the commonly used Hebrew-Yiddish name of such a blessing is *brokhe*). That is the reason for the unusual address: "living and everlasting King."

It would, of course, be an exaggeration to call the performance of natural functions a divine service, although the books on rules of behavior discussed even them in detail, but the washing of hands and the benediction that followed it gave them a certain ritual character. It was not permissible to cleanse oneself simply with water running from a faucet. One had to pour the water from a pitcher on one's hands. At the side of my father's bed stood a washbowl with a special, round, two-handled pitcher full of water, so that he should not have to take even four steps with "unclean" hands. One had to give thanks: "Blessed art Thou, *Adonai Elohenu,* King of the universe" (every benediction began with these words, the rest I translate rather freely and in a shortened form), "who hast supplied our body with conduits and openings, and if any one of them would not function, we would be unable to exist and stand before Thy face."

It was the prayers, the blessings, and the singing of Psalms that formed the framework of every meal. Everything was done in God's name, everything was meant to serve God. Each meal was an act of worship. *Sub specie aeternitatis.*

I want to mention but a few more of those daily blessings which belonged to the ritual of waking and rising. Not only did we have to thank the Lord for giving us back our souls, but also had to thank Him that He did not create us pagans, slaves, or worse yet, women. The real "chosen" people were we, the men; God demanded the hardest service only from us. The world of religion was a male world, and most of its events were male events. They were my father's and mine. And what a sequence they were: twelve months of a constantly changing kaleidoscope of colors and moods. In the Passover feast, my mother, too, played a role, albeit more by working than by participating in the ritual. On her shoulders rested the complete turning of the household inside out and back again. The other feasts and holidays were totally male preserves: the days of mourning as well as the days of joyful feasts, the Feast of Weeks; the anniversary of the destruction of Jerusalem when we were supposed to sit barefoot on the floor, to fast, and to recite Jeremiah's Lamentations; the High Holy Days of the fall; the Feast of Tabernacles that commemorates Israel's wanderings in the desert as well as the fruits of the Land of Promise; the joyous feast of the Torah, *Simchas Torah,* when the reading of the Five Books of Moses was completed and started again from the beginning, and when it was permitted to dance in a procession with the Torah scrolls—all these were male holidays. The image of my mother is almost completely absent from these memories. However, there is a month in every year, the month of Elul, at the end of summer, the last month before the New Year, when nothing actually happens, except the recitation of penitential prayers, that always reminds me of my mother. At the beginning of every lunar month, my father and I used to go outside to greet the new moon, its rebirth, with a prayer. Apparently, my mother was interested neither in the changes of the moon nor in the greeting of the months. But as summer drew to a close and my father and I went into the yard to greet the reappearing late-summer moon, my mother suddenly, almost unexpectedly, sighed. *"Elul,"* she kept repeating, *"Elul, Elul. Ein Jahr ist wieder vergangen."* ("Another year is gone.") This sentence contained all the sorrow and all the trusting

acceptance of passing and rebirth, of the finality of life and its eternal renewal.

One more thing I want to interject here: Ever since I was a small child I remember that at the beginning of every January the Devecser mailman brought us a calendar as a gift. Of course, he expected to get a few crowns or *Forints* in return. The calendar identified the months with their lovely Hungarian epithets: *Január:* the month of winter; *Február:* the month of winter's end; *Március:* the month of the beginning of spring; and so forth. I still like to designate the months in my private correspondence in this manner. Thus, August: the end of summer; September: the beginning of fall. *Elul* has something from both—I hear the word even today in the voice of my mother—a mixture of resignation and thanksgiving: We thank Thee, O Lord, that we are alive, that we survived another year, and at the same time, we thank Thee, O Lord, that one year has passed and we are one year closer to the inevitable, the date of which only Thou knowest. We thank Thee O Lord, for life, although we know that it will pass.

By the way, my father could not be called affectionate either: when he left on a journey, or when he arrived back from one, he barely kissed my mother on the forehead. I was permitted to kiss his hand. These were all the permissible emotional manifestations. I remember that my father traveled a great deal. Why did he travel? Easy to explain. First of all, there was the "clan," the numerous rabbis related on my real mother's side. Because of her early death, my father was actually nothing more than an outside member of the Landesberg clan, but they did not forget him altogether. On occasions such as weddings, burials, circumcisions, bar mitzvahs, the more rabbis present meant the more grandiose the celebration. Then there were the many relatives on my father's side. They were mostly lower-middle-class people: a few Slovakian lumber merchants, artisans, and small store keepers. For them, the rabbi relative who officiated at a wedding or eulogized a deceased with special warmth was a source of family pride. And then there was another reason why my father did some traveling. He never liked Devecser. After the few "keepers of the Sabbath," the Adlers, the Adolph Mauthners, the Friedbauers, moved away, and especially when I, too, went off, first to the college and later to the university, my father was left completely alone, companionless, silent. Traveling was

good for him. Once one of my cousins was sent by his parents to board with us for a year so as to be able to attend a Jewish elementary school—there was none in the village where they lived. In the early 1920s, Elsa, a Linksz niece, spent a school year with us. And then, once, one of my father's dreams became a reality: he had a *bokher,* a young Talmudist, who studied with him to prepare himself for admission to a Yeshiva. He was a small, unsightly, very smart boy, on whom Devecser and its people did not make a good impression (nobody was interested there in the Talmud). When I came home for the summer and started my literary soirees with the so-called "cultured" middle-class girls of Devecser, he shook his head in disapproval.

Whenever these things come to my mind, even today, it is a mystery for me that, while my popularity was high among the girls, the boys continued to hate me or to ignore me. The "upper class" classmates, with whom I sat through the four elementary grades, went right away to a *gimnázium.* I hardly saw them even during the summer vacations. Only one of them became a doctor—Andor, the son of the haberdasher, who once, when I wanted to play with the gentry boys (they were already high school students at the time) slammed the door of their house in my face. He practiced in a small Transdanubian town when I already counted as quite a successful specialist in Budapest. He never came to see me. True, I didn't look him up either. He did not survive the Nazi times. The others, the well-to-do ones, generally continued the business and farming activities of their parents, and to the best of my knowledge all perished in death camps and labor camps. Only the poor boys were forced to go to Budapest; some of them survived.

But to return to my father's travels, I remember especially well those of his trips that took him to communities in search of a rabbi. My father was unhappy in Devecser, and not primarily because of the unsatisfactory salary. He wanted to find a "better" congregation. He wished to live among "humans." Whenever the Jewish weekly *Egyenlöség (Equality)* arrived, the first thing my father would do was to glance through the want ads. They were inviting applications from Jewish teachers, cantors, ritual slaughterers, and occasionally, even from rabbis. I remember the legal-size bond paper my father filled with his beautiful pearl-like handwriting, detailing his *curriculum vitae.* From it, of course, it became apparent that he did not have a diploma

from a rabbinical seminary. Only Neolog congregations advertised in *Egyenlöség.* The Orthodox chose their rabbis in an entirely different way, and for a rabbi "tainted" with the title *doctor,* and, what is more, occupying a Neolog position, it would have been hopeless to apply. Most of the applications were returned, accompanied by a polite letter of regret. A few communities invited my father for trial sermons, and wrote their polite letter afterwards. One community, the one in Mezötúr, asked him twice to preach, but in the end they did not elect him.

My poor father's second trip to Mezötur was a rather tragicomic event. The express train going to Transylvania stopped at Mezötúr for one minute, and my father, seeing no porter, got off the train without his luggage, to be welcomed by a committee from the community. ("Obviously, I could not appear before them with a valise in my hand," he explained to us.) The train took off with his luggage, containing the clean shirt, the formal suit, and of course, his prayer book and the manuscript of his sermon. (A week later the Railway Agency brought the luggage back to Devecser undamaged and without charge.) Whether or not this incident contributed to his lack of success, I have no way of knowing. The fact is that my father did not become the rabbi of Mezötúr.

Finally, when I came home from Kiel in 1925 with my brand new doctor's diploma, I was greeted with the joyful news that my father had been invited to be the rabbi of Köszeg. By that time he had turned all gray. He was 55 years old. He and my mother were to spend almost two decades of their lives, their last two decades, in Köszeg. They were happier and more satisfied there. Köszeg was a "free royal city," a place of old culture, and the congregation was part of the Burgenland Jewish communities, proud of their great past. Let me mention only one of those communities, that of Kismarton (Eisenstadt), the Kismarton of Prince Eszterházy and of Haydn, and of the famous Jewish museum. What happened to the museum during the Nazi regime, I don't know. (Today Eisenstadt is the capital city of the Austrian Burgenland district.) The proximity of Vienna and the influence of German culture could be noticed in everything. (I think one of the characteristics of the Jews is their bilingualism. In Devecser, the Jews, and especially the younger generation, no longer spoke German. Nothing could have shown more their cultural decadence.) My father's

salary was modest also in Köszeg. But he was not dependent anymore on a government handout. The basis of the material well-being of the Köszeg congregation (just as that of many other welfare and cultural institutions of the city) was secured by foundations established by the Jewish Baron Fülöp Schey. Baron Fülöp became a rich man by supplying the Austrian army during the Italo-Austrian war, and he became the benefactor of the city of his birth. He built the beautiful synagogue considered a work of art. In the early 1960s, when I visited Köszeg, the synagogue served as a storage place for vegetables.

I never felt at home in Köszeg. After they moved there, I usually saw my parents only during the Jewish holidays, and later, only when Magda and I paid them a visit. Even today I could still enumerate who lived in Devecser on, say, Klapka Street or the Deák Plaza, but I could never tell who lived in which house in Köszeg in, say, the Baron Fülöp Schey Street. (Of course, neither do I know the present name of that street.)

8

Two Semesters in Budapest (1918-1919)
A Second Start

In my introductory Chapter 1, which has the same title, I wandered off a long way from the 1918-19 law studentship, the revolution, the private tutoring, and the dictatorship of the proletariat. And from Lajos Kassák, and the *Ma,* about which I would like to say so many things. About the counterrevolution I have not yet said a word. It will be best to start all over again. Perhaps with the second start those roadblocks—those occasionally indicated, but most often unidentified, digressions—will get less in my way. The title *Two Semesters* itself implies that the university was the *raison d'être* of my life in Budapest at that time. Even my police registration card stated that I was a law student. I must confess that during the months spent in Budapest in 1918 and 1919, the university had very little influence on the course my life took, and, to use a pompous expression, on my intellectual development. I don't even remember the faces of my law professors. Bernát Alexander's lectures on philosophy interested me much more than Roman law. Kassák and his circle and the literary magazine *Ma* played a far greater role in the events of that period in my life. *Ma* was simultaneously also a book publishing company (perhaps it even sold books about modern art?) as well as a picture gallery, the meeting place of long-haired youths (already at that time!) and young artists. All this had a great influence—*must* have had a great influence—on the development of my aesthetic views. It was then and there that my life-long association with modern *avant-garde* art was born. The arts, especially

the fine arts, were to remain an important part of my life. It is necessary that I discuss this here in detail, and a few repetitions will be unavoidable.

Pápa, the city, afforded little enough chance for self-education in art, and the curriculum of the college even less. In our junior year, in his course on World History, Professor Lakatos discussed Modern Times—in the freshman year the subject was the Ancient World, in the sophomore year, the Middle Ages. Both the textbooks and the lectures gave only a very scanty coverage to the arts. For some reason, two names stuck in my memory: Claude Lorrain and Nicolas Poussin. It would seem that the aesthetic appreciation of our professor ran out of steam by the time the modern period was reached.

The history course of the senior year dealt again exclusively with Hungary, but, of course, on a higher level. The title of the textbook used was *Investigative History of Hungary.* The sections dealing with fine arts discussed mainly the painters of the Hungarian academic school, from Kupetzky to Barabás to Benczúr and on to Feszty whose fame rested on his huge cyclorama entitled *The Arrival of the Hungarians,* and ending with Mihály Zichy. But they did not reach Pál Szinyei-Merse. The name of Mihály Munkácsy figured, of course, in capital letters in this evaluation. As I mentioned already, I tried to fill the gaps by reading up on the subject. The book titled *The Barbizonians* helped me more than any other book to understand, to gain insight into, the evolution of 19th-century European painting. I had not even heard yet of such schools as Impressionism, Postimpressionism, Futurism, the Fauve, or Cubism. Neither did I know about German Expressionism and the Dada, although in connection with these there was not even a language barrier. Curious as it may seem, I encountered the Secession much earlier than any other "ism"—not in original creations, which I did not have a chance to see, but in the illustrations of books, as well as (how odd!) in the pieces of furniture which adorned the gentry homes of Europe.

Every year the daily *Pesti Napló* gave a Christmas gift to its subscribers. Our neighbors in Devecser, the family of Béla Schwartz, were subscribers, and through them several beautifully produced, gold embossed, album-like books fell into my hands. I remember especially well one of these gift books: it was called *Csodaalbum (The Album of Wonders).* It was full of multi-colored decorations and illus-

trations, about which, of course, I did not know at the time that they bore the mark of the Secession, that later was looked down upon, but that today I can again enjoy very much. (If I only still had those books!) I remember the name of Árpád Basch, and of Nelly Hirschfeld, who illustrated Vörösmarty's *Szép Ilonka* (Beautiful Helen).

I am hesitating: why should I save from the third death (even if only temporarily) an insignificant book that, moreover, pointed in the wrong direction? But it did belong to my education—my self-education—and to the age, the place and time, in which I grew up. The book I have in mind was written by a certain Károly Pekár, and its title was something like *A Magyar Nemzeti Szépről* (On the Hungarian National Beauty). It was, in general, of poor quality, and it glorified the Hungarian (or rather, psuedo-Hungarian) genre-painting. As a rule, whenever a painting depicted a herd of cattle or horses, a draw-well or a *csárda,* or perhaps a boy in his peasant's pants, it was pronounced "beautiful," "nationally beautiful," or "Hungarian-nationally beautiful." If it depicted smoking factory chimneys, miners or steelworkers it was "not beautiful," and no such pictures were shown among the illustrations. Before long, of course, I discovered that there was such a thing as a "socialist beauty" or even "international-socialist beauty." This kind of painting came in two versions: one showing the muscular steel worker (the future) and the other the sickly, tuberculotic miner with his starving children (the past, the guilty past). As I said, it is evident that Károly Pekár hardly deserves even a temporary resurrection. But, inevitably, the names of his two brothers surge up into my memory. One of them, Gyula Pekár, was a huge-bodied but weak-penned novelist. (I remember only the man, not the books.) The other, whom I do want to "save from death," was Mihály Pekár, dean of the Medical Faculty of the Elizabeth University which moved from Pozsony to Pécs. He salvaged some traditions from the liberal era into the *kursus,* as that racist regime was called, at least as far as one of the universities of Hungary was concerned. Later I shall perhaps have more to say about him.

I clearly remember sitting in a street car on my way home toward Aréna Avenue when a passenger who had just boarded said that the communists were freed from Central Prison and that the government of Béla Kun, the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat," was formed. I happened to have a volume of some rather mediocre socialist propa-

ganda poems in my hand. The book was superbly produced, printed on heavy white paper. The poet's name, it seems to me, was Hevesi, and the title of the book, *Internationale.* I doubt very much that the *Ma* published it. Suddenly a poem was born in my mind. It expressed both my enthusiastic happy reaction and my doubts. The only stanza I remember went something like this:

> Of the bread of yesterday,
> with the knife of yesterday,
> a man of yesterday cuts a slice, and
> Beethoven is still beautiful.

I remember that I continued to struggle with this poem for days. I cannot recall whether I ever put it in writing. (My poetry was, anyhow, very much on the wane.) But even in its fragmentary form, the poem reflects the influence of the Kassák-circle. Ady, Babits, Kosztolányi, Béla Balázs always insisted on rhyme and rhythm. The writers of the *Ma,* the "Todayists," were the ones who, to my knowledge, dared to free themselves for the first time in the Hungarian language, from these obligatory shackles. That marvelous ode of Kassák, *Mesteremberek (Artisans),* was a beautiful poem, a "world poem," without rhymes and matching syllables. Even today, during my solitary evening strolls, I occasionally recite it to myself. And I? Only a short while previously I spent hours, days, trying to mold something worth saying into a pre-cast verse form, for instance that of a sonnet. And now, lo and behold, here was a poem without rhymes and with one syllable more in the fourth line. What a revolutionary step!... I remember one more line from my poem:

> the week with seven Sundays...

I do not know where and how this sentence fragment fitted into the poem, nor whether I approved or disapproved of the idle irresponsibility it expressed. Neither do I know how Beethoven got into the picture. It could have been nothing more than phony bragging. (That was not an uncommon aspect of my behavior. My acquaintance with music was still almost zero at that time.)

But even then I knew that the revolution did not erase the past, nor did I wish that it should, although, "to erase the past completely" was the stated goal of the final struggle celebrated in our new hymn.

(Interestingly, I never knew who, and in what language, wrote the original lyrics of the *Internationale,* and I did not know who composed its tune). Here was the *Ma,* here was the "world turned international" (I twisted the new hymn a little), but there was Vörösmarty despairing over the fate of the world:

> Man hurts the Earth
> There is no hope.

And here was Ady, the poet-prince, suffering the aches of Hungary's hopeless future. No matter how I adored Kassák, in reality his North Hungarian, graceless, working-class dialect always bothered me, and it always hurt me to listen to him when he started discussing Ady with contempt in his voice. In the judgment of Kassák (at least at that time) Ady was just a confused, patriotic idealist. I acknowledged that Ady also wrote several mediocre poems. But soon I also discovered that those were exactly the "socialist" poems. At the end, I forgave Kassák everything. A book review published in *Ma* directed me toward the *Napló* (Diary) of Dezsö Szabó, which from there on for a long time became my almost constant companion. The first edition of the *Napló és Elbeszélések (Diary and Short Stories)* produced by a master craftsman, Izidor Kner, Gyoma, 1918, is here on a shelf in my library. The book is a noble piece of Kner work; even its paper has not yellowed. Only its cover is missing.

I can hear the voice of Kassák. I can still see his face and his black shirt. He never wore a tie. I also remember László Moholy-Nagy, Béla Uitz, and Sándor Bortnyik, one or two of whose paintings we saved from our apartment in Budapest. During the thirties, Bortnyik was a patient of mine. I recognized László Moholy-Nagy when, about twenty-five years later, I met him at an exhibition in New York. The customs officers of Budapest did not rate these pictures as "art treasures," and so we could bring with us to America almost every piece of graphic and all the small figures. One of the little clay figurines hanging on our wall might have been the last work of my friend, Béla Friedbauer.

Of course these possessions are of later origin, mainly from the years of my private practice in Budapest. Poorer artists paid with minor works—with aquarelles, pencil drawings. Not only to me. My friend, Gyula Baron told me once, laughing, how many things his

father, Jónas, a well-known professor of surgery, had accumulated over the years. Professor Jónas Baron was noted for his humor. His sons knew dozens of anecdotes about him—some only attributed to him. Once, while showing his picture collection to one of his guests, he supposedly referred to it as *"Die Galerie kranker Meister"* (The Gallery of Sick Artists).

This is the way we ended up owning a small collection of works by Hungarian artists of the thirties: a few pieces of little value according to the customs officer, yet they were very valuable for us. At least we have them with us; they are symbols of the continuity of our lives. (Other "honorariums" would have gone down the drain anyway.)

Even so, I am sorry that we bought works of art only rarely. But, of course, with our income it would not have been possible to buy really good and valuable paintings. We had a rough start. We were in debt. The optician, László Juszt, let me have the office equipment on credit. By the time my practice started to pick up I left Budapest. Even today I can see a large, ethereal watercolor of József Egry, titled *St. Christopher.* I could have purchased it for a small amount. But an inner voice kept me from doing it: what if your father would see such a picture on your wall? The poor dear was hurt anyway because a color print with Hebrew inscriptions marking the direction of the east (certain prayers must be recited facing Jerusalem, that is, the east) and the handwritten tablet listing the annual dates of the anniversaries of my mother's death, did not hang on our walls. Even today I am ashamed of my failure to display them.

During the middle thirties things began to ease a little and we moved into a larger apartment. My father came to visit us. In the morning we recited the morning prayers together. (I told him—it was a lie—that I prayed every morning at home with the *tefillin,* even if it was not possible for me to go to the synagogue. At that time I took it for granted that my father believed all that. Today, as I think back, I begin to be less and less convinced that he did.) When we reached the "Eighteen Benedictions," which one has to recite turning toward the east, my father asked me,

> *Wo ist Misrach?*
> (Where is east?)

My blood froze. I had never thought of it. I had to decide in the

fraction of a second where east could be. Fortunately, I gave the correct answer.

Digression: Mózes Kahána, the Son of a Rabbi

I remember very well the name of Mózes Kahána. How I envied the heroic and symbolic name: Not Móric Kohn, Magyarized into Márton Katona, hiding behind the Hungarian facade, denying his Jewish past, but Mózes Kahána. However, not only do I remember the name, but also his famous poem (it either appeared in *Ma* or in a separate volume of poetry):

> Go to hell, my father.
> Go to hell, my mother.
> Go to hell, my first teacher.

I had obviously assumed that the same problem tortured both of us: God who had to be denied, the tradition that had to be shed. But I could not accept the solution. Was it cowardice? Sentimentalism? What would a parent say if a poem like this, written by his son, got into his or her hands? And how can one, especially in a poem, write such a phrase as "go to hell"? Almost exactly at the same time (haven't I mentioned it somewhere already?) two of my poems appeared in the Jewish monthly *Múlt és Jövö (Past and Future)* and, yielding to the demand of the editor, Dr. Joseph Patai (his name was already Magyarized), I chose a Hungarian name as a *nom de plume.*

I forgot the name of the author of some other writings. It was not Endre Barát, who was also the son of a rabbi and, by the way, also a Landesberg great-grandson. I suppressed the name. But I remember well that in the late thirties I read a novel and short stories by a writer, the son of a rabbi, which were obviously autobiographical characterizations of his family, distorted by hatred. I remember only one short story. Its title was *Vészfék (Emergency Brake).* It described in scornful detail the travel of his neurasthenic mother in a railroad car. At the end, his mother pulls the emergency brake without any reason, yielding to a neurotic impulse.

I almost fell into the other extreme. I wanted very much to enter the University of Budapest, but felt that it was of hardly any significance to which of its schools I was admitted. After all, I was to be a writer and, just as Ady or Ferenc Molnár, I was also to drop out of the entire university game. For a moment I was even considering that I would yield to my father's wish. Why should I hurt him? After all, I said to myself, I might just as well enter the Rabbinical Seminary. Was not Judaism, the Jews, *die Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Science of Judaism), one of the most interesting subjects? And I may not have to deal precisely with those hated codes which regulated every moment of one's life. It would be interesting, and even exciting, I thought, to study freely, without commentaries, the Bible, the Talmud, the Kabbala, medieval Hebrew poetry. But what will happen (even the thought scared me) if I publish somewhere the results of my studies in these fields and my father reads them and, inevitably, discovers that they were essays written by a scholar, about scholarly subjects and not the homilies of a believer? It was unthinkable. And in addition, the poor dear would be humiliated in the eyes of his Orthodox friends.

When, in 1931, we returned home after two years spent in Münich, I showed Father a 60-page essay in which I discussed my experiments in the University Eye Clinic. I fancied it as my *Habilitationsschrift,* which would secure me a position on the faculty, but Hitler intervened. My father did not understand, could not understand, much even of the title, and it would have been very difficult to explain to him what the sympathetic nerve system was, whose effect on the intraocular pressure of the eye I examined based on animal experiments. As in everything that I ever wrote, here, too, theory predominated. The chief, Professor Wessely, was more interested in facts, in figures, in the experiments. He felt there was too much theory. To me the results of the experiments were interesting only because they demonstrated some kind of biological law, "the wisdom of the body"—the expression comes from the pen of Cannon, the famous Boston physiologist and Nobel laureate—as it creates an equilibrium with the antagonistic reactions. To my father, when he asked me what my essay was about, I emphasized the latter idea. He was comforted. "After all," he said, "you just wanted to demonstrate how wisely God organized our body. But we Jews know this anyway." And this is precisely why, he explained, when we take care of our bodily func-

tions, we bless the Creator. Of course, "the holes, the tubes," brought the prayer for washing the hands to my mind. I confess that when I was at home on a visit, I continued to wash my hands in the ritual manner after taking care of my needs, and on those occasions I recited the blessing quite loudly so that my father should hear that I am still "with it." "Yes, we already know all this," repeated my father. Apparently, he accepted that a doctor's job was healing, but did not believe too much in medical science. Disease was God's punishment, the healing, the manifestation of His grace, and there was nothing supernatural in miracles, for instance, in miraculous healings. God is above nature, and what is natural and unnatural is purely the decision of God. To pray for recovery is a holy obligation and not superstition. As I say, my father somehow accepted by that time that doctors heal, and that I examine eyes. But he would have found it much more desirable if, at the end of the workday, I would rather "play" with the words of God—referring to that certain verse from the 119th Psalm that includes my name *Tzevi.*

In this respect my father was neither better nor worse than other religious people who prayed to God for recovery, but who still went to see a doctor. He settled the dilemma rather lightly with a sophism of one of the famous rabbis. (I believe the rabbi of Munkács.) According to legend, this rabbi said once to the world-famous Professor Fuchs of Vienna,

> If God wants that I should be sick, and wants me to get well, I wish that you should be His *shaliah* (messenger).

Mózes Kahána, Mózes Kahána, I got far away from you, from your memory, and from my memories. Perhaps you too were the son of a rabbi and felt you had to free yourself from paternal bondage. I understand you, I really do understand you, although I could have never followed or imitated you. Mózes Kahána, if you are alive, let me extend to you my hand with reverence.

I used to have all the issues of the *Ma,* and all the publications of the *Ma,* but I lost them all. I never heard again about Mózes Kahána.

Correction Added in 1976

I find that the entire foregoing digression concerning Mózes Kahána is a figment of my imagination, including the detail that he was the son of a rabbi. My friend Sanyi, a doctor of chemistry, another lover of the old country and one of the lovingly critical readers of my manuscript, tells me that that certain poem with the curse that demolishes all inhibitions,

Go to hell, my father...

was written by an author named József Révai. My friend Sanyi keeps up with the contemporary literature of our old country; as far as he knows, Mózes Kahána is alive and is a writer in Rumania. Even an autobiography of his is supposedly in preparation. Mózes is a common first name among the Protestant Hungarians of Transylvania and it does not identify its bearer as a Jew. On the contrary. On the other hand, the family name Kahána argues strongly for it, since it is but a variant of the Hebrew word *Kohen* (priest). All this was confirmed by my friend Professor Scheiber, who also let me know that the autobiography of Mózes Kahána had been published, but that in the meantime the writer himself had died.

And since I am dealing with erroneous memories, let me bring up a more striking example. It appears that there is a slight mistake in my memory of Csáky Street. My friend Sanyi remembers that the apartment of the Kassáks and the party offices were in the next side street of Lipót Boulevard—i.e. in Visegrádi Street. (I really should take the Kassák autobiography from the shelf, and look into it.)

But let me continue where I left off.

I wish to talk about the modern, ultramodern, expressionist, revolutionary fine arts I had first seen in the exhibition rooms of the *Ma.*

The first time I faced the exhibited works of art I was completely confused. I still looked primarily for the story in pictures, the *genre,*

the realistic details, just the way my mother did. But I already began to suspect that there was also a formal aspect to a work of art, not only a descriptive element. For instance Munkácsy's *Death Row,* or details of it, or genre paintings of other artists, are beautiful not because one can so easily recognize the boots in the hands of the cobbler's apprentice, or the hen scratching the ground, or the little dog jumping up and down in the corner. I began to understand that in a painting by Mednyánszky or by László Paál there was an emotional element, a mood, a suggestion, not only a depiction of a scene. Ever since that time a painting by Károly Ferenczy has remained one of my favorites. When I am in Budapest, I usually go to see it. (It is now in the Hungarian National Gallery.) Its title is, I believe, *Summer Evening.* I understood, I sensed, that the beauty of this picture had little to do with the craftsmanship of the artist who knew how to draw wagons and horses. The mood of the picture is set by the rays of the late-afternoon sun reflected in gold-orange hues from the wall of a house, and from the steeple of a church. (That old, unornamented wall gleams, illuminates.) But all this was at the time still far from the messages of the *Ma.* For a long time I did not know what to make out of pictures of people put together from geometric forms, and especially with pieces of paper glued together in some haphazard fashion. Of course, I wanted to understand desperately why they were considered beautiful. I felt that, somehow, the revolution in art was just one aspect of a much wider (a world-wide) revolution in politics, in the sciences, and in religion, of which we were fortunate enough to be contemporaries. And I also began to understand that to paint pictures of proletarians was not the equivalent of modernism. The ground therefore was well prepared. This is how a Bortnyik aquarelle with its shades of blue (even today I can see it hanging on the wall of the exhibition hall) hit me like lightning: suddenly, and once and for all, it illuminated and explained to me the essence of the expressionists' art. (Excuse the comparison: St. Paul on the road to Damascus comes to mind—the *volte face* [Paul-turning], lightning-like, sudden illumination of the way of his life.) It is difficult for me to describe this experience. I never read books on aesthetics, therefore my art-connected vocabulary is meager. Suddenly, very suddenly, and without any transition or thinking, I discovered that those two or three veiled misty figures shown in the picture with anatomically impossible distortion, without

any descriptive genre-like detail, do not express a fact, are not *illustrations* of mourning women, but *illustrate* (and this is essential) a different reality, a reality more real than facts. In other words, it does not depict mourning women, but *the mourning* of the mourning women. I was suddenly startled by the thought that when I see with my inner eye Aunt Steiner or Aunt Schönfeld, crying about the premature loss of their daughters, I really do not see the tableau (think of the scratching hen in the churchyard in Munkácsy's painting, or the barking little dog in the same picture). That is to say, it is not even true that I could depict the entire scene by reproducing its unessential photographic details. My inner eye really sees only a movement. And even that in an exaggerated form: the essence, the veiled, bent figure, the hands raised to heaven or dropped in the lap. Nothing else. Since that time I understand that what an expressionist painter paints is, for me, the non-painter—a memory image. The essence, only the essence. The Platonic shadows which are more real than the external reality, because (and here Plato erred) they are in me, in my "innermostness," and I need no extrasensory perception to perceive them. (Of course, I added this last sentence just now. At that time, I did not know about the Platonic "shadows," let alone of the so-called ESP.)

It is possible that all this is just commonplace; it is possible that all this is erroneous. (I never had time to occupy myself with the philosophy of painting.) In my memory that painting or drawing by Bortnyik in the exhibition hall of the *Ma* in 1919 furnished that stroke of lightning which, once and for all, illuminated and showed me the way to an understanding of the art of all ages, and especially made expressionism, the *avant garde* art, acceptable as a life experience.

Why, when, and how I left my job at the Stock Exchange in Budapest I do not know. What was my title, my position? I do not remember this either. (I see an otherwise empty room with a desk: that was my office.) It is almost unbelievable, but apart from Zoltán, I remember no single face, no name, no person. To whom did I report, and from whom did I receive instructions? It could not have been an exciting or interesting job. I did not wish to become either a private or a public bureaucrat, and I always hated office work. I remember that, during my stay in Budapest, wall notices urged young people of my age to report for a physical for possible induction. Only a few conformed.

My friend Iván, who continued to work at the bank, considered reporting an act of foolishness. *"Es zieht sich"* ("it lasts"), he quoted the new satirical scene of a Budapest cabaret in which two actors kept pulling at the two legs of a pair of pants, echoing a well-known advertisement of that time, that of the *"Indestructible Gutmann"* haberdashery. An unavoidable association: in the New Year issues of the newspapers the advertisement had a twist: the men stood side by side and said, "Today we are not tugging; we, too, wish you a happy New Year." In our family this sentence became almost a private joke, and its meaning symbolic. My pessimistic brother-in-law Imre used to begin his New Year's greetings with "Today we are not pulling," meaning we are not pulling the yoke of life. Of course, the *"Es zieht sich"* referred to the dictatorship of the proletariat. Actually, my friend Iván, an enthusiast of the light Muses and a frequenter of cabarets, pronounced the *"Es zieht sich"* as *"Es tzitzach,"* giving a funny twist to the Yiddish expression. Most probably the actors pronounced it the same way. Being a typical culture snob, I never went to a cabaret. I believe I missed a great deal. The cabaret joke is usually a better thermometer of popular feelings than my doubt-ridden enthusiasm.

I associate another cabaret joke with a classmate of mine from the Jewish elementary school of Devecser, Gyula Szelestey. Gyula's family had by that time (1918) moved to Pest, and he was a student at the Technical University. Very likely he was the one from whom I heard it. As this joke had it, an actor entered the stage, and his movements gave the unmistakable impression that he was buttoning his pants or adjusting his suspenders because he had just completed his "number two." To the question of his associate asking where he had been, he answered, *"im Räterat."* The pun cannot be translated. One has to know that one of the German terms for "toilet" is *"Retirade,"* while *"Räte-Rat"* meant "council of councilors." I was told that the audience was rocking with laughter, but pretty soon the cabaret was closed down, and perhaps the actors were locked up.

Gyula Szelestey was my first Christian friend. In Devecser he went to the Jewish elementary school. His father, Gyula Senior, was a teacher in the local Catholic school, but they fired him because "that half-wit" (as people referred to him) denied the existence of God. "Why could he not keep his mouth shut?" said Mrs. Péntek, our washerwoman, obviously voicing public opinion, "Now he can go begging."

At this point, of course, a mental drawer labelled *Gyula Szelestey* opens, unasked and obtruding. I cannot help it. No matter how I try to break the compulsive association, I cannot prevent the adjective "Christian" from pushing itself forward. I am ashamed.

I would like to write about Hungary, the country of the childhood and of the youth of a European born in 1900, about the Hungary of Feri Körmendi and Sándor Márai. Both of them were born in 1900 and had experienced the same atmosphere during their childhood.

It just so happens that even today, or perhaps, today again, most of my friends are Jewish. (But isn't the situation the same in this New York "melting pot" with most first generation Italians, Germans, Irish, Polish, Armenians, etc.?) On the other hand, if somebody was not a Jew, his friendship had special significance. My friend is Christian and "liberal." Behold: he accepted me as his friend. "It is interesting," said a young physicist and atomic scientist who was born here in America, the son of a surgeon, in a Methodist hospital in Texas, of Hungarian extraction, "it is interesting that all the New York friends of my parents are Jews."

Gyula Szelestey was an "intellectual" already in grade school. No wonder. He was the son of the atheistic Catholic teacher. He was very well read, knew a lot. I always envied him. He was permitted to read whatever he fancied, especially books on natural sciences and travel adventures. Once he read a travelog about explorers who scaled the Himalayas, and ever since my fourth grade in the elementary school, I hear the name "Gaurizankar" spoken with the voice of Gyula Szelestey. His parents soon left Devecser where they had lived in poverty since Gyula Senior became unemployed. During the Károlyi revolution I met Gyula on a street car. We greeted each other happily and decided that we must meet again. But neither of us had a pencil to write down the other's address. My elegant address was 48 János Nagy Street. "It is difficult to memorize it," he said. I shook my head disapprovingly. "Forty-eight," I said, "the war of independence, the revolution!" He was not too impressed. "And your address?" I asked. "Twenty-seven," he said, and added the name of a poor street in the eighth arrondissement. I did not know what to associate it with. "It is very simple," said Gyula, "just remember that the third power of 3 is 27." I really did memorize it. I want to add that my friend Gyula remained courageously liberal, even during the harsh *kurzus* years. I was moved when I

said good-bye to him before leaving for America. Then I lost track of him. I could have looked up in the Budapest telephone book whether anyone with that name was listed. It did not come to my mind. And now perhaps it is too late.

The telephone directory led me back finally to my friend Pali, the littérateur of the college of Pápa, the enthusiastic reciter of poetry. (He received first prize in the recital competition of the Educational Society in 1917 or 1918.) Even today it is his voice that recited in me the poem, *Tözed (Fires)* of József Kiss (as I remember, it was this poem for which he got first prize):

> And half awake and half a-dreaming,
> I poke and poke the dying embers.

Digression: A Week in Budapest in 1966

I poke and poke to revive the embers.

During my first visits to Hungary I avoided, whenever possible, those of whom I had heard that they had reached high positions during the early years of the new People's Republic. During my first visit to Budapest I phoned one of my best friends and honored colleagues of the past. It was not he who picked up the phone. After noticeable hesitation somebody answered that "Mr. Chief Physician" had left for a vacation, and that they would call me back. They did not. Zsiga, my old ex-classmate from Pápa, explained that people in high positions did not like to mix with Americans. *He* could. He was only a retired helper in the restaurant industry.

Much later, in the middle sixties, I did call Pali's number listed in the phone book. I had learned from some friends in Pápa that he was living in Budapest—ailing, retired from an engineering career he had spent with foreign embassies—and that he was respected, even highly respected, by the government. During that visit we stayed in the Gellért Hotel. The very first thing I did was to dial Pali's number: "We just arrived ten minutes ago... In the Gellért...; yes, we have a car,

we can be there in a few minutes... I am very happy..." "Why didn't you call me ever before?" "I shall explain."

We became intoxicated with re-living the past: the college in Pápa, the later years in Budapest. What do you know about this, and that, and that? Do you remember that boy, that girl, that professor, that poem, that line? Of course. He even knew by heart my own poem *Tavasz, 1917 (Spring, 1917).* And of course, the *Ode.* "We must visit Kálmán," Pali said on the next occasion. "He remembers you. He is expecting you. I spoke to him." Kálmán became a theologian, but in reality he never had any pastoral job. A most happy fellow. One of the experts specializing in the study of a certain epoch of Hungarian Calvinist ecclesiastic music. We visited him in a terribly run down, one-room apartment with an iron stove, in a half-ruined house somewhere beyond the City Park. (Was it perhaps the *Róheim Villa* in which Count Tisza was murdered?) He was really a most happy person. He had nothing. Just as the happy man in the tale by Anatole France, he did not own even a shirt.

During that particular week in Budapest we met Pali every day. The automobile made the city a dream. I reveled in the past, I let us be taken in any direction. One evening was unforgettable. I would like to return once more in my lifetime to Budapest to see once more that marvelous sight. (Of course, it would be impossible. There is more to the "unforgettable" sights than just what is "seen." The "seer" is also part of it.) It is very difficult for me to describe what I have seen. Imagine flying over fleecy clouds in an airplane, looking down from above over a sea of clouds. As I remember, we were at the terminal of the "Children's Railroad" on Mount Sváb. It was a late summer or early autumn evening. Perhaps there was a full moon. We were high, but not too high, above the city. One could look down in every direction over a moon-lit cloud-city, a cloud-Buda. But the clouds were, in fact, trees; a forest glittering in silvery moonlight, and in addition, studded with electric lights. I looked down upon the trees. A forest seen from above! Never in my life have I seen a painter or photographer portray a hilly forest from above. (Perhaps it is best if I do not go back to look at it again. City of my dreams, my adored Budapest, I have never seen you so beautiful.)

Pali was married to his second wife. It was also her second marriage. They had an apartment, considered aristocratic in the cir-

cumstances of Pest, on Lenin Boulevard. The daughter and son-in-law of the woman also lived with them. Both were high officials in the Ministry of Public Education—a beautiful, elegant couple. Also living with them was a delightful granddaughter, a student at the Technical University. Hers was the maid's room. "Don't you remember this furniture?" asked Pali reprovingly. "It used to be my parents' dining room set in Pápa." (How could five people live in one apartment? I asked myself. Three generations! And the parents' old-fashioned carved-wood dining room set, rejuvenated with pride!)

Pali was just as small, as fragile, as he had been in high school, and just as elegant. Not a single hair was missing from his dense mane, but he was completely gray. Severely diabetic. Two coronaries. He rarely went out, but that week he, too, was carried away. Even so, two days before our departure we decided to leave the "sick ones" at home, so that next day I may go with Pali's stepdaughter and car, unencumbered, to visit the past. What did I want to see? Everything. Buda, Lógody Street, where there had to be an empty lot and Novoszád's wine cellar described by Béla Balázs; the Csend Street in the Tabán section, where one summer evening long ago I had strolled with Sári, and where I would have loved to live after retirement. Then I discovered that there was no more Tabán, and no more street in Buda named Csend (Silence). I wanted to see Semmelweis' birthplace, the *Vérmezö* (Blood-heath), which too did no longer exist, the Ruszwurm confectionary, the Matthias Church (they were just renovating it), the streets of the Castle Hill of Buda; the view from the Guggerhegy (one of the hills of the Buda side); a hotel called Bellevue where we used to go dancing with Magda. I wanted to sit in the *Véndiófa* (Old Walnut Tree) or *Zöldfa* (Green Tree) restaurant; in the *Szentháromság* (Holy Trinity) Square, to see the residence of Lajos Hatvany. I was a limping, aging gentleman (limping from a severe accident, walking with a cane), and therefore permitted to take the arm of the elegant youngish lady. (I was always susceptible to flare-ups of loves, even if only platonic ones, which came suddenly and disappeared just as fast.) In all its aspects it remained one of the great and full days of my life. Next day I rushed off with Bandi Mátrai to the National Gallery to take leave of the paintings of Csontváry, the autumnal picture of Károly Ferenczy, and the *Riviera* by Aurél Bernáth. Then I quickly went up to Pali to say goodbye to him. He did not feel well. Two or three weeks later came a

short letter: one evening Pali peacefully went to sleep forever. A picture postcard came a year later from one of the Dalmatian spas. And once one of my patients who visited Budapest brought greetings.

Two years later I was back again. I called the phone number on the Lenin Boulevard. The younger lady of the house picked up the receiver. "I must tell you the sad news: my mother died suddenly from a coronary ten days ago." I did not go to see the cloud-forest. There was no one to go with.

But let me return to my actual theme, to the more central, more burning issues of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, and the drafting committee of Pest. It was for me a matter of course to report. The recruiting physician suggested putting me into the category of those not suitable for front line duty. (I was not a great athlete.) I started arguing with him. I told him that if he finds that I am qualified for military service then he should mark me as "suitable." I shall gladly go to the front to protect my country against the Czech and the Rumanian "bourgeois." (At that time there was no conflict between patriotism and socialism: the fatherland was the Proletarian fatherland, while the enemies were the servants of the criminal capitalists of the *Entente*—of the *Entente* which tripped Mihály Károlyi and stole Transylvania, Kassa, Pozsony.) If he cannot do that, I told him, then he should declare that I am not suited for military service. After a minute of hesitation, the doctor did exactly that, and from then on I had a certificate which I kept in my pocket all the time, and according to which I fulfilled my obligation to report and was found to be unsuited for military service.

The paper was in my pocket when, following the collapse of the Hungarian Soviet regime, I was loitering in Budapest illegally—i.e. without a residence registered with the police. It happened to be a fine autumn day on the bank of the Danube, a beautiful early autumn day on the terrace of either the *Hangli* or the *Vigadó*. Suddenly soldiers or policemen surrounded the square and announced in a loud voice "Razzia!" For a few minutes I hesitated, not knowing whether my paper would testify for or against me. At the end I decided that the fact that I reported to the "Reds" would rather speak against me, and I tore up the certificate in my pocket and I threw the small paper pieces on the ground as if I were feeding the pigeons. I forgot how I managed to

identify myself. Perhaps it was the university registration book, or perhaps a certificate of citizenship, I don't remember. In any case, as long as the Red rule lasted, I was waving that paper as a flag of honor. I cannot say that I was a great hero. I did not report voluntarily for war duty, and I never became a card-carrying member of the party. In reality, I never liked to submit to any kind of strict, doctrinaire discipline. I was a "tender soul," and that is what I remained. My Christ-faced friend Samu (about whom I shall have more to say later) was indeed a member of the party, he went to the front and was even wounded. Let me say (or rather, let me confess) I did not cut a very stalwart figure. That summer I had my nineteenth birthday, but my back was already bent, my posture stooping since my childhood

> *(Arthurkám, geh nicht so gebückt; Arthurkám, Du brauchst einen Gradhalter, Du hast eine Hühnerbrust, ja, die Englische Krankheit.*

I hear my mother say a hundred times). My rickety sternum, my glasses, my thinning hair already at the age of 16—all seemed to prove that I was really unsuitable for military service.

I had one other pretext which justified in my own eyes my avoidance of military service. It happened during the year I spent in Budapest, I do not know exactly whether during the Dictatorship or a little before it, that some kind of purulent fistula developed under my left knee and refused to heal. It left a scar visible for years. I had to have my knee bandaged, which made me limp. I went to see a new M.D., a few years older than I: my friend Rózsi from Devecser (the wife in later years of the Texas Methodist chief surgeon). She worked at the time in the Bródy Pediatric Hospital of Budapest. I showed her the wound, which she diagnosed—with juvenile medical conceit—as tuberculosis. I accepted the diagnosis lightly. At the end the problem cleared up. To this was added, during the first few weeks of the Dictatorship, a very acute inflammation of the nail on the big toe of my right foot. Because of it I had to wear a slipper on my right foot. It is possible that years of malnutrition were a contributing factor making my wounds heal poorly or slowly. Besides, I have an inkling that I was only too glad to play the semi-invalid a bit longer. I still remember that during the last weeks of the Dictatorship, which I spent in Pápa, I still moved about with a slipper on my right foot. That certain "bespectacled, lame

soldier," whose name was not revealed during the martial-law trial of the expedition to Lovászpatona—I was he. (Terus went to the trial. Later we saw each other in Budapest. I learned this detail from her.)

The job at the People's Commissariat did not last very long. And I could not stay too long in the apartment of Mrs. G. Zoltán disappeared from my horizon or from my memories. Apparently, he had more important things to do than to patronize me or to irritate his aunt. On the first of May I was back home in Devecser. A very precise piece of memory proves it. I remember the festive May-Day procession—or rather not the procession as much as Jenö Komlós, the son of our cantor, who in grade school received that certain twenty-crown gold piece of Pechner, and who became an apprentice and later, assistant in one of the Devecser fashion stores. I can see him clearly in his military uniform; he had some kind of non-commissioned rank. His white gloves shine even now before my eyes, as he carried the red flag during the march. I did not march. I was careful not to scandalize my father's town, or his religious congregation with any act.

Martyrs and War Dead
Jenö Komlós and the Twenty Crown Piece of Mr. Pechner

May 1, 1919, was the last time I saw Jenö Komlós. As I said, I can still see his white cotton gloves as he carried the red flag. During the fall of that year, the Prónay gang slaughtered him, too, together with some twenty others, in the count's forest of Devecser. What was his sin? He marched. Of the others, I know only the name of Dr. Balla, the dentist of Pápa. (He certainly was not a Bolshevik. On the other hand, he really did not treat the cavities in my two front teeth too well.)

It would be interesting to learn whether there is a monument over their mass grave in the count's forest of Devecser. Such a monument would be warranted, although people generally become martyrs by accident, and whether someone is remembered is not independent of the situation at any given time. For instance, I remember the name Hollán. During the thirties (when we lived in that neighborhood) it

was the name of one of the side streets of Lipót Boulevard that I saw almost daily. Hollán, I believe, was a martyr for the cause of the counterrevolution. Who he was, what he was, and why he became a martyr, I do not know. On the other hand, I know that during my last visit to Pest, the street had a different name. Or perhaps, that was the Sándor Fürst Street? After awhile people forget about martyrs commemorated by street names, and forget the reason for their martyrdom. I must admit that, in spite of all my political prejudices, I did not cease to think with sadness of the victims of the counterrevolution of Devecser, the two teachers (I shall say more about them) who were also martyrs of an idea (if I am still permitted to use such a grand word). How wise it is that in Budapest they call a thoroughfare the "Avenue of Martyrs." The name *Mártirok útja* in Buda stems from the fact that during World War II a large block of buildings (with hundreds of people in them) was totally destroyed in an air raid.

From the martyrs whose names were supposed to be immortalized my mind turns to the "heroes," the war dead. Well, were they heroes? Were they not rather victims? The victims of a stupid, bad, or simply outdated, system?

At the beginning of 1918, general fatigue was already great, and the "Jewish question" became more and more critical. The officials of the Jewish congregation of Devecser decided to commemorate with a marble plaque the names of their eleven members who had fallen in the war. The tablet was fastened to the wall of the synagogue above the seat of my father, but it had only ten names on it. The father of one of the soldiers, Rudolf Faragó (originally Franczoz) insisted that the name of his son should not be listed. He "absolutely" knew, he "felt it," that his son was alive, that suddenly he would reappear. I was able to follow for twenty more years the history of the Jews of Devecser. (One of the brothers of Rudolf was a patient of mine in Budapest.) During that time Rudolf Faragó did not reappear.

It is amazing how well I remember the day of the declaration of war against Serbia, the beginning of World War I, and the extra issues of *Az Est (The Evening)*. I also remember an enthusiastic procession with flags and torches on the evening of the same day. Endre Grosz, at the time twenty-odd years old, the son of the tailor József Grosz, carried the large flag. I can see myself marching next to him. How

proud I was to march beside him. Next day he had to enlist. I cannot remember at all what he said while marching. But during the great and joyful shouting and waving of the flags, this big, handsome, strong young man turned to me and uttered some words which conveyed to me that he had a premonition that the war was to mean the end of his life. As I say, I do not remember the words, but for me World War I really began with those enthusiastic shouts, the waving of the flags, the "Down with Serbia!"—and the foreboding of death. And as I remember, it was indeed Endre Grosz who was the first war dead of Devecser. When in 1959 or 1960 I was, for the last time, in Devecser, I saw the synagogue turned into a sport palace. I forgot to look to see whether the marble plaque was still on the wall.

But now we are talking about Jenö Komlós, the son of our cantor, who was of the same age as I (I was one class ahead of him) and our next-door neighbor in the other house belonging to the congregation. As I remember him, he sat in the bench ahead of me in the third grade—I sat behind him in one of the fourth-grade benches. The third, fourth and fifth grades shared one classroom and were taught by Jakab Szepesi. And here I must mention that he rapped on our fingernails with a ruler as a punishment. I remember that we had to "purse up," that is, gather our fingers to take his raps. It did not hurt too much. The harshest punishment was to be made to stand behind the blackboard for the duration of the period. I also remember that a classmate once wet his pants and had to stand behind the blackboard. The poor boy was terribly ashamed, while the other children were laughing. Children can be very cruel with their murderous laughter.

So, I can see Jenö Komlós (at that time still Kohn) in the bench ahead of mine, and I can hear the teacher, or the chairman of the school board, as he announces that this year Jenö Kohn, as the best student, received the twenty-crown gold coin of the Pechner Foundation. During the two previous years, I received the prize in succession and the announcement did not offend me at all. I knew that I was the best student, and I also knew that the cantor's family, with their five children, were much poorer than we. During lunch time I went home and told my mother about the stipend. It seems that Mother was taking it for granted that I was to get it again, and 20 crowns in gold were a lot of money at the time. She became extremely angry with me,

reproaching me that had I been more diligent I could have earned the title of the best student this year as well. That once, only once in my life, in her life, she was unjust, and at the end she said,

Der Teufel soll dich holen
(The devil take you!)

I could never forget it. I could never forgive it.

This is why Jenö Komlós and Mr. Pechner got inseparably associated in my memory. Mr. Pechner was an old, very old, widower. When I was six or seven years old I had to go to his house every evening for goat's milk to strengthen my weak lungs. How odd. How very odd. Mr. Pechner gave every year the twenty-crown gold prize, and still he was the symbol of thriftiness, nay stinginess, in the eyes of the people of Devecser. When I first read Dickens' *A Christmas Carol,* Ebenezer (a beautiful Hebrew name) Scrooge appeared to my inner eye with the face of Mr. Pechner.

After Mr. Pechner's death, my mother said (she enjoyed the innocent village gossip) that already in his death rattle, in front of the vigil-keepers of the Hevra Kadisha, Mr. Pechner kept repeating, *"So lang man kann, soll man,"* ("as long as one can one should") and that at the end Uncle Silber asked him, *"Was soll man, Herr Pechner?"* ("What should one do, Mr. P.?") Upon which he said, *"Essen soll man."* ("One should eat.") He was such a miser that he almost starved while trying to save money. My mother loved good food and cooked well. One of her recurrent phrases remained throughout her life:

So lang man kann, soll man; essen soll man.
(As long as one can, one should eat.)

After that first of May, whether I returned to Budapest to my job, I do not remember. (Perhaps it happened at that time that I got stuck in Veszprém and saw the old canon?) I am sure that during the sad week of the counterrevolution in Devecser I was again (or still?) at home. I was at home, and did not leave the house. I do not remember the exact date, perhaps it was early in June. This was the only time when, according to my memory, my father kept the gate locked day after day. Apparently, nobody came to the synagogue to attend services. Whatever happened I could observe only from the corner of the street window covered with a heavy curtain. I can recall no detail, I do not know what

happened and how. The entire counterrevolution could not have lasted longer than three days. Red soldiers arrived and that put an end to the uprising. There were two Catholic teachers among the escaped leaders. I knew both of them well. One was called by the people of Devecser the cantor-teacher. As I remember, his name was Sipos. We knew him well; he lived in the house adjacent to the Jewish school; even today I could find my way there. The other teacher was only one or two years older than I, almost a friend of mine. He was the older of the two sons of Mr. Baják, the carpenter. The younger Baják boy, who occasionally appeared in a blue cassock among us, was a seminarian. I know that one of the boys was called Béla, the other Pista, but which one was which, I no longer remember. For years, during the summer holidays, we used to stroll together with the Berán and Rosenberg girls in the Church Square. In Devecser, anti-Semitism was virulent only among peasants. The Baják boys, high school students, the children of a master artisan, were no anti-Semites. And besides, I am sure that most of the Jews sympathized with the counterrevolution. With the one exception of Jenö Komlós, I recall no Devecser Jew who would have played any role during the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. How did the news get into our locked-up house, I cannot remember. But I did know that they arrested the Baják boy. Whether there was any trial, any session of a martial law court, any public prosecution, any defense attorney, I do not know either. But even now I can see (I see it from a corner of a curtained window) a fleeting shadow, soldiers pushing a person with his hands tied behind his back. They were taking the Baják boy to the Church Square.

I do remember vaguely that when I saw this, I rushed out into the yard, toward the gate. Apparently I wanted to run out of the house. I do not know what could have been my purpose. It was some kind of insane reaction. Perhaps I wanted to say something, to beg that they should not hurt him, I do not know. With all my heart, I was panting for the success of the revolution. At the same time, with all my heart I could feel that what was happening was senseless, and that the death of the Baják boy would put an irreversible end to his family. It would be a perpetual wound for Devecser, while for the future of the revolution, it would be an insignificant event. I remember that my father was running after me, the gate was locked, and my mother was screaming. Members of my father's congregation later said, deeply distressed,

that one of the executioners was a Jewish boy from Pápa. I knew his family; I knew him also, from sight. Even today I can see his large, protruding eyes. Fear began to rise in the hearts of the Devecser Jews. For me, the unsullied beauty of the revolution came to an end. I believe both teachers (I remember that a third leader was also hanged) were buried in the Catholic cemetery. Next day, as I heard, a bouquet of flowers was found over the grave of the Baják boy. It was said that Babus Biró, the sister of my fallen friend Imre, placed the flowers there during the night. The gate of the Biró house was adjacent to the gate of the cemetery. The two were separated only by a small fence.

It is alarming how dim are my memories of those days. I do not know exactly what brought Géza to Devecser during the days after the suppression of the counterrevolution, and why I met him precisely at the Schwartz's, our next-door neighbors. Géza was not only a smart and clever man, but also had his heart in the right place. He knew my father well. During his early years in the high school, Géza, who always had to go to extremes, was well known in Pápa for his extraordinary religious devotion, and my father held him up to me as an example worthy to follow. (Well, I did follow his example—but not the way my father imagined it.) Although we were old friends, Géza did not visit us. Obviously, he did not want to involve my father in an uncomfortable situation, and I really appreciated it. He was bound to know that neither the village nor the congregation was on the side of the revolution. As I recall, he had to participate in the court trials of the lesser "criminals." He was wearing a very becoming military uniform. Understandably, he had no officer's stars.

I retain a certain hazy memory about our meeting at the Schwartzes': the wife of Mr. Belák, the county judge (perhaps at that time already the chief county judge) came in and asked me to intervene with Géza so that her husband, who was not at all involved in politics and continued to run his office, should not be hurt. (It is possible that he was in prison at that time, but I do not remember clearly.) Apparently, Géza had some sort of influence in such matters. I remember vaguely that Judge Belák came to us to pay a courtesy or thank-you visit—in other circumstances this would have been an unheard-of event. It is also a fact that my parents suffered no harm even during the wildest "white terror." Belák may have had some kind of role in that. He became the new chief judge, the successor of Károly Huszár,

but I do not remember when. On the other hand, the Christians of Devecser considered my father a *de facto* saint. The public custom of Devecser required that on the Day of Resurrection (the evening of Holy Saturday) every window should show a burning candle. Even though my parents never followed this custom, our windows were never broken, not even during the *kurzus*.

The Dictatorship of the Proletariat offended my father who, despite all his religious fervor, was a Hungarian patriot to the marrow. He listened quietly when I held forth about the unjust distribution of goods: it did not interest him. According to him, whether somebody was rich or poor was determined by God Almighty, "blessed be his name," and not by the laws of Marx. He had just as few ties to capitalism as to socialism. Some kind of election of council members was about to take place in Devecser, and people had to register in order to be able to vote. It became clear that my father, a rabbi, had no right to vote—he was "a class-enemy." I, on the other hand, did have that right. He could never swallow the offense. That he could not be a follower of the new system was quite natural. Church and socialism were antithetical, and the socialists in general were neither religious, nor the followers of a denomination. I continued to adhere to my pretended role even during that summer, and when I was at home I continued to go to the synagogue and "study" with Father as before. Gently I tried to convert him. I produced the proletarian poems of Ady. My father countered with biblical quotations. Yes, the prophets and the holy royal psalmist were also against the oppression of the poor and the greediness of the rich. Yes, even the Bible was already against usury and slavery. Later, after the fall of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, when I was hiding in Pest, my father came to look for me. Only then and there did he begin to speak out almost passionately against the irreligious system that had been overthrown. I got mixed up in bad company, he kept repeating. I should repent. I should come home. I should give up the false ideas, I should leave the bad company. I was listening quietly, icily. Even now I can see the two of us. My father had to leave to catch his train. We were standing at the door of Uncle Poldi's apartment; we were supposed to say thank-you and goodbye. I was still silent, and finally my father began to be angry. "Won't you admit finally that you made a mistake and got mixed up in bad company?" he asked. "I don't admit it," I said quietly, but with determination. Then my father really

lost his temper. He slapped my face. I was already in my twentieth year. That was the first and last time in my life that he slapped me. And then we both cried. I kissed his hand, the hand which slapped me. I always used to kiss his hand whenever he left or arrived. This was the way we parted. I was not to see him thereafter for a good many years.

Digression on the Inadequacy and Unreliability of Memory

How inaccurate memory can be, and sometimes how untrustworthy, could not be better illustrated than with this report. As I have already noted at the beginning of Chapter 1, I am unable to assemble into a complete mosaic the months of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, although those few months comprised the most decisive period in my life. Let me repeat here that of which my memory is unquestionably sure, which is not based on added information. I remember clearly that the Dictatorship of the Proletariat began (one or two days won't count) on March 21, 1919. In my heart I was happy about the omen I saw in it: the spring and the revolution began simultaneously. That I composed a poem fragment while traveling by streetcar to the Nagy János Street is also a certainty. (Ergo, I was in Budapest.) I am quite sure that I had some kind of a job on Freedom Square in the palace of the Stock Exchange. (Ergo, I remained in Budapest.) I am also sure that I was at home, in Devecser, on the first of May. (After all, I see Jenö Komlós parading in front of our house, with his white gloves and a flag.) And certain is also that the days of the counterrevolution caught me at home. (I see the soldiers dragging the Baják boy toward the Main Square.) But where was I and what did I do in the meantime? Did I go back to Budapest? (That certain journey in the cattle-car, and the episode in Veszprém would well fit in here.) But if in between I was in Budapest, why do I not remember it? Where did I stay? Perhaps still at Mrs. G's? That is unlikely. More probably I was hanging around in Devecser. (Nice little revolutionary!) Did I perhaps make the round of villages to collect food for my parents? I did. But the dates are uncertain.

Again, it is certain that during the days following the suppression of the counterrevolution Géza visited Devecser. And it is also certain that I spent the last weeks of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat in Pápa. (Sári was also there—she was at home.) Very likely (but I do not have any direct recollection of it) Géza offered to give me a job in Pápa at one of the local newspapers, the *Pápai Hirlap,* and at a hoped-for "people's university." I have therefore two dates which, if I were a historian, I could easily look up—the date of the counterrevolution of Devecser, and of the collapse of the revolution. Apparently, between these dates I was in Pápa. On the other hand, no matter how hard I try, I cannot give an account of the month of April, and especially of May. And I have no answer to the question of why, how, and when did I give up the job at the Stock Exchange.

Nor do I know how long I stayed in Devecser following the suppression of the counterrevolution and the visit of Géza. It might have been a short time—perhaps days only. There is no room in time for more in the course of the events. But I repeat: it is certain that I spent in Pápa the last four or six weeks of the Hungarian Soviet regime. Very likely they were happy weeks. Géza rented (confiscated?) in the apartment of a well-to-do merchant, a room with a view on the baroque Main Square, on the great double-steepled church, and the Esterházy palace. My status had apparently changed: earlier I had always lived in the ghetto of Pápa, for a time in the *Bástya* (Bastion) of evil reputation, with poor Jewish families, in comfortless rented rooms. Now I was living with Géza and both of us were eating at his parents' place. Once during those weeks, my father paid us a surprise visit and left very reassured. I had kosher meals in the house of Géza's parents and pretended that I had been going regularly to the synagogue. The revolution infected even bourgeois Sári, and the common enthusiasm gave some hope to my hopeless love. One evening—it was summer—in Sári's garden, Pali, a friend of ours, also a student at the college, recited the poems of Béla Balázs. With a Mona Lisa smile, Sári turned her face toward me and reached for my hand. They were happy weeks.

What did I have to do? As I have mentioned, I was supposed to organize some kind of socialist workers' school, and to give lectures on the history of literature. In addition, I wrote some inspiring lead articles in the *Pápai Hirlap,* perhaps also book reviews, and helped the editor. I remember well that it was during this time that my poem

written for Sári's eighteenth birthday finally appeared in print (discreetly I dedicated it only to "S"), although somewhat belatedly. Just as two or three years earlier I had fancied Trócsányi a university professor, so now I dreamt that Géza would become at least a people's commissar, and possibly even a prime minister or the leader of the Internationale; and, characteristically, I imagined myself a companion rather than a leader, perhaps a secretary of state or the secretary of the Internationale. I was afraid of public appearances and of positions of leadership.

I can never forget my unsuccessful experiment as a political or popular speaker. It happened during the weeks I spent in Pápa. I was supposed to talk to a crowd that filled the theater. I no longer remember the occasion. Perhaps I was supposed to introduce a propaganda movie. I remember that I prepared a fancy address in a style much too high for young Red soldiers, factory hands, and women workers. I was standing on the stage, and awkwardly and unsuccessfully, tried to hold the attention of the loud and restless crowd. Then, out of the wings, Géza suddenly appeared on the stage in a uniform which even without the officer's markings was obviously that of an officer and not of an enlisted man. Within a few minutes there was silence—Géza got the situation under control. Never again did I try either political or any other kind of speech, nor to make comments at meetings. With these antecedents, it was for me even more unexpected to become a few decades later in America, a well-known and sought-after lecturer.

Humble withdrawal, which figured even in my daydreams, had not always been characteristic of my early childhood fantasies. There was a period (probably around my thirteenth birthday when I had my *bar mitzvah*) when in my fantasies I was the liberator of the Hungarian Fatherland from the Austrian yoke, and the first president of the Hungarian Republic. My name was Attila Ladányi, and thereby hangs a tale. Among the books I received as gifts, there was a volume of the *Hazafias Könyvtár (Patriotic Library)*. I do not remember its title, I know only that its editor was Mózes Gaál the Third. It described the uprising and the cruelties of the Wallachian mutineers Hora and Kloska. (Today, of course, I see this in an entirely different light.) Reading that book, I made a plan to put into effect fair but strict regulations, expulsions, relocations, and dispersals, and thus trans-

form the Rumanians and Slovakians within a single generation into Hungarians. The change of my name from Arthur to Attila is easily understandable; I chose Ladányi as the family name because it could be spelled only in one way. In the case of names such as Lenkei or Lévai, there are two possibilities: one can spell them either with an "i" or with a "y"; I did not wish to use the "i," and to use the "y" would have been cheating—it is a mark of Hungarian nobility. This is the way the Ladányi name was born. This is why, for a short time, I was in my infantile fantasy Attila Ladányi—not a baron, not a count, not even a doctor, but the President of the Republic, the creator of a Hungary of thirty million, the successor of Lajos Kossuth.

9

The Lovászpatona Incident (1919) and Its Consequences

I asked myself countless times, what was the purpose of that completely senseless undertaking which, as it soon became evident, ended sadly with two lives lost. I cannot give any answer at all. It lives in my memory as the expedition to Lovászpatona. The expedition was Géza's decision. What he hoped to gain from it, I do not know. It could have had only one acceptable purpose—to save some people from the anger of others in a life-threatening situation. I do not know. But I do remember that, upon our return the next morning, some eight or nine hours after our departure, we did not find Géza to whom we wanted to report about our mission and from whom we expected further instructions. Did he resign? Did he, so to speak, return the keys of the city to the mayor who, until that time, was officially his subordinate? Or did he just escape under the cloak of darkness as soon as a chance offered itself, and without saying a word? I do not know. I must have asked him about it during our later meetings. (How can it be that my memory, often studded with the most ridiculous details, has no place for this?) As things turned out, escape was indeed the only thing Géza could prudently do. I can accept that. In Pápa he was a symbol of the dictatorship, and they would have certainly arrested, perhaps even killed, him as soon as he lost the military power. But how did I get involved in the whole affair? What business was it of mine to participate in a military detachment of ten or so people, with a slipper on one foot and the certificate of "unsuitable" in my pocket? Géza certainly did not force

me in any way. I am sure that I volunteered. If I say I did it because I felt honor bound to do so, I have just about described the situation. But what does this have to do with Béla Balázs? Béla Balázs (I have already mentioned his name quite often) joined the army as a volunteer sometime during World War I. (He described his experiences in a war diary, which is lost). He did it not out of patriotism, as he had said, but because he felt, "why not me, why somebody else?" With a conceit even greater than mine, he told himself, "Go, and suffer, you, too." This self-inquiry, this soul-searching, this "why somebody else?"—this has remained associated in my mind with the name Béla Balázs. This is what guided me when, during my sophomore year at the college, I stood up and complained about a teacher who slapped, not even me, but somebody else. And this is what, during my medical years in Prague, made me join a committee that lodged a complaint against the German university with the Czech ministry—an entirely senseless undertaking.

But I must finally turn to the subject, although I am still trying to postpone it. (For instance, right now I would much rather write about the poems of Béla Balázs, and an essay about one of his most beautiful pieces of writing, a poem in prose, entitled *A Story About Lógodi Street.* It was a sentimental masterpiece, telling about the mountains around Budapest, about "spring, death, and the far reaches.") But, as I said, I must finally return to the subject. Well, what happened was that friends notified the city commandant that something was brewing in Lovászpatona. Perhaps the local people threatened, or even incarcerated, the communist leaders. I did not know.

I remember only that we went with Géza to the city commandant's office. It was late in the evening. It must have been Saturday night, if the collapse of the dictatorship really took place on Friday, and Géza ordered one of the non-commissioned officers (I remember a leather-coated, red-haired, hoarse-voiced character from the outskirts of Budapest; we dubbed the like of him "Lenin boys") to go to Lovászpatona with a detachment of ten, apparently in order to rescue some comrades who were in trouble. It was difficult to get together a group of volunteers, therefore, as I said, I felt honor-bound to volunteer. Up to that moment I had never held a military rifle in my hand. In a few minutes they taught me how to fire and reload the *Mannlicher,* as the rifle was called, and we were on our way, riding in an open truck toward the aimless destination. At the end, the mission cost two

persons their lives, one of them the leader's. To what extent was I, too, guilty of what happened? I was never able to clear it with myself. Obviously, among the ten Red soldiers I was the one who should have manifested some common sense; but I was the youngest, and apparently the only one who was scared, and besides, I hardly fitted in with the group.

The entire expedition is shrouded in darkness. It was still night when we arrived. I remember an inn where we stopped. Our leader, the red-haired Red soldier (alone or not, I do not remember), went out to look around. I am sure I did not go with him. (I was "lame." I had a slipper on the right foot.) It was already close to dawn when our leader returned and told us in a rather subdued voice that he had knocked on the door of the parish priest, who pointed a revolver at him, whereupon he fired a shot at the priest. Again, I do not know what really happened. It is very likely that we all rushed over to the parsonage; or possibly, we got back on our truck and drove there. I remember only that for a few seconds I saw a lifeless black heap on the ground in front of the entrance. That was all I could see. If the priest was dead, his was the first dead body I had seen in my life. I saw no face, no blood. Only a heap of black rags. And I could see excited, threatening crowds of young peasants milling about in the street. We started back to Pápa as fast as we could. Whether one could have called a doctor—I confess I did not think of it—or whether the priest was still alive, I do not know. But soon we were to hear that he died. From that point on, fog shrouds the Lovászpatona expedition in my mind. I try to squeeze out some drops of memories, but they have long dried up. I do not know when and how we returned to Pápa. I do not know whether we reported to any office or officer, or simply dispersed. I do not know with whom and where I left the rifle. The censorship of forgetfulness functioned perfectly. But I do remember that Géza was not in his office. He had left Pápa and was safe. Some kind of collapse of all order must have occurred, a breakdown of discipline. Or perhaps only my nerves fell apart? (Did perhaps Peidl resign? Did someone named István Friedrich occupy the prime ministership? Not likely. It is not likely that the premiership of Peidl could have lasted only one or two days. Or a week? But all this does not matter. I am not writing history.) All that I know is that I found myself suddenly in the courtyard of Aunt Ambrus. Why there? I do not know. Even today I can see the yard, the apartment, the

entrance leading into the kitchen, and good old Aunt Ambrus with her three daughters. Why at their place? I know that they did not let me go, although obviously, their own security was threatened by my presence. I stayed with them. For how long? A week? I think less. But I am sure that I stayed until Sunday morning. I also know that my father visited me there (how did he know where I was?) and discovered that I did not have with me the velvet bag containing the prayer book and the *tefillin*. Apparently that event is the origin of that anxiety dream which recurs even today from time to time: I am visiting my father (my parents?) and forgot to bring along the *tefillin*... It has innumerable variations, this dream. Sometimes my father does not notice that I do not have the *tefillin* with me, and I am trying to camouflage the situation with the most comical tricks. Sometimes he acts as if he had not noticed it, but *I* know, even in my dream, that he is pretending. My father, being a believer, was not afraid of anything or anybody; he hired the coachman, Mauthner; he made the trip from Devecser to Pápa through villages seething with unrest. Did he come to take me home? I do not remember. But I know that I did not go with him. It is also certain that he took the risk of going to the apartment I shared with Géza to fetch the *tefillin* and the prayer book. He brought the velvet bag to the Ambrus home and then drove back to Devecser. No harm came to him. I do not think anyone else would have dared to do this.

Later it became apparent that Béla Friedbauer's family knew about me, about my whereabouts, and about a planned escape. How did they know? I do not remember with whom I discussed the plan. It is most likely that I spoke about it to Aunt Ambrus. The best place to hide was Budapest, but it seemed that it was not advisable to take the train directly there. There was a train in the afternoon from Pápa to Pest, and at dawn (when the streets were empty) there was a train going in the opposite direction, toward Szombathely and Graz. I decided to take it. Some nine or ten days after the collapse of the communist regime (it was Sunday morning) in the small hours, I went to the railroad station, carrying my belongings in a backpack. I wore shoes on both feet, not the slipper; and I am sure that the *tefillin* was also with me. A few hours later I found myself in Szombathely. I spent the day there, loitering in the waiting room, waiting for the afternoon express train, to take it back again to Pápa and then through Györ toward Budapest. On the express I took a seat in the darkest corner of

a full compartment, and while the train was stopping in Pápa, Béla Friedbauer, the sculptor-son of Uncle Lipót Friedbauer, the poor, half-blind, house painter (I have already mentioned him in a previous chapter), carrying a large parcel, elbowed through the crowd, looking for me. He barely had time (the train was already starting) to hand the package to me. It was a royal gift: a whole roasted goose. It was sent to me by the Friedbauers, good, simple people, and devoted friends of my parents, to make sure that I would not starve to death. Although they were very poor, they were generous. (About fifteen years later, Béla was to sculpt a head of Magda. The bust remained in Budapest and disappeared. As I mentioned, a small terra-cotta statue hanging on the wall of my study still preserves the memory of Béla.)

The journey was long. It lasted many hours in the crowded car. By the time we reached Tata, everybody had made friends with everybody else. As I said, it was Sunday; at various stops a great number of women got on the train; most of them went to the provinces to buy food. Budapest was by that time occupied by the Rumanians; we heard that martial law was in effect, and a strict curfew kept people at home after nightfall. ("All persons unable to prove that they have a legitimate reason to be in the street will be shot on the spot.") In the train, nobody spoke about revolution or counterrevolution; the many young, healthy, ruddy women gossiped about their children and their housework, and about where, when, and how they could barter food in exchange for clothing, shoes, etc., because the peasants sold no produce for money. A handsome, long-haired, dark-eyed young man sat diffidently among the many noisy women; by the time we arrived in Győr, he was everybody's favorite. He said he was an actor. There was a rumor that the Wallachians were taking away all the food parcels as the passangers got off the trains. Everybody was trembling: what will happen? The handsome actor explained that he always got off the train at the suburban station of Kelenföld (he lived in Buda). He had an infallible method: a few hundred yards before the Kelenföld station there was a switch; the train slowed down and he got off. The tracks there were separated from the streets only by a fence; there was no guard, and he was never caught. One of the young women with a large bundle of food also wanted to get off at the same station and the actor volunteered to take with him the bag as he jumped off the slowing train, and to wait with it for the woman at the entrance of the railroad station.

Some completely unimportant scenes remain engraved in one's memory, I don't know why. As I keep telling myself on innumerable occasions, this was the decisive turn in my life—the train, the escape, the leap toward the future. I ought to write down in capital letters, or at least in italics, *had I gotten off that train at Celldömölk, had I changed trains to avoid Pápa and to get to Devecser to hide with my parents, everything in the future would have been different.* Perhaps, like Jenö Komlós, I would have ended in the forest of the Esterházy estate. My heart was full of anxiety about the night in Lovászpatona, and of sadness because the dreams had died. Of all this, I remember especially two scenes: I can see Béla Friedbauer as he spots me and gives me the roasted goose; and I see the actor as he jumps off the train with the large bag. The train goes on, it speeds up again, and suddenly there is dead silence in the car, nobody utters a word. In that unforgettable moment everybody knew that the actor had absconded with the bag. Then the young woman got off the train at the Kelenföld station and started wailing. (It is possible, I scold myself from the distance of about 65 years, that it did not turn out to be like that. Perhaps the actor did really wait for the woman at the exit? Memory mine, beware of cheating! Keep writing about memories, I am telling myself, not fiction. What actually transpired, you will never know.)

In spite of all its humane moments, and even its comical aspects, that day, that journey, was a frightening experience. I can only repeat: ever since that day I feel that it was the journey which decided my entire future life. Everything that was to happen thereafter was determined at that juncture. Like the hero of Dezsö Szabó in his *Nincs Menekvés (There is No Escape),* I opened a door, and since then every other door opens from there. And all this was a consequence of the Lovászpatona incident. Had I stayed at home that night, had I not volunteered, not joined the detachment, it is very likely that I would not have left Hungary. In vain do I say to myself that I did nothing to cause me to be afraid, and I was too small a cog in the machinery of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. The fact remains that I *was* afraid, and felt that I was in danger. Had I not felt that I must flee, I would have stayed in Hungary, and in that case, I believe, I would have hardly become a doctor. I would have become a professor of Hungarian or German literature. (I certainly would not have continued the ridiculous law studies.) But is there any point in searching my mind? I would

have to be a novelist to create another Arthur Linksz, who, that evening, happened to open the other one of the two doors between which he had to choose.

Exactly, almost photographically, I can still see the railroad map of Hungary, and on it a thick red crayon line that starts from Szombathely and leads to Celldömölk. There, the line suddenly divides into two, one leads to Pápa, the other to Devecser. I can see myself sitting on the train. I know that on this short stretch the express train has only one stop, in Sárvár. I must decide whether to continue my journey through Pápa, toward Györ and Budapest (as originally planned), or to get off at Sárvár or Celldömölk and change to the train going to Devecser. And then I shall have to decide again whether to get off at Devecser and go home to my parents, or continue my journey through Székesfehérvár, also toward Budapest. It was, I knew, easily possible that either in Pápa or in Devecser somebody, a malevolent somebody, would recognize me. At the end, it was not I who decided. It was inertia that decided for me. There I sat in a corner, in a crowded compartment, in the security of anonymity, with my backpack on my lap. I felt safest remaining seated there, alone, unnoticed. I did not get up, did not get off in Celldömölk. The train continued through Pápa, toward Budapest.

Apart from these episodes, I remember only that I left the train at the East Railroad Station on the Pest side of Budapest. It was midnight. Rumanian soldiers were in the city. Martial law permitted no loitering in the station until the morning. There were no street cars running. I started out with my backpack and the roasted goose. I was holding on to my railroad ticket as an identification. I walked down Rákóczi Street, I reached the boulevard; I walked in the middle of the broad boulevard so that it should be evident that I was not slinking in the shadows from house to house. I was walking, walking deliberately. Patrols of Rumanian soldiers (they knew some Hungarian) stopped me, let me go. I turned into Üllöi Avenue—was the house number 15?—I reached an old, large yellow apartment house facing the medical faculty. It was there that Mihály Török was staying with a friend, a man named Donát. (As I remember, his first name was Lajos, and at the time he was still a medical student.) I rang the bell. The porter looked askance at the night visitor, but let me enter. Donát and Mihály also let me in; yes, they had room for me, I could stay at the moment. The bad thing is, Mihály thinks aloud, that the porter knows that

there is a stranger in the apartment, so that I cannot stay there for long without reporting to the police.

This is how I became a wanderer for about four weeks. I could spend only one or two nights in the same place—at the Fellners', at Borka's (Sári's sister); with Uncle Poldi in temporary quarters on Kálmán Street (they fled in October 1918 from Ó-Beszterce, from the anger of Slovak peasants); with Uncle Vidor, the steelworker relative, on outer Váci Avenue; with strangers, the friends of friends. I remember a woman dentist and her beautiful sculptress sister, who lived downtown in Váci Street. Here the memory of another very beautiful, very interesting woman pops up. She was the daughter of the Lutheran bishop of Pápa and (unbelievable!) a leftist, a sympathizer, a revolutionary. But all this lives in my memory only very vaguely. It is possible that I am mixing up my memories with those of others. At that time many people were in hiding.

Of course, I always had to be "at home" in the evening before the street doors of the houses were locked. (Porters must not see the stranger.) It was not with the nights, but the days, that the three of us on Üllöi Avenue had the greater problem. I had to spend some days doing nothing, in libraries, in museums, in galleries, in cafés, in the parks, and, of course, in restaurants, if they had anything at all to serve. I remember that one morning, Mihály, Donát and I were strolling along the beautiful old streets of the Castle Hill. At the end we found a restaurant where all they could offer was some kind of squash, not even bread. Even so, those few weeks were not a total loss. I read and relived, over and over again, *The Village Swept Away*. An ambivalent mixture of admiration and hatred tied me for a long time to this book. If once in a while, now rarely, I pick it up, the colorful splendor of its rich stock of words still surprises me. I don't believe that I had ever before, or have since, met with such mastery of the Hungarian language. Two other books remain unforgettable memories. It seems that they just happened to match my mood of that time. One was by Lajos Pilisi. Its title was *Dekroá Viktor Csodálatos Élete (The Wondrous Life of Victor Dekroá)*. Pilisi died early, he never completed this autobiographical novel, his only one. The other book—oh, pearl of pearls!—was *Lila Akác (The Purple Acacia)* by Ernö Szép. (How much I would love to write about them here! I can remember even words and phrases from them. But this is not the time.)

I See Me

That terrible, fearsome "stroll" from the Eastern Railroad Station through Rákóczi Avenue and along the Grand Boulevard to Üllöi Avenue is unforgettable. I can see myself; I see me, Arthur Linksz. I am standing somewhere in the air, on a very high balcony, and am looking down upon the empty, completely abandoned Grand Boulevard of which I have a bird's-eye view. I am looking from north to south, from Rákóczi Avenue toward Üllöi Avenue, and not the other way around. On the left side of the street, in the shadow of a door, a few Rumanian soldiers are standing, and in the middle of the street walks a small person, almost unrecognizable from the distance. His back is toward me; he is not going toward me; he is going away. It is an Arthur Linksz going toward Üllöi Avenue with a goose and a backpack. "I," Arthur Linksz, can see that "he," Arthur Linksz, is walking.

I do not know how and when Géza escaped from Pápa. I do not know what suddenly induced him to give up everything. I can say about him what Professor Trócsányi said about me: "I know that neither money nor blood soiled his hands." I also know that following the suppression of the counterrevolution of Devecser he tried to save people, and not to judge them. It seems that the "run wherever you can" of the fairy tales was our chief advisor. Whoever could manage, left, whichever way he found. I still do not understand why the red-haired Red soldier did not escape. Mihály Török did not have to escape. He spent the months of the dictatorship in Pest. Mihály believed in Anatole France and Ervin Szabó. He loved books, not power, and he disliked every dictatorship. He abandoned his law practice in Pápa at the beginning of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Being the conceited revolutionary I was, the noble guardian of the "truth," I looked with contempt upon Mihály at the time. However otherwise I liked and respected him. "This is where the old-fashioned liberal ideas will lead," I grumbled to myself. Mihály moved to Budapest, to his friend Donát on the Üllöi Avenue, as a lodger, and signed up as a trainee at the city library. One of the humblest admirers and students of Mihály was Árpád Molnár, the son

of a sheetmetal worker of Pápa, a young socialist poet and journalist. A delicate blond youth, he published during the war a small volume of poems entitled *A mi csatánk (Our Battle).* One copy of it still exists—in my library. Árpád fled. I do not know why. I lost track of him. Géza wound his way toward Budapest, and for many months was hiding in the apartment of a friend of his, Anti. Only the narrowest circle of friends knew where he was. Anti was a friend of Géza, but in a different sense than I. I was a believer, a pupil, an ideological follower, an amanuensis. Anti was a bourgeois. His father had an exclusive fashion shop for men in the inner city. The shop was so elegant and exclusive that only a very few selected, beautiful gentlemen's things were shown in the window, and not a lot of articles as in the stores of Rákóczi Avenue. So exclusive, that there was only one word on the store sign, the family name of Anti. Anti was Géza's comrade; they became friends on the battlefield. As for Géza's ideology, enthusiasm, exaggerations, fanaticism—all that did not interest Anti. I do not know what Anti did during the dictatorship. In the weeks following its fall he worked in the shop. He gave me permission to visit Géza in his apartment in Buda, to say goodbye to him a few days before I left for Pozsony, which move, as it turned out, opened a new chapter in my life. I remember clearly the house. Anti's apartment was located in one of the quiet side streets of what was then Fehérvári Road. Years later I was often in that neighborhood. I know that Klopstock and Strelinger and Piroska Kalmár and Sári (when she was a young medical student) and Frigyes Karinthy—perhaps in a café named after Hadik—all belong there, to that road later named after Miklós Horthy. And that also the Winklers, Magda's aunt and her husband, lived there. And that once I accompanied Magda, and on the way we decided that we would get married.

Thereafter, I met Géza only in Pozsony. It is almost miraculous how easy is was for him to flee Budapest. Anti boarded the Vienna-bound Danube steamer at a station *before* Budapest, with a ticket valid until Vienna. Then when the ship stopped in Budapest, a crowd of young people, Géza among them, greeted him from the shore. He was allowed by the policeman, or the Rumanian soldier guarding the exit, to step ashore for a minute to embrace his friends. And then, instead of Anti, Géza went "back" with the valid ticket and Anti's passport. In the darkness of the evening the guard did not notice the exchange.

I did not see Anti for twenty years. Actually, it is not quite true that I did not see him. I could not even forget him. During the thirties, I went to the State Eye Hospital three times a week, and the streetcar I took passed through the inner city. I always looked out the window—in the front of the shop the car slowed down for a sharp curve—and I saw the sign with Anti's last name, the elegant store windows, and occasionally, a figure behind the counters. If I happened to have something to do in the area, I passed in front of the store and looked in to see if I could get a glimpse of Anti. I never entered the store. For twenty years I tried to shun everybody who knew about Pápa and especially about Lovászpatona. This fear never left me completely.

Two of Géza's brothers were students at the medical school in Pozsony in which classes reopened on schedule. It was in their apartment that Géza and I met. Unlike me, Géza did not matriculate in the moribund law faculty of the Hungarian University in Pozsony. He went instead to Prague. I met him there again the following year. I even remember the place: it was the Jewish students' canteen in the garden of the famous *Altneuschul,* the medieval synagogue of Prague. For a while we saw each other frequently. Géza had a strong, athletic body, with an interesting face covered with scars left by skin abscesses of earlier years. As he told me with a satisfied smile, two beautiful girls, both medical students, were desperately in love with him at the same time.

However, Géza could not stay in Prague for long. The new Czech government had no liking for the communist escapees from Hungary, and Géza soon moved on to the West. I remember that before he left I helped him carry a large crate of books to a friend's apartment for temporary safekeeping. A whole library was lost this way. That was when I last saw Géza. Of his two medical student brothers, the older—trustworthy, earthbound, Géza's opposite in every possible way—ultimately returned to Pápa. Later I heard that he starved to death on the Russian front during the Nazi war. Before that I met him several times (and soon I will have to speak about that). I still remember one of our talks from our time together in Pozsony. Naturally, at that time, we, the "former Orthodox," were monistic materialists. As students of Ostwald and Haeckel and Büchner, we denied the existence of the "soul." We were often starving, but once, when we gorged ourselves on bread, Sándor, Géza's older brother, said "It is the

soul that we are eating." The younger brother, Kari—a humble, quiet, somewhat colorless boy who spoke little and did not concern himself with politics—emigrated to Russia. He was never able to come back. Somehow he got to Charbin, in Mongolia, and was "liquidated" during the Stalin era. Who knows why?

As for Géza himself, for a long time I lost sight of him. Some members of his Orthodox family lived in the Holy Land, and years later I learned that he, too, had settled in Palestine. Again, several years later, I heard that he had become a well-known lawyer in Jerusalem, and one of the leaders of the most religious Orthodox Jews. He adopted a Hebrew name, grew a beard, and married the daughter of a very distinguished Orthodox leader. The taste in my mouth turned bitter. Although I, too, ceased to be a revolutionary and settled into the comfort of a well-established practice in Budapest, I did not return to the bosom of the faith, and always retained my emotional ties with the "left." The inner connection, the memory connection, and the emotional connection with Géza was lost once and for all. We never wrote to each other. All I knew about him I got second- and third-hand from people in Pápa. And I always kept away from Pápa.

Then, in 1936 or 1937, before the *Anschluss,* Géza's brother Sándor turned up in my office in Budapest. He was accompanied by another older brother and a very old bearded man, their father, the retired principal of a grade school, who was a friend of my father. All three of them were desperate. They told me that Géza had gone to some congress in Vienna, and there the Hungarians had abducted him. They were afraid that he would be spirited into Hungary. During the first few years of the anti-Semitic regime in Hungary the Hungarian Embassy in Vienna acquired a certain notoriety along these lines. But this danger passed: the leaders of the congress apparently had enough time to alert the Austrian authorities. The Hungarians claimed that the person whose extradition they requested was not a political offender, but an ordinary criminal. In any case, Géza was in investigative custody pending the outcome of extradition proceedings. His father and brothers asked me to go to Vienna and attest that Géza was in Pest during the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, or at least during the counterrevolution of Devecser. They, of course, could not know that I, too, was not in Budapest at the time, but they remembered that I was not in Pápa. I must confess that I was afraid to get involved. My wife was most definitely against my

going. I tried to make myself believe that I had no kind of moral obligation toward Géza ("a traitor to our cause"). Even so, I was caught in a terrible dilemma: between an old friendship and the fear, the fear that I had come to call the fear of Lovászpatona. That the long lost "limping, bespectacled individual," one of the confederates of the executed "leather-coat," who, in addition, was himself in Devecser during the counterrevolution, would suddenly appear before Hungarian officials, was a truly frightening prospect. But Géza's family came to see me again and again, and tried to persuade me to do what I could. In the end, I decided to ask the advice and opinion of Anti, Géza's self-sacrificing, risk-taking comrade. I went to the store and introduced myself. Anti, of course, remembered me. I told him that I must talk with him very urgently, on a matter of life and death concerning Géza, and we agreed that he and his wife would come to us the same evening. To some extent he, too, was afraid of getting mixed up anew with old, buried events—but to go to a medical office is less noticeable than to go to a small street in Buda where everybody knows everybody. Anti, his wife, and my wife, all three of them, tried to convince me that I should not go to Vienna, that I had no obligation to do so. In the end, I did not go, and even today I have some guilt feelings about it. However, the affair ended well anyway. The Austrian officials did not extradite Géza. On the other hand, they expelled him from Austria. But, of course, for none of that can I claim credit.

Some ten years later (in the meantime, a second world war ended, and I had been living in America for a long time), the Hebrew University of Jerusalem invited me to hold a seminar about the physiology of vision. I did not accept this most flattering invitation, and only I myself know (the reader may guess) the reason why. In the meantime, Géza died, quite young, of a cardiac thrombosis. Two or three of his younger brothers continue to live there with their family. I think their father, the old teacher, also died in the Holy Land. I, myself, however, never went to Israel. As was the case with Vörösvári Street in Óbuda, Israel, too, remained a place I had never seen. And now it is too late. I do not wish to compare myself to the medieval poet, Jehuda Halevi, but ever since my childhood it has remained in my mind that that great lover of Zion died on his way to the city of his dreams. And this knowledge has become a superstitious fear for me.

10

Pozsony-Bratislava (1919-1920)

The months I spent in Pozsony from September 1919 to April 1920 were dark months—of poverty, hunger, great, great loneliness. The dream was torn to shreds by the awful reality. The revolution died; the country fell apart. And the wonderful, intense bonds of friendship? It was as if suddenly walls of stone, gates of iron separated me from everybody to whom I used to belong. In mortal danger, Géza continued to hide for a long time. Mike, even though not hiding, was waiting in Budapest. He was waiting—"God knows how it all will turn out." Soon it became evident that his waiting made good sense. I do not know when Mike returned to Pápa. He remained a lawyer, poor, humble, liberal. He lived happily with his wife, Franci. He stayed in Pápa until Auschwitz. Terus continued her parents' wood and coal business in Pápa. She, too, stayed there until Auschwitz.

The slap my father gave me still smarted, but it is possible that it saved my life. After receiving the slap, I did not take the train to Devecser again. And Sári—the perpetual and hopeless love? She was doubly unreachable. Only Vilma, Aunt Ambrus' daughter, remained as a link. Vilma, the serious, humble, softspoken Vilma, the faithful friend with whose family I spent my week of hiding in Pápa following Lovászpatona. She became a medical student in Vienna. I sent my letters to her from my exile (*Epistulae ex Ponto,* as I remember from Horace). From her (she wrote beautiful, long letters in her pearl-like hand) I heard about everyone I loved. Messages and answers reached

me through her. At the time there was no mail service between Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Hungary remained an enemy. Of course, one had to be careful about the letters. Czech censorship was open and official. They even stamped the letters to show that the censor had opened them. They opened every single letter that came from foreign countries. Pozsony was a dead end into which I escaped, in which I finally found Ariadne's thread to my future life.

The revolution died. This was the basic motive. Pozsony became Bratislava, and, as I said, a dead end—the place of my half-hearted attempt to return to Orthodoxy. I shall have more to say about this in a minute. (The attempt was hopeless from the beginning, and it was not even honest.) The third semester in law school made it clear that law, and especially Hungarian law (I was certainly not going to study the nonexistent Czechoslovak law) had no reason, no purpose. The Hungarian fountainhead of poetry suddenly and permanently dried up. I was unable to finish the ode I planned for Sári's nineteenth birthday. A few lines of the half-finished poem still live in my memory. However comical it may appear today, even to me, for awhile I really believed that I would become a poet, a writer, an active Hungarian politician. In reality, the history of literature, Hungarian literature, was the subject which I should have studied had I used common sense. But times have changed, and today will anyone ever again read Vörösmarty or Endre Ady, or especially Lajos Kassák? Especially Lajos Kassák! And Kassák, too, had fled. Neither could I go back to Hungary again. Could one live in a country where, as rumors had it, Trócsányi had suddenly become a member of the Christian Party, and where my still idolized Dezsö Szabó, author of the *Elsodort Falu (Village Swept Away)* lived and, following the "collapse," had suddenly become a rightwing counterrevolutionary and anti-Semite. I am almost ashamed to return to this theme. I accepted the anti-Semitism of Dezsö Szabó as long as he hated only the capitalist Jew and not me, whose soul and blood was Hungary. Seldom in my life did I "live" a book as intensively as I did his *Elsodort Falu*. I have written about it often enough, but it keeps crowding into my pen, in spite of the fact that I was unable to identify with anyone in it. In the late summer of 1919, as a fugitive in Budapest, I read it again; I re-lived the *Elsodort Falu*. I went to Buda to walk the streets frequented by Judith, the heroine of the book. Somehow, I believed and I expected that Judith would suddenly approach me there.

My copy of the first, beautifully printed, edition of *Elsodort Falu* was lost. (Most of the books I collected up to my emigration to Pozsony were lost.) But I have here with me a later copy, poorly printed on paper that has turned almost black, with a handwritten dedication "To János Vedres, Budapest, March 5, 1923, Dezsö Szabó." Who could that János Vedres have been, who sold, discarded or gave away a book dedicated to him personally by Dezsö Szabó, and did so obviously only a few months after he received it?

After arriving in Pozsony, I moved in with a family of relatives. They had no extra bed for a guest in their small apartment, and so I slept on the floor. The numerous boys and girls in the family did not like the stranger who took up living with them during those confused times, a stranger who had no documents and who arrived in suspicious circumstances. I moved out within a few days. The greatest problem was reporting to the police. I was of military age; I spoke no Slovak; the travel document with which I crossed the border was obviously the wrong kind of recommendation. In my new place of residence—if a bed in an overcrowded apartment can be called by that term—the landlord did not press me to report. Fortunately, before long I succeeded in getting a birth certificate in Slovak from Galgóc, my native town. The Czechs and the Slovaks could not agree on the new name for Galgóc: the Czechs called it Hlohovec, the Slovaks, Frasták. Ultimately, the Czech name prevailed. And, of course, a Slovak birth certificate was much better than a forged Hungarian border pass.

The Hlohovec registrar was either ignorant or unfamiliar with the new official Slovak language. Or maybe his pen moved automatically, so that in the box marked "religion," he wrote "Roman Catholic." Only thus can be explained the most comical personal document: a birth certificate in Slovak in which the first three lines read:

> Artur
> Chlapec (Boy)
> Israelite

while the next three lines contained personal data relating to my father:

Ignác
Rabbi
Romsky Katholik.

All this in beautiful calligraphic writing, attesting that my rabbi father belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. I do not remember the data concerning my mother. To this day I regret that I have not saved this remarkable document. But, evidently, I had to replace it with a new one. After awhile, however, it seemed advisable to report to the police and explain what a person of military age, who spoke no Slovak, was doing in Bratislava. Thus, it was decided that, with the help of my Orthodox relatives, I would matriculate at the world-famous Orthodox Yeshiva of Pozsony, founded by the renowned Moses Sofer. Thereafter, I could safely burn the "passport" with which I crossed the border at Párkány. That trip, let me add, was not easy either. It lasted two days. In the railroad station of Párkány, all through the night, soldiers by the hundreds lay on the ground waiting for trains. Some of them were trying to get home from Hungary to Czechoslovakia; some wanted to go in the opposite direction. Nobody noticed me among them, there were so many; hardly anybody examined papers.

My enrollment in the *Pressburger Yeshiva* supplied me with another legitimate document, and a very valuable one at that. It seems the new authorities respected Orthodoxy; the Orthodox were not revolutionaries and—in contrast to the Neolog Jews who had absorbed Hungarian patriotism in the liberal half-century of Franz Joseph—had no Hungarian loyalties. Even if they were not the friends of the new regime, at least they were not its enemies.

My admission to the Pressburger Yeshiva also secured me automatic freedom from military service. The authorities accepted the great Yeshiva as an institute of theology, and its students, future rabbis, were not obliged to serve in the army. The emotional disturbances I suffered and the guilt feelings that haunted me at the time cannot be demonstrated better than by the choice I ultimately made against a country which had given me refuge, and would have given me a home, a future, life, security, and even the prospect of a career, had I not thrown away all these chances. But "facts are facts" (one of my father's favorite sayings with a dubious meaning): neither the revolution, nor the counterrevolution, nor even the "white terror" could change the fact that I felt myself to be a Hungarian, a compatriot

of Vörösmarty and Endre Ady (and, despite everything, of Dezsö Szabó). It was unimaginable for me to become a Czech soldier. Then and there, in A.D. 1919, in the mournful year of the collapse of the revolution and of many of my dreams, this problem was temporarily solved by my admission to the Yeshiva. I want to add that this same emotional chaos was one of the reasons why, after three and a half undisturbed years at the Prague medical school, I left the Czech capital and went to Kiel, to a German university and into a new uncertainty: there I was a foreigner, while by that time I already had a valid Czech passport. (Since I was born in Slovakia, the question of domicile or citizenship was not even raised.) I was also given a document stating that for the duration of my studies I was exempted from military service. In two more years I could have graduated as a physician in Czechoslovakia with a doctor's degree from the German University of Prague, and without even having to learn Czech or Slovak. I gave all this up, and from the official Czechoslovak point of view (and according to the opinion of a lawyer relative of mine from Zsolna) I became, in effect, a military deserter when, in the autumn of 1923, I left Prague, never again to return there. As it turned out, it was quite easy to obtain a Hungarian passport, since I had my old certificate of domicile from Devecser. From that time on I avoided Czechoslovakia. It was only during the early 1960s, in possession of an American passport, that I dared to return to Czechoslovakia to visit relatives. Even so, I was not completely free of anxiety. In fact, my anxiety was not totally without foundation: when I reported to the immigration office of the police in Zsolna, I experienced the most nightmarish moments of my life. I was separated from my American passport which was returned to me only next morning. But there is no sense in discussing this here. At that time, I believe this was about the beginning of the twenties, I hardly dared to go back to Hungary either. I hardly dared, but I went anyway. In the summer of 1923 I dared to go to Budapest with my valid Czechoslovakian passport, but not yet to Pápa or to Devecser. Sári was in Budapest, by that time already an M.D. and in psychoanalytic training analysis with no "forks" in her road, and spared the agony of choosing which door to open. My parents came to see me, and everybody urged me to come home. But the incident of Lovászpatona continued to be the source of some anxiety. I did not know to what extent were the Hungarian authorities aware of the identity of that certain bespectacled, limping,

Red soldier.

After August 1919, more than three years passed before I saw my father again: in the summer of 1923 he suddenly and unannounced appeared in Uj-Beszterce, hoping to find me there. (How odd, how very odd: the Czechoslovak authorities did not easily give visas to Hungarian clergymen in those years.) It so happened that I was not there, although I usually spent the summers in Uj-Beszterce. The relatives did not know where I was. I spent about two weeks incognito in an Austrian spa hotel, with a beautiful blond woman who seduced me and broke Sári's spell. My father returned home with unfinished business. When finally I surfaced in Uj-Beszterce, I reproached myself bitterly. I was ashamed of myself. Somehow, I believe it was again through Vilma, I let my parents know where I was. Once again, my father obtained a visa and came to see me. It was very tiring and difficult to travel at that time from Hungary to Czechoslovakia. The trip was complicated by many transfers, slow local trains, and the last leg had to be done in that contraption already referred to, that springless, jolting, peasant coach with wooden benches which was not improved by the years in between and the change of regime. Finally, from Ó-Beszterce one had to walk. I can still see the tired, broken, graying, aged man, arriving on foot from the direction of Ó-Beszterce. He desperately wanted me to come home at last. But, of course, at that time the *numerus clausus* had been introduced in Hungarian universities, and besides, I was still afraid. There could be no discussion about my going back to Hungary. But my father's eyes spoke silently, and it was very difficult for me to resist them.

My life began to take a better turn. About that time I completed the first set of examinations called *rigorosa*. There was no "royal ring" to be earned in Prague anymore, but nothing could go wrong with a *summa cum laude*. I got a straight "A" in every subject, even in physiology, from the dreaded Hofrat von Tschermak, that (how characteristic!) German ultranationalist with a Czech name, who was not a friend of the Hungarian (and mostly Jewish) students, most of them with dubious, often forged, Slovak papers, who crowded the German University of Prague. The number of the Hungarian students who failed once or twice was considerable. The language of tuition and of the examinations was German, which proved difficult for many of

them. I remember another student in the class who received an "A" from Tschermak. His name was Orvan. He was a young man from Zsolna; German was almost a mother tongue to him.

Before my life began to improve I had to go through a period of starvation. Sometimes I was so hungry that I cried. I remember that once, for a whole week, bread and lard were my only food, and I jumped on and off the streetcars because I had no money to buy a ticket. The "excellent" grade on the physiology test suddenly made me well known, and again, as before in Pápa, tutoring became the basis of my improved life situation. I preferred to prepare well-to-do and elegant women students for the exams, mainly physiology and biochemistry. Thus, I began to earn some money. I usually roomed with my friend Sándor Marmorstein, and we moved into a somewhat better room. Even today I remember that one Sunday at noon (on Saturdays and Sundays the free Jewish students' canteen was closed) I dared enter a small restaurant in the suburbs and with my limited Czech vocabulary I ordered lamb chops with a stein of Pilsener. It was a memorable occasion. And I have never forgotten the yellow shoes with pointed toes I saw in the windows of an elegant shoe store in downtown Prague, near the statue of Hus. Like a fetish, that pair of shoes hypnotized me. I walked by daily if I could, in front of the store, although I had nothing to do in that area; as one bewitched, I stared at the shoes; they were incredibly expensive, and even though they represented quite a contrast with my clothes—mostly hand-me-downs from my uncles, I bought them. My dear, puritanical, revolutionist friend, Samu (very shortly I will have to speak about him) berated me sharply for my improvident folly. The upshot was that I never again put on those shoes.

Under the influence of Professor Tschermak's unforgettable lectures I decided that I, too, shall become a physiologist, and not a practicing physician. At the same time, for many reasons, I did not want to remain in Prague. My one-sided love affair with Weimar Germany began to blossom. Thus the solution of Kiel was not completely senseless, at least not as a temporary solution—although I knew that in Germany I would not be able to earn a diploma that would permit me to practice medicine *there* without German citizenship. But then, when I embarked upon the Kiel adventure, I had no

desire to enter into medical practice. In fact, my diploma, dated Kiel 1925, made me only a Dr. Med. Sci., a doctor of medical sciences on the basis of a thesis published by the Physiological Institute of Kiel, but I was not permitted to take the *Staatsprüfung.*

In the meantime, at home the political atmosphere improved to some extent. The son of a master cooper of Devecser, Representative Rezsö Rupert, a young lawyer with the courage of a Saint George, dared to question the national heroes of the "white terror," and no harm came to him. (It just occurs to me that I do not even know what happened to Rupert, what became of him in the years after we emigrated.) So at the beginning of 1924 my father hired a lawyer who pleaded first in the Pápa, later in the Veszprém court, and I don't know in what other offices, and finally produced some kind of official document attesting that there had never been any kind of investigation against me and that my name was not listed in connection with any kind of anti-state action. Thus I was able to come home to Devecser during the summer vacation of 1924, and then, in 1925, to return permanently. At that time, at least, I believed that my return was permanent. It took another three years until I finally received, in 1928, my M.D. diploma at Pécs, authorizing me to practice medicine in Hungary. It was typical of me: I started school in 1905, at the age of five, a year younger than my classmates. Later I lost this year of advantage. It was only in 1914 that I became a freshman in the Calvinist College in Pápa. And then came those eventful three semesters about which I am writing these confessions—from 1918 to 1920. Then I lost another semester: I was not ready in time for the first examination. But I felt I had to prepare myself thoroughly to get an "excellent" in physiology. Yes, I must admit this character flaw. I wanted to be a good student, a "straight A." I was a good boy, a polite admirer of the adults, the professors (the ruling class?). And at the same time, I wanted to play the role of a leftist, who in politics would not stop short of the revolution, and in the arts, of the avant-garde. Yes, I was an atheist, yet Jew; a Bolshevik, yet conservative; scornful of the existing social order, yet simultaneously, envying and later exploiting it.

Obviously something was not quite in order here. If I were a psychoanalyst, I would postulate the existence of some kind of a "Peter Pan complex": the man who does not want to grow up. I, of

course, derive the concept from the well-known play about an adolescent boy who somehow succeeded in not having to grow up. When I began to study medicine I was twenty, two years older than the other freshmen, and those who had finished high school with me were two years closer to earning their coveted M.D.'s. Even if I was jealous of those well-dressed, good-citizen "regulars," I also felt sorry for them: they were so much closer to the end, to the closing of the gates, to the inevitable immersion into everyday bourgeois life, to sinking into the mud. After I received my doctorate in Kiel in 1925—two years behind the "regulars"—another three years passed before I obtained my "nostrification" which entitled me to engage in medical practice. With one foot I was a student in Pécs, with the other an ophthalmological resident in the Jewish hospital of Budapest. This new life suited me well. During the months spent in Pécs, I could again feel myself a student; usually I passed my examinations with flying colors, and always found an attractive female colleague who needed tutoring, with whom I could study as a friend, while also earning some money. During most of my time in Budapest I had my room and board in the hospital—that was my actual salary. I had no apartment of my own. Of course, I was not allowed to practice. But even in 1928, at the age of 28, my life was not yet settled. It was almost spooky how I repeated the wandering life pattern of my father.

At that time, in 1928, Magda and I were informally engaged, but I spent one more year in the relative comfort of the well-furnished doctors' room of the Eye Department of the Jewish Hospital, where I also took all my meals. I earned pretty good money with writing and with translations. My Saturdays and free days I spent in the Gedeon Richter Pharmaceutical Factory for which I wrote the drug descriptions inserted into the packages. Once in a while I even saw an occasional private patient. After the official hours, I was able to use unofficially the well-equipped examination room of the hospital. Of course, I paid no income tax. I did not even have to fill out a tax return. I was a non-person.

But the best part was just coming. When we told our folks that we wanted to get married, both families felt that now, finally I was beginning to show signs of maturity. They expected of a young doctor to use his wife's dowry to buy furniture, equipment, and rent an apartment. I did nothing of the sort. Quite to the contrary. I must

confess that I wasted both my small savings and Magda's not too substantial dowry, while trying for two more years to run after a life form that was obviously not predestined to be mine: an academic career, scientific work in Germany. I must state here, gratefully and still with reverence and even with admiration, that Magda did not resist me, she did not want to change my ways, however irrational she had found them, however irrational they proved to be. True, we spent two very beautiful years in Munich. I still felt that Weimar Germany was my true emotional homeland, the place where I wanted to live more than anywhere else. It took two years before the dream (and the money) disappeared. During those two years, neither money, the sums spent on lawyers, nor patronage did help. I did not succeed in obtaining German citizenship. And what good luck I had! Two years later Germany already was in the grip of the Nazis. Precisely when I was about to get a salaried position, when that certain great monograph of mine which I dreamt would result in my acceptance as a Privatdozent at the university was almost completed, and when in another German state my chances to become a German citizen seemed excellent, suddenly everything collapsed. The *Völkischer Beobachter* (the daily paper of the Nazis in Munich) published a hideous article about me: it alleged that I was taking away the bread from a poor German's mouth. Its title was printed in large red letters: *"Ein Ungarischer Jude in der Universitäts-Augenklinik"* ("A Hungarian Jew in the Eye Clinic of the University"). Then they began to attack the head of the clinic, who (one could not blame the poor man) had for years tried to hide that the blood flowing in his veins was one quarter Jewish. His name was Wessely, and since the word Vesely in Czech means happy or joyful, he was soon referred to as *der Jude Lustig* (the happy Jew) in another loathsome article. (By the way, the etymology of the name happened to come from me. One day, in the dining room of the eye clinic, I was musing aloud about the origin of the name—without any malice of course. One of the doctors who overheard my remarks must have inspired the article.) In 1931, the Nazis were already a power in Munich. It was time for us to leave. And of course, where else could we go, except back to Budapest? Professor Wessely kindly offered to recommend me to a former student of his, an ophthalmologist in St. Louis, Missouri, but I chose the other door. And so, in 1931, we returned to Hungary. That time I was convinced that this was final.

Practice, income, responsibility, regular job, an apartment, bourgeois life, all begun in that year, and in Budapest. I felt that I lived out the words of the Hungarian national anthem,

> Let the hand of fate bless you or smite you,
> Here you must live and die.

It was in September 1931 that I hung up my shingle, and began to wait for patients. For a long time I had thought that I was cut out for anything else, except medical practice. But, lo and behold, it soon became clear that nothing I had done before was as successful as my medical work with patients. However, the hand of fate wanted it that as soon as our life became normalized, we should again leave and make the great move to America.

The recurrence is almost spooky. But things do repeat themselves constantly. It seems as if mystical forces were directing man's fate; as if there were such a thing as predestination. And yet, always, every man is the shaper of his own fate.

My own life pattern repeated itself when I arrived in New York in 1939. Never for one minute did I regret that I left Budapest. Although my heart ached for the beautiful city, at times I was almost glad that I had left. In New York I again did not have my own apartment; I again was not the slave of regular office hours. Again I was a man without the ordinary bourgeois responsibilities, living in poverty, first as a guest and later as a roomer. I was a student again. Pretty soon, I became quite well known among the German, Austrian, and Hungarian refugee colleagues who were arriving in increasing numbers. I passed all the required medical examinations on the first try. And again I supported myself by tutoring, by preparing my colleagues for the same examinations. Magda joined me half a year later. And then came to pass the "miracle" already mentioned. We spent four years, four beautiful years, in a dream city, at the University of Dartmouth in New Hampshire, where I was employed but was not permitted to practice. I did not even want to. On the other hand, I published a few really good papers, which established my reputation in the American professional circles. And our two boys were born there—the first real responsibility. Life was not a game anymore. Four years later we came to New York, and finally I opened an office. I was already more than 43 years old. The colleagues, with whom I arrived in America, were

already past the difficulties of establishing themselves. I had to take a loan to be able to pay the rent of the apartment in the first few months. During the first few years, I still augmented the meager income I had from my practice with tutoring, with preparing doctors for the ophthalmological board examinations. Gradually my practice grew. Teaching became a hobby—a noble hobby, an expensive hobby—it involved lectures, invitations, journeys, congresses, and finally, the writing of books and earning the title of professor. I had no time to make a lot of money. But I never minded that. My sons once reproached me that because I was busy writing books I had no time to go to ball games with them, as other fathers did, most of them younger than I. I regret that. But it cannot be undone. I read in a biography of Alexander Dumas Pére that on his death bed he was squeezing a five-*sous* coin in his hand. When questioned by the people around him about it, he said that he had come to Paris as a child without a *sous,* and therefore, the five *sous* in his hand proved that the final balance of his life showed a profit. I have no reason to complain either.

But let me return to the beginning of my story. The date is still 1919, the month of September in Pozsony (I should say Bratislava). I myself did not regret the new move either. Just as some kind of a bond always remains among divorced couples, Orthodoxy had not become strange to me. I knew well its tunes and forms, and the Bible, the Talmud, Jewish history, Jewish folklore (that which today in America we would call Judaism) never lost their early magic for me. I almost wished to return to Jewishness—even if not to Orthodoxy. (In the latter I would scarcely have succeeded.) The revolution was over. It died in Hungary. It died also in Germany. In Czechoslovakia, it was not even born. Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg were killed. The Proletarian Dictatorship of Munich was drowned in blood. (Who remembers today Kurt Eisner, or the philosopher-revolutionary, Gustav Landauer, both of whom perished there?) In Czechoslovakia, the new national victory blunted the class-war, just as the national catastrophe did in Hungary. The great ultimate aim—internationalism—suddenly appeared out of reach, just as it had lost its magic. The only labor organization of which I know, with the term "international" in its name, is the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union—a large, conservative labor union in New York which for decades was

dominated by Jews. As for Zionism, I was never enthusiastic about it, not even about the Labor-Zionist movement. One cannot be—I kept saying to myself in those times—simultaneously Hungarian and Zionist. At the same time, Martin Buber's books, written in beautiful German, about Hasidism, about the life of the great Hasidic rabbis and their legends, preached a vibrantly alive piety, even with a dead God (suddenly, miraculously these books had come into my hands in Pozsony). One of the problems was that—no matter how comical this sounds—to be a true Orthodox Jew takes a tremendous amount of time, in addition to the tremendous amount of minute behavioral peculiarity. The latter did not really bother me. As I have said, I knew the rules of conduct and was very careful: on Saturday I did not turn on the lights, I shaved with *aurum* (that certain chemical stuff), I did not have my hair trimmed in front of my ears (if you wish, you may call it either an Orthodox side lock or Biedermeier side whiskers). I knew exactly when one had to wash hands and when to recite the blessing over the hand washing, over the bread, the fruit, and even when witnessing thunder and lightning. And I always performed these pious moves loudly and conspicuously, to prove, even to show off, my Orthodoxy. I was that rare oddity: a *bokher* with a high school diploma, the circle squared, or as we said in Hungarian, an iron ring made of wood. At the beginning my new classmates regarded me with some suspicion, but I somehow solved the problem. The twice-daily synagogue attendance, the prayers and benedictions, the rituals, fill a great part of the day, and especially of the Sabbath. I had no time for all that; I did not want to spend my time on it. As I said, I did not regret the time spent studying. Even today I do not feel that the time spent with the Bible, one of the majestic manifestations of the human spirit, was wasted. Of course, my father disapproved of my attitude on religious practice, and had sharp enough eyes to discover it quite early in me and to condemn it. For my father, the Jewish religious texts were nothing less than divinely inspired, given personally by God to Moses, containing instructions as to how one must serve Him. My father had a special hatred for the science of comparative religion and the higher biblical criticism, not to mention Darwinism. He had no objection as long as comparative religion discussed the relationship between the other religions. But a science of *Jewish* religion? That simply did not exist. It was blasphemy to consider the Great Flood a legend adopted from the Babylonians. No less blas-

phemous was the Neolog view that the biblical six days of Creation are to be interpreted symbolically. A book that became famous, or infamous, during my childhood, titled *Babel und Bibel* (I read it, finally, only a few years ago) one was not even permitted to mention. And the Darwinian theory—that heresy of heresies!—that the species could have any other origin than the Divine Word! Nor could one speculate on the origin of the universe. The Bible says "Let there be light, *and there was light.*" There was no question to be asked.

With his university background, my father vaguely realized that already "that faithless Goethe" had also denied the immutability of the species, the impossibility of changes in them. In our house, Goethe was anathema in contrast to, let's say, Lessing, regarded as "one of the pious of the peoples of the earth."

Under the influence of Buber's books, I went a few times to one or the other of the Hasidic prayer houses in the Jewish quarter of Pozsony. I wanted to observe, and experience first hand, their hypnotic ecstasy. Of course, I could stand it only for a short time. While the Orthodox Saturday morning services took two hours, the Hasidim did not let go under four to five hours. But, as I said, I had to solve the problem of wasting time on rituals. In the *Judengasse* of Pozsony there was not only the large and beautiful Main Synagogue, in which the majestic chief rabbi, Akiba Schreiber, a great-grandson of the great Moses Sofer, the *Hatam Sofer,* kept court in aristocratic pomp. There were also many small prayer houses serving the different sects, trends, Talmudic associations, and the members of minor yeshivas. This made it possible for me to tell my cousin, the school principal, that I was frequenting the great synagogue, or the small *shul* of the local *landsmannschaften,* while telling the opposite to my homeroom rabbi. I carried it off quite well. On Friday evenings, I occasionally went to the synagogue of my relative—hoping for a dinner invitation. Since I still remembered from early childhood quite a few Psalms by heart, and also some medieval Sabbath songs with their melodies, I even managed to improve the atmosphere of usually drab Friday evenings in his home.

It is unnecessary to say that even so I participated in the Talmudic school only half-heartedly. First, I had to find one or two students to tutor—I had to earn money for room and board. As in the past, I taught algebra, but now I also taught the new mandatory

subject, Slovak grammar, keeping ahead of my students by preparing myself from lesson to lesson. After finding a foothold in Pozsony, I enrolled in the law faculty of the University so as not to lose another semester. Of my two law semesters in Pest, the validity of the second was somewhat doubtful; it coincided with the Dictatorship of the Proletariat that, as I remember, simply closed down the law faculty. The new Elizabeth University of Sciences of Pozsony was already tottering, but, the authorities had not yet got around to closing it. By that time most of the faculty and students had fled to Budapest, and soon thereafter the entire university found a new home in Pécs. That is where, after many years of roving, I was to complete my medical studies. Since according to my registration book I was officially admitted to the Elizabeth University of Sciences in Pozsony in 1919, subsequently, in Pécs in 1925 I was considered a student with "established rights," which meant that the admission limitations of the *numerus clausus* did not apply to me. At least that was what a few generous and liberal professors of the Pécs faculty of medicine decided. Foremost among them were Mihály Pekár, the professor of biology and dean at the time, and Géza Entz, the pathologist. I could say about them in Hebrew, "Blessed be the memory of the just men." Both of them deserve that their memory should be preserved.

This law semester of Pozsony turned out to be an interesting episode of my life. But first I have to report about the Clarissa Street slum in the Jewish quarter, which was for a while my domicile, my shelter. As I mentioned, I moved there from my relatives' house shortly after my arrival in Pozsony. The room was cheap, the landlord too primitive to ask for papers, and the police too disinterested to bother me with registration forms. Clarissa Street was located on the slope of the Castle Hill. It was not really a street, but a row of steep stairs cut into the hillside. No wheeled conveyance could, of course, negotiate it. The house itself constituted a kind of passage built against the mountainside. It contained many tiny apartments, all housing terribly poor families with crowds of children. At least 50 families may have lived on its labyrinthine floors—with one communal toilet per floor. In my room there was no desk or lamp; but then, after all, I went there only to hide or to sleep. I can no longer remember the occupation of my landlord. He was a primitive, limited person, uneducated even in Hebrew and in matters of religion. Only his

poverty was greater than his stupidity. In Devecser, even the poorest Jews were not that poor. As one came in from the stairway one entered the family bedroom with two large beds. One had to pass through this room in order to reach the room occupied by three lodgers. One of the beds in that room was rented by one Salvator Wetzler, who was a haberdasher's clerk. I got the other bed, the one under the window, that happened to be vacant. Along the wall, between the two beds, there was a sofa. During the daytime, this was the drawing room, at night, a rather primitive *bokher,* some sixteen or seventeen years old, slept on the sofa. That youngster did not go to the great Yeshiva, which had the rank of a Talmudic academy, but to one of the many "Talmud Torah" schools of Pozsony. He respected us adults very much. He never inquired about our comings and goings. Salvator (a very rare name for a Jew) was a solid, silent, withdrawn young man, perhaps nearing thirty. Apparently he took his meals outside. The little *bokher,* as I recall, occasionally offered me a share of his home package. Salvator left for the store rather early, the little *bokher,* too, left early for his school, while I usually stayed home for a while and read Meister Eckhart and other mystics to whom I was led by Buber. The title of one of those books leaning toward mysticism was *Der ewige Jude (The Eternal Jew),* written by a Dutch author, Vermeylen. I think it was illustrated by woodcuts by Masereel. It suited my mood of the time: Christ himself was the wandering Jew, and in those days it appeared to me that since the revolution was dead anyway, the only salvation for mankind would be for all men to become Jews believing in Christ. I enjoyed several books illustrated by Masereel; I studied them closely as the years went by. His woodcuts (some portraying Christ) remained among my favorites. In fact, those books enabled me to enjoy German expressionist art, to become, and remain, one of its enthusiastic admirers.

After I had lived in Clarissa Street for several weeks or perhaps months, one evening a disheveled, tall, black-haired young man turned up in the apartment. He was a nephew of the haberdasher, had a Christ-like asthenic appearance, and was thin almost to the breaking point. From then on two people slept in Salvator's bed. We lodgers hardly spoke to one another; the newcomer, too, was rather taciturn. Occasionally he left early, sometimes he stayed late. One morning (I was by that time officially a Yeshiva student) I took out of my suitcase

a small book with a green binding, one of the very few books I managed to take along with me, and began to read it. Anybody familiar with Hungarian literature could have easily recognized that the book was part of a high-quality series titled *Kultura és Tudomány (Culture and Science)*. I have long forgotten the book's title. At any rate, it was not the kind of book a Yeshiva student was expected to read. Our new roommate recognized the book and began to talk to me, and in the course of a rather brief conversation, it became clear to me that he was unusually well-read, thoroughly at home with literature, sociology, philosophy, quite familiar with Petöfi and even Ady, and well-aquainted with Kassák and his circle. He was perhaps two years my senior, and had worked as a clerk in Budapest. I do not have to explain what joy, what liberation, our ensuing conversations were for both of us. Of course, on that first occasion, we both tried to beat around the bush, but soon we began to confess to each other that, in fact, we were both Hungarian political refugees. He was a much more dedicated believer, a more serious and more courageous revolutionary than I ever was or could have been. He took that certain "go and suffer, you too" motive (about which I have written elsewhere) more seriously than I, that much was beyond any doubt. He had actually joined the Red Army, and as a communist patriot fought against the invading Rumanians on the Tisza front. He even sustained a wound: a bullet settled in his pelvis, but—how extradordinarily lucky!—caused him neither pain nor infection. A few years later, upon my insistence, he agreed to have it removed. One night he waded and swam across the river Ipoly and crossed the border without papers. Fortunately, he, too, was born in Slovakia, in a village quite near Galgóc. He was the son of the local Jewish teacher. While he was still a toddler, his family moved to Budapest.

Of course, he did not want (or was not permitted) to talk about certain things, and I could figure out only later that he must have had certain obligations of which he could not talk and of which I did not even want to know. Samu Wetzler (he preferred to be called Samuel) was from then on, and for nearly fifty years, until his death, my best friend, a faithful, brotherly friend. He remained throughout a pure-hearted believer, while I, mixing the skepticism of Anatole France with the mysticism of Buber, evolved (or, as he saw it, became debased) into a comfort-loving, liberal, bourgeois doctor. My friendship with Samu

Wetzler was a much too important part of my life to speak about it here in a few brief sentences. The only thing I want to say is that until the time of Hitler, Samu lived in Prague, and in the 1930s, it was precisely because of his pure-hearted revolutionary feelings that he collided with his party which then expelled him and his wife. He moved to Paris, where, as he said humorously, he was a "double" emigrant: an emigrant from both the Hitlerite and the Stalinist systems. He remained in Paris for the rest of his life.

I have just described my room in Pozsony, and wanted to tell more about my semester as a law student at the university in that city. But I have two more memories connected with that room in which Samu and I lived. A few weeks after his arrival another stranger showed up in our night refuge. It seems Samu was instrumental in his arrival. I could see that he was a friend, or rather, a superior of Samu. I, too, had known him. I had met him, I believe, in the Galilei Circle. He was an important man. He had played a role in the short-lived Hungarian communist experiment, and was a most wanted fugitive. His name was Tivadar Sugár. He was assigned half of my bed, and since he immediately declared that he suffered from open tuberculosis, I decided that it would be safer for me to sleep with my head next to his feet. Within a few days, Sugár was spirited away by an obviously well-organized group, as I recall, to Russia. By then the police were looking for Samu. He spent perhaps as much as two weeks in prison. He insisted that they caught him stealing. (Of course, I never believed it.)

Salvator and I alternated in bringing food to Samu and to another "thief" (of course a comrade) called Rothbart, who just happened to be in the same prison at that time. On one of my visits to Budapest around 1960, I forwarded to him, over the telephone, warm greetings from our mutual friend, Samu. Rothbart was almost totally blind. A few years later both he and Samu obtained valid papers. They could not expel him. We met again in Prague. Rothbart, who was born somewhere in the southern part of Hungary, was deported to Yugoslavia.

My other memory links me to the family of my landlord. When I first moved in, the landlady was in her last month of pregnancy. The happy event took place in one of the family beds. A rotund lady (the mid-wife) and several heavily bearded, middle-aged men of the Hasidic type appeared in the apartment. They asked us lodgers that for a while

we should not pass unnecessarily through the bedroom. When I came home in the evening, the world, and the room, were richer with a new citizen. What impressed me the most (I had never seen anything like it previously), was that they had hung large Hebrew posters on the four walls of the room—amulets to protect the newborn and the mother, containing appeals to angels and archangels, and incantations to ban the ancient enemy of Adam and Eve and of all mankind, the evil she-demon, Lilith, the Queen of the Night (who was, according to Kabbalistic interpretations of the Bible, the first wife of Adam). Only much later, during my years of practice in New York, did I have a chance to inquire about those magic papers. Some of my patients told me that the hanging of such charms was still a custom among the Hasidic Jews, and that it was observed even in America. One can buy such printed amulets in Jewish religious bookstores. The Yiddish expression *Kimpetorin* derives from the German *Kindbetterin* denoting a woman in childbed. At least this was how the Hasidim of Pozsony explained it.

But it is now time to report about the other side of my time in Pozsony. As I said, I lived only with one foot in the ghetto, and tried to skip even some of the obligatory classes in the Yeshiva. I had to convince myself that this double existence was not due to a split personality but to the given circumstances. If one recites aloud the blessings over bread with a hat on one's head in a kosher students' canteen before putting a piece of bread in one's mouth, after awhile one does it automatically. This, I felt, must not happen. It was not that long before that I had escaped from Orthodoxy. Buber here, Hasidism there, this must not happen. Once in a while I had to escape into the Christian city. And there was no more marvelous place there than the café. As soon as I began to earn a little money, I went from time to time to a café far away from the ghetto. There I could sit, warm and comfortable, read, and take my hat off. I can see myself reading *Der ewige Jude (The Eternal Jew)* in a café.

Occasionally I took a stroll in the Christian quarter. I loitered in the clean, quiet streets of the old city among its beautiful old houses. They radiated culture, serenity, peace, and well-being. How good it would be to be "one of them"! One evening I found myself in an old square with a beautiful church: the Coronation Church, in which the Hapsburg emperors were crowned kings of Hungary. I knew that for a long time Pozsony was the seat of the Hungarian parliament. I sneaked

into the church. It was almost dark. In one of its chapels a priest was saying mass; only a few older ladies with scarves on their heads listened to him. I took a seat near them in order to understand their recurrent, softly murmured responses. I did not understand the words recited by the priest. But the women repeated again and again:

> *Heilige Maria, Mutter Gottes, bet für uns arme Sünder,*
> *jetzt und in der Stunde unseres Absterbens. Amen.*
> (Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us poor sinners,
> now and in the hour of our death. Amen.)

Even now I can hear the melody of the refrain and their almost Viennese German dialect.

I do not know why this walk remained so unforgettable for me. I have another, rather hazy, memory about an evening, about such a solitary walk. A statue was looking down at the Danube from one end of a landscaped plaza—the Statue of Maria Theresa. (Could it have been an equestrian statue?) A secondary figure, that of a man, extends his sword and his arm toward the queen. It was easy for me to remember the three words,

> *Vitam et Sanguinem*
> (Our life and blood)

engraved into the pedestal of the statue. The statue represented the famous scene that took place in Pozsony and in which the Hungarian nobles offered their life and blood to the queen empress. Some time later the statue was removed by the Czechoslovak authorities. The Rumanians, I was told, handled things differently: the famous statue of King Mathias, the work of János Fadrusz, was left in its place in Kolozsvár. However, they declared King Mathias a Rumanian national hero.

It is, of course, possible that such carpings are unjustified, and that I am ungrateful, partial and prejudice-laden—almost a chauvinist. Am I unjust? Yes. There was no *numerus clausus* in post-World War I Czechoslovakia and they did not even require that I should urgently learn the language. Only when Hitler established an independent Slovakia did the situation deteriorate to the level of Szálasi-ruled independent Hungary. The fact is that despite my Jewishness, half-consciously I remained a Hungarian chauvinist. But, at least, I was not

alone in those feelings. I remember clearly the last few months of 1938. I was about ready to leave for America. It happened during that time that Hungary (as it turned out, only for a short period) "recovered" Kassa. My friend Tibor broke into tears, overwhelmed by emotions as we listened to the radio describing the entry of Regent Horthy into the city. (Tibor, too, became one of the victims of the Nazi regime in 1944.)

Historical facts unwelcome to a political regime can easily be made to disappear by governmental fiat, which can pretend that events that did happen actually never did take place. I have another typical example. I do not remember the year, but according to a Slovakian census the ratio of Hungarians in Pozsony (Bratislava) showed, for the first time, a drop so that they constituted only 19 percent of the city's population. Now, according to the law, 20 percent was the minimum which gave a population group the right to be counted as a national minority. Until that time, those interested could read on the street signs of Pozsony the names of the streets in large letters in Slovakian, in smaller letters in German, and in even smaller letters in Hungarian. But now that the Hungarians lost their minority rights, the city council spent many thousands of Czech crowns to replace them with brand new signs, which did not have the Hungarian names. Assuming that the purpose of street signs is to provide information, the new signs were thus less useful than the old ones. Of course, as I am writing this, I realize that I am not fair, for a comparison with the nationalistic policies of old Hungary makes those of the successor states seem an improvement. But I am not writing a political essay. I am only remembering. And one, of course, sees the splinter only in other people's eyes.

It is almost impossible to describe the tremendous impression made on me by a little thing I saw in America the day after my arrival in New York. It was the first time I went to the Hungarian neighborhood of the city. (I was staying with relatives in the Bronx.) Suddenly I thought my eyes were playing a trick on me: I saw over a store window the words

MÁK, PAPRIKA, LEVÁR
(poppy seed, paprika, marmalade)

and, clearly, not a soul cared that they had no English translation next to them. Mr. Roth, the importer (his name was given in small letters) was obviously catering to a Hungarian clientele (the clerks spoke Hun-

garian), and, as far as the state was concerned, it was nobody else's business to interfere.

Even more memorable for me was another store, that of a butcher, on whose window one could read the modest sign:

Magyar üzlet
Deutsches Geschäft
Slovensky obchod

That was the moment when I fell in love with America and blessed the good fortune which brought me here.

Of the Pozsony university I remember only the law school. In 1919 that university was a rather peculiar one. It had everything—classrooms, offices, seals. Only two things were missing: professors and students. The only active law professor I remember was Béla Tuka, whose field was the philosophy of law. Tuka was an admirer of Gyözö Concha, the famous professor of the philosophy of law or history of law, at the university of Budapest. As I recall, Tuka came from a peasant or artisan family in Léva. He had only *one* student: me. He came to his lectures regularly, once a week, at the appointed time. I had cooked up some excuse to obtain permission to absent myself from the Yeshiva, and I was always there in time waiting for him in the classroom. Tuka used to step down from the podium and sit down next to me in the benches and engage me in conversation. The situation was certainly uncommon: a Yeshiva *bokher,* who, in addition, was a political refugee in hiding, discussing problems of legal philosophy with the Christian, conservative university professor, a student of Concha. Unforgettable. Tuka, of course, did not deliver any kind of organized lecture. As I said, we were conversing. He spoke about Pest, about Concha, about Roman law, philosophy, and even about politics; I tried my best not to give myself away, having recourse to my literary knowledge. He and I agreed on one thing: the leaders of our country did not handle the so-called problem of the nationalities in the wisest possible way.

At the end of the semester we parted as friends. I left for Prague to become a medical student. As I mentioned, in Prague there was a famous German university, and my Slovakian birth certificate well

camouflaged my questionable citizenship. They admitted me without any further questions. And what about Tuka? I did not know why he was delaying to follow his colleagues. Later I learned that he finally opted for Slovakia, and became a full professor at the new Slovakian university. Deep down in my chauvinistic soul I regretted it, but I understood him. Many Hungarians discovered quite suddenly the Slovakian blood surging in their veins. There were, of course, quite a few who dared to declare themselves Slovak or pan-Slav even before the end of the Hungarian world. But I never met them. My perspective, like that of most of the Jews of the "Upland," was completely false.

I had spent the two months following my high school graduation in June, 1918, in County Trencsén, in Ó-Beszterce and Uj-Beszterce, with my grandmother Fanny and Uncle Vilmos. Under their care my lung irritation cleared up. Also the encouraging words of Professor Bálint who stated that I was not seriously sick helped. After graduation my father took me to him for a check-up, and I shall never forget, at the end of the examination he paid the doctor 20 crowns—out of his monthly salary of 100 crowns. He reassured me that it was well worth it.

At the time the Jews of Ó-Beszterce were already whispering among themselves that the town notary had pan-Slavic leanings. I remember one occasion when his daughters went to the neighboring heath to pick flowers, and with garlands on their heads, sang a beautiful Slovakian folk song which began *"Tece voda."* At that time, two short months before the Hungarian collapse, we still called the Slovaks *tótok*. And, frankly, despite all my Hungarian patriotism, I felt that some of the senseless chicaneries of the Hungarian authorities were unjustified. An inscription remained in my memory—a painful symbol of that attitude. I saw it on a tall public building in Turócszentmárton in August 1918. I think it was the headquarters of the Society of Slovak Public Education. It was in Hungarian, and read,

MUZEUMI TÓT TÁRSASÁG
(Tót Museum Association).

I can imagine how much discussion and argument took place between the Slovakian patriots and the Hungarian authorities until that word *tót* was permitted to be included in a Hungarian text. Two

months later the Hungarian world came to an end. And so did the singular world of the Hungarian Jews of the "Uplands." The Jews, even though the older generation hardly spoke Hungarian, were strong supporters of Hungary. As I have mentioned, in a village of County Trencsén one of my distant uncles was the village judge, the only symbol of higher authority. He was the only Jew in the village, and knew but a few words in Hungarian. And I also remember that a few years before World War I (an elegant bearded gentleman, Count Albert Apponyi, was at the time Hungary's minister of religion and public education), a small, six- or seven-year-old peasant boy from Ó-Beszterce, a neighbor of my grandmother, could read and write only in Hungarian. He had no Slovak text books.

I could easily tell more and more about all this. Barely two months after I left Ó-Beszterce for Budapest (cured, and quite a few kilograms heavier) to start studying in the law school, to embark on a conquest of the world, newly emboldened peasants, many of them neighbors, expelled my grandmother and looted the establishment. Similar things happened to my uncles who were tavern keepers in the neighboring villages. Some of them, including my grandmother herself and my Uncle Poldi, my father's youngest brother, never returned. With the departure of grandmother Fanny, Ó-Beszterce ceased to exist as the hometown and center of the Links family. The houses, the lands, the business fell into the hands of strangers.

I don't think that there were more than twenty or twenty-five Jewish families living in the Ó-Beszterce of my childhood. Even so, they had a pleasant small synagogue where, at least on Friday evenings and on Saturdays, formal services were held. They even had money for an employee, a *shammes,* who at the same time was the ritual slaughterer and the beadle. All this gave a certain framework, a form, to their communal life. All this came to an end in the fall of 1918. A few Jewish families did return. They became peasants, Slovaks, and lost their Jewishness. One of the daughters of a related family living far away, in an isolated place in the mountains, married the Christian village teacher. The family and Jews who lived in other communities considered the event "unheard of." This woman, with her Christian husband, survived the Nazi times; most of the other members of my family perished in the Holocaust.

My Uncle Poldi was one of those who never returned. He trans-

planted himself and his family into Budapest, where he became a wood and coal dealer in the sixth borough. He spoke Hungarian, though poorly. After four years in the army, at the end of the war he came home with the stars of a squad leader. He arrived just in time to save his family. Many years later, when I read Tamás Kóbor's book, *Ki a ghettóbol (Out of the Ghetto)* (I still have it), it brought to my mind Uncle Poldi's basement store.

My father's oldest brother, Uncle Vilmos, and his family escaped across the mountains into Galicia. About a year after the so-called *prevrat* (I think the word means something like *chaos*) he dared to come back to Uj-Beszterce where only the walls of their house and the pub license remained. The pub itself (it was, apparently, the only reasonably large vacant room in the village) was taken over by the new Czech gendarmes' detachment, and my returning uncle gladly agreed that it should remain there. They reduced the size of their living quarters (two of their three children were married already), and opened a new pub, and a new store among the hostile Slovak peasants, under the protection of the Czech gendarmerie. (The Slovak peasants hated the Czech gendarmes with their Russian-type flat military caps almost as much as they had hated their Hungarian predecessors with their rooster feathers.) Uncle Vilmos died in peace at home many years later. His wife, Erna, all three of their children and all their grandchildren were dragged away twenty-odd years later by Slovak or German Nazis (who knows by whom) to one of the extermination camps. Aunt Erna, I remember, was a diligent, pessimistic, thin, ugly woman; all her life she worked hard. She was illiterate; but in accordance with good Jewish tradition, she was bilingual, equally fluent in Slovak and German. I often find myself quoting one of her immortal sayings,

> *Wie man liegt, liegt man schlecht*
> (However one lies, one lies badly).

Perhaps she was right.

As I said, I had learned soon that Béla Tuka became a Slovak. One could not condemn him for that. For many years thereafter I heard nothing about him, until in the mid-forties I came upon his name in *The New York Times*. The paper said that Tuka had become a very powerful figure in the cabinet of Tiso, Hitler's pawn and the Catholic

priest-president of the so-called independent Slovak Republic, and that after the war the martial-law court of the new government condemned him, together with his chief, to death. Both were hanged. I heard some people familiar with the Slovak situation confirm this intelligence. "The death of many people" they said, "was on the conscience of Tuka." Even today I cannot believe it. Even today I cannot understand it. True, the entire Nazi Holocaust is beyond my understanding. I keep telling myself that the whole thing was just some kind of terrible nightmare.

In a way I am almost sorry that I did not stay longer in Pozsony. Although to tell the truth, I did not have much to brag about there. There were in Pozsony twenty- to twenty-five-year-old *bokhers,* who had done nothing but study the Talmud under the strict discipline of the Orthodox Yeshivas since they were three years of age. Compared to these scholars of the Talmud, which according to old Jewish tradition, sharpens the mind more than anything else, I was an ignoramus. I did not understand too well the Yiddish into which the text of the Talmud was traditionally translated. I was unable to follow the difficult arguments of the commentators. In Pozsony I was the one who needed a tutor, as the poorest students did in my former schools. In addition, most of my schoolmates looked at me with suspicion; I was the first *bokher* with a high school diploma—infected with strange, forbidden, sinful sciences—whom they had met in their lives. Most of them were very sincerely religious.

In that atmosphere it was astounding that some of them nevertheless started, rather hesitantly, to talk to me about their feelings. They displayed a combination of fear and admiration, almost envy. As the example of Maimonides or of Spinoza proves, the Jewish imagination was always intrigued by other systems of philosophy. Slowly it became evident that I was not the only one who entertained doubts under the cloak of religious devotion. The doubts, of course, were present to different degrees. One could hardly find among them another atheist like me, whom the concatenation of truly unusual circumstances had brought to that stronghold of Orthodoxy. It was unlikely that a single one among them doubted the truthfulness of the religious dogma or the validity of the hundreds of prohibitions and commandments that circumscribed their lives. Some of them ignored only a few ritual rules. There were those who cut the sideburns (as I

did) to the limit of permitted shortness, whereas at the other extreme, some let their sidelocks grow down to their shoulders. There were those who depilated their faces with a chemical (as I did), whereas others had untouched, wildly growing full beards. But most of them did not try to modernize at all, they simply hungered for the world of secular knowledge. They asked me for book titles, wanted to know about books which they could read secretly in the privacy of their rooms. One or two of my fellow students would have liked me to help them refine their Yiddish into *Hochdeutsch*. Thus it happened that, in the eyes of a small minority of my schoolmates, I acquired some kind of intellectual superiority, which, of course, did not mean that their mental capacity was lower than mine. In fact, almost the opposite was true. The schoolmates who became friendly with me were unusually interesting, even brilliant, young men, most of them from Orthodox or Hasidic families. Their home environment succeeded better to separate them from the 20th century, the secular sciences, and even modern Jewish scholarship, than my father was able to do in my case. In fact, I do not believe that he wanted to go that far. Of course, at the time, I was rather conceited, and attributed my liberation from religion to my own brilliant analytical capabilities. Today, I can see that it was mainly a question of the environment. Basically, I grew up in a partly irreligious, partly Christian environment, and all my father's efforts to counterbalance this by himself were wasted.

Two short friendships that developed under these circumstances have remained in my memory. One of my friends, an older student, perhaps 24 or 25 years old, from one of the Ruthenian counties, who was always rather conservatively dressed, exhibited what seemed to be unusual musical talent and interest. He was the only *bokher* I ever knew who owned a violin. He knew how to play Jewish tunes without notes, the way a gypsy would. Once in a while, Sunday at noon, the two of us sneaked out to a matinee in the concert hall of Pozsony. It was on such an occasion that he, as well as I, heard Mozart's Jupiter symphony for the first time.

My other friend was quite young—he could not have been more than 16—quiet, almost shy, low-voiced, unusually polite. We talked a great deal. After awhile he confessed to me that, in fact, he was not religious; that, perhaps, he did not even believe in God really, and that he came to the Yeshiva only under orders from his father who expected

of him that when he became 18 he would marry the girl chosen for him through the mutual understanding of his and her families. What else did they expect of him? Nothing unusual. Only that in the future, too, he should spend the greater part of his time studying the Talmud, and should continue the strictly circumscribed life of a Hasid, while joining the business of his father-in-law (a rather well-to-do man). To rebel? To drag his parents, the two families and his fore-ordained helpmeet into painful embarrassment? To be banished from the community? The mere thought appeared to frighten him.

Soon thereafter, I moved on to Prague. I received from him a few letters, written in an artificial flowery Hungarian but studded with Hebrew quotes. Letters written by Orthodox Jews, especially to someone belonging to their group, have their special, rigid, but even in its rigidity, attractive style. He called me his teacher, his master, his benefactor. (Yet I did not teach him anything and did not do anything for him.) Then, about fifteen years later, he looked me up in my office in Budapest. He had become a somewhat rotund, prematurely aged man, with sidelocks and a wide-brimmed black hat. Suddenly, he bent down and kissed my hand. I do not remember exactly, but I think one of his sons had a complaint falling within my medical competence. How much I would have loved to talk to him! But I did not dare to ask him whether he was happy, or at least satisfied. What could he have answered? I remember his name precisely, and also the name of the village where he lived. It would not be fair if I would divulge them here. I am possibly the only one who knows the great secret of his life.

My exit from Pozsony was otherwise indecorous, and not even in good style. It did not take me too long to realize that neither the Yeshiva, nor the law school had any purpose or made any sense for me; that I had actually wasted three semesters, and that "Hungarian literature" away from Hungary was neither a profession nor a livelihood. ("The medical profession is international" was the encouraging message in the letters of both Sári and Vilma, one of Mrs. Ambrus' daughters.) This is how I became a medical student. This is how, at the end, I became a doctor. I obtained Professor Tuka's end-term signature; but, I am ashamed to admit, I simply ran away from the final examination at the Yeshiva and did not even say good-bye to my teacher. What could I have told him? My conduct obviously corroborated his belief that there was "no blessing" in the secular sciences,

and neither was there any in one who became contaminated with them.

From there on it was only a question of money. My uncle, Jakab Lieberman, the rabbi of Léva (he already had two daughters and a son at the medical school in Prague) helped me, encouraged me to start anew. I spent my mid-term vacation with them. Then I received enough money for travel, for the tuition fee of one semester, and for lodging. One of my lawyer uncles gave me a black cutaway with striped pants, and from another, I got a khaki uniform with yellow leggings. For quite a while I kept wearing this military uniform. At least it provided me with a good alibi. I did not have to explain where I had been, what I had been doing, since I passed my high school exam, and why I was older than the class of 1902 (the gentry boys, the lucky ones who had problem-free lives) which started its studies that year. It even gave a certain kind of distinction to my poverty. The charitable organization, *Jüdischer Freitisch,* accepted me as soon as I reported, and thus five times a week I had a warm lunch (oh, how tiny were those meat portions!). Nevertheless, my stomach and my entire physique were so debilitated that during the summer vacation (I tried to find employment as a private tutor), I suffered from severe dysentery and almost died. Only rarely did I dare to wear the cutaway.

I still have my registration book from the German University of Medicine of Prague: the picture pasted into it shows a sunken-faced, already rapidly balding, unsmiling young man in a black cutaway and a high stiff collar.

11

How I Became an Ophthalmologist and Not a Psychoanalyst

A Verse from the Gospel According to Matthew

My medical career began in the department of ophthalmology of the Jewish Hospital of Pest. I was first a resident, and then an "honorary" assistant physician from 1925 to 1929. I received no salary. The head physician divided part of his private income (mostly from surgery) among his associates. I was the youngest. In addition, I was a supernumerary; I had no valid diploma yet. This was no basis for a livelihood. But I soon obtained an extra job with the famed Gedeon Richter Pharmaceuticals, which paid quite well. I was also able to make some money with teaching, translating, and ghost-writing. Hence I had the means to go into analysis—and it was just the right time to do so. At about the same time I got involved in another unhappy, unrewarding, and fortunately brief love affair. (Why should I write about it? It hurt, it passed.) Soon I discovered that physicians were almost privileged in the realm of love, and that it was quite easy to find partners among the younger women, as well as among the older ones who flocked to the out-patient departments of hospitals and private offices. But without LOVE (I spell the word in all caps) these affairs remained frustratingly unsatisfactory. I did have a tendency to depressions, and this was another reason why I wanted to go into analysis. I paid a visit to Sándor Ferenczi, the dean of Hungarian psychoanalysts, who after an hour-long conversation, decided that, indeed, it would be beneficial for me to go into analysis, and recommended me to a much younger colleague. I underwent analysis for a year, or per-

haps a year and a half. At that point my doctor concluded that I had no really serious emotional or sexual problems to work on, and discharged me. During the analysis much was discussed about my father, and a lot less about the past or hopeless love affairs. (Other unimportant affairs were to follow, and then, soon, I met Magda.) The one thing, however, of which I never spoke, not even to my analyst—was the Joseph dream. Deep inside I hoped that perhaps my analyst would be the one to help me fulfill it. Whether I admitted it to myself or not, this was one of the reasons why I went into analysis. I do not know exactly what I expected of it. Perhaps, I waited for him to suggest to me to go into a *lehr-analysis* (training analysis). (Sári used this term about her own analysis, whose specific purpose was apprenticeship—one of the conditions of admission to the guild—not the therapeutic resolution of conflicts.) Perhaps I fancied that my analyst would get up from his armchair and greet me as the new luminary on the star-studded sky of analysis. He did not get up; he did not welcome me; he did not suggest to me that I should become an analyst. All he would have had to say was one word. But he dismissed me as an uninteresting, colorless and, in addition, poorly paying case as cured. So the dream fooled me again.

Actually the Jewish Hospital's director, its chief of internal medicine, Professor Henrik Benedict, was the only one who made me feel, to some extent, welcome, and held out the hope that I could perhaps have a future in the hospital.

I must interject here something very important. By that time one could not call Benedict any more to a patient or into consultation. He was seriously ill, and his illness was already quite apparent. Nevertheless, on one occasion he came to visit one of his old friends, Mrs. W., who happened to be a relative of mine. It would seem that a person who is near death can speak more easily of the past, perhaps even to those who are not too close to him. The conversation touched upon the "calling" of the physician. In the presence of Mrs. W., we spoke in German—and the equivalent of "calling" in German is *Beruf*. This is how the words remained in my memory, although I did not understand their meaning for a long time, nor did I know their origin. Benedict said, *"Ich war kein Austerwählter, nur ein Berufener."* For years I have tried to figure out what this mysterious sentence meant. Only much later did I discover that the elderly doctor paraphrased the Gospel according to Matthew in Luther's German translation: *Denn*

viele sind berufen, aber wenige sind auserwählt.

So even he, the famous physician, professor, and scientist, had his doubts. He felt he did not belong to the "chosen," although healing was his *Beruf,* his "calling." The English Bible renders the verse, "Many are called, but few are chosen."

There is here an almost mystical link with a book that has been one of the greatest joys of my last twenty years: Chaim Potok's novel (I think I once already mentioned it) about the Hasidic rabbi of Brooklyn and his son, who could study together, but could not converse with each other. It can be nothing else but pure coincidence, but it is still eerie: the title of Potok's book is *The Chosen.* (Who is the chosen? The rabbi? His son? The Hasidic community? The chosen people of the Bible? The author does not reveal it.)

In the summer of 1925 I returned from Germany, from Kiel, with my useless medical diploma. In Germany it was not valid because I was a foreigner. In Hungary it was not valid because it was a foreign diploma. True, I had spent two marvelous years in Kiel in Weimar Germany, where I felt I was on top of the world. Professor Benedict was impressed by my three papers which had been published in *Pflügers Archiv,* the foremost German physiological journal. The first I had written in Prague, the two others in Kiel. The Prague essay was born in the laboratories of the physiologist Tschermak, and it dealt with a peculiar problem of spatial vision, the binocular vision field, the so-called Horopter. (About 30 years later I was admitted on the basis of a paper on the same theme into the exclusive American Ophthalmological Society.) The publications from Kiel, from the institute of Professor Höber, involved an entirely different field. (Of course, as Tschermak did in Prague, so here Höber gave me the theme. I did not choose it. Such a paper was known as *Schüler Arbeit* [Student Work]. The topic was of interest to the professor.) In Höber's institute, in Kiel, I performed microchemical experiments. I had done the same thing for a semester while still in Prague, in the institute of pathology of Professor Arthur Biedl, at that time world-famous, but today almost completely forgotten, who was also of Hungarian origin. I never believed that I would become a practicing physician in any specialty. (I was quite surprised when it turned out that I was successful in private practice.) At any rate, I could not yet decide whether I should go into ophthalmology (which I liked most) or become an internist, or, perhaps, a laboratory

specialist. Laboratory work attracted me. And since I was not sure what I wanted to do, at my request Professor Benedict first sent me to the Policlinic of Internal Medicine, where one of his assistants, János Biedermann, was at the time the attending chief. I spent perhaps three months at that clinic, and even today I think of them with nostalgia: that was the only time when I really examined patients, listened to their hearts and lungs, analyzed urine, and checked blood counts. I always felt embarrassed about my inexperience in general medicine. I never delivered a child; I never set a broken bone. But it seems that Benedict had plans for me. One day he came to fetch me from the Policlinic, and announced that it made no sense to waste my time, if I'd rather become an ophthalmologist. He took me to the department of ophthalmology to introduce me to my future chief and to his assistants—and so I became an ophthalmologist. *Ich war kein Auserwählter. Ich war kein Berufener.* ("I was not chosen. I was not called.")

It was not my decision. It so happened that that day was a very bad day at the department of ophthalmology. But I suspect that this was the very reason why Professor Benedict took me there. It was the first of October, or perhaps November 1925, the day of the annual changeover in the hospital personnel. An unfriendly colleague, the assistant physician who had just completed his term, was moving his things out of his office; an excited colleague, up to that time the second assistant, was moving his things into the vacated quarters. A smooth-faced young man, a mere titular assistant, was indignant over not becoming the assistant. My new chief (himself new in the position) did not seem to like all these changes. He wanted to have his own familiar assistant to be his deputy. He had promised the position to him should he himself become chief. But then, the excited colleague had certain acquired rights. The former assistant of the chief—by far the more talented of the two—became only a second assistant. And it was exactly in this storm center that Benedict brought a new aspirant. An outsider. Of course, all this began to dawn on me only later.

So that is how I became an ophthalmologist. As it turned out, I did not regret it.

Afterword

As the miracles come
so did I write this book...

These lines open Endre Ady's *In the Vanguard of the Dead,* the last volume of poems published in his life. That is the way I wrote the Hungarian version of this book, too. I am less and less sure whether I did well to write it and whether I did well to write it in Hungarian. Most of my friends do not speak Hungarian. My sons, with their vocabulary of a few hundred Hungarian words, could not read it. The family had watched my scribbling, which lasted for more than two years, almost with animosity. After all, I wrote it in a language which is not addressed to my sons. "It will have to be translated," said my family and friends. I would not be able to translate it. I could have written it in English. I am told by the readers and critics of my English professional books, that I write in English very well. But in this case, this would be an entirely different kind of book. However, I did not give up hope that I would find a translator, in the very real sense of the word. "To translate," says Webster's dictionary, means "to change from one place, position or condition to another; to transfer."

My latest English book dealt with problems of writing and reading and the disturbances in learning to read, especially to read English. In its foreword, I wrote about my "thirty-year love affair" with the English language. Nevertheless, English has remained for me an acquired language, unlike Hungarian or German, into both of which I was more or less born. My feeling is that I do not translate from one language into the other. If I talk to somebody in English, in Hungarian, or in German, it is in that particular language that I understand what I hear and formulate what I say. That is, I think in that language.

On the other hand, I lack completely the talent required to translate simultaneously from one language into another. I greatly admire the linguistic talents of those employed for this purpose by the United Nations. (József Vészi, the editor-in-chief of the one-time *Pester Lloyd,* the influential German language daily of Budapest, had a secretary

who could listen to the Hungarian speeches in Parliament and transcribe them in shorthand in German, so that they could be printed in the afternoon edition. This has always struck me as prodigious.)

As a man of letters, I must be somewhat ashamed of myself. I wrote an autobiography, a kind of last judgment on myself. To write an autobiography (and I misquote Ibsen) means to pass judgment on oneself. I wrote it in Hungarian, my true mother tongue. In my early years I even wrote poetry in Hungarian. I could write poetry only in Hungarian, no matter how Rilke or Hofmannsthal or even Goethe enchanted me. Then came my "affair" with English which I had to conquer, but for which I still need a dictionary. Although I was bilingual from my earliest childhood, the first twenty years of my life continue to live in my memory in Hungarian.

Today, despite all of this, I don't even have a Hungarian-English dictionary, much less a Hungarian lexicon, or an etymological dictionary written in Hungarian for Hungarians. On the other hand, what endless hours I have sacrificed in order to be able to understand, to be able to love, the English language. I had to fight hard for the English language. The Hungarian language (and also the German) was mine as part of my birthright. There is no reason to celebrate one's possession of the mother tongue. It is the foreign language for which we must struggle, which we value. I have written pages and pages about the beauty of the English language.

Within less than a decade, a second "miracle" occurred. My friend and colleague Dr. John J. Alpár, took it upon himself, as a labor of love, to translate my book. I could fully understand his difficulties. Here are his thoughts on his endeavor:

> One of my earliest memories as a resident in ophthalmology at the First University Eye Clinic of Budapest in 1949 was that many of my inquiries concerning a certain research project prompted other doctors to direct me to several monographs and articles all authored by a certain Dr. Arthur Linksz. Dr. Linksz was a legend at the clinic. Since that time I have encountered Dr. Linksz's works either in their original form or in the form of references. His

monumental life work has been a constant inspiration. His lucid language, both in German and in English, was a source of joy. His articles gave lie to the usual prescription circulated among the profession against insomnia—"If you cannot sleep, pick up a medical article and in five minutes you will be out and under." His papers were stimulating and sources of unending inspiration.

My first personal contact with Dr. Linksz was at the Museum of Archaeology of Mexico City during a reception held for participants of the World Congress of Ophthalmology. I introduced myself, thanking him for sharing his knowledge with us. Later we exchanged greeting cards and one or two patients. A few more exciting books later, I had the honor of visiting him in his apartment in New York. Parkinson's disease had already taken its toll, but the great mind was lucid and stimulating. It was then that I first received *THE BOOK:* The Book which opened the window to show me the other person hiding behind the mask of the great scientist, the great professor, the true teacher. Arthur Linksz, the man, that troubled Hamlet-like revolutionary (reactionary?), the Freudian enigma, the violator and the upholder of one part of the fourth commandment—"Honor thy Father and thy Mother." I read this baring of the soul, these confessions, the vast panorama of the early twentieth century Hungarian life. I read The Book all in one sitting. I then became determined to translate it so that it would be more accessible to his many admirers and colleagues. However, I encountered enormous difficulties when I began this "labor of love." My time, my other commitments, the time of my staff, constant breakdown of the word processor (my God, what did the medieval monks who copied the gorgeous manuscripts do when they encountered rheumatism which broke down their "word processors"); these were the least of my troubles. The greater problems were the story itself and the languages. I am not native to the English language. I was already over 30 years old when I learned it. It was even more difficult translating Dr. Linksz's Hungarian. He freely used regional idioms, colloquialisms, and accents which are

typical to geographic locations and to social classes. He quoted beautiful Hungarian poetry, which loses its essence in translation.

As Dr. Linksz states in the Foreword, the third death is when you "cease to exist" for all time. It is the death of non-rememberance, silence and obscurity. The death of the soul. The death of death. The "first death" is when you actually die at the end of your life. The "second death" is found in the Book of Revelations 20:5 and 6—"But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection." Verse 14 continues: "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death."

As a Catholic, I know the great psychological curing value of confession. It is the purging, the pruning, the catharsis of the soul from painful memories. This book indeed evades and fights the *third death.*

Appendix

(Letter to the Editor of *Uj Kelet* in Israel

In memoriam of a Tzaddik

While reading in the columns of the periodical *Uj Kelet (New Orient)* that Professor Arthur Linksz' autobiography, written in Hungarian, was published in America, the image of Izsák Linksz, the late scholarly rabbi of Köszeg, the father of the author, suddenly rose up in my memory.

From the beginning of October 1942, great masses of Jewish youth from the Trans-Danubian district of Hungary were crowded into the concentration camp of Köszeg. I was one of them. Already at that time, the infantry barracks of Köszeg, where we had to report, had an ominous reputation. As soon as the gates were closed behind us, we were completely isolated from the outside world. Those giant gates of the barracks complex were guarded by soldiers, armed to the teeth. Even when it came to the senseless exercises on the hill we had to march in formation, under military guard. We climbed the mountain in bitter cold weather made worse by blizzards. On the top of the mountain the icy wind of Köszeg was even more unbearable. In the next few months our situation improved somewhat, we were even able to attend, once in a while, the Friday evening services at the synagogue, with the permission of our company commander, under strict military guard, and in military formation. It was there that we became acquainted with rabbi Izsák Linksz of blessed memory, and were impressed by his personality, his greatness. With what power and dedication did he pour courage into us when he mounted the pulpit and delivered his sermon! What a wonderful feeling it was to listen to him and to come under the spell of his great oratory, while outside the black storm clouds gathered and threatened to engulf us!

Indeed, he gave us so much: he gave us solace and strength. Many inmates of the forced labor camp, who were brought there after our

own group had been moved out, were the recipients of his spiritual consolation. What a great service did he perform! He offered hope and consolation to thousands of depressed and desperate souls.

It is an irony of fate that precisely his city was chosen for setting up that camp. His was a very difficult role to fill—excrutiatingly difficult in the circumstances that severely restricted his own right to speak up freely.

Fate did not spare him either. His kind and good soul, together with the souls of many millions of his brothers and sisters ascended into Heaven.

Blessed be the Tzaddik's memory!

Sándor Bender
Holon, Israel

Great Praise for the Hungarian Version of this book . . .



PHOTO BY G.D. HACKETT

"A few days ago I received my copy of ***Visszanézek.*** I simply could not put it down. Its style, its theme, the delightful manner of presentation—all these are virtues of the book which attest to it that it *had* to be written . . . "

András Apostol
Editor-in-Chief
Magyar Hirek (Hungarian News)

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